

Expanding the Robert Graves Canon: A Review of Fred H. Higginson's *A Bibliography of the Writings of Robert Graves*¹

A chinook wind is sweeping down the mountainside beyond my den window, whipping everything loose and light, driving leaves across the road in a shimmering dance, dissolving all into dust-whirls. For the few people left who were trained to high levels of precision and performance, this is like the contemporary world, which seems as randomly driven and as wantonly swept by unseen forces as our mountainside. In a shattered world where standards are lowered daily and things come together right only occasionally, where precision is held in disrepute, one undertakes the task of descriptive bibliography at his risk. Compounding that risk is the enormous complexity of the bibliography of Graves's books. His most popular publications appeared in numbers of different editions over a long span of time, and there were numbers of impressions of each edition. Moreover, there were numbers of reprints of the different impressions. Partly because of this complexity and partly because, at least since the end of World War II, the most prominent English and American publishing houses have tended to be as screwed up as Hooligan's goat, the printing history that appears on the title page versos of Graves's books are frequently incomplete, or wrong, or totally misleading. For trying to wend his way through this jungle, even after the splendid trailblazing of Fred Higginson, Professor Williams deserves something like the Order of Merit.

The moment you pick it up, some flaky edges of this book abrade the senses. Perhaps only a soupçon of slovenliness led the publisher to call *Fred Higginson* "Frank" on the inside flap of the jacket, although his name is right on the title page. Perhaps only a crook of the pen caused their advertisement flyer to repeat this egregious error. But what on earth made them announce the publication of "*Robert Graves: a bibliography*" when the title page reads: "*A Bibliography of the writings of Robert Graves*"? And why is this mis-title printed on the spine of both the jacket and the book? Is a book, too, shattered, with alternate authors and titles sliding back and forth between its parts in the best psychedelic manner? Are these the new ground rules—if you aim at a duck in London and hit a turtle in Cornwall, it's close enough to count as a bull's-eye?

Inside, the book is better ordered, and we must record a deep debt of thanks to Williams for what he has added to our knowledge. For the scholar a bibliography ought to record every publication of an author, no matter how ephemeral, that was issued while the author could have made changes in the text. This is especially true in the case of Graves who throughout a long lifetime radically changed his opinions of his own poems, continually changed and rejected texts, and allowed some translations and foreign editions in English to be abbreviated by other people. Only by tracing such changes can the development and maturation of a creative writer be established. For the book collector a bibliography should record every printed item by an author, accurately described in minute detail so that any item in hand (or in book catalog) can be readily defined as identical to a known item or a new addition to the

bibliography. On both issues every bibliography fails to some degree. We probably never will be able to record all of Graves's periodical contributions, some of which appear in obscure Indian magazines. And in bibliographical descriptions, as I myself have amply demonstrated, no one can be completely accurate. It therefore is petty to quibble with shortfalls in either of these areas unless they are major. But it behooves a reviewer to notice them to some degree.

Williams' revision of Higginson presents a complete record of publications by Graves to the end of 1985, which adds about 25% to the record. It covers new publications since 1965, new editions, impressions and reprints, new periodical publications, through the period of time at the end of his life when Graves was still mentally competent. Williams found the elusive Australian school edition of *Lawrence and the Arabs*, so eagerly sought by Higginson (see his Appendix I). Moreover, this bibliography has absorbed seven different articles listing addenda and corrigenda to Higginson, including my own 35 page contribution (referred to in this review as "Mason"), published in scattered publications. Williams has added signature collations to the books in my article.

Beyond this large expansion of coverage Williams has obtained a very great amount of new information from publishers' archives that identifies the exact date of publication (which often varies from the date in the book), the relation of one edition to another when plates or printed sheets were transferred from one publisher to another, the exact composition of a book when pages from more than one printing were combined, and the difference in paper used for different editions from the same plates. Williams also adds the name of the printer of a book when available. All of this is presented in a format with one signal improvement over Higginson. Each edition is fully identified by the number and sub-letter at the beginning of the description, "A61b," rather than, as in Higginson giving the generic number, "A61", to the first edition, and only the sub-letter, "b", to each other edition, a system that drives the user crazy when identifying editions of multi-edition books such as *I, Claudius*. New entries are inserted in their proper chronological sequence among the old by using decimals, the new A30.1 following the old A30.

Williams cuts back the coverage of Higginson's section D, Miscellanea, to eliminate Disc recordings, Ephemera, Film and TV appearances (including commentaries by Graves), Tapes, Radio appearances and radio scripts, Braille editions, and Music settings of Graves's poems. For these we will still need Higginson. Indeed it is terrifying to contemplate the task of achieving even approximate completion in this wide span of media, to which we now would have to add compact discs, laser discs, and CD-ROM publications. But there have been some losses in the process. Surely the mimeographed script for the BBC and other radio broadcasts deserve recording in a book-and-periodicals bibliography. Surely two items dropped from Higginson's Ephemera are highly significant bibliographically:

Hig. D23. "Cat Goddess," as a Christmas card is signed by Graves and dated "1951," two years before the earliest other printing of this poem recorded by Williams.

