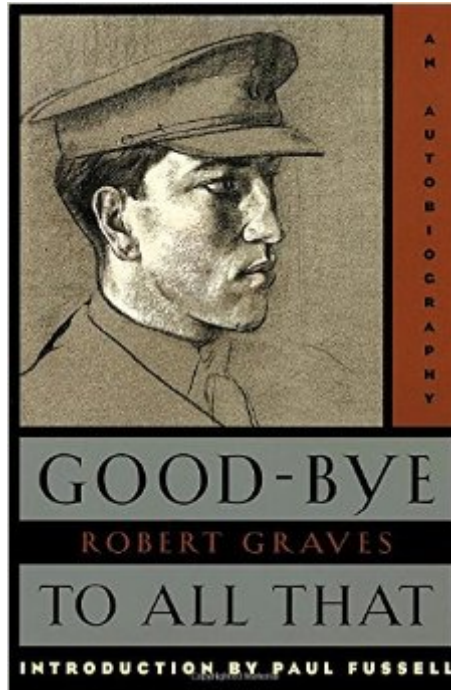


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# Good-Bye To All That: An Autobiography



## Synopsis

In this autobiography, first published in 1929, poet Robert Graves traces the monumental and universal loss of innocence that occurred as a result of the First World War. Written after the war and as he was leaving his birthplace, he thought, forever, Good-Bye to All That bids farewell not only to England and his English family and friends, but also to a way of life. Tracing his upbringing from his solidly middle-class Victorian childhood through his entry into the war at age twenty-one as a patriotic captain in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, this dramatic, poignant, often wry autobiography goes on to depict the horrors and disillusionment of the Great War, from life in the trenches and the loss of dear friends, to the stupidity of government bureaucracy and the absurdity of English class stratification. Paul Fussell has hailed it as "the best memoir of the First World War" and has written the introduction to this new edition that marks the eightieth anniversary of the end of the war. An enormous success when it was first issued, it continues to find new readers in the thousands each year and has earned its designation as a true classic.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

GOOD-BYE TO ALL THAT is about considerably more than just Graves's experiences in the trenches in WW I, but it is that section of the book that makes this memoir stand apart from most others. That, and the exceptional honesty of the book, which manages to be tell-all without being gossipy. There is also a sense of renunciation; instead of nostalgic longing to recover the past as one find in other memoirs, Graves is anxious to put the past aside for good, to have done with it entirely. The best parts of the book are those dealing with his dreadful time in school, he time serving

in the war, and his various friendships. Some of those friendships sneak up on you. He writes at length of a literature professor at school named George Mallory who profoundly molded his reading and literary sensibilities. He writes for page after page about "George," but it isn't until he begins a chapter with the words, "George Mallory did something better than lend me books: he took me climbing on Snowdon in the school vacation." It wasn't until that moment that I realized that George Mallory the literature instructor was THAT George Mallory, the famous mountain climber who attempted Everest (and perhaps conquered it) "because it is there." George becomes one of Graves's greatest friends, and even serves as best man in his wedding. The other friendship I found fascinating, perhaps because the man himself remains one of the most mystifying characters of the 20th century, was T. E. Lawrence. As Lawrence removed himself from the public eye more and more in the 1920s and 1930s, being in 1920 perhaps one of the most famous individuals in the British Empire, he changed personas from Lawrence of Arabia to Private Shaw, reenlisting in the Army as an auto mechanic.

I first became aware of *Goodbye to All That* when I was reading *Resurrection* by Pat Barker. Barker's WWI historical novel has Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, and Vera Brittain as characters in a British army hospital. Graves is a minor character, but Sassoon and Owen are the main characters. My curiosity about Robert Graves's impressions of his WWI experiences led me to *Goodbye to All That*. By the time Graves had written this book, he was 35 and was living with Laura Riding, his literary muse and lover. Yet he does not mention her in the book. Rather he concentrates on the disastrous British school system that he endured as a child and young man, his experiences in WWI, and ends with the downfall of his first marriage to Nancy Nicholson (the mother of his 4 children) and his teaching position in Egypt at the University of Cairo. Nancy was a socialist and feminist and eventually she drove Graves away. This is so odd considering that Graves was totally sympathetic to patriarchal power structures and devoted much of his writing and poetry to the White Goddess. There is no White Goddess to be found in these pages however, which is so odd considering his fascination with this topic throughout his poetic and literary career. T.E. Lawrence was a friend of Graves and gave Graves the copyright to four chapters of *Pillars of Wisdom* for publication in the USA. This allowed Graves additional income to support his writing career as well as a large family. The sections on WWI are the highlights of the book. Robert Graves enlisted at age 19 and became an officer due to his social class. He is seriously wounded and his family is told he is dead but he rises from this condition to regain his health. He meets the poet Siegfried Sassoon during this convalescence. He also meets Dr.

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