

# WG's Discarded Dozen

*A look at the author's first twelve long-suppressed novels*

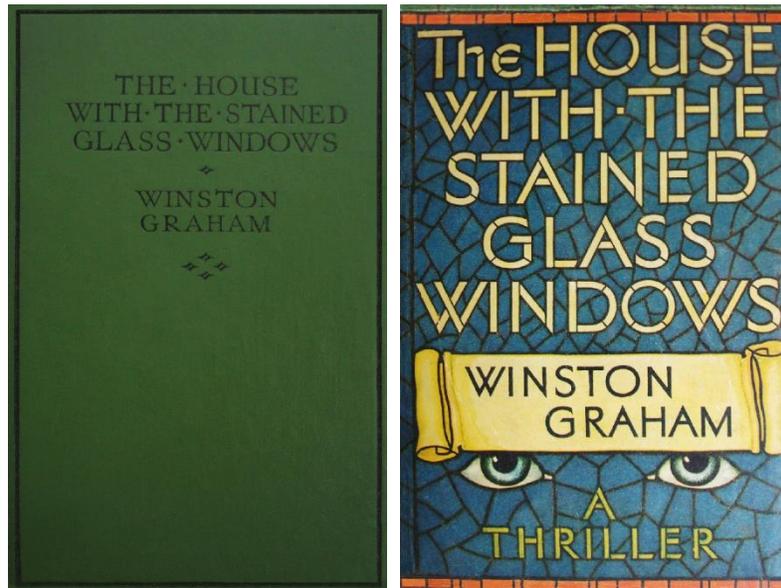
After five years of trying, twenty-six-year-old Winston Graham finally realised his ambition of becoming a published author with the appearance in October 1934 of *The House with the Stained Glass Windows*. The book had been written in 1929 and rejected by three publishers before, in, May 1934, Ward, Lock agreed to take it subject to revision of its "super-sensational" finale, a request with which the author was more than happy to comply. In the nine years and three months following its release, Ward, Lock published a further eleven Graham novels. All of these first dozen WG titles have been long out-of-print, with their author refusing all suggestions that some or all of them should be re-published. He came to regard them as apprentice work that should be "suppressed"<sup>1</sup> because it would be "a con"<sup>2</sup> to offer them to a public grown used to associating a higher standard of writing with his name. The earliest reference I could find to this attitude comes from a 1955 profile in which he told Earle F. Walbridge: "I would not wish to resurrect any of [my early novels]."<sup>3</sup> In 1967, speaking to Arthur Pottersman, he went further:

*Some of the novels I wrote then earned up to £100 each, but I keep them under my hat now. I have been approached to have them reissued, but I've always said No. To me, even at the time of writing, I was conscious that they were experimental books, not in the literary sense, but in the sense that a reasonably good carpenter first practises not by making a new chair, but by "inventing" a chair for himself.<sup>4</sup>*

The author retained this dismissive opinion of his early books for the remainder of his long life. Although four of the twelve were eventually re-published in revised form, none have ever re-appeared in their original form, either before WG's death or since. But are they really as substandard as he claimed? Let's find out.

(WG = Winston Graham, WL = Ward, Lock & Co., Ltd.)

**(1) *THE HOUSE WITH THE STAINED GLASS WINDOWS* (WL, October 1934)**



Twenty-nine chapters; 320 pages.

**Plot**

(Chapter 1) The recent onset of chest pains takes twenty-six-year-old Richard Egerton to Harley Street to consult his late father's friend and "the greatest living authority on the heart", Sir Rupert Willouby. After a few questions and a brief auscultation, Willouby, who wears a moustache and beard, tells the unfortunate Egerton that he has six weeks, three months at most, to live.

(2) In a Bloomsbury hotel room, we meet two shady characters, tall, clean-shaven M. D. Francis and a mysterious cove called Age, who talk of selling some books to a third man called Banbergh.

(3) Siblings Ray and Aileen Boynton are concerned about Lucille Barclay, a school friend of Aileen's who has just been certified sound after spending three months in a "mental home". Her "oily" step-uncle James is about to take her to Hawes Towers in Yorkshire. Aileen has been invited up for a week and has a hunch there will be trouble. Ray can't accompany her since he is about to depart for the Argentine. They consider hiring a private detective to go with

Aileen whilst posing as her second brother Fred. They then think to ask their friend Richard Egerton instead.

(4) We learn more of Lucille's back-story. On her twenty-first birthday, which will fall during the coming house party, she is due to inherit about £70,000, the money presently held in trust by her step-uncle and guardian James Pedlaw. She had a mentally ill half-brother and Lucille is afraid she's going the same way. Aileen believes the uncle is deliberately causing Lucille's health problems because he wants her money for himself. Aileen asks Richard if he can think of anyone who might accompany her incognito to the house party, then, noting his odd behaviour, demands to know what's wrong. He reveals his grim news.

(5) We learn that when Aileen and Ray arrived, Egerton had been about to shoot himself, and once they have gone, he considers whether to try again. He decides he will, but this time is interrupted by the early return home of Bowers, his aged butler.

(6) Egerton spends a day mooching then a second considering what he should do to make the most of his remaining time. Finally he rings up Aileen and asks her to lunch.

(7) We learn that Lucille's father, Stewart Barclay, first married Catherine Pedlaw. She didn't live long and left a baby, Ernest, about twelve months old. Five years later Barclay married Lucille's mother and Lucille was born a year later. Ernest, then nearly eight, who "had been a little mental from birth", grew worse with age, his affliction "in part ... hereditary and certainly quite incurable." When Lucille was five, pneumonia killed her mother and half-brother. Her father died when she was seventeen, leaving all his money in trust to her and his house in Yorkshire to his brother-in-law James Pedlaw. After school and some travelling on the continent, Lucille went to live with Pedlaw in London and quickly began to complain of hearing noises at night, sleeping erratically, headaches, "seeing things that she wouldn't describe" and so on. When she went to stay with Aileen for four weeks, all symptoms disappeared but, on her return home, recurred, worse than before. Lucille

thinks she's going the way of her late half-brother; Aileen believes step-uncle James is responsible for her "illness". The house party is already underway. Egerton agrees to accompany Aileen and to drive her and Lucille – who delayed her departure from London – up to Yorkshire in his Talbot tomorrow – Sunday – in good time for Lucille's birthday on Tuesday.

(8) The three travel north. Richard finds Lucille "flawlessly lovely". We learn the names of the thirteen other residents plus two servants who will be staying at the Gothic pile – not on the telephone, miles from the nearest station, believed haunted for two centuries – Hawes Towers.

(9) We're given a tour of the house with stained glass windows and meet host James Pedlaw (weak mouth), his two friends David Priestley (fishy eyes with penetrative properties) and Colonel White (undoubtedly handsome but lips a little too full), guests Earle Bryant (genial American millionaire), apathetic solicitor Everett, tall, bald-headed Dr. Toulson (whose voice Richard thinks he's heard before), three chatty girls, Mary, Sylvia and Clarice, two young men, Selbie (plump) and Lowe-Davisson (long and thin) and Mr. and Mrs. Gordon. Morose black butler Jefferson Smith has been in post nearly eighteen months after the departure of five previous butlers due to assorted ghostly happenings. We learn that one room in the house – "the haunted room" – is "reportedly the centre of the trouble" and, although it is never used, Lucille has been installed next door.

(10) The last member of the household, old Mrs. Lambert, the housekeeper, is introduced. Over pre-dinner bridge, Richard assesses his fellow guests. Lucille suffers a first fright when, in her room, the face of a glass-fronted oil painting of her father "moves". Bryant acts suspiciously.

(11) At a private interview, Uncle James tells Lucille that, due to market losses, her inheritance will be nearer £19,000 than £70,000 and gets her to sign bank documents. In a second interview, Francis (see chapter two) tells "Banbergh" (which we're told is an alias) that he has succeeded in obtaining two books of Sir Rupert Willouby's diary simply by impersonating him and walking into his home, using a duplicate key, whilst the specialist was away for the weekend.

The books contain material which, if published, would "ruin" the Harley Street man. Francis proposes to sell the books to Banbergh for £4,000. Whilst Banbergh leafs through them, Francis tells him that "Richard Boylton" is an assumed name. He knows the young man is Richard Egerton because they met for the first time a few days ago. Banbergh says: "When I conceived this house party ..." We are given to understand, then, that "Francis" is Dr. Toulson, who recently impersonated Sir Rupert and, in the course of robbing his home, examined chance-caller Egerton and told him he was terminally ill, and that "Banbergh" is Uncle James, who is in cahoots with, and also in thrall to criminals.

(12) Two in the morning: Lucille wakes from a bad dream to hear breathing in her room. Not just Aileen, who is asleep beside her, but someone else. She tries to wake Aileen but can't. Before retiring, Richard removed the "moving face" painting from her wall and rigged up a string from her room to his, attached at his end to a bell so she might send him an alarm signal if need be. She turns her light on and sees the painting is back on the wall, its half-human, half-simian face watching her. Someone is in her dressing room. She pulls the string. It has been cut. She tries to open her door but can't. She screams. The lights go out. She falls to her knees, faints and bangs her head hard on the steps.

(13) Seven a.m. Woozy Aileen rouses slumbering Richard to tell him Lucille is "ill". They find her unconscious on the floor of her room. Richard lifts her onto the bed and revives her with whisky. The painting is not on the wall and the pull-string is not cut. But when Richard commits violence on the painting with a stick, he finds a false panel on its back through which the face of the image can be lifted away, leaving an oval through which a real face may peer. He resolves to get to the bottom of this mystery and feels reassured by the fact that, since he's not long for this world, he can, should the need arise, "ignore the law".

(14) At breakfast, solicitor Everett is missing and Priestley makes plain he suspects Richard is an imposter. On the pretext of clearing Lucille's headache, she, Aileen and Richard go for a drive, even though today is her twenty-first

birthday and she has other house guests to consider. The three eventually end up in York, where Richard places a call to his London brokers to find out whether the financial information given by Pedlaw to Lucille is genuine. If not, he must be an embezzler. Whilst waiting for the call to come through, they discuss switching rooms for the coming night. Aileen then suggests, on the strength of a newspaper article, that Richard and Lucille marry.

(15) A long argument back and forth about the merits of this plan, with knight-errant Egerton all for it and Lucille most reluctant to take advantage of his quixotic nature. The phone rings.

(16) Egerton's brokers inform him that Pedlaw was lying; further that Pedlaw, Everett and housekeeper Mrs. Lambert are the only directors of one of the companies Pedlaw mentioned and that a second "that came into being about five years ago and went smash eighteen months later" had an M. D. called "the Hon. William Banbergh, who went to America".

(17) The three get back to Hawes Towers at five o'clock just ahead of an impending snowstorm. Pedlaw is annoyed. Everett is still missing. Richard discloses to Pedlaw first his true identity and then that he and Lucille were married in York by special licence at two p.m. that afternoon. (He claims the pair met at a dance and have been in love for the past three months.) Aileen, alone and snuffling, considers herself "a damned soft little fool".

(18) The house guests are told of the wedding. Toulson in particular looks displeased. Mrs. Gordon is absent, having been unnerved by bumping into a black, snarling *something* in "a dark passage". She insists on leaving immediately in spite of the heavily falling snow, but Bryant announces that all the cars have had their spark plugs removed, so that no departure is possible. Bryant's enigmatic talk suggests he's a detective. Someone takes a pistol shot at Egerton, but the bullet just nicks the top of his right ear. Due to the weather, the house is cut off.

(19) Egerton and Lucille work out that the gunman must have been Priestley or Toulson. He reminds himself that their union is a "business contract". While

they're talking of how best to make their alliance look like anything other than the marriage of convenience it is, two revolver shots are heard. By his suspicious movements, Priestley seems the likeliest suspect, his intended victims this time Pedlaw and Colonel White, both unhurt. Bryant searches Priestley but finds nothing. The sound of maniacal laughter is heard from the top of the stairs. It is now concluded that a madman with a revolver is roaming the upper part of the house (where the Gordons and Toulson are in their rooms) and Smith the butler, armed with a poker, is sent up to seek out and overpower the miscreant. After a stage wait he re-appears to say he's found no madmen, that the Gordons are unharmed and that Toulson is nowhere to be seen, but that he did find something under Toulson's bed. He then carries over his shoulder down the stairs the dead body of Everett, whose throat has been cut.

(20) Bligh the chauffeur and Rogers the footman have been sent on foot for the police. All the men in a body have searched the house in vain. "The existence of a secret passage or ... place of concealment was now accepted as the obvious solution." All retire. In the darkness of their room (Egerton, on a chair by the door, having woken to find the lights don't work), first Lucille and then Richard are attacked by an unseen assailant. When they eventually get some candles alight, he has mysteriously gone. The bolster, standing in for Egerton beside Lucille in the bed, is slashed from top to bottom.

(21) The police and a Doctor Robinson have come. In Pedlaw's study, Bryant reveals to Pedlaw and Inspector Brookes that he's a detective inspector from London and that he disabled the cars "to keep the house party intact until the police arrived". Bryant believes Everett was a blackmailer. After making an excuse to leave the study, he advises Brookes not to say too much in there because everything can be overheard. He then asks who first directed Brookes into the study? It was the butler.

(22) After a thorough search of the house, which Pedlaw insists has no attic, a secret room between Toulson's and Everett's is found containing blood-stains left by Everett's murder and Toulson, slumped dead (suicide by prussic acid) across a small table.

(23) Toulson has left a two-page confession which identifies Everett as a blackmailer and himself as his murderer and the gunman of yesterday and the one who attacked Richard and Lucille in the night and the thief of his cousin Willouby's diaries, which he asks to be returned to their owner. Seven guests – the Gordons, the two young men and three young women – arrange to leave the house, but Bryant stays on.

(24) Egerton confides in Bryant, who shows him Toulson's confession. Egerton asks Dr. Robinson to examine him and is given to understand that he was hoaxed by Toulson in London and is in excellent health. He is relieved, of course, but also married ...

(25) Egerton fortuitously sees Mrs. Lambert pass through the wall of the lounge into a secret passage and follows her. The passage connects to Pedlaw's study, Lucille's room and two other rooms up in the attic, outside the first of which he picks up a rag doll. After counselling Lucille and Aileen to stay locked in Lucille's room, he goes off to confront Pedlaw.

(26) Under duress, Pedlaw admits the presence of "an imbecile" in the house, who is confined to the attic whenever guests are staying. Bryant declares that the mastermind behind all the criminality is Banbergh, who is Pedlaw's brother and the man who murdered both Everett and Toulson. He says Toulson's confession "was a forgery from beginning to end". White shoots and injures Bryant. Priestley steps in and disarms White and Pedlaw. The lights go out. More shots; Pedlaw takes a bullet in the shoulder. When the lights come back on, White and Priestley are gone. Bryant sends Egerton to flash an SOS signal with a torch. Butler Smith bars his way.