Fig. D20. "To Juan at the Winter Solstice," dated 22 December 1944, a year and a half before the earliest publication of this poem recorded by Williams.

Williams also omits Higginson's Appendix II, European Editions in English, which drops the record of all the Albatross Library and Tauchnitz editions, some of which contain emendations that Graves permitted the publishers to make, as he did in foreign translations of his books, reflecting his own opinion of the value of parts of his own writings. The elimination of Higginson section E, a selective bibliography of works about Graves and reviews of his books, is entirely appropriate. They belong in another kind of bibliography, and one has already been published.

Higginson's bibliography was, on the whole, highly accurate both in its large and in its detailed aspects, and in this regard Williams stands as a worthy student of his former teacher, with some exceptions. The one real, totally irrational howler confronts us early on in this book:

A6b. *The Pier Glass*. First American Edition (1921). *Note*. Williams adds a 3½ page note describing a copy offered in J. Stephan Laurence Catalog 50 of a different book "ON ENGLISH POETRY"!!!! Even though two pages later, in A7b. *On English Poetry* English issue (1922), in the note Williams describes what is obviously the same book offered in J. Stephen Laurence's Catalog 45. It is impossible to account for an error of this magnitude on any rational grounds. So much for the art of proof-reading.

A76b. Alarcon's *Infant With the Globe*, was published in 1959, not 1955 as recorded, a fact made clear in Williams' note, as well as in the book.

Addenda and Miscellanea on pp. 316-319 contains ten items that are not included in the Index, the kind of omission that drives book collectors and librarians up the wall.

Finally, related to bloopers is the bibliographical bug gone mad. One would welcome complete bibliographical descriptions of foreign translations of Graves's books, which are not even given titles in the notes where they occur. Why then in Williams' Appendix I, which records three book translations of selections from Graves's poetry, one in Italian, one in Polish, one in Hungarian, are full bibliographical descriptions of these books given, even though they match no book by Graves?

Williams' Appendix II lists the most important public collections of books and manuscripts by Graves, citing the published lists of holdings for those that have them, and for others, which are important, giving summaries without any statistics that might give a scholar some notion of how extensive they are. For all of these summarized collections, there have long been available extensive descriptions of their holdings published in *Focus on Robert Graves*, a periodical with which Williams shows only nodding acquaintance, though it is the only

one dedicated entirely to Graves. This leads to some serious omissions of important information that belongs in this bibliography, and in the case of one collection results in a shortfall that seriously cripples this bibliography. For instance:

App 18. Berg Collection, New York Public Library. Williams uses Higginson's description (1965), whereas the January 1972 *FoRG* publishes a full-page detailed list of holdings.

App 20. Humanities Research Center, University of Texas. Williams uses Higginson's description. The January 1972 *FoRG* gives a numerical summary of holdings by type.

App 24. University of Victoria Library. *FoRG* for January 1972 gives a 1½ page detailed list of holdings and the September 1982 issue published a 2½ page narrative by Christopher Petter describing them. None of these articles are mentioned by Williams.

App 22. This is the disaster lapse. Williams reports that the McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, acquired my collection "in the 1980s" (it went there early in 1976) which includes "several hundred items of printed books and ephemera." A statistical summary of this collection when it included about 1,300 items appeared in *FoRG* for September 1973. Totally aside from Tulsa's holdings of Graves before they acquired mine, and some spectacular collections of letters they have acquired since, when my collection went to Tulsa it was by far the most extensive collection of Graves's printed material in existence consisting of 1,619 pieces, of which 679 were books by Graves and 500 were periodicals containing his contributions. In addition it contained 266 letters, 6 typescript manuscripts and 1 corrected holograph manuscript. A complete list was compiled for evaluation before it went to Tulsa and a Xerox copy of this list has been lent to collectors and scholars here and abroad since then.

Unfortunately, and incredibly, Williams' schedule of research did not include visiting *or writing* to me or to Special Collections at the University of Tulsa, though he managed to get to England and Australia! This grave omission leaves spectacular and unnecessary gaps in this bibliography. Repeatedly Williams reports that he has not been able to see copies of books that I know are at Tulsa to verify or flesh out his descriptions. Even more important, he has missed discovering the existence of a wide range of Graves's books. Here are more than fifty omissions, all of which he would have found in the list of my collection had he asked to see it:

A46a. *Antigua, Penny, Puce*. Price was 7/6, not 10/6 as recorded.

