

The Robert Graves Estate

When Robert Graves died in 1985, I was made executor of his Will. By profession I am a self-employed oil geologist. This involves working in such places as the Middle East, West Africa or the North Sea. But it also allows me to spend a substantial amount of time in Deya, where I live in one of the houses Robert bought in the thirties. Now, when I am not being a geologist, my time is mostly taken up with the Robert Graves Estate.

Robert made no special bequests in his Will, and he named no literary executor. After probate was granted, I set up a trust to administer the copyright of his works on behalf of the beneficiaries of the Will (his widow Beryl and surviving children Catherine, Samuel, Lucia, Juan, Tomas, and myself). The trustees look to me for advice. In turn I get help from my mother, Beryl Graves, who looked after the affairs in Robert's declining years, and from friends of Robert. A.P. Watt Ltd., London, continue as literary agent.

As executor, my aims are to have Robert Graves read and enjoyed by as large a public as possible, to ensure that his manuscripts, letters and other Grave-siana are safe but accessible, and to consolidate his place among twentieth century men of letters.

A fair number of the books are in print in the U.S. and in Britain. However, because several publishers are involved and the subject matter is so varied, the Graves' titles are rarely all stocked by one bookshop. Often they are hard to obtain, especially in the U.S. On request, I can provide a list of current titles in print for the U.S. or in Britain with the publishers' addresses.

Most Graves' manuscripts of poetry and prose have been preserved and are in library collections in the U.S. and Canada. Some later manuscripts are still held by the family. Few of the collections have so far been fully catalogued, making it hard for researchers to know the nature, location and availability of material. A comprehensive worldwide catalogue of the manuscripts needs to be produced, preferably on an international computer base. This would require cooperation between the holders of material. I have already put out some feelers and received a positive response.

Robert Graves was one of the last of the great letter writers. Many of his letters are in collections, and again a comprehensive catalogue is needed. But many more of his letters are lying in his friends' and correspondents' shoe boxes. For those like myself who feel uncomfortable about selling personal letters and do not quite know what to do with them, I suggest they donate them to the collection at St. John's College, Oxford. Robert was there as an undergraduate and again as Senior Fellow in his years as Professor of Poetry. I have set up ground rules with Dr. John Kelly concerning access to personal material in the letters. Well over one hundred letters are in the collection already, including

those to Ava Gardner and Spike Milligan. Others have been promised. I am working on the St. John's letters to identify the persons mentioned and to provide short bibliographical notes on them. This should be done with all the letters, especially those written in the Thirties, while there are still persons around who can recognise the names.

I am in contact with several photographers or their heirs who did work on Graves. I have also had copies of many of the photographs of Robert in the family's possession filed in the National Portrait Gallery Archives, London. But an in-depth iconographic catalogue needs to be produced before the material is lost forever. Negatives would hopefully be acquired by an institution. Perhaps recordings, radio interviews, television material and films with which Robert was associated could come under the same heading.

Even the bibliography, although fairly complete in Williams' new edition of Higginson,¹ requires periodic updating as new publications come to light.

Academically, Robert Graves is a complex subject. As poet, historian, novelist, mythologist, letter writer, lecturer and "eccentric," he does not fit neatly into any simple category. He was a "one off" and requires a category of his own. His interpretations of history, anthropology, the Bible, and his appreciation of poetry rarely followed accepted academic lines. A definitive book showing the thread that runs through his work and his way of thinking has not yet been written. Perhaps when it has been completed he will be easier to deal with in the classroom.

I am publishing what I hope are the complete Graves war poems, which are fifty four in all. Of these, only three appeared in his volumes of Collected Poems after 1927. Five are previously unpublished, and the manuscripts are among the holdings of the Berg Collection in the New York Public Library. The title of the book is *Poems about War*,² and it will be published on Armistice Day, 11th November 1988.

Other projects are underway, but I hope that for now this will have given a fair enough picture of the direction that the Robert Graves Estate is taking. Any help or ideas will truly be appreciated.

Notes

¹F.H. Higginson and William P. Williams, *Robert Graves, A Bibliography* (St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1987).

²Robert Graves, *Poems about War*, ed. William Graves (London: Cassell, 1988).

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