(27) Smith overpowers and is about to kill Egerton when Bryant shoots and disables him. Egerton comes upon Priestley, who has already sent an SOS. After checking on Lucille and Aileen, the pair go up to the attic where they find White, dead from a gunshot wound sustained earlier.

(28) Priestley, a Scotland Yard man, tells Egerton a story: the Pedlaw family comprised twice-widowed mother Mrs. Lambert, elder brother James and

twins Catherine and Charles. Stewart Barclay marries unstable, heroin-addicted Catherine. Mrs. Lambert and Charles (wrongly) blame and come to hate Barclay for Catherine's early death. After his remarriage and the birth of Lucille, whom Mrs. Lambert also loathes by association, Barclay persuades Mrs. Lambert to adopt Ernest, "deficient from birth", for "a consideration". While mother and Charles continue to despise Barclay, second brother-in-law James makes a pretence of befriending him. In the two years between Barclay's apoplexy and death, Pedlaw, Barclay's solicitor Everett, his doctor Toulson and Charles (aka Colonel White aka Banbergh) defraud him of £150,000. They also forge his will, leaving Lucille £60,000. With Charles off in South America, Everett and Toulson begin to blackmail Pedlaw, who embezzles Lucille to meet their demands. On his return, Charles wants the residue of Barclay's money, so sets Pedlaw onto appropriating it, then murders Everett and Toulson and forges Toulson's "confession". Mrs. Lambert was behind the designs on Lucille's sanity, giving and then depriving her of heroin (as she believed Barclay had done to her daughter). Bryant is a Canadian-born American detective called Leroy, also on the trail of White and supplied with false UK police credentials by Priestley. The shots fired at White and Pedlaw were fake: "White put a bullet through his coat – on old trick, that, not quite worthy of him". Black butler Smith, wanted for murder in America, "will swing".

(29) Richard and Lucille are surprised to find that their feelings of love are mutual; their impetuous marriage may prove not quite so grievous a misstep after all.

## **Review**

The main business of a "thriller" is to thrill, and a novel which does that so successfully as Mr. Graham's may be thoroughly commended. Of course, readers of the ultra-critical school might find fault with the author on one or two minor points, but do such readers ever make the "thriller's" acquaintance? Whether or not this is Mr. Graham's first excursion into this realm of fiction, one is not sure, but he certainly has all the tricks of the trade, using that phrase in no derogatory sense. He writes vividly and briskly, and

the exciting tale he has to tell is not so far-fetched as to spoil the effect of his narrative style – an important point this. And it *is* an exciting tale, right from the first chapter to the last ... [details of plot omitted] ... This is exactly the kind of setting for a house-party which contains a number of people who are obviously not what they pretend to be. At once we suspect certain characters, and as soon as dark deeds are perpetrated our suspicions deepen, but Mr. Graham knows what he is about, and he takes good care that these are not confirmed until the proper time, and even then the reader may find that there are a surprise or two in store. Altogether a thoroughly competent piece of work.

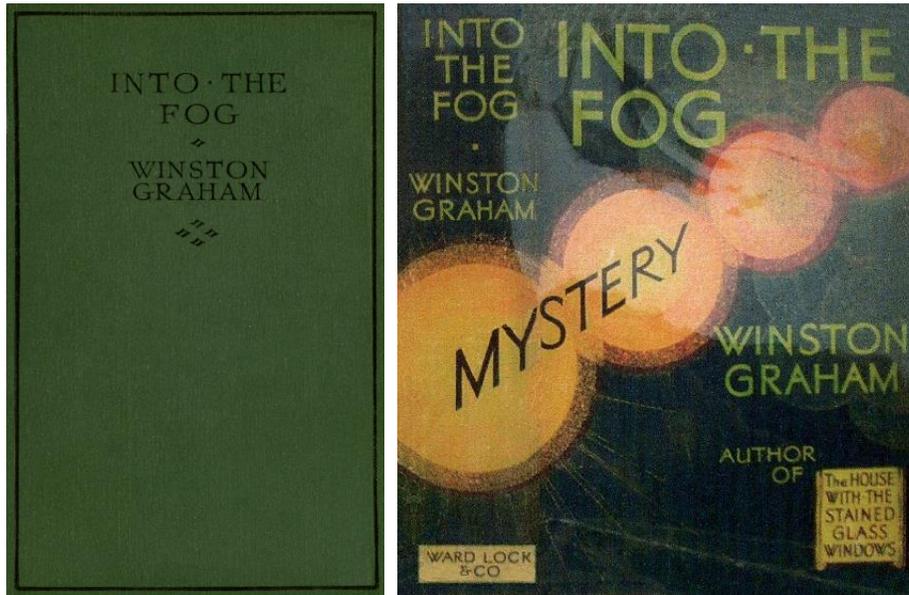
*The Scotsman*, 18 October 1934

## Comment

WG described the book in 1967 as "a plain thriller, set in London and Yorkshire, under the general influence of Sapper and A. E. W. Mason"<sup>4</sup> and in *Memoirs*, 1.3 as "amateurish, derivative ... and sloppily written [but with] immense story-telling drive [such that] if you could believe the story it would grip you to the last page." And that qualifier – "if you could believe the story" – identifies his first book's primary weakness. It's fun, of a sort, but of the most fevered, rabid, untempered kind and this, remember after its "super-sensational" finale had been "toned down". His older self expressed surprise it ever came to be published, and it's hard not to empathise. He suggests in *Memoirs* that, unlike Kipling or Graham Greene, he didn't come "fully equipped" to his craft; that he improved as a writer<sup>6</sup> – and, if proof be needed, this novel is Exhibit A. Nonetheless, precisely because of the fine writer he did become, this first foray, be it so raw, holds interest over and above its limited intrinsic merit, simply by virtue of its author. Yes, it's juvenile Gothic hokum which it would be wrong to attempt to pass off as "literature". But surely it ought to be possible to publish such a work without resort to any "con"? For more, see SUMMARY below.

\* \* \* \* \*

**(2) INTO THE FOG (WL, March 1935)**



Book One, seven chapters; Book Two, four chapters; Book three, four chapters; Epilogue; 256 pages.

**Plot**

**BOOK ONE: COVERING A PERIOD OF SEVEN HOURS**

(1) It is a foggy autumn evening; driving is difficult. In the drab dining room of a Bodmin hotel, Anthony Craig is bored. A girl enters, then leaves soon after him. He changes a wheel on her car then follows her through the fog across Bodmin Moor. She stops outside a house near Launceston. He passes, then, forced to double back on foot, sees two men leave the house, one carrying the now-unconscious girl. They put her in the back of her car, turn round and drive off. Craig follows on foot, able to keep up because they have to drive slowly in the fog, and tracks them three-quarters of a mile to an off-road property called St. Lucia Lodge. The girl is carried inside. He gropes round the house in the dark, grazing forehead and hand in the process, and is able to open a cellar door at the back and go in. Inside, by the light of a match, he finds, on a trestle table under a sheet, the dead body of a circa thirty-year-old man.

(2) "A huge open gash" behind the man's ear suggests death by unnatural causes. Tony cannot proceed further into the house as he can hear voices in the next room, so goes back outside and passes on round the property. Peering through part-drawn curtains, he sees a man in a clerical collar playing a violin before a mirror. Tony has an idea.

(3) After knocking on the front door, which is opened by a butler, Tony says he's had an accident then swoons on the doorstep. He is carried inside, into the presence of the violinist, ex-missionary the Rev. Paul Frayne. The other members of the household are butler Pollitt, chauffeur and reformed alcoholic Woods and gardener Pendavey. After initial reluctance, Frayne agrees to allow Craig to stay the night and begins plying him with brandy. Soon Craig sinks, apparently drunk, to the floor.

(4) Craig's brandy was laced by Woods on Frayne's instruction. Frayne orders him carried up to an attic room and locked in. Craig awakens and, thanks to his penknife, soon has the door open. He breaks into an adjacent room, finds the drugged girl and rouses her. She, Eline Vincent, lives in Penzance with her Aunt Agatha. The cottage she drove to was being rented by her elder brother Digby, a Scotland Yard CID man on a painting holiday. He was "onto something really important" concerning "smuggling" and had instructed her to visit him via a letter she now realises must have been forged. Frayne and Co. discover Craig is not in his room. He holds them at bay whilst Eline makes a run for it but, after a struggle, a chase and some gunplay, both prisoners are recaptured.

(5) Frayne quizzes Tony; he, securely bound, frets about his aching limbs and uncertain future. Woods returns with Tony's car. After the rope is removed from Tony's legs, he is driven beside a gun-toting Frayne by Woods to a lonely coastal ravine. Pollitt follows with the late Digby Vincent in a second car. Frayne tells Tony he's been a smuggler for four years and last year had to kill a Boscastle fisherman who discovered more than was good for him. The gang set out a storm lantern, light towards the sea, and run a rope ladder down from their promontory to the beach below. Presently we learn that, fog notwithstanding, "they're here."

(6) A French trawler skipper, Moreau, and two of his crew land three civilians who are escorted away by Frayne's men. Moreau ferries Vincent (dead) and Craig (bound) out to his trawler, which sets off for France. Later, in the course of searching his captive prior to pitching him overboard, Moreau is stabbed in the back by Craig, who had managed surreptitiously to work his left arm free of its bonds.

(7) Craig leaps into the sea and, having eluded the pursuing matelots, reaches the cliff-girt shore. His partial ascent of a formidable cliff is then described at length.

## BOOK TWO: BEING INCIDENTS ON A THREAD

(1) Back at St. Lucia Lodge, Frayne talks with Eline, propositions her, fights with her and then tells her that both her brother and Craig are dead.

(2) Craig is stranded on a remote cliff-ledge high above the sea. A poacher out at three a.m. hears his cries for help and goes off to rouse the local doctor.

(3) Tony – having been rescued with rope from the cliff, fed, clothed, funded and driven to Plymouth, from where he flew to Croydon – reports all he knows to Superintendent David (a colleague of Digby Vincent's) at Scotland Yard. They then discuss how best to proceed.

(4) David and Craig are flying to Plymouth. While Craig sleeps, the CID man studies possible identities of "Frayne" and his team, plucked from police records on the basis of Craig's descriptions. As the plane tracks west, the pilot notes fog ahead.

## BOOK THREE: COVERING A PERIOD OF TWO HOURS

(1) At St. Lucia Lodge, a bi-annual meeting of Frayne's criminal organisation is taking place. Eight men attend, all wearing a silk mask and pocket badge marked with a Greek letter for identification purposes. Yearly accounts are rendered. Theta (Frayne) then explains that recent events have made three

murders necessary, including those of a Scotland Yard detective and his sister – but Epsilon tells the group that Theta is lying; that the female is not in fact dead but being held prisoner by Theta up in the attic. When Frayne orders Pollitt to take Epsilon in charge, the latter draws a gun and reveals himself as Craig.

(2) Craig locks all in the meeting room then Pendavey in a cupboard before fetching Eline from the attic, but their way back down is cut off by Pollitt, now at large once more. The couple backtrack to the attic and barricade the stairs with a wardrobe. Shots are exchanged. Pollitt and Sigma breach the barricade, but Craig overpowers and repels them. Eline calmly tells Tony she's been shot three times by Frayne, at which point he realises he loves her. The pair retreat to the better sanctuary of a bedroom. While he's off fetching her manicure case, she collapses insensible to the floor.

(3) Tony tends her wounds – two in the left arm, one above the left hip – and piles all the furniture in front of the room's only door. He tells Eline the police are due in half an hour. As they reveal their mutual love, she grows progressively weaker until finally slipping into unconsciousness. There's a knock on the door.

(4) Frayne offers to let Eline go "on a pledge of silence" if Tony will give himself up. He refuses. Gang members start to leave the house as the police arrive. Tony ventures downstairs and corners Frayne who chose unwisely to double back for his violin. Believing Eline dead, Craig shoots him in the shoulder, smashes his instrument then half-throttles the man before Superintendent David arrives. David goes up to Eline and calls for the police doctor who, after a brief examination, pronounces her not dead yet – "but I'm afraid she soon will be."

## EPILOGUE

Tony is in hospital. We learn that he got into the meeting by the simple expedient of overpowering the real Epsilon at the gate of St. Lucia Lodge and impersonating him. All of the gang except Woods have been caught and Pollitt

will probably turn King's Evidence. On learning that Eline still lives, Tony faints. Next morning, the two lovers are reunited. They will have their chance.

## **Review**

### **ART OF THRILLING ~ Winston Graham Has It**

Many an author has set out to write a thriller, and after succeeding reasonably well for the first few chapters has fallen down on the job. Mr. Winston Graham, however, is too experienced for this, and as a result his latest novel, "Into the Fog" ... is a welcome addition to the book shelves.

The theme is simple and perhaps well worn, but that does not matter. Anthony Craig, motoring through Cornwall in a fog, sees a girl kidnapped. Most of us would probably have contented ourselves with getting in touch with the local police, and have left it at that. But heroes in novels never see the thing in that light. At any rate, Anthony Craig did not. He followed the girl and her captors to a lonely house. There he forced his way into a cellar where his first encounter was with the corpse of an obviously murdered man.

Just as obviously you and I would have turned back at this stage, and, despite our earlier enthusiasm for adventure, gone in search of the policeman we had ignored at the outset. Not so Anthony. He went right ahead, and forced his way into the house, and, of course, was taken prisoner by the crooks who have kidnapped the girl.

In reading the book I naturally expected that Anthony would fight his way out, and in this I was not disappointed. But Mr. Graham does not make the thing as simple as all that. Many a novelist at this stage would have called in Scotland Yard, and worked to a tame finish. Mr. Graham, however, knows better than that, and for many a chapter thereafter he kept me on tenterhooks – in fact, I switched out the light at 5 a.m. before I reached the distressing word "finis."

There is an art in making the hair on the back of one's head stand up, and this author knows all about it. It is a long time, for instance, since I have been so

absorbed as I was in the desperate climb of Anthony Craig up the face of the Cornish cliff, which was his only way back to rescue the girl of the fog. Mr. Graham has the art of suspense at his command, and before he allowed me to read of the final downfall of that unusual crook, the Rev. Paul Frayne, he gave me many a bad moment.