B40. William Sargant, *Battle for the Mind*. Graves says in 9/2/56 letter in my collection that he "re-Englished" this book, as well as contributed to it.

- A43d. *Claudius the God*. London, Methuen, 1969, 9th impr. Unrecorded.
- A43e. *Claudius the God*. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1968, 9th impr. and 1970, 10th impr., Unrecorded.
- A114. *Collected Poems, 1965*, London, Cassell, 1967 (2nd English edition), and London, Cassell, 1967, Readers Union edition. Unrecorded.
- Follows 114. *Collected Poems, 1966*. Doubleday, 1966 (Anchor Books edition), 2 different impressions. Unrecorded.
- “Conversations With Robert Graves.” Mimeo scripts for BBC 3rd program. 5 August 1960; 9 August 1960. Unrecorded.
- Focus: 3* (Corgi Modern Poets) ed. by Dannie Abse. London, Transworld Publishers, 1971. Contains Graves’s introduction to his own poems. Unrecorded.
- A20b. *English and Scottish Ballads*. London, Heinemann, 1969, 5th impr. Unrecorded.
- A66. Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*. N.Y., Noonday Press, 1967. Unrecorded.
- A32d. *Good-Bye to All That*. N.Y., Cape and Smith, 1930, 4th impr. Unrecorded.
- A32f. *Good-Bye to All That*. N.Y., Blue Ribbon Books, 1931. A smaller size book, including illustrations. Unrecorded.
- A72. *The Greek Myths*. Amended Penguin edition. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1957. 2v. Unrecorded.
- A72c. *The Greek Myths*. N.Y. George Braziller, 1959. Iv. 2nd. impr. Unrecorded.
- A72d. *The Greek Myths*. London, Cassell, 1965. 4th impr. Unrecorded.
- A57b. *Hercules, My Shipmate*. N.Y., Creative Age Press, 1945, 3rd impr. Unrecorded.
- A42a. *I, Claudius*. London, Barker, 1934. Wrap-around label issued with the first edition. Unrecorded.
- A42i. *I, Claudius*. 4th English edition (1949). London, Methuen, 1969. 5th impression. Williams’ date is wrong.
- A42j. *I, Claudius*. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books. 4th impr., 1960, 5th impr., 1962; 9th impr., 1967; 10th impr., 1969. Unrecorded.

- A42k. *I, Claudius*. 4th American edition (1953). N.Y., Avon Publications, 1957. Unrecorded.
- A42l. *I, Claudius*. N.Y. Vintage Books, no date (later than first impression.) Unrecorded.
- Follows A42m. London, Queen's Theatre, 1972. Program for John Mortimer's production of *I, Claudius*. (Contains a contribution by Graves.) Unrecorded.
- Alexander Millward, *In Memoriam*, June 1967. (Includes a Graves translation from Goethe.) Unrecorded.
- A59b. *King Jesus*. London, Cassell, 1969. 8th impr. Unrecorded.
- James Gibson, ed., *Let the Poet Choose*. London, Harrap, 1973. (Contains poems and a note by Graves.) Unrecorded.
- Follows B11. *The Mercury Book*. London, Williams and Norgate 1927, 2nd series. (Contains poem by Graves.) Unrecorded.
- National Theatre Program. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*. London, no date. 3rd impression. Unrecorded.
- B72.1. David Sutton, *Out on a Limb*. London, Rapp & Whiting, 1969. Limited edition of 100, numbered and signed by the author. Unrecorded.
- A97b. *Oxford Addresses on Poetry*. Garden City, Doubleday, 1962. 2nd impr. Unrecorded.
- Follows B1. *Oxford Poetry, 1917*. Oxford, Blackwell, 1917. Contains poems from *Fairies and Fusiliers* with textual changes. Unrecorded.
- A53a. *Proceed, Sergeant Lamb*. Bath, Chivers, 1970. Unrecorded.
- A55b. *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*. N. Y., Macmillan, 1944. 3rd impr. Unrecorded.
- A120a. *The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam*. London, Cassell, 1967. 2nd impr. Unrecorded.
- Follows A30. The Seizin Press, 1928. Necessary Books. Contains "Ode to the Triumph of Bodily Intelligence." Unrecorded.
- A51. *Sergeant Lamb of the Ninth*. Bath, Chivers, 1969. Unrecorded.
- A102a. *The Siege and Fall of Troy*. London, Cassell, 1968. 3rd impr. Unrecorded.

A102c. *The Siege and Fall of Troy*. N.Y., Dell, 1969. 2nd impr. Unrecorded.

Follows A77b. *The Somme*. Mimeo text for BBC broadcast of 16 August 1956. (Graves & Frank Richards). Unrecorded.

A54a. *Wife to Mr. Milton*. Bath, Chivers, 1968. Unrecorded.

WNBC Television. *Speaking Freely*, February 15, 1970. Mimeo text of an interview with Graves by Edwin Lewan. Unrecorded.

