

# Welcome Back, *Good-bye*

*William Graves*

***Good-bye to All That: An Autobiography*** by Robert Graves, edited by Fran Brearton, introduction by Andrew Motion  
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For Robert Graves's literary executor, it is wonderful to see the 1929 edition of *Good-bye to All That*, with Laura Riding's 'Worlds's End' as the epigraph, the Sassoon poem, and most importantly, Graves's epilogue, just as it was when it first came out. It is also in an affordable format, albeit without the photographs which were included in the original Jonathan Cape edition. Andrew Motion has written a succinct and moving introduction: and it has been edited and annotated by Professor Fran Brearton, which, as Graves himself knew, was badly needed. The successful brushed gun-metal grey cover design is evocative of war experience. As Andrew Motion suggests, the 1929 edition and the re-written 1957 edition are different books. The 1957 may be a smoother read, but Robert's soul is in the 1929, and although there is no mention of Laura Riding in the main text, the 'Dedicatory Epilogue to Laura Riding' is an integral part of the book.

Readers of *Gravesiana* may recall that this is not the first reissue of *Good-bye to All That* (1929). It reappeared in 1995, on the occasion of the centenary of his birth, edited and annotated by Richard Perceval Graves, author of the three-volume biography of Graves, and introduced by Paul Fussell, who considered it the era's greatest memoir. It was published as an academic book by Berghahn Books, first in hardback and later in paperback, but it never sold well. That Penguin held the rights to the title, at the time considered as the same book, made things difficult. Now with both editions on the Penguin lists I hope it will again reach the general public, who will appreciate why it was such a runaway

success when published in 1929.

Andrew Motion's excellent introduction not only gives the background to the writing of *Good-bye to All That* but also discusses the construction of the narrative. *Good-bye to All That* was written at an emotional moment in Robert's life. Laura Riding, with whom Robert was deeply in love, had rejected him for Geoffrey Phibbs, who was, in turn, in love with Robert's wife Nancy. Laura, a natural controller, lost control of the situation and had attempted suicide. At the time, English law perceived suicide as an immoral, criminal offence against God and also against the Crown. This meant that Laura would have to go to court and the 'foursome' (as Laura called the relationship, which ended in her jumping out of the fourth floor window in the aptly named St Peter's Square) would surely come under public scrutiny. Even their friends and neighbours referred to the house as 'Free Love Corner'. Robert's friend Sir Edward Marsh, an important person in the Civil Service, promised the case would not be brought against them if they left England as soon as Laura was able to travel.

So Robert needed money (one of the three motives he mentions for writing the book) to get Laura out. The other two motives were a Ridingsque 'opportunity for a formal good-bye to you and to you and to you and to me and to all that' and 'forgetfulness, because once all this has been settled in my mind and written down and published it need never be thought about again'. Laura was still in hospital when he embarked on the project. How much her absence from the main text is due to legal reasons is hard to tell.

The 'defenestration' occurred on 27 April 1929 and by October they were in Mallorca. *Good-bye to All That* was written in under four months. It is the only book which Robert ever dictated. Whether he consciously planned the construction of the narrative as Andrew Motion suggests is difficult to know. There was certainly not much time. He had never fully recovered from his post-traumatic stress and the situation and the dictation of the

book must have brought things back. It was taken down by Jane Lye (the noise of typewriter would have made it impossible for him to think) and this may have a bearing on the way the book was cast.

Several of his old friends complained about inaccuracies in the book, most notably Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, and Dr J. C. Dunn, all of whom wrote their own war memoirs. But others such as Private Frank Richards found that the ‘inaccuracies’ reflected the war they experienced. Certainly the book is not overly accurate historically. But then how accurate can memories be after one’s brain has been knocked about in the barrage of noise of the trenches, after being in coma and left for dead during the Battle of the Somme, and after suffering from untreated severe post-traumatic stress, which he somehow managed to overcome, but never cure, through his poetry. He had not kept a diary and relied to some extent on letters he had sent his parents, even transcribing them at times. But he laid bare the horror of warfare and life in the trenches. Several of the more traumatic incidents in the book appear first as poems, such as ‘A Dead Boche’. Perhaps even the first inklings of *Good-bye to All That* appear in the title poem of his first collection, *Over the Brazier*, long before the Laura incident:

What life to lead and where to go  
After the War, after the War?

And

But Willy said: ‘No, Home’s played out:  
Old England’s quite a hopeless place:  
I’ve lost all feeling for my race [...].

I suggest that research is still needed to be able to understand how and why the book was constructed as it was: and there are many unpublished letters written by Robert which require looking

at. The draft of a letter from Casa Salerosa, Deyá, on 14 May 1930 to an American editor came into my hands the day before the present edition went on sale:

Dear Mr Feipel,

Your industry impresses me. The misprints are due probably to American compositors: I did not get American proofs or, indeed, any copy of the American edition. The inconsistencies of hyphenating are due

- 1/ to the book having been dictated and the typescript corrected in a hurry, in illness.
- 2/ to the farming out of the book at the printers to four or five separate compositors each with ideas of their own as to hyphens (and capitalization & the use of inverted commas)
- 3/ to a rule which I have namely that if one writes for instance  
The Eighteenth Century was a time of decorum . . .  
there is no hyphen, but that if Eighteenth Century is an adjective  
e.g. Eighteenth-Century decorum was . . . .  
there is a hyphen.
- 4/ To my eliminating the hyphens that I would naturally put in if there are too many about in the line.
- 5/ To the notorious blindness of an author to mistakes in material which he knows only too well.

[...]

You have missed one or two bad errors – unless they were amended by American compositors – e.g.[.] ‘I had drank’ occurs four times; a most infuriating invention of an English compositor which I somehow did not notice.

Many thanks.

Robert Graves

These and many other misprints were in the material which Fran

Brearton has painstakingly edited, not to mention the title of the book itself, in which Graves hyphenated 'Good-bye'; the 1957 edition appears without a hyphen. The short timeline she has added and the annotations and the overt differences between the two editions are just right, useful but not overbearing. I welcome the 1929 edition back.

**William Graves** is Robert Graves's literary executor, and director of the Fundació Robert Graves. His memoir *Wild Olives: Life in Majorca with Robert Graves* was published in 1995, and he edited Robert Graves's *Poems about War* (1988) and *A Week in Mallorca with Robert Graves* (2006).