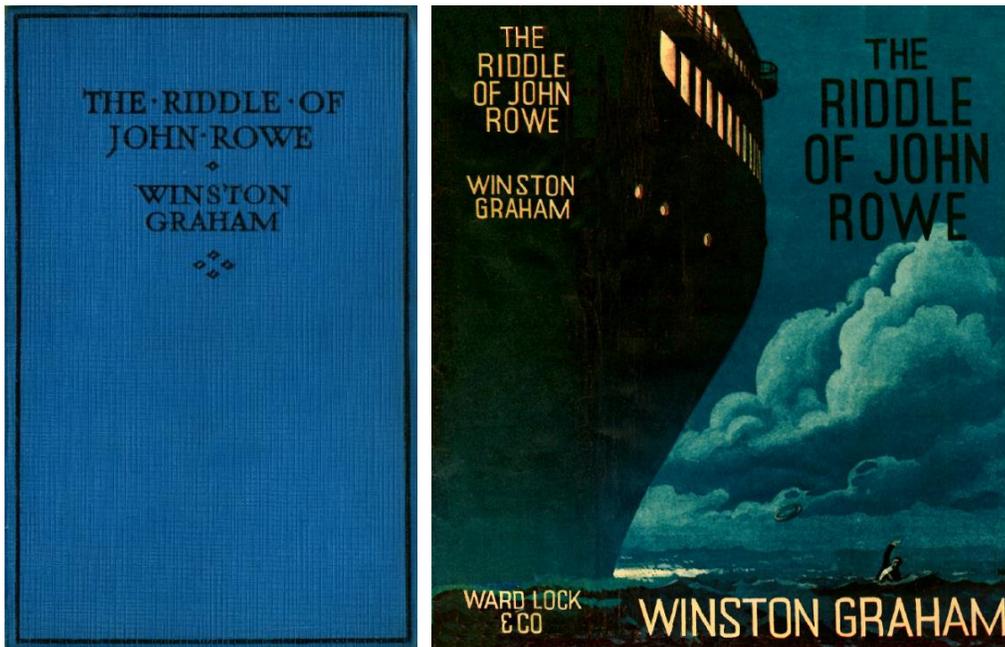
T.D.H., *The Launceston Examiner*, 27 April 1935

### **Comment**

When WL agreed to the October 1934 publication of *The House with the Stained Glass Windows*, they told their new author they wanted to follow it up with a second novel within six months, which didn't faze WG since, by then, *Into the Fog* was already written. It proved, like its predecessor, rough-hewn, dubiously plotted, vigorous, vicarious fun. The book offers another most unlikely tale rendered in mostly competent but sometimes laboured prose, with little sign yet of any gilding by the divine flame. Chapter 1.7's extended cliff-ascent set-piece is a challenge WG will essay for a second time in 1950's *Night Without Stars* then twice more (albeit at less length) in *The Little Walls* (1955) and *The Loving Cup* (1984) – in each case with an unpersuasive result. This novel, like the one before it, holds interest because of who wrote it and when, but is otherwise undistinguished.

\* \* \* \* \*

**(3) *THE RIDDLE OF JOHN ROWE* (WL, September 1935)**



A three-chapter Prologue followed by thirty chapters; 320 pages.

**Plot**

**PROLOGUE**

(1) Gamekeeper Tom Rowe saves his employer Sir Andrew Gresham from drowning then dies of pneumonia, leaving his five-year-old son John an orphan. Sir Andrew adopts John and raises him alongside his own son Arnold, of similar age. The boys are temperamentally quite different: John, quiet, industrious and intelligent; Arnold mischievous and apparently superficial. After he has shown exceptional promise at college, Sir Andrew sets John up in a research laboratory (wireless telegraphy his field) and later settles on him "a considerable sum". Following a previous "unfortunate" romantic entanglement, Arnold arrives home with Marguerite Staines, whom he introduces as the girl he intends to marry. Sir Andrew and his sister Jane are unexpectedly won over by Marguerite and the engagement is announced in the press. But Marguerite falls in love with John, and Arnold, who seems to take it well, is jilted. He accepts a secretarial job in Egypt, leaving home to

take up his new position shortly before John and Marguerite are married. Their honeymoon will comprise a sea-trip to Australia, Marguerite's country of birth, to visit her parents.

(2) May 1910: on board the *S.S. Nigana*, on his wedding night, just out of Southampton, John enjoys a quiet pipe as he strolls around the deserted promenade deck. A drunken Arnold emerges from the shadows – on his way to Egypt with his employer, he says – and, after a bitter fight, pitches John into the sea. He is sufficiently remorseful to fling a lifebelt after him, but does not report the incident either then or later.

(3) Via excerpts from a series of letters, cablegrams and newspaper reports we learn that John Rowe is lost at sea; that Arnold Gresham has resigned his job and returned home in order to proffer whatever assistance he can to Marguerite (having told her, incidentally, that he had travelled overland to Egypt and was therefore *not* on the ship); that a body washed ashore at Teignmouth in mid-August is identified as Rowe's with the subsequent inquest returning a verdict of "death from misadventure"; that, two years on, Arnold has done well enough with a firm of city brokers to become a company director; that on 1 October 1912 he marries Marguerite and that eleven months after that their daughter Joyce is born; that in December 1914 Arnold enlists and in April 1917 is "severely wounded"; that in March 1920 Sir Andrew dies, leaving Captain Sir Arnold Gresham M.C. the new baronet; that in the 1924 general election Gresham stands unsuccessfully in the Liberal interest but then, in 1929, at the age of forty-five, is elected as a Conservative member in a Wiltshire seat; that George Roberts, an employee of the Melbourne Centenary Bank who absconded in December 1930 with £46,000 remains at large, believed still in Australia and that on turning twenty-one in September 1934, Joyce is promised by her parents before her next birthday an "ocean-going steam yacht" big enough to carry twelve.

## CHAPTERS (1) TO (30)

(1) It is September 1935. We learn that Arnold Gresham was permanently sobered by the death of John Rowe, cured of depression by his military service

but left lame and asthmatic and now, prosperous, fifty-one but looking sixty, is about to set off on a three-week Mediterranean cruise with Marguerite (forty-seven) and Joyce (twenty-two) in the latter's new motor yacht *Scylla*. Joyce has asked Canadian-born parliamentary secretary Robert Bourne (about thirty) to join the party. We also meet crew members Captain Yorke (sixty-two) and First Officer (thus second in command) Michael Stratton (twenty-seven).

(2) The *Scylla* sails from Tilbury with twelve aboard: the three Greshams accompanied by Baker the valet and Bourne, plus seven crew. Captain Yorke has little education but the instincts of a gentleman, Stratton a disquieting reserve, the forty-six-year-old engineer is Jefferson, "young Drew" (nineteen or twenty) is a handyman and assistant cook, the three seamen are Thompson, Payne and Fugler. Baker the valet is doggedly devoted to Gresham, who, soon after the Armistice, paid for plastic surgery to ameliorate the other's disfiguring war wounds. Two further passengers – Gresham's Aunt Jane (seventy-two) and former headmaster and university chair Professor Crabtree (looks sixty-five but probably considerably less) – are due to board at Cowes the next day. Stratton thrice frustrates Bourne's attempts to become intimate with Joyce, whom Bourne loves and intends to marry. Joyce later acknowledges to her mother she has ambivalent feelings about him.

(3) The *Scylla*, 200 tons, 110 feet long and 21 across the beam, lies off Cowes. Keen photographer, lepidopterist and Gresham's friend of four years Professor Crabtree M.Sc., F.R.S., is aboard and the Greshams and Bourne are ashore to collect Aunt Jane. Against Yorke and Crabtree's advice, Joyce goes swimming. To her annoyance, and despite being ordered not to, Stratton follows her about the sea in a dinghy. Caught in an adverse current, she has extreme difficulty returning to the yacht and, after eventually succeeding, has to be lifted by Stratton semi-conscious from the water and carried back to her cabin.

(4) After receiving a complaint from his daughter, Gresham censures Stratton and orders him to apologise to Joyce for his behaviour, which he does with transparent insincerity.

(5) The elder Greshams and Crabtree play bridge, the weather deteriorates, then Joyce finds her father prostrated in his stateroom. When Marguerite arrives, Arnold shows her a note, left on his pillow, from "John".

(6) Though the writing looks like John's, the two decide the note can only be a forgery left by one of the twelve persons (themselves excluded) on the yacht, with blackmail the probable motive. As they consider possibilities, there's a knock on the door. When no-one enters, Gresham opens it to find a letter pinned to the panel, this time to Marguerite and again from "John".

(7) Gresham goes with Yorke through details of the crew and concludes that none can possibly be John Rowe, who would now, if alive, be fifty-one. Thompson, the only one of like age, has bright blue eyes; Rowe's had been grey. The yacht is searched for a stowaway in vain. Gresham finds another note, this time pinned to his bathroom door, suggesting that he should be relieved to find he's not, after all, a murderer as he thought – or is he?

(8) Bourne and Joyce have noted that her parents are acting strangely but can't fathom why. Joyce and Stratton continue to needle one another. Dirty weather impends.

(9) As the wind strengthens and passengers feel unwell, Joyce and Stratton have further words, which end with him warning her that "Everything isn't quite what it seems in this ship." In the worsening storm, a dinghy is swept overboard, Payne's arm is broken, two lounge windows are smashed and Stratton saves Joyce from drowning when she impetuously tries to help repair the damage.

(10) Aunt Jane is not fit, so Marguerite sleeps in her room. Arnold, left alone, has bad dreams. He hears tapping and scratching sounds at his door, which he is afraid to open.

(11) After the locked door of Sir Arnold Gresham's stateroom is broken open, the baronet is discovered dead on his bathroom floor. Yorke and Crabtree, "the two senior men on board", consider the circumstances; Gresham's body

shows "pinky-red patches on the skin" and "trismus" or lock-jaw. Crabtree hints that the dead man's medicine is spiked and asks Yorke to have the lock on the door repaired without delay and to procure from the yacht's medical supplies some hydrogen peroxide.

(12) An hour later, Yorke, Crabtree, Bourne, Stratton, Baker and Joyce meet in the lounge, where Crabtree announces his belief that Gresham was poisoned by a dose of his medicine adulterated by potassium cyanide. Using the hydrogen peroxide provided by Captain Yorke, he carried out a simple blood test to show the presence in Gresham's blood of the poison. He himself brought some cyanide on board for use in his photographic and butterfly collecting pursuits and a check of the baggage room has revealed several items of luggage with their locks forced, including an attaché case of his that contained the poison, half now gone. Baker states that, before retiring the previous evening, he went to Gresham's stateroom. Though the door was locked, tacked to it was a plain envelope which he removed. Inside, on a piece of paper, was written the single word "RIP".

(13) After agreeing to put about for England, Yorke discloses that the *Scylla* has sustained rudder damage during the storm, making it necessary to head for the nearest port, which, 150 miles or one day's sailing away, is Lisbon. Marguerite tells Crabtree and Joyce about the notes from "John" and her suspicion that John Rowe – who, if alive, would be her legitimate husband – is on board. Was the sailor called Fugler listening at the door?

(14) Crabtree instructs Bourne and Stratton to search the ship together, collecting as they go a specimen of everyone's handwriting, all writing pads and materials, gloves and anything smelling of almonds. Crabtree will search Gresham's stateroom with Joyce and the three ladies must search each other. Bourne and Stratton struggle to subdue their mutual antipathy. In the stateroom, Crabtree finds a coded cablegram Joyce thinks will have been sent by Marguerite's parents (in code "because it's so much cheaper") and a four-year-old copy of the *Melbourne Observer* with a piece cut out of the picture page. Joyce asks who knew he'd brought poison aboard. Crabtree replies that he'd told only one person: her late father.

(15) Crabtree takes everyone's fingerprints then spends more time alone in the stateroom. Later, after a rest, Joyce hears noises in there so opens the door to investigate – but before she can get the light on, her arm is grabbed, a hand is clapped over her mouth and she's pulled inside.

(16) Baker hears Joyce cry out and sees a man run past him – due to the black handkerchief masking his face, he can't say who it was. The company find Joyce lying unharmed on one of the stateroom beds, the door-lock having been forced for a second time. No-one has a satisfactory alibi. Crabtree had set up a camera and flashlight wired to take a picture of anyone opening the stateroom's desk. Though the intruder attempted to dispose of the camera through the porthole, the legs of its tripod have prevented it falling into the sea and it is retrieved. Crabtree states his intention to develop the plate. Yorke acts suspiciously.

(17) At dinner everyone is tense. Aunt Jane accuses Yorke of lying about the whereabouts of his crew, which he denies.

(18) On the sun deck, under the stars, Bourne asks Joyce to marry him. She declines, telling him she doesn't love him. Baker announces that Lady Gresham's and Bourne's rooms have been ransacked. Bourne speculates whether Yorke and Stratton are behind this. He meets Stratton on the main deck and the two apologise to each other for previous ill manners. Stratton has a bandaged left hand, which Bourne squeezes, suspecting that the injury is feigned.

(19) Joyce delivers Crabtree's nightcap. Though the photograph has proved inconclusive, Crabtree believes that the criminal's determination to retrieve a clue from the desk, despite the obvious risk, is significant. He takes a sip of whisky then spits it out, yelling: "Merciful God! It's poisoned ..."

(20) By swallowing salt to make himself sick and then sniffing ammonia, Crabtree survives. Joyce had left the drink outside the door before bringing it in, so anyone could have doctored it. Stratton moves mysteriously about the ship.

(21) Joyce can't sleep. She rings for Stratton (who is quartered in a maid's room, wired with a bell). During their talk, he tells her he loves her, that, while not the murderer, he is the author of the notes signed "John" and that John Rowe was his father.

(22) We learn that, after going into the sea, John Rowe was picked up by a French fishing vessel and put ashore in fisherman's clothes near St. Malo. Having lost his memory and thus with no knowledge of his past or identity, Rowe settled near Rennes and married the illegitimate daughter of a painter called Stratton. Michael Stratton is their son. Though Rowe died last year, two months before his death his memory returned and he told Michael full details of Arnold's perfidy. Joyce denies her father was on board the ship Rowe fell from. She believes Stratton is the poisoner and tells him she'll denounce him to Yorke and Crabtree in the morning. He manhandles her, stifles her screams with kisses, then tells her that proves he can't be the murderer, otherwise he would not have kissed but strangled her.

(23) The next morning, Yorke announces that Stratton has been put under arrest. Jane, Marguerite and Joyce mull over events.

(24) The *Scylla* arrives in Lisbon. Bourne presses Joyce to go ashore with him. Crabtree is also anxious to land, to collect a cable that may prove helpful.

(25) The British Consul comes aboard with a doctor and customs official. When, an hour later, Gresham's body is taken ashore, Crabtree and Bourne go with it. Bourne returns, tells Joyce he's booked two train tickets to Estoril for later that afternoon and beseeches her to go with him, which, after consulting her mother and great aunt, she agrees to do.

