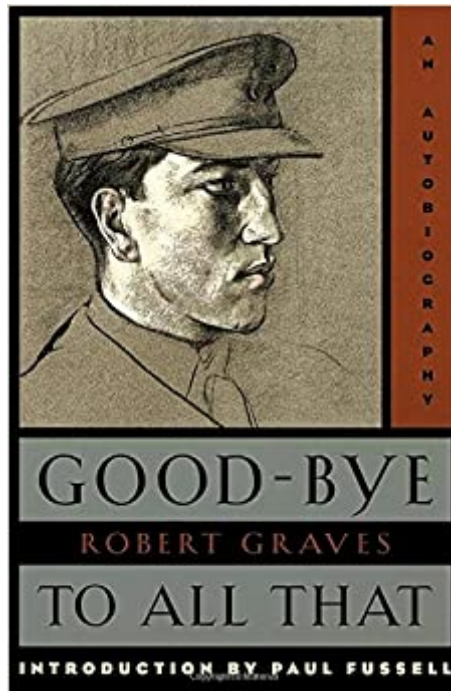




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# Good-Bye To All That: An Autobiography



## 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

The quintessential memoir of the generation of Englishmen who suffered in World War I is among the bitterest autobiographies ever written. Robert Graves's stripped-to-the-bone prose seethes with contempt for his class, his country, his military superiors, and the civilians who mindlessly cheered the carnage from the safety of home. His portrait of the stupidity and petty cruelties endemic in England's elite schools is almost as scathing as his depiction of trench warfare. Nothing could equal Graves's bone-chilling litany of meaningless death, horrific encounters with gruesomely decaying

corpses, and even more appalling confrontations with the callousness and arrogance of the military command. Yet this scarifying book is consistently enthralling. Graves is a superb storyteller, and there's clearly something liberating about burning all your bridges at 34 (his age when *Good-Bye to All That* was first published in 1929). He conveys that feeling of exhilaration to his readers in a pell-mell rush of words that remains supremely lucid. Better known as a poet, historical novelist, and critic, Graves in this one work seems more like an English Hemingway, paring his prose to the minimum and eschewing all editorializing because it would bring him down to the level of the phrase- and war-mongers he despises. --Wendy Smith

Autobiography by Robert Graves, published in 1929 and revised in 1957. It is considered a classic of the disillusioned postwar generation. Divided into anecdotal scenes and satiric episodes, *Good-Bye to All That* is infused with a dark humor. It chronicles the author's experiences as a student at Charterhouse School in London and as a teenaged soldier in France during World War I, where he sustained severe wounds in combat. His memoir continues after the war with descriptions of his life in Wales, at Oxford University, and in Egypt. -- The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature

Graves recounts his war experiences in a wholly unemotional way that add clarity and believability to his account. He avoids any temptation to brag about himself or glamorize his experience, even though he was clearly a brave and successful officer who was also emerging as significant poet at the time. Other authors may have been tempted to overplay their relationship with a figure like T.E. Lawrence, but Graves just relates a few anecdotes from his postwar time with Lawrence at Oxford. He casually mentions the astonishing detail that Lawrence gave him four chapters of "Seven Pillars of Wisdom" to serialize in America because Graves and his young family needed money. From a reader's standpoint, however, the best thing about "Goodbye" is not the details about trench warfare or the horrors experienced by poor Tommies dying all around. It is the hum and humor of Graves' prose, seen here in the bud which would flower so gloriously in books like "I, Claudius". Don't read this to learn about WWI. Read it to learn about memoir.

A wonderful and poignant read from someone who went on to become a renowned author and poet. If you want a refreshing antidote to the often maudlin prose and poetry that came out of the Great War ("..corner of a foreign field..." comes to mind), this is the book for you. Written with honesty and clarity, it is deservedly a classic of the war writings. And it is a poster child of how to write memoirs.

Somehow this book made me want to be a turn of the century British boy who ends up fighting in the first world war. I could write that exact same review about a lot of books, but this one did it more. Some of my school years were spent tracing this good fellow's bee obsession, which somehow never involved reading this one; I had thus high expectations of for a bee-based theory of the war, or some terrifying bee event in his early youth, but if it was there I missed it.

Robert Graves was .to me a great Writer. I love this book. and Thank God it made its way here. his writing at times reminds me of Shakespeare funny at times, then sad

Robert Graves is probably best known to American readers as the author of *I Claudius* and the translator of many classics including Suetonius' *Lives of The Caesars*. Here he writes of his experience growing up in the early 20th century in England, his time in the trenches of WWI and his life post-war as a writer. Graves begins by sharing the time he spent in the English public school system and the cruelty he experienced there. He enlists in the army to get away from it all and finds much of the same social conventions that he despised replicated in the service. His descriptions of life in the trenches of France is gut wrenching. He is severely wounded and returns to England. Post War Graves writes of his time at Oxford and his friendship with TE Lawrence (of Arabia) and other notable writers of his generation. I found this part of the book incredibly interesting. Graves and his wife embark on a bicycle trip and stop to visit Thomas Hardy. He and Hardy discuss poetry and literary criticism. Following that there is a fascinating period that he spends in Egypt teaching. As a memoir and autobiography this is first rate. In the end the title refers to England itself. Graves left to live out his life in Spain.

There's not a lot I can add to what other reviewers have already said about Graves's memoir, so I'll dispense with a summary and say briefly what I liked and did not like about it. Take it or leave it. First of all, Graves knows how to write--this memoir is just as entertaining and fun to read as any of his novels. His literacy and narrative ability immediately set him apart from many of the other World War I memoirists--whose books are often clunky and poorly written--as do his wit and his eye for the significant detail. The book is very funny in many places and deeply moving in others. His descriptions of trench life are suitably depressing, as are his tales of the randomness of World War I violence and even the suicidal tendencies of some of the soldiers. The only things I disliked about *Good-bye to All That* were Graves's obvious bitterness and the lackluster final third. Graves, of

course, is entitled to be bitter about the war--it was a terrible experience for thousands of people--but his view of the war as expressed here is imbalanced. His narrative is significantly skewed and rather self-pitying in places. Also, the strength of his narrative peters out near the end, when he spends some time teaching in Cairo. The last few chapters read more like notable miscellany than a coherent memoir. Those two misgivings aside, I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. Not only was it a good memoir, it was a remarkably good source (I read this for a graduate seminar in World War I) for the attitudes and ideals of the "sensitive artistic types" following World War I. If you're interested in comparing this memoir with a vastly different perspective, I recommend reading it along with Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel*. Recommended.

While there are portions of the book written with tongue firmly in cheek, altered to fit continuity, or reshaped for the need for drama, this remains one of the finest books on encountering war. The "culture shock" of a young, early-20th Century British male, slamming into the violence of war dominated by machine might seem to narrow its relevance but that shock is far more universal than people who have not encountered it might imagine. I recommend this not only for those trying to understand the experience of combat but to other veterans who are looking for a way to find a voice for their own experiences; Graves touches on much and may provide the openings and ideas some need.

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