

Comments

A SUPPRESSED POEM ('DEAR ROBERTO')

To The Editor, *Focus on Robert Graves and His Contemporaries*.

Your contributor, Patrick Campbell, (Vol. 2, No. 2) assumes that Graves was responsible for the printing of 'Dear Roberto' by 'The Unknown Press'. I have never heard this suggested before.

The first edition of *Goodbye to All That* which contained Sassoon's poem (that is before the poem was removed) was published on Nov. 18th 1929. By then Graves was already living in Mallorca and the 'suppression' of the poem was arranged by Jonathan Cape and Sassoon — Sassoon called on Cape six days before the publication date and 'because of his wrought up condition' agreed to remove the poem and the reference to Sassoon's mother* — but even so some hundred copies got through without the cancellation (Higginson - *Bibliography*)

How Graves (who knew nothing about this at the time) could have arranged for the printing and distribution of 'A Suppressed Poem' later the same year or why he should have done so is beyond my understanding. Sassoon never accused him of it.

In fact as far as I know the only mention of the poem Sassoon made in writing was in a letter to Graves (March 2nd 1930): 'Your printing of my verse letter without my permission was excusable — you could not have known that I should be shamed by the emotional exhibitionism, though you may have remembered that I tried to get it back from you some years ago and you evaded me by sending a copy of it.'

Who then was responsible for the 'pirated' edition of 'Dear Roberto'? Presumably someone who knew them both and who knew what was going on 'behind the scenes' at Cape's. Whoever it was took it direct from the first edition of *Goodbye to All That*, and not from the original letter — the only change (apart from the odd punctuation mark) being in verse 2, line 2 which has 'at Base 1;' instead of 'at Base;'

Patrick Campbell asks 'Why did Graves refer to the verse-letter as "the most terrible of his war-poems?"' I imagine because he thought it was (and he repeats his opinion in the revised edition of *Goodbye*, 1957) — certainly not to make the most of his 'literary coup' and boost his sales.

Yours etc.

Beryl Graves

* See R.P. Graves *The Years with Laura*