(26) Crabtree returns to the *Scylla* with the British Consul and three men and holds court in the lounge. He says Stratton admitted to him writing the first three notes *but not the fourth* and the professor's surmise is that, having read the second and third notes, the killer used the situation to commit murder whilst being able to cast suspicion on someone else. Crabtree sanctioned Stratton's arrest so as not to alert the killer to his own suspicions. The decoded cablegram proved to be from Marguerite's father, Barrett Staines,

an Australian high court judge, confirming that wanted thief George Roberts (see Prologue, chapter 3) who has a distinguishing mark in the form of a large scar above his right elbow, is still at large. The scissor-marks in the Melbourne newspaper are fresh – Crabtree surmises that Gresham noted a resemblance between a photo there and someone on the ship and sent an enquiry to Staines which received the above reply. Crabtree found a distinctive glove-print inside the rim of his forced attaché case and the collection of gloves ordered during the search revealed two owners of such gloves aboard – but the fingerprints of only one of those persons was on the camera which the killer had attempted to push through the porthole. The professor's poisoned whisky was found to contain two crumbs of tobacco. From this Crabtree surmises that the killer hid cyanide crystals inside a cigarette, which he used to spike the nightcap when opportunity allowed – and though Stratton had such opportunity, that he doesn't smoke makes him an even more unlikely suspect. With the help of the Consul, Crabtree has been able to obtain from an Australian press agency and their police force photographs and fingerprints of "George Roberts" aka Robert Bourne.

(27) After a pleasant bathe, Joyce and Bourne sit chatting on a deserted cliff-bound beach at Cascaes, just west of Estoril. Among other things, she asks how he got the nasty scar on his right arm, which he lies unconvincingly about. As she collects things prior to their departure for the station, he knocks her to the sand and, in the space of four minutes, ties and gags her and carries her into the depths of a secluded cave.

(28) After staring out to sea for an hour, Bourne tells Joyce that, after stumbling upon his true identity, her father – despite his own shady past – had demanded that Bourne quit his job, leave the country and have nothing further to do with Joyce or face being turned over to the police. Two days after that, he wrongly accused Bourne of being the author of threatening letters. Realising that Gresham had a second enemy aboard gave Bourne the idea of killing Gresham and letting the blame fall on someone else. Luckily, in overhearing a conversation between Crabtree and Gresham, he learned of a possible means and managed to steal some of the professor's poison. This afternoon, he'd arranged with a shady tramp steamer captain of his former

acquaintance to pick him up off this coast and drop him in Brazil, along with Joyce, whom he is about to render unconscious with a drugged rag to the face when a third person steps into the cave.

(29) Stratton overcomes Bourne in a fight, despite being stabbed deeply above his left elbow. He frees Joyce and, while she climbs the cliff, repels Bourne and the two sailors who have landed to collect him. They cross fields and a wood to reach his hire-car, at which point Joyce insists his bleeding arm must be dressed without further delay.

(30) We learn that, despite having "practically no Portuguese", Stratton had managed to find Joyce merely by enquiring after her for two and a half hours until stumbling upon a French-speaker who had noted her direction of travel. After that, the boat coming ashore from the tramp steamer led him to the right cove. As the two drive back to Lisbon, Joyce admits the state of her heart and the pair agree to marry – the love her mother and his father were cheated of will be theirs.

## **Reviews**

Mr. Winston Graham wants to impress upon his readers something of the horror which stalked the Gresham *ménage* when, after twenty-five years of complete normality, a sinister ghost from the past appeared to shake the very foundations of their lives. In order to do this he describes briefly in a prologue an incident which occurred twenty-five years ago. Then the story proper opens, and we follow for nearly one hundred pages the dull, though highly estimable, record of the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Gresham and their daughter, Joyce. Readers who want to be thrilled without undue waste of time may, after reading the prologue, skip quite happily to page 92. After that the fun, or, rather, the horror, and mystery, are fast and furious for two hundred further pages. The setting of the main action of the story on board a steam yacht adds colour to the tale, and makes the mystery more difficult to solve.

*The Irish Times*, 30 November 1935

There is not much doubt that most readers of light books will enjoy this story, with its excitement, romance, adventure, and unexpected thrills. It would be unfair to call it a thriller solely, but it has the merits of such, with some others of its own. Beginning with a feud between two men, one the son of a wealthy baronet, and the other his adopted son, it leads to rivalry between them to win Marguerite Staines. What this produces will provide the reader with a good deal of interesting matter in which the developments are unexpected. Murder enters into the later phases of the story, and further romance, and with a good deal of action it moves to a reasonable finish that will satisfy most people. On the whole, a good tale.

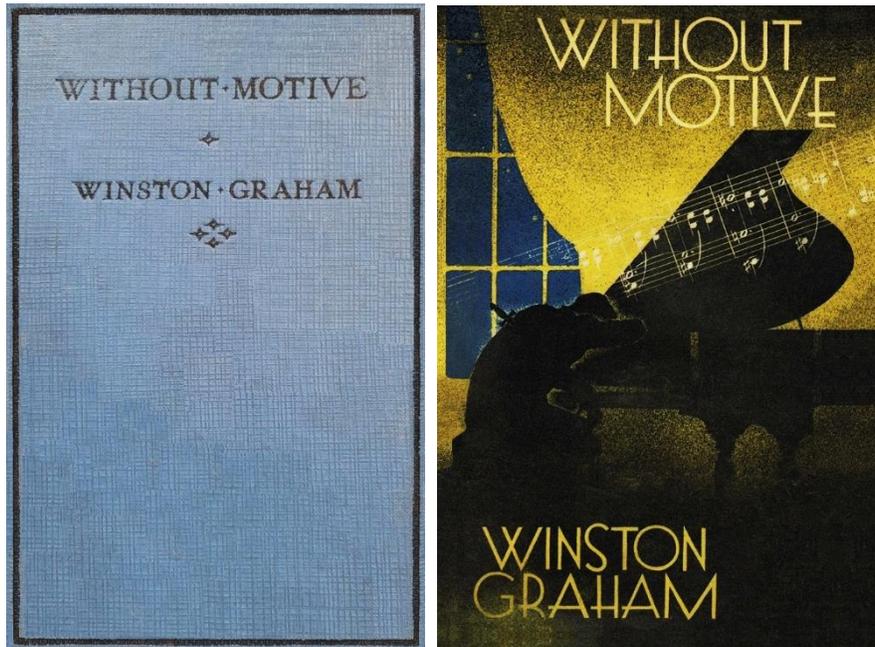
*The Hobart Mercury*, 1 February 1936

### **Comment**

A third contrived and implausible thriller, more journeyman work with no sign still of the thoroughbred-between-the-traces to be. Though Crabtree springs vividly to life off the page, other characters remain 2D ciphers. When reading these early books, the older writer's determination to suppress them is not hard to sympathise with, fascinating though – for reasons that have little to do with their intrinsic artistic merit – they be.

\* \* \* \* \*

(4) **WITHOUT MOTIVE** (WL, April 1936)



Book One: seven chapters; Gleanings; Book Two: eighteen chapters; Epilogue; 320 pages.

**Plot**

BOOK ONE: VALSE TRISTE

(1) It is January the twelfth. Peter Tenby is senior housemaster at Rackford, a "lesser public school" standing on the banks of the Wye in Gloucestershire's Forest of Dean. He is returning from his Cheshire home a week before the start of term at the invitation of his headmaster, forty-one-year-old sportsman and scholar Philip Stanton, to a "small party" to be held over "a long weekend". There has been speculation that Stanton might be leaving to take up another appointment – Tenby wonders whether he himself might be his successor – and about to marry. On the way to Rackford, Tenby encounters "very striking" circa thirty-year-old Alfa Romeo-driving "woman of action" and contributor to *National Geographic Magazine* Ruth de Floy, whose name has been coupled with Stanton's. But when Tenby arrives at the head's home, he overhears her through the open front door congratulating Stanton "as an old

friend" presumably on his engagement to someone else. Tenby is admitted by housekeeper Mrs. Greeve.

(2) Tenby is introduced to Stanton's fiancée Alice Mannering and her elder brother Henry, a Birmingham solicitor, then has a first chat with Miss de Floy, who patronises him with blithe disdain. At dinner he meets the three remaining guests: Colonel and Mrs. Clay and bluff, self-made, forty-five-year-old Stephen Cartwright. Clay is Chairman of the School's Board of Governors and Tenby thinks he may be here to give him the once-over as Rackford's prospective new head. At the dinner table there is a "distinct atmosphere" with Alice Mannering its focal point. Tenby senses enmity between her and Cartwright, friction between her and Miss de Floy and general unease. At 8:40 the lights fail. As candles are sought, Stanton recalls that the house was formerly a Cistercian monastery reputedly haunted by "some hounds and a woman going mad".

(3) Having repaired to the library, the guests pass the evening playing bridge and talking whilst Mannering, with some help from his sister, provides piano accompaniment. Stanton has Mrs. Greeve fetch the book with the ghost story in, which he reads to the company aloud, the gist being that on Twelfth Night each year someone local dies mysteriously. At midnight, the lights fail again. In the ensuing darkness, someone stabs Mannering in the back with a black-handled dagger. Although not dead, he is in a bad way.

(4) As Mrs. Clay faints and others panic, Stanton extracts the knife from the wound while Ruth calls the local doctor. Mrs. Greeve enters with candles but, at sight of Mannering, screams and drops them to the floor. Ruth coolly summons the police.

(5) 1:50 a.m. The police are here and, with Mannering having died shortly before the doctor's arrival, the case is murder. The "razor-sharp" knife was one of two bought by Stanton in the Belgian Congo fifteen years back and since displayed, safely sheathed, on the library wall. Chief-Inspector Nichols quickly establishes that the only people who could have known they would make an ideal murder weapon were Stanton, Clay (to whom Stanton had

shown them the previous day) and Mrs. Greeve. We learn that Stanton was at Oxford with Mannering, has known Alice well for about six months and Ruth for "three or four years" and was indeed about to become head of another school, with Tenby considered "a strong candidate" to replace him. Clay states that no intruder could have come through a window to commit the crime since they were all locked, but when pressed to state how he knows this, declines to answer. When the local power station is phoned to confirm the times and duration of the black-outs, the police learn that Stanton had called them to complain about the first and *been forewarned that a second would take place* (for maintenance purposes) *at midnight*. Mrs. Greeve states she was in the cellar when the second black-out occurred and encountered no strangers as she made her way through the house to get candles; also that the library windows had *not* been locked during the afternoon; also that she had noted bad feeling between Miss Mannering and Cartwright and that "some of the others didn't much care for him – or 'er." As for Stanton, she'd worked for him for more than three years and "you couldn't 'ave a nicer man if you searched England and Wales!"

(6) Alice tells Nichols she's known Cartwright "slightly" for some years, having been introduced by mutual friends in a night club and that her late brother met him for the first time "a few months ago". She'd been her brother's housekeeper for the past two years and before that companion to an old lady. Henry was "delighted" at his sister's engagement. Tenby gives Mrs. Clay an alibi – she was talking at the card table so could not have moved undetected in the dark – but confirms the antipathy between Mannering and Cartwright. Ruth tells Nichols that she had hoped Stanton would ask her to marry him and, on learning of his engagement, had come without invitation to "see the girl"; also that she had not previously known either of the Mannerings or Cartwright. Cartwright relates how, as Mannering lay dying, the men insisted the ladies leave the room, which they did with reluctance, shepherded out by himself and Tenby, who then stayed out with Alice. When Cartwright returned, he heard Stanton tell Clay that one of the windows was unlocked which Clay said couldn't be true since he himself had verified they were all locked tight no more than two minutes ago. Cartwright, a stockbroker, first met Stanton in Switzerland a year ago, when he "did him a good turn", then

met him again a fortnight back in Chepstow, which was when he was invited to spend this weekend at Rackford. Miss Mannering he declares "just an acquaintance". Nichols is pleased with progress but troubled by an apparent lack of motive.

(7) At eleven a.m. next morning, Nichols interviews Stanton again, telling him that there were no fingerprints on the knife other than Stanton's, that he invited Mannering to his house, he alone knew that the power would go off at midnight, that he lied about the (un)locked window – in short, that he, Nichols, suggest that he, Stanton, might care to make a further statement – whereupon Stanton confesses to the murder of Mannering.

## GLEANINGS

(i) 18 January: after hearing evidence from Mrs. Greeve that Stanton was "subject to periods of abnormal excitement", noticed most recently during December's new moon, and from the cook that he had complained to her once of "severe headaches", the jury at the inquest on the body of Henry Mannering returns a verdict against Philip Stanton of Wilful Murder.

(ii) 5 February: after a police court hearing that takes evidence from Dr. Noel Hallam, Chief-Inspector Nichols, branch secretary of the Southern Welsh Electricity Board George Taylor and two guests present at the school at the time of the alleged crime, Philip Stanton is formally charged with the murder of Henry Mannering. Though the accused continues to decline legal representation, Mr. Anthony Russel, solicitor, has been retained by friends to watch the case on Stanton's behalf.

## BOOK TWO: ECHO

(1) With Stanton in prison awaiting trial, Tenby has just completed his first term as Rackford's provisional head. Clay meets him in the library and states that while the police can establish no "ordinary" motive for the murder such as debt, disagreement over Alice or "some old-standing hatred", Clay believes there must be one "quite out of crime's normal purview" which he intends to

find. To this end, he has invited Miss de Floy, Miss Mannering and Cartwright to stay with Tenby, himself and Mrs. Clay at the school over the coming Easter weekend. Tenby and Clay agree that Clay should act as host and take charge of the house for this period.

(2) It has been raining for three days and floods abound. Ruth de Floy arrives with Mrs. Clay, then Cartwright with his attractive, much younger sister Sylvia. He claims to have written about her, but Tenby has received no letter. Alice must be picked up from Monmouth station. Ruth tells Peter to take her car, which has more "guts" than his.

(3) Floods delay the train and make for an eventful return journey to the school, during which Alice complains about her lack, to date, of "justice" from the other guests.

(4) In the library, in front of Sylvia, Ruth and Tenby, Cartwright reenacts the murder as he believes it happened. Ruth censures him without seeming to pierce his thick skin. Sylvia and Tenby chat warmly.

(5) At dinner, Mrs. Greeve serves the same menu eaten on the night of the murder. Cartwright's lack of tact discomfits everyone at table. Clay is eventually forced to acknowledge that he intends to "reconstruct some aspects of the crime".