The Writer's World., ed. Elizabeth Janeway. N.Y., McGraw-Hill, 1972. (Contains transcript of a panel discussion that included Graves.) Unrecorded.

South Bank Poetry and Music. London, Poetry Society and National Book League, 1970. Contains "The Strayed Message." Unrecorded.

B73. C.R. Dalton, *Without Hardware*. Canberra, Nicholson Prints and Publishing Co., 1970. Hardback edition limited to 500 copies. Unrecorded.

Williams could have had all of this information for the price of a 22-cent postage stamp, and lack of it leaves yawning gaps in his bibliography. There are, in addition, some questionable items in his absorption of Mason's addendum to Higginson's bibliography:

A3c. 2nd American edition of *Fairies and Fusiliers*. Higginson records a copy in maroon cloth, Mason records a variant bound in purple boards with a chartreuse label. Williams records only a binding in purple cloth. Does Higginson's binding not exist?

A14b. American issue (1925) of *My Head! My Head!* Higginson records front and spine labels in orange. Mason records a mint copy with front and spine labels in yellow, a color which quickly suns to orange. Williams describes the front label yellow and the spine label orange, the only detail in which he varies from Higginson's description. Is this a straddle?

A23c. American issue (1929) of *Poems (1914-26)*. Higginson records a copy in brown cloth; Mason describes one in maroon cloth. Williams discards Higginson's binding. Why?

Follows A32. *A Suppressed Poem*, for which Mason gives full description. This is the first separate publication of the passages suppressed from the first edition, first printing of *Good-Bye to All That*. Unrecorded.

A54b. First American edition (1944) of *Wife to Mr. Milton*. Williams inserts into Higginson's description the two additional leaves recorded in Mason but does not change Higginson's 192 leaves to 194, which Mason records.

A55c. *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*. Readers Union impression (1944). Mason records a variant purple cloth binding, which, since it matches the stain on the top edges, is probably the first state of the binding, but Williams does not mention it.

B11.1. *The Best Poems of 1926*. Williams plaintively says, "Mason reports this edition but I have been unable to see a copy of this book," and the publisher's archives could not help him. My copy is in Tulsa, but Williams didn't even write about it.

Follows B29. Williams omits Mason's record of *Lilliput Annual*, volume 8, which includes the first book printing of "Leave, 1915." Williams' note to C298 acknowledges my record but states that this "would appear to be only a binding up of the issues of this journal for 1941; 1939/40 was the last time this journal was issued in book form." How can it not be in book form when it contains (as recorded in Mason's description) a title page, a list of contents, and a list of cartoons and photographs? It is in a commercial binding in cloth, with the spine stamped in gold: "The Lilliput Annual Vol. 8", as Williams could have seen had he gone to Tulsa. This item should be B29.2 in Williams's bibliography.

B50.1. *Best Poems of 1958*. Williams omits the record of the dust jacket that appears in Mason.

Finally, and with no denigration of Williams, since we all have our little piles of addenda, the following should be added to the record.

Books

The Broom Anthology. Boston, Milford House, 1969. Contains first book printing of "How Many Miles to Babylon?"

A Calendar for 1974, reproductions of artists' paintings, with an introduction by Graves. Palma de Mallorca, Fomento de Turismo, 1974.

David R. Salavitt, *The Eclogues and the Georgics of Virgil*. Garden City, Doubleday, 1972. (Contains a preface by Graves). Finland. London, Poetry Bookshop, 1924. (Broadside).

Lollocks. Titahi Bay (New Zealand), The Aspect Press, no date, but about 1980.

Poems for Shakespeare. London, Globe Playhouse Trust, 1972. Contains two poems by Graves.

Periodicals

John O'London's Weekly, June 16, 1934. Contains a letter by Graves.

Le Monde des Livres, March 15, 1969. Contains an interview with Graves.

Paris Review 12:118-145, Summer 1969 (Williams C852). Contains a poem by Graves, "Broken Neck," as well as the interview.

Saturday Weekly Westminster Review, 22 January, 1920; 20 June, 1920. Both contain poems by Graves.

Sunday Times Weekly Review, January 3, 1971. Contains a telephone interview with Graves.

What pithy lessons can be deduced from all the foregoing? (1) Descriptive bibliographies are extremely difficult to complete at a highly satisfactory level. (2) Even when not totally satisfactory they are very useful sources for a range of information. (3) Standards of scholarship have dwindled considerably in the past twenty years. (4) Now, more than ever before, eager seekers of information about an author's books will seek out all bibliographical records about his works, no matter when published.

Note

- ¹ Second edition revised by William Proctor Williams. Winchester, St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1987. 354 pages. \$90. Distributed in the U.S. by The University Press of Virginia, University Station, Charlottesville.

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