(6) Back in the library, Sylvia (twenty-three) talks with Mrs. Greeve, who tells her that Stanton had "two queer spells" before the night of the murder, then with Tenby, who finds himself more and more attracted to her, then to Cartwright, who, on trying to "maul" her in unbrotherly fashion, is brusquely rebuffed.

(7) Before all guests, Clay suggests that Stanton must have had a powerful motive for killing Mannering, which he would now rather hang for than disclose. Clay believes that someone among them knows what the motive is and, in order to help his friend – indeed, possibly to save his life – intends to uncover the truth. It comes out that the caller to the power station

complaining about the first black-out gave no name and, in his confession, Stanton denied making any such call.

(8) Clay receives Alice's reluctant blessing to reconstruct the crime, with Sylvia taking Mannering's place at the piano, which she is unable to play. With the lights out, matters are halted when sounds from a window indicate that someone outside is trying to break in. With the window open but before the intruder can enter, Alice screams and the man runs off into the dark. Clay then takes a phone-call from the Chief Constable of Gloucester informing him that at 7:30 that evening Stanton broke out of Gloucester gaol and is now on the run.

(9) Clay and Tenby believe Stanton could not possibly have travelled from Gloucester to Rackford in so short a time. A second call from the police stating that he has been traced onto a train bound for Worcester (i.e. in the opposite direction) reaffirms their conviction, even though a hurried search of the grounds for "a tramp" proves fruitless. With Alice gone to her room and the others to the lounge, Sylvia sneaks into the library and places a trunk call to London, which will take ten minutes to connect. Tenby comes in and, though she tries to chivvy him out, is still there when the call comes through. He stays while she talks ostensibly to her father then hints at his feelings for her and asks why since dinner she's been playing a part. She's on the brink of some admission when the door opens.

(10) Alice enters and, after Sylvia leaves for bed, tells Tenby that Sylvia is not Cartwright's sister. He is a blackmailer who picks up down-on-their-luck young women to pass off as his sister or a married acquaintance, whom he "runs for a season in London or on the Riviera" to throw at a wealthy sucker's head, after which, in a month or so, he usually collects a comfortable wad of notes. She knows because she was one of his girls for eighteen months (most lasting only nine). She tells Tenby that she's served twelve months in prison for shoplifting and that he's the only one in the house not to know it. Prior to the murder, on learning of her engagement to Stanton, Cartwright tried to blackmail her, asking for money in return for staying silent about her past. When she refused to pay, he told Stanton and all his guests everything, which

accounted for the "atmosphere" Tenby sensed at the time. Stanton, she says, swore to stick by her and had told Cartwright he must leave on the Sunday morning. Once again the door handle turns.

(11) Cartwright enters and is soon given to understand that Tenby now knows what he is. He asks to be left alone with Alice. She reluctantly asks Tenby to leave, which he does. Cartwright then attempts to blackmail Alice again, this time by offering her two letters which would incriminate her in a robbery at a house in Kent where she worked as "Mary White", a governess. He has seen that her brother left her £4,000 in his will and wants half of that legacy in exchange for the letters. She says she'll tell the police he's a blackmailer and let them do their worst. "Your word against mine," says Cartwright. "One person's word against another's is no good at all." "But what if it's two to one?" asks a third party.

(12) Philip Stanton is in the room. After locking the door and pocketing the key, he beats Cartwright in a fight, takes and burns the letters and then makes Alice promise she'll leave the house at the earliest opportunity. He reiterates to her that he killed her brother but refuses to say why. Tenby comes in through a window then Clay and the others through the door. Stanton declines their invitation to let him escape and advises them to lock him up until the police arrive.

(13) Stanton is locked in an upstairs room. Because of the floods, the police won't be able to collect him before morning. Clay questions Alice about why Stanton and Cartwright fought but she won't tell him. And why did Stanton return to Rackford? She professes not to know. In Cartwright's room, as Sylvia bathes his wounds, the pair start to fight. Tenby walks in on them grappling, then, having drawn entirely the wrong inference, withdraws in disgust.

(14) Alice is convinced, as she was not before, that Philip is *not* insane and, rather than see him submit to re-arrest, would like to see him try to escape. In view of his insistence that she leave the house, she reasons that his motive for murder might not be connected with her brother's affairs but, rather, to someone presently at Rackford. Troubled by a comment of Mrs. Clay's during

the reenactment, who said that Mannering playing the Valse Triste on the piano was "rather apt", she goes to a lumber room containing music books and looks up Sibelius, who wrote the piece. Though the book tells her nothing useful, a photograph flutters from it. "She stared at it; then her body went cold." Now she must see Philip. She passes through the house but repeatedly gets lost until, finally, having blundered through the deserted candlelit kitchen, she enters a passage. A shadowy figure stands immobile at its farther end.

(15) Rather than go to bed, Sylvia waits up until 3:30 a.m. then returns to the library to make a second attempt to use the telephone. But before she can do so, Mrs. Greeve enters and tells her all: that Philip Stanton is her son and she a proud and protective mother; that she had intended to kill Alice Mannering rather than have her marry Philip, but had stabbed the wrong person in the dark and that she now intends to put things right by taking care of Alice (having just removed the second dagger from the wall) and exculpating her son in the process. Sylvia tries in vain to talk her out of this plan. Alice enters the room.

(16) Having been challenged by Alice in the passage with a photo of Mrs. Greeve and her son, the housekeeper had made an assignation with the girl in the library which Miss Mannering, at peril of her life, is now here to keep. Sylvia blocks Mrs. Greeve's first assault and is stabbed in the arm. Then, as the housekeeper relentlessly stalks her quarry around the room, Sylvia snuffs out the solitary candle, plunging all into darkness.

(17) As Sylvia rouses Peter by pounding on the piano keys, Alice jumps out of the window, followed by Mrs. Greeve, who chases her across the garden and then collapses. The two are carried back inside – Alice suffering from shock; Mrs. Greeve apparently struck down by a stroke – and Stanton is released from confinement. Clay reveals that this house party was organised with the blessing of Chief-Inspector Nichols who, like him, was not satisfied by the absence in the case of any clear-cut motive and that, on being appraised of Clay's plans, Stanton had escaped from prison because he feared a second attempt on Alice's life. We learn that it was Henry Mannering who phoned

the power station. Cartwright notifies the company that the police will be here in an hour.

(18) Sylvia Bentley is a reporter with the *Evening Record*. Having heard about the house party, she paid Cartwright, an acquaintance, £20 to pose as his sister. Peter, unseen, overhears her phoning in copy to her editor, though notes that she omits, out of "decency", any mention of Alice Mannering. He asks her to marry him. The police arrive.

## EPILOGUE

Three days later: Stanton, who will not be charged for breaking gaol, has accepted the post of headmaster at the new experimental school Clay and the governors propose to open in South Africa. His mother will not recover from her stroke. Sylvia leaves a letter for Peter declining his offer of marriage for the present but telling him that if he still feels the same in September, she'll be in Shanklin for two weeks, so maybe will see him then.

## Reviews

"WITHOUT MOTIVE" is reticent of facts, and though most of its characters are acceptable, the whole effect recalls the footlights. It has exciting, effective moments, but they spring from circumstances belonging to the conventions of melodrama, such as the hero's escape from the condemned cell at the critical moment.

The headmaster of a west-country school entertains a few friends (so to call them) to meet his fiancée. After dinner the lights fail, and a piano player is stabbed in the back (a nice, bloodless stab). Subsequently the hero confesses to the crime, and no one can see his motive for crime or confession. Act ii is a reconstruction scene, and Act iii provides the happy ending and a general tidying-up which has not much regard for probability. It is not hard to guess the guilty party, but the reader is not enabled to do more than guess, and the motive is barely guessable.

Millward Kennedy, *The Sunday Times*, 24 May 1936

Mr. Winston Graham's murder appears to be "Without Motive" for quite a long time; but of course there is a motive, and when it comes we find that it has been both archaically melodramatic and quite cleverly hidden. That is a type of the fascination of this book all through, a fanciful and pleasing selection and combination of several well-worn threads, among which it is not unfair, I think, to mention bogus confession and murder of the wrong person (an argument, this last, against [illegible] to play the piano), into a pattern which holds the eye for three hundred and twenty pages.

Torquemada, *The Observer*, 17 May 1936

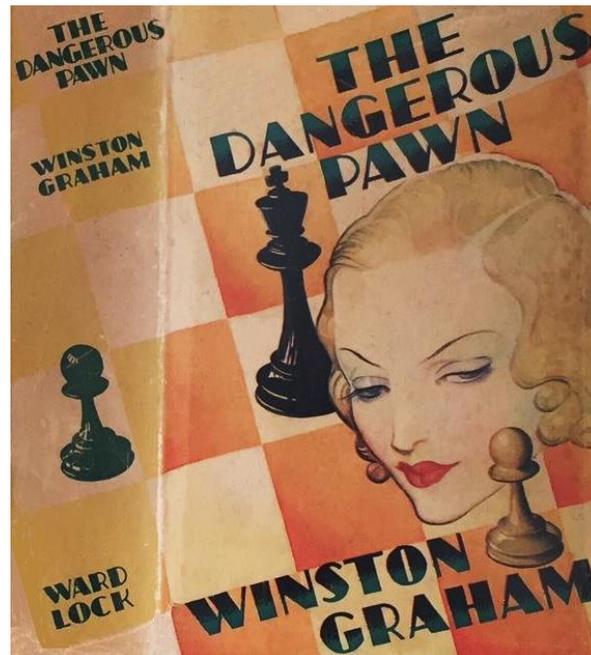
### **Comment**

WG's fourth straight thriller, although redolent of thirties doyenne Agatha Christie and all the better for that, still offers little to distinguish it from the pulp fiction pack, to be read then quickly forgotten. Despite being a contemporary novel when published, *Without Motive's* period-piece air adds twenty-first century interest and its plot, because slightly less strained, is more easily swallowed than his febrile first three, though coincidence still plays too large a part. Ultimately, once more, such interest as the book holds is more academic than literary.

A spirited young male finds himself in a closed community, his freedom of action curtailed by snow, fog, floods, close confinement or being at sea. Not all his fellow travellers are who they claim to be, some have a dubious past and at least one is a murderer. Thanks largely to our protagonist's pluck and enterprise, right prevails and, by way of a reward, he wins the handily-placed girl of his dreams. In his first four novels, WG hones his nascent skills by offering four variations of the same hackneyed tale. Will his fifth buck the trend, extend his range, prove more engaging, or merely serve more of the same?

\* \* \* \* \*

(5) **THE DANGEROUS PAWN** (WL, 11 March 1937)



Book One: eight chapters; Book Two: fourteen chapters; Book three: nine chapters; 316 pages.

**Plot**

**BOOK ONE: THE PIECES**

(1) The negligence of David Ashton (27), a Government engineer in India, has led to the breach of a river bank, serious flooding and the loss of two lives. "Infatuation" on his part is involved.

(2) Eve Paterson (21) met Ashton on her brother Jim's plantation very soon after her arrival in India and the two clicked immediately – but she would not hear of a "public engagement" because "her father was a martinet", so the couple met clandestinely, which she revelled in but he did not. He spent time with her rather than attend to his duties, which led directly to the fatal flood, so, rather than wait to be relieved of his duties, he resigns his post. Eve sends him a letter ending their relationship. Ashton then learns from Jim that Eve is to marry an army officer called Eldridge, as Jim assumed he knew, as it had

always been "an understood thing". Jim thought, quite wrongly, that Ashton had been merely "out for a lark, like her."

(3) Both David's parents are dead; his only living relative an Uncle Joshua, brother of his late father, who lives by himself, with little regard or concern for his nephew, on a small (100 acre) rented island – one of the Scillies, of which David is a native. In Calcutta, Ashton decides, with the help of a pin, to head for San Francisco by way of Hong Kong. Because he has little ready money, he had intended to ask in the shipping office if he could work his passage, but on finding Eve, her father and Eldridge there, is sufficiently flustered to book for himself the best stateroom on the ship.

(4) On board, taken for a wealthy English traveller, he is drawn to another, initially by their shared love of chess. Valentine Leigh, of about his age, is travelling to Singapore to transact some business for his father, a chemical merchant, and, after hearing the story of David's recent past, offers him a position as his secretary, which, after some hesitation and persuasion on Val's part, David accepts.

(5) After twelve days in Singapore, the pair return to England. Leigh is junior director, under his father Corbett Leigh, of Messrs. Clifford & Leigh Ltd., and David soon becomes useful to them both. Val is a gifted musician and painter but lacks the application necessary to make the most of his talents. When his father is killed in a plane crash, the firm becomes his. He puts an under-manager called Rogerson in day-to-day charge and leaves David as his nominee while he holidays on the Continent. David's Uncle Joshua dies and leaves him £900 plus the tenancy of Nancewath, the older man's rented island home. David instructs his solicitor (a) to bestow a bequest of £50 on Peter Penaluna<sup>7</sup>, an old sailor and ex-lighthouse keeper who lived with his uncle and (b) to arrange for termination of the island's lease, which will be due for renewal in seven months time. Val returns from holiday to announce he is engaged.

(6) Anne Weyman, fair, attractive, twenty-three, lives near Oxford, though Val met her in Nice. They plan to marry within three months. When Val hears

about Nancewrath, he instructs David to countermand the termination of his tenancy and grows enthusiastic about wanting to "get away" there, if only for weekends. David points out that from London it's impossible to make a return trip in a weekend, never mind spending time there. Val tells him they're going down on Thursday, by seaplane, which he'll leave David to organise – oh, and don't tell Anne.

(7) The pair are flown down to St. Mary's, largest of the Scilly Islands, then ferried over to Nancewrath. Val instructs the boatman to return next day at eleven. The island boasts a landing stage, boathouse and trim cottage by the beach and, further inland, a house – Three Winds – in an advanced state of disrepair: rat-infested, rotten floors, thatched roof part-fallen in etc.

(8) Penaluna (70) appears and identifies David as Joshua's nephew "because of the likeness". We learn that nine years ago Joshua was left a semi-invalid by a mild stroke, after which Penaluna cared for him in the cottage, with Three Winds, on its owner's instruction, left unmaintained, to go to ruin. If the visitors wish to stay the night, then, they must share the cottage with Penaluna and his three cats, which they agree to do. Val proposes that Penaluna remain on the island and take responsibility for clearing all the rats, and that David should stay also to superintend the repair of Three Winds – though with no word to Anne, to whom it must come as a surprise – with perhaps a monthly trip to London to check on the well-being of the firm. Both men agree to this proposal.

## BOOK TWO: THE QUEEN – AND OTHERS

(1) Val and Anne marry in mid-November and following a honeymoon in the West Indies, South America, South Africa and Egypt return to Southampton in late April. Meanwhile, David oversees the restoration and extension of Three Winds whilst growing fitter in body and soul.

(2) The Leighs visit Nancewrath – Anne for the first time – and approve of David's work. On their first evening in Three Winds, he is invited to dine with them.

(3) During the evening, Val proves cynical and irritating, condescending to David and subtly domineering his wife. He wants David to remain on the island through the summer while he himself intends to visit London once a month. His overriding ambition, he says, is "to put his wife on canvas". David senses troubled times ahead.

(4) In Penzance, David meets the first party of guests Val has invited to the island. There are five: connoisseur and art critic Montague Bute, whom, despite their mutual antipathy, Val wants David to cultivate, a Chelsea sculptress called Phyllis Partington, a couple called Timothy Gauze, a socialite and gossip columnist, and vapid Muriel Anley, and the girl David knew in India as Eve Paterson. David acknowledges first to himself and then to Eve that he used to bear her a grudge but does no longer. On Nancewrath, Val admits to David that he met Eve on the ship coming back from Egypt, realised who she was and arranged for her visit due to his "incurable love of experiment". When David expresses his displeasure, Val, unconcerned, asks whether he thinks the island's ground might be metal-bearing.

(5) Val and his guests have a "rowdy" party from which David leaves early to watch the sunset and think. He is soon followed by Anne, whom, it transpires, Val has "sneered" at in front of the guests. Later, David overhears the couple sparring in Three Winds then, on entering, makes an excuse for his presence which he subsequently learns from Penaluna Val will have known was a lie. His forebodings intensify.

(6) The following week Val goes to London. David finds himself alone in the house with Anne, but there is constraint between them. Her aunt and uncle are due to join the other guests tomorrow.

(7) David, Anne, the Rev. and Mrs. Charles Weyman and Val, newly arrived from London, travel together from Penzance to Nancewrath. David is not amused to be asked by Val if he is falling in love with his wife. Later, Val tells him he is "disappointed" with Anne. Val requests David to go to London for two weeks to assess the financial health of the firm. Finding herself alone with David, Eve suggests going back to London with him, but he chokes her off.

(8) Val wants to withdraw capital from the firm, but David advises him to wait. During David's absence in London, Val gets a man called Crisp over from Penzance who, with helpers, digs holes in the marsh for four days, telling Penaluna he's looking into the possibility of draining it. David's solicitor wants to see him. Muriel and the sculptress leave for the mainland.

(9) Anne was looking forward to a couple of days in Penzance, but Nance-wrath is cloaked in fog. Val locks himself in Eve's bedroom, seized with the urge to paint. At one the fog lifts and David ferries Anne across to St. Mary's. Though they arrive safely, the mailboat has gone. After Anne has done some shopping, David tells her it might be unsafe to attempt returning today as the fog is likely to close back in at any time. Rather than risk Val's displeasure, she persuades David to chance the crossing, which, against his better judgement, he does. Soon shrouded in fog, their boat is holed and starts to sink. David assists Anne onto seaweed-covered rocks, in the course of which she gets thoroughly wet and hurts her legs. They grope their way forward; an indefinite but more solid mass looms ahead.

(10) The pair are cast away on the small uninhabited island of Maidenhair, which David recognises from childhood visits. After nearly becoming separated in the fog, they stick resolutely together. Finding a freshwater pool, he bathes her cuts and grazes with a handkerchief.

(11) David remembers a dilapidated shelter which they manage to find: it has three walls, a dry sand floor but little remaining roof. David has brought Anne's case with them, which contains pyjamas, stockings, slippers, a cardigan and some chocolate. He tells her to put on dry things whilst he collects firewood, which she does. He gives her his coat to wear and lights a small fire, with his meagre supply of driftwood later supplemented by a beam from the shelter's roof. Deep into the night they exchange hopes, dreams, life stories and finally kisses, together with a mutual recognition of the other's worth and regard.

(12) In the morning, fog gone, they're spotted by a coastguard cutter out looking for them, taken on board soon after noon and ferried straight back to

Nancewrath. Val welcomes Anne coolly by playing Annabel Lee on the piano. At lunch, Eve makes malicious reference to a play called *Potiphar's Wife* in which a spouse takes up with her husband's manservant. Afterwards, Mrs. Weyman asks whether David tried to take advantage of their situation, to which Anne replies: "I couldn't have been in better hands." Val's latest painting is of two tiny figures – a man and woman – silhouetted against a cadmium horizon beneath a blanket of fog containing the faces of leering phantoms, Harpies, Pans, satyrs and so on. David once more feels that if he remains on the island there must inevitably be trouble.

(13) When Eve leaves, Val goes too, following receipt of a letter from Rogerson. As Eve and David say their goodbyes, she warns him off Anne, telling him not to make the same mistake twice. But in the two weeks that Val is away, he barely sees her and never alone. Bute and Gauze remain on the island – David can't fathom why. He begins applying for jobs in the civil engineering world.

(14) Val contrives a meeting at Three Winds between himself, David, Bute and Gauze. David learns that Crisp's "drainage" investigations of some weeks back were in fact a mineral assay which has revealed substantial deposits of alluvial tin. Accessible by dredger (thus with no need to mine), the estimated worth is £100,000, netting perhaps £50,000 after all costs. Val proposes to set up a limited company with Bute and Gauze to exploit this opportunity and wants David (as lessee) to buy or rent the island's mineral rights, which he would then turn over to the company; he, should he wish, could become company secretary on a fixed salary of £500 a year. David agrees to look into the question of acquiring the rights without delay.

### BOOK THREE: THE END GAME

(1) David leases the rights for £25 a year and the Nancewrath Mineral Development Co. Ltd. is formed, with managing director Val Leigh holding two £5000 shares, four other directors – Bute, Gauze, Alleyne and Porter – one each with a seventh to be split among minor investors such as David and Rev. Weyman. The sale of a plot inherited by David from Joshua in Birmingham

nets him £4750. Mrs. Weyman notes that Anne is always "at a stretch" in the presence of Val and concludes that all is not well between them. When she tells Anne that her husband has taken a small share in Val's island tin mining concern, it is clear that Anne knows nothing about such plans. David feeds back to Val a rumour that his firm's Canadian mine is about to fold, which Val denies.

(2) With all guests having left the island, Val and Anne dine alone. The supercilious, egotistical side of his nature – "Women are built principally for ornament"; "Your first responsibility is to please me"; "... the little pocket of your mind" – is to the fore. She quizzes him about his "illogical" plans to despoil the island and elicits the reason for them: his firm is "in low water" due to problems with its Spanish and Canadian mines. He then accuses her of being hamstrung by guilt after allowing David to make love to her on Maiden-hair, which she denies.

(3) David cuts his hand and so goes to Three Winds for iodine. Discussion between him, Val and Anne ends with David knocking Val down. Val bumps his head and is briefly unconscious. When back on his feet, he orders David off the island (forgetting, presumably, that David is the leaseholder). David agrees to go but warns Val that if he continues to subject Anne to his "third degree methods", David will "kill" him.

(4) David travels to London, as he had four years ago to Calcutta, with his life "at a tag end". On the train he thinks out why Val, who seemed to have acted with deliberation, might have wished to push their relationship to breaking point at this time. He first visits the firm's offices then sets about making other inquiries.

(5) Anne chats with Penaluna and learns that he's agreed to write once a week to David. Relations between her and Val deteriorate. He takes a new secretary called Crewe. The inaugural meeting of the tin mining company is due and the four directors travel to Nancewrath. Once there, the first gale of autumn pounds the island. After a treacherous crossing from St. Mary's, David arrives unexpectedly at Penaluna's door.

(6) The meeting hears that a dredger costing £10,000 will be the company's only substantial initial outlay. David sneaks into Three Winds, meets Anne and wins a promise from her to leave the island with him when he goes. He then gatecrashes the meeting to reveal that Crisp's assay report has been falsified by Val, whose only intention was to use his investors' money to support his failing firm in the short term and to pay them back – but no more than that – in the longer term; in other words, to practise a blatant swindle.

(7) Next morning, David proposes to Alleyne and Gauze that they should invest with him in Clifford & Leigh Ltd.

(8) The proposition is put to Val that David, Alleyne and Gauze should together rescue Clifford & Leigh from bankruptcy with Alleyne taking control of the board and a new manager replacing Rogerson. In return, Val should allow Anne to divorce him. Val agrees on one condition – that Anne and David give a solemn undertaking never to wed one another. After much argument, David accepts.

(9) David crosses to St. Mary's to spend the night. Anne follows. Their futures will unfold together, come what may.

## Reviews

Except for an abortive attempt to obtain money by false pretences, there is no crime in "The Dangerous Pawn," a book which is chiefly notable for two really finely contrasted pictures of the Scilly Islands, Winter and Summer. Mr. Graham also contrasts two characters with a great deal of insight: the Pawn, a decent fellow who wrecks his career at the outset by a professionally inexcusable lapse, and an egomaniac, not, indeed, without redeeming features, but so hopelessly caddish in grain that it becomes a matter for wonder that Anne stood him for a month. There is, perhaps, a touch of weakness about the end of the tale, yet it is difficult to see what else Mr. Graham could have done, and he has at least resisted the too easy way out.

Torquemada, *The Observer*, 11 April 1937

In spite of one's disbelief in Valentine Leigh, sensation-hunter and swindler, with his almost occult powers, we find the book interesting because of its incident and setting.

Doreen Wallace, *The Sunday Times*, 18 April 1937 (excerpt)

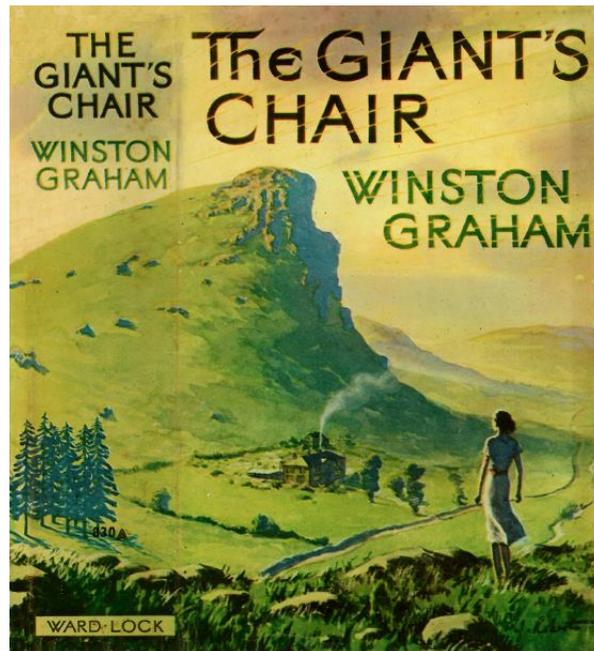
### **Comment**

After four gothic, stock-peopled, pulp thrillers, at last a step up to something better: a confident, insightful, disciplined character study featuring three protagonists who spring to life beneath the author's pen as previously had not happened with anything like this degree of success. The scope of the ambition of WG's publishers is revealed by their reaction to his submission of this work. William Lock recognised it as "ten years ahead of any of the previous books" but told his author "'commercially I could shake you'."<sup>8</sup> Rather than see him "improve", in other words, WL would prefer him to go on knocking out formulaic second-rate fare for which they knew there was a ready market. Whether for this reason or some other, WG went back to thriller writing with disappointing results. Although like a cork his innate talent refused ultimately to be held down, what if Lock had said: "This book shows great improvement; well done; *let's have more of the same.*"?

Moving from India to London to the Scilly Isles, the story gives a first hint of the exceptional aptitude that years and works ahead will so bounteously confirm. With typically severe self-criticism, WG dismissed the book in 1959 as "very bad"<sup>9</sup> and it is not without its faults, its principal weakness Val's character, which never quite rings true such that his relationships with both David and Anne, while central to the plot, are, finally, unconvincing. It also ends a bit tamely. But should it be "suppressed" because unworthy of its author's vaunted reputation? Assuredly not, for it does nothing to discredit it, either then or now. On the contrary, indeed: WG's "first attempt at a straight novel"<sup>10</sup> is also the first of any distinction to bear his name and, as such, deserves to be read.

\* \* \* \* \*

(6) **THE GIANT'S CHAIR** (WL, 18 January 1938)



Twenty-nine chapters; 314 pages. Republished in substantially revised form as *Woman in the Mirror* by The Bodley Head Ltd. in 1975.

### **Plot**

(1) After the death of her father, twenty-four-year-old Norah Faulkner decides to accept Agatha Syme's invitation to become her live-in secretary. Mrs. Syme, an enterprising widow in her late fifties, lectures on "political economy and hygiene" and writes "much-syndicated gardening articles for the Press". The two women met when Mrs. Syme befriended Norah on her first trip to Paris to nurse her then-sick parent. Norah travels by train through rural, sparsely populated and increasingly rugged mid-Wales to take up her appointment.

(2) Timson the chauffeur/gardener picks up Norah at the station. Eldest of three sisters, she has just split from her staid boyfriend Phil and wonders whether her decision will prove sound. Timson drives her over moors and hills, past derelict lead mines and slate quarries to remote Syme House. Actually two houses knocked into one, and part disused, the property stands

before and is dwarfed by a sheer, looming, cliff-like, granite outcrop called Cader Morb, or The Giant's Chair.

(3) Norah is billeted in three rooms at the top of the house and spies behind it a tidy rock garden with small lake beyond. At dinner she meets Mrs. Syme's torpid, bespectacled, sixteen-year-old son Gregory and her cousin – also his tutor – the fussy, opinionated, self-absorbed Rev. Mr. Rupert Croome-Yardel (sixty-three).

(4) Mrs. Syme shows Norah round her garden then expresses her concern over Gregory's debilitating shyness. She asks Norah to do her best to befriend him. The house was built up against the cliff, we hear, "for luck". In the afternoon, Norah goes for a walk and asks Gregory to come, but he won't. She meets Christopher Carew, a tall, outspoken, thirtysomething analytical chemist on a painting holiday. He knows the Symes, whom he calls "egregious"; Gregory is "nasty" and the equal of his mother "can be found under any garden stone". He tells Norah he'll be in the district for ten days and that if she should want his help or advice at any time during that period he'll be pleased to offer it. She declines to pose as foreground for his watercolour and departs, leaving behind the stockings she removed after wetting her feet when crossing a stream.

(5) Norah notes that the house is full of portraits of Symes past; also that her room has a persistent musty smell that airing fails to clear. She's about to have a bath before dinner when Mrs. Syme comes in and wants to stay and talk while she bathes. This Norah diffidently allows. Mrs. Syme tells her about "cousin Simon" who is due to arrive tomorrow. Son of her late husband's brother, he fell out with his father (now dead) and went to America some years ago, suffered a setback due to recent flooding in Ohio and is now returning to live at Syme House for an unspecified period. Gregory feels proprietorial about the house, which will one day be his, and doesn't like the idea of Simon's coming. Mrs. Syme suggests to Norah wearing her hair in a certain way which, she feels, would "look nice", which Norah agrees to do. Mrs. Syme slips the strap of the girl's vest from her "satin-like" shoulder and leaves.

(6) Next day, an air of expectancy pervades the house. Norah returns from another walk to find that Simon has arrived. Tall, thin, sandy, about forty, he is dumbstruck on being introduced to her by her resemblance to someone. Mrs. Syme manages the conversation while he collects himself. Norah's resemblance is to Mrs. Syme's late niece Marion. "You remember me mentioning it, dear, when we first met," she says – which Norah agrees she does. Doole, the bold-eyed young butler just returned from a holiday, has arrived with Simon. "Very efficient," Croome-Yardel says of him, "but doesn't always know his place." Throughout dinner, Simon is constrained. On entering the lounge, he notices something missing and snaps at his aunt. Norah reflects that Carew, for all his faults, is the only straightforward character she's met since her arrival.

(7) Next morning, Norah enters the library and surprises Ted Doole kissing Alice the maid. He hands Norah a parcel and leaves. Alice asks her not to say anything to Mrs. Syme as Doole is secure in his job and she would be sure to lose hers. Norah acquiesces then gets Alice talking. Of Simon, Alice says she hasn't seen him before "but you cannot live here without hearing rumours ..." Simon enters and insists Norah must leave the house; that as long as she remains she is in danger. He can't say more without "giving everything away" which he has agreed not to do. She sees Mrs. Syme who tells her that Marion was Simon's sister. She died aged twenty-three of "something caught from one of the maids". Norah opens her parcel. Carew has returned her stockings; enclosed with them is a poem expressing the hope that she'll change her mind about posing for his painting.

(8) Norah travels by car with Mrs. Syme and Gregory to visit a series of reservoirs called Elan lakes. Gregory, says his mother, "really loves ... great expanses of water", such as the one beside Cader Morb. On the way back to Syme House, Norah learns that an "expert gardener" is invited for dinner – not a local man, but one who holidays in the vicinity; a nephew of Lord Viele-Carew ...

(9) Carew and Mrs. Syme talk horticulture. When introduced to Norah, he calls her "Miss Parker" with no hint of prior acquaintance and she plays along.

When he attempts to draw Simon out about his experiences in the American floods, Simon abruptly leaves the room. Norah follows and receives the same abstract warnings from him: while in this house, she is in danger – he too – and she should leave. The entrance of Doole with coffee prevents any further exchange.

(10) At an opportune moment, Christopher slips a note into Norah's hand asking her to meet him alone between 10:30 and 11:00 behind the house for "a really important reason", which, after making him wait, she does. In the course of a long talk, he suggests an attraction to her and willingness to help. He has noted suspicion and hostility among the locals towards the house and senses something not right there. He knows Simon was lying at the table about his American experiences and intends to investigate the Symes. Norah tells him to be sure to include Marion in his inquiries. They arrange a sign – a towel hung in her bedroom window – should she be in need of his help but be unable to get out. Oh, and he's not really related to Lord Viele-Carew (though he did meet him once) – he just told Mrs. Syme that to get his foot through the door.

(11) Norah returns to the house and walks into the darkened lounge. Mrs. Syme, half-asleep in a chair, asks: "Why've you been so long, Ted?" Norah tries to creep out, then, as Mrs. Syme rises, hurries up to her room and locks herself in. She starts to hear a rhythmical knocking noise through the wall – when she taps back, its rate and vigour increase.

(12) Next morning Mrs. Syme apologises to Norah for Simon's behaviour, which, she insists, the girl must ignore. Norah asks who occupies the room next to hers and, when told Simon does, suspects a lie. In the afternoon, everyone's spirit is lifted by an outing to Aberystwyth, though, while there, Gregory, who wants to be a psychoanalyst, asks Norah if she sleeps with Simon. When told no, he says: "Well, you might. Brothers and sisters sometimes do." "Who told you I was his sister?" she asks. "I think it was Doole." Norah resolves to leave the house as soon as a reasonable excuse presents itself. That night, in bed, she again hears half an hour's rhythmical knocking through the wall.

(13) A stormy, wet and humid day puts everyone on edge. Simon tries to speak to Norah alone but Mrs. Syme stops him. Later, lying on her bed reading, Norah hears noises in her sitting room and opens its door to find Simon there.

(14) Simon urges Norah to stop pretending she's anyone other than Marion. Norah thinks at first he's drunk but then realises he's mentally disturbed. We learn that Marion was not his sister – he *has* no sister – but his wife, and that he's not been "in America" these past seven years, but "locked up" in a care home. Norah points out that, if Marion was still alive, she's now be in her thirties – i.e. several years older than Norah – but Simon is not rational enough to accept this, believing her merely lying like all the rest. Simon forces kisses upon her, but when she half-faints, becomes quiescent. Norah realises that someone has played a contemptible trick on them both. Doole, lurking suspiciously, hears her scream and comes without hurry or concern to her door, but when he knocks she asks him calmly to get Simon, who is "not very well", to bed.

(15) Norah and her employer have a showdown. Mrs. Syme acknowledges that there has been some prior insanity in her family, though Simon's case is the first to have required confinement – and he has lately been released as "cured". She claims the "America" story was concocted for his benefit, to help shield him from the stigma that attaches to known mental illness, and that the chance resemblance between Norah and Marion is actually slight and certainly not significant. Norah suggests she was induced to change her hair style to strengthen the resemblance; on the contrary, says Mrs. Syme, her intention was to lessen it. Norah states she'll be leaving the house in the morning. Mrs. Syme threatens that if she attempts to cause any trouble, she might find herself on the wrong side of the law, and hints that her tractable servants would all be prepared to testify to spurious crimes perpetrated by Norah since her arrival. Norah suggests she knows the motive behind Mrs. Syme's scheming, which "can be found among the oil paintings in the back lounge". Mrs. Syme orders Doole to escort Norah, forcibly if necessary, to her room, and keep her there. As butler and guest warily eye each other, there's a knock on the front door.

(16) Carew enters with a party of four holidaymakers from Aberystwyth who, earlier in the day, climbed nearby Plynlimon then lost their way in the poor weather and were now seeking succour of a kind – food, warmth, shelter – it is beyond his meagre resources to provide. Mrs. Syme takes them in and serves sandwiches and coffee before a blazing fire. One of the group believes she recognises her host as a former Miss Marvin, teacher at a girls' school in Essex; this Mrs. Syme emphatically denies. Knowing that her employer will soon offer the visitors Timson and a car to return them to their hotel, Norah slips out to the garage behind the house with the intention of disabling both cars.

(17) Carew and Norah get a chance to talk. After she brings him up to date, he says she must either leave Syme House this night or he'll have to stay. "On what pretext?" she asks. "No idea," he replies.

(18) The four newcomers are ill-matched couple Jim and Veronica Dawson – he a blunt Cockney, she a pretty but dim-witted social climber – domineering solicitor's widow Mrs. Repple and plump doctor's daughter Miss Foulkes. On Mrs. Syme's instruction, Norah takes the three ladies upstairs. Mrs. Dawson is pregnant, and unhappily so, because Jim "doesn't like children". She recalls a court case last year in which a Christopher Carew was in the dock following "some sort of brawl" and wonders whether the man who helped them this afternoon might be the same chap. Mrs. Repple hears knocking and draws it to her host's attention. "That's my nephew Simon," Mrs. Syme explains, "badly shell-shocked during the war ... He has not been well today and is confined to his room."

(19) Timson announces that both cars are out of commission so the four guests must stay the night. They and the household settle round the fire to talk of the last war, the one impending and the state of the nation. When Carew leaves soon after eleven, he reminds Norah not to forget her promise to drop in on him sometime.

(20) Mrs. Syme tries again to win Norah over, suggesting they would complement one another as a team, but Norah will have none of it. In her

bedroom, she again hears noises from her sitting room and is part-relieved, part-annoyed to find it is Carew, who, after leaving, slipped back into the house through a window he'd unfastened and crept upstairs. Once everyone else had retired, his plan had been to sit like a guard dog on the stairs and smoke the night away, but the door of the passage leading to Norah's rooms is shut and bolted, as it never was before, meaning that, for better or worse, the couple are imprisoned together for the night. He tells her he loves her and asks her to marry him. She declines, saying she wants, for a while, at least, "to be independent of everyone". They argue back and forth. She learns the background to his court case. Eventually he retires to sleep in her sitting room, after warning her that he'll knock early in the morning, when they'll need to "step warily".

(21) As Norah lies mulling over the events of the day, and particularly the last half-hour, Carew re-enters her room. After further prickly discussion – she on her dignity, he all well-reasoned assurance – she explains her conception of Mrs. Syme's motive: the dated portraits of Simon's and Gregory's fathers, both now dead, indicate that the legal and rightful owner of Syme House is Simon, surviving son of the elder brother. Mrs. Syme's assumption of ownership with passage in due course to Gregory can only hope to succeed if Simon is re-committed and declared mentally incompetent, and this will be the end to which she is working.

(22) Chapter 22 provides a detailed account of Simon's life: early eccentricity, a tough war – invalidated out of the army in 1917 after a hellish year in Flanders – followed by chronic insomnia and mental debility. His love of Marion, surprisingly requited, and their marriage in 1924 ushered in four balmy years during which "Simon forgot he had ever been a neurotic" – but, after diphtheria snuffed out her life, "the resistance he'd been putting up to the peculiarities of his own temperament ended". A specialist he saw invited him to spend a week's holiday up in Lincolnshire – but, on wanting after a month to return home, Simon found he could not. When finally, after so many years, he was let out to live with Aunt Agatha, he agreed for her sake to go along with her story about his having been in America. Briefly he savoured the sense of release. They then introduced him to the girl. Now, locked up in his own

home and abused even by the butler, anger is the ruling constituent of his feelings. If only he had a piece of strong wire, he feels sure he'd be able to open his door. He stares at the single picture on the wall, not because it is in any way remarkable, but because it is suspended from the rail by a length of fine, strong wire.

(23) Midnight: the house is quiet and Simon free. He roams, lamp in hand, through passages and rooms until reaching the lounge, where the small picture of Marion used to hang. After searching, he finds it, face-down in a table drawer, but accidentally knocks the lamp over. Soon, despite his efforts to stamp out the flames, the room is ablaze.

(24) Miss Foulkes, forced to share a bed with Mrs. Repple, is having a sleepless night. She thinks back twenty-four years to the Miss Marvin – *Agatha* Marvin – she knew, a teacher, universally disliked, who left the school under a cloud. That she and Mrs. Syme are one and the same seems to her beyond doubt. Veronica Dawson, too, is awake and fretful. Her restlessness awakens Jim, who quickly realises that the house is on fire. He rouses Mrs. Syme, who, after a little thought, takes charge, making sure the four guests are dressed and know the way down. Gregory is awakened by smoke from a dream in which he was rescuing Veronica Dawson from drowning. He drops then treads on and breaks his glasses, then blunders about the burning house until stepping into space and falling.

(25) Carew rouses Norah and they batter in vain at the bolted door. Beset by heat and smoke, they are about to try "the last resort" of knotted sheets out of the window, which will get them at least part-way to the ground, when the bolts are undone by a scorched and blistered Simon, come to rescue "Marion".

(26) As Carew is off assessing the possibility of escape down through the house, Norah tries to reason with a dazed and troubled Simon. Christopher reports that the short bed-sheet line is their only hope and is about to set Norah off when Simon opens his coat to reveal, wound around his waist, a stout rope.

(27) Gregory is dead and Mrs. Syme poleaxed by the news. No-one else is seriously hurt, though the house is now a charred, smouldering ruin. Mrs. Syme had lied to Jim about having warned Norah, who, she said, had "gone down the other stairs". Carew reveals to Jim, who is shocked but not displeased, that his wife is pregnant.

(28) Carew speculates that much of the Syme story will remain unknown. He and Norah are keen to help Simon, whom they believe sane. After more protracted soul-searching, the two agree to marry.

(29) A diminished Mrs. Syme sits by the body of her son.

## **Reviews**

Mr Graham tells a good story, and telling a good story is the first duty of a novelist. The best means of doing it is here: lively prose, clearly-drawn characters, both major and minor, and a mastery in the narrative of scenes that are as definite as the dahlias in Mrs Syme's garden or as the top of the hill, "Giant's Chair," that dominated her house.

*The Scotsman*, 3 February 1938

It would be quite interesting to know how often writers have made use of the innocent young secretary type of stock character to set in motion their story of some mysterious household. We feel that Mr. Winston Graham is capable of more originality than he has shown here. He has chosen a perfect setting: a strange, rambling old house, situated in a remote Welsh valley and surrounded by legendary landmarks. The inhabitants of this house are most promisingly mysterious and sinister when we first meet them. But, though they provide material for some rather pretentious [psychology, they fail to] justify themselves. As for the sane hero of the story, who rescues the secretary-in-distress, he is just a dull replica of a long line of strong-charactered heroes.

*The Irish Times*, 5 February 1938

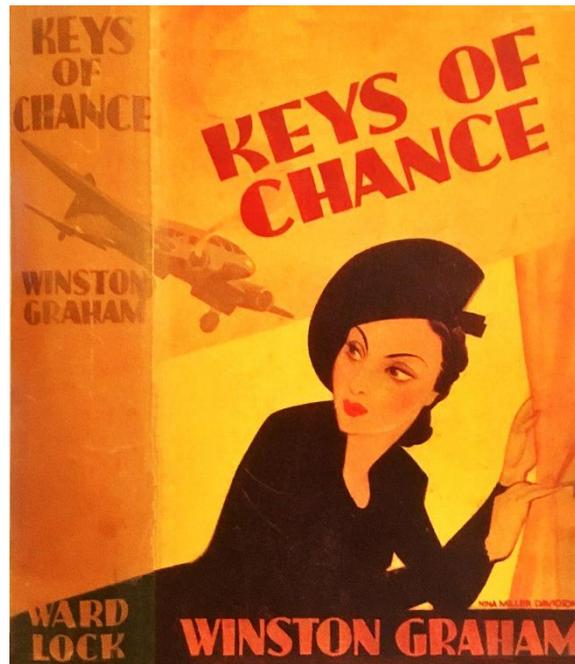
## Comment

This novel was the only one of WG's first nine that he saw fit in later life to revise and re-publish, which suggests that he regarded it in some way more favourably than any of the others – and its story is a strong one. It takes a while to get going and is slowed mid-way almost to the point of stalling by the introduction of four characters whose principal literary purpose appears to be the provision of "padding". All things considered, then, it is perhaps not surprising that WG felt moved to give the book a makeover and, dispassionately speaking, *Woman in the Mirror*, with its plot tweaked and its text honed, is a leaner, punchier, more on-message read. But, when it comes to WG, I'm not dispassionate and I don't see that, while the revised work is commendable, the worth or interest of the original is thereby reduced or negated. Indeed, like its predecessor, it repays the trouble of finding, with more than enough of its author's distinctive, authentic voice between its covers to please the most obdurate grouch. And, in contrast to some of the other revisions (*The Merciless Ladies* especially), the original and revised versions differ so substantially that the independent existence of both is wholly justifiable.

NOTE: after five novels featuring leading men, *The Giant's Chair* is WG's first in which the lead character – Norah Faulkner – is a woman, paving the way for Philippa Shelley, Cordelia Blake, Marnie Elmer, Deborah Dainton, Stephanie Locke and Emma Spry in *Take My Life*, *Cordelia*, *Marnie*, *The Walking Stick*, *Stephanie* and *The Ugly Sister* respectively.

\* \* \* \* \*

(7) **KEYS OF CHANCE** (WL, 6 January 1939)



Twenty-nine chapters; 316 pages.

**Plot**

(1) On a Sunday evening in November in a hall near Hyde Park Corner, London, Robert Clapton, a medium at a Christian Seekers meeting relays a message to his audience from a spirit, elderly when he passed over, concerning the crash in which he died: *THE PENGUIN WAS SABOTAGED, ITS FUEL ADULTERATED BEFORE TAKE-OFF BY THREE CONSPIRATORS FOR FINANCIAL GAIN*. Listening on are a big, crippled man in early middle age and, beside although unknown to him, a tall, slender, bespectacled girl in her twenties.

(2) The death of Mary Seymour's father in the Penguin air disaster of two years ago left his dependents – that is, her mother and herself – destitute. For the past eleven months Mary has struggled along, lodging in Bloomsbury, two meals a day, getting odd translating jobs, sending money home; the meeting she saw advertised in the paper. The Penguin was taking to France a consortium of financiers intent on tackling that country's impending monetary crisis; Mary's father one of the party because a "semi-official Government

interpreter". She goes to the following Sunday's meeting and notes two chairs along the same blue-eyed, crippled stranger.

(3) At this week's meeting, a bigger audience and different atmosphere: one of expectancy and unrest. In due course the medium returns to the subject of the Penguin disaster and has no sooner referred to the bribery of a member of Cucklington Aerodrome's ground staff whose wife was in ill-health than he is interrupted by first a single heckler and then several. A fight starts, objects are thrown and the medium is hustled off the stage. Mary, who missed her tea, feels faint. As disorder intensifies and the police arrive, the lame man shepherds Mary through the jostling crowd and out of the hall. A stocky, pink, bald chap called Veerson addresses him; we learn his name is Captain Raymond. He leads Mary to his car – a powerful Bentley – in the next street and drives her to his flat in Craddock Mews.

(4) His name is Bill, he was lamed in 1918 and he keeps an ingratiating four-year-old bulldog called Moses. "Veerson" is Clarence Veerson, the millionaire, one of a group of City men "attacking the franc" two years ago whose interests would have been served by the plane crash. Mary speculates that the group might have had a hand in it. Bill knows Veerson and offers to introduce her to his house the following Thursday. Perhaps influenced by the brandy and soda she's drunk, she accepts his offer.

(5) The next morning, Mary returns to the hall and on a noticeboard finds the address of Christian Seekers secretary James Troubridge. She visits his house and is told she can't see him, but recognises Clapton the medium and tells him who she is. He gives her a lift to Victoria in his taxi and advises her on the way to forget his revelations, which he regrets having made, and not to expect any more, for there will be none. But stubborn Mary won't be dissuaded.

(6) Thursday: in the car on the way to Veerson's, Bill tells Mary that Veerson has "only amounted to anything since France went off the Gold Standard" i.e. since the plane crash, meaning that it definitely *was* to his gain. He has a nervy young wife called Monica, a daughter at finishing school in Germany and a French secretary named Fodcarre whom she would be well advised to "keep

clear of". Nearly all of those arrested at the meeting were rent-a-mob toughs, but one – Thomas Bedulley – works on the ground staff at Cucklington Aerodrome. Bill warns Mary that most of the people she'll meet tonight will be jangly, empty sorts. So why is Bill here? "My dear," he says, "I make half my living at poker." Veerson tells Mary he's writing a booklet on the French Constitution and, having been advised that she's a translator, asks if she'll undertake to translate his work so it may be published in France as well as England. This she agrees to do.

(7) Bill is driving to Weatherways, his cottage in the New Forest on Sunday and invites Mary to come. Despite reservations, she accepts. They spend a pleasant day; he hints at an attraction to her. Coming back, he advises her to forget about Veerson, but again she takes no heed.

(8) The first day's translating goes well, though Mary senses that both Fodcarre, whom Veerson describes as a "political refugee", and Monica resent her presence in the house. Veerson proposes a fee for the job of one hundred guineas, which Mary is pleased to accept.

(9) Work proceeds. On the Wednesday Mary chances to see a well-groomed Monica called for and driven off by Bill. On the Friday, after a wet and agitated Fodcarre, with a newspaper in his coat pocket, demands to talk to Veerson, Mary overhears them arguing. Later, she buys a copy of the paper and finds in it a report of the suicide of Thomas Bedulley (see Ch. 6). We learn that Veerson grew up very much influenced by his French mother: with her family "dispossessed like so many others during the revolution", she inculcated in him "a standing grievance against democracy".

(10) Though Mary still has reservations about Bill, when he asks to see her again on Sunday, she accepts. He drives her (Moses too) to Brighton for lunch, by way of Cucklington Aerodrome. They are followed there and part-way back by "an old Lagonda". She tells him that Veerson's book is "seditious", that in it he advocates revolution to bring about the overthrow of democracy in favour of a "benevolent dictatorship". Bill has learned from a Foreign Office contact that six months ago the French Government made an unsuccessful

application for Henri Fodcarre's extradition – in other words, that in France he is a wanted man. He confides to Mary that he owes Veerson "one or two grudges", though declines to be more specific because, he suspects, she'll think them "petty". She concludes that they're probably "something to do with women".

(11) Veerson resents Fodcarre's ascendancy over him, which dates back to the latter's sabotage of the Penguin, which saved Veerson's bacon after he had speculated recklessly on France going "off gold". Fodcarre is now arranging for an observer to attend the inquest of the Cucklington suicide victim. He warns Veerson to mind what he tells Mary, whom Fodcarre suspects of being other than what she seems. We learn it is he who arranged for her to be followed. He also commissioned a private inquiry into Robert Clapton, the trouble-making medium. This discloses that Clapton lost what money he had in the "Porteus chain-store smash" of 1923 in which Veerson was involved.

(12) Bill lunches with Monica who has noted Veerson's "not fatherly" interest in Mary and is thinking of leaving him.

(13) The first day of the inquest is uneventful, but at the second the dead man's wife testifies that two years ago he was blackmailed to let a foreign gambler called Troppmann to whom he owed money have unrestricted access to the aerodrome for an hour, after which the foreigner quit the district and her husband, in despair, eventually took his own life. The jury's verdict is suicide while of unsound mind with a recommendation that the Air Ministry reopen the Penguin inquiry. Fodcarre (aka Troppmann) is livid – says he could kill the medium – and Veerson tries to calm him. Since Veerson is otherwise occupied in the mornings, Mary starts to come in the evening to work instead. On the Friday afternoon, Fodcarre informs Veerson that his inquiries have disclosed the identity of Mary's father. She, he suggests, is a spy and when she comes to the house this evening he will question her. Veerson, whose wife is away for the weekend, gives him other orders, which he ignores, upon which Veerson tells him he must either obey or "take a month's wages and clear out".

(14) Bill tells Mary to listen out for any mention of "the C.S.A.R.", an organisation he's been told the Foreign Office may be interested in. Fodcarre, we learn, is "to do with" this and Veerson provides "financial assistance". Mary goes to Veerson's in the evening. He lets her in, asks if the Seymour who died in the Penguin crash was her father, which she admits, tells her he's not merely a successful financier but also a misunderstood aesthete, makes an ineffectual pass at her, then informs her that Fodcarre, who strangled a woman before he was twenty and served seven years for it, has been discharged. When she suggests that might leave Veerson in danger, he tells her he is protected by certain papers in his possession that could convict the Frenchman, who this afternoon was turned out of the house and went off "like a beaten dog". Since it's clear that no translation work will be done this night, she wants to leave, He implores her to stay; says he'll pay for her time. He then asks her to take Fodcarre's place as his secretary. She declines; though it would provide an ideal opportunity to become better acquainted with his affairs, she's grown tired of her investigation and wants to end it. He presses upon her an £8,000 pearl necklace complete with Cartier receipt and now she's determined to go, but he has a turn and, having rung for servants without result, she helps him to his room. He asks her, before leaving, to fetch some items from a further room and, when she comes back, finds him in the process of locking the door. Heart sinking, she sees his game, but he says: "I can't turn the key."

(15) He slumps onto a chair, can't move his right arm, can't stand properly or speak clearly. He has had a stroke. With difficulty Mary manhandles him onto his bed then telephones his doctor. As he lies prone, waiting for help to arrive, Veerson turns his head to see that Mary has his safe door open.

(16) When the bell finally rings, she opens the door to admit Fodcarre. He forces her into the library, demanding to know who has sent her, why she's interested in him and what she's found out. He intimates that he'll have no qualms about strangling her if necessary; and, rest assured, doesn't "make empty threats". The doorbell rings again and the doctor enters. Having seen the patient, he directs Fodcarre to contact Veerson's wife in Dorset and Mary to get him a bowl of hot water. She meets Woodman, the butler, just arrived

home, and tells him to take water to the doctor. She then tries to leave by front and back doors – both locked – and eventually makes her escape through a window, taking with her in her case papers lifted from Veerson's safe.

(17) Mary goes to Bill's flat and gives him letters, some encoded, that seem to comprise proof of Fodcarre's involvement in C.S.A.R., an outlawed pro-revolutionary society working towards the overthrow of the French state. Fodcarre phones, asking if Bill knows where Mary is and telling him that Veerson is dead. Mary can't go back to her digs and Bill warns her it would be highly risky to flee to her mother's (whose address the inquiry agents would know). Mary wants to go to a station and head off for a random destination but he tells her, brooking no argument, that he's leaving right now for Weatherways and she's coming with him.

(18) They arrive at a quarter past one and bed down – together.

(19) He wants her to marry him but she hedges. He leaves for London to deliver the incriminating letters to the Foreign Office before hurrying back. They reveal among other things a plot to implicate the French premier in a scandal and so bring him down as well as details of Fodcarre's criminal past. One letter includes an obscure reference to "Victor's house, the second cow from Southampton".

(20) Alone in the cottage, Mary comes upon a large sheaf of unpaid bills suggesting that Captain Raymond lives well beyond his means and then a letter from a Sûreté officer to Bill's Foreign Office contact confirming that the French authorities will pay a reward of 100,000 francs for evidence leading to the extradition and conviction of Henri Fodcarre. This letter is dated 19 November i.e. a week after Bill and Mary met, suggesting that he has manipulated her actions to suit his own ends from start to finish – from meeting hall rescue to bedroom congress. Mary dons hat and coat, leaves Weatherways and walks off down the road.

(21) Eventually coming upon a garage, she hires a car and driver to take her to her mother's. Having left the letters at the FO, Bill drives to Veerson's and

speaks to a jaded Monica, urging her to change her way of life. She angles for a closer association with him, but he's not biting. Fodcarre asks him again if he knows where Mary is, then tries bribery followed by threats, suggesting that interference is a dangerous game to play – a statement Bill heartily endorses. Mary arrives at her mother's Edgevere bungalow, lets herself in *and is seen to do so*.

(22) Bill finds Weatherways empty and resolves to look for Mary first in London, then – if he can remember the address – at her mother's. He rings Mary's landlady, who irritably denies her presence, but Bill considers she's probably been told to say that, so sets off for Bloomsbury anyway. Fodcarre is advised of Mary's whereabouts and takes the 6:40 train from Paddington heading west. Mrs. Seymour has gone to Bournemouth for the weekend to visit her ailing sister, so Mary settles in for a long and fretful night.

(23) Mary sits alone, feeling cheap and used. At her London lodgings, Bill verifies her absence and notes the name of her mother's village from a postmarked envelope. As Mary's fears intensify, she identifies their primary cause: her sense that Fodcarre, who "doesn't make empty threats", will soon be here.

(24) Bill speeds through the dark towards Edgevere. Rather than stay alone in the house, Mary decides to throw herself on the mercy of the village pub and ask them, despite her lack of ready money, to take her in for the night. Hurriedly she packs a case and opens the door to leave. Fodcarre stands on the step.

(25) After he has slapped her hard, she tells him that Bill has traded the letters via the FO for money. As he rummages through her suitcase there's a heavy knock on the door. She answers, Fodcarre's ivory-handled automatic at her back. It's the village policeman, checking the house in view of Mrs. Seymour's absence and recent local burglaries. Suspicious of Mary's manner, not to mention the livid slap-mark on her face, he comes in and is reassured when Fodcarre – who passes himself off as Mary's "cousin-by-marriage" – points out a framed picture of Mary on the mantelpiece. As the P.C. is about to leave,

she announces: "It isn't true. This man is a criminal who forced his way in here and is threatening to shoot me."

(26) When no-one answers Bill's knock, he walks into the house to see Mary, white-faced, in a chair and the inert body of a policeman on the floor. Fodcarre, gun in hand, tells him to sit, which he does. Moses, quickly bored with waiting in the car, follows his master into the house. As Fodcarre turns at the sound of the dog's entry, Bill goes for him, stick swinging. The local doctor, having called on a sick child next door, comes up the path, attracted by the ruckus. Fodcarre bowls him over and runs into the night. The doctor tends the policeman, shot in the chest but not dead, then Mary, shot in the shoulder and now fainted, as Bill limps next door to summon police and ambulance. The doctor tells Bill he'll take Mary home where his wife, a trained nurse, will tend her; he himself will check Bill over.

(27) Next morning, Mary is feeling much better but is stunned on learning at the doctor's breakfast table that Bill's injuries were not inflicted in 1918 but two years ago when the Penguin aircraft he was piloting crashed in France. When the doctor rings Bill's hotel to report on Mary's condition, he's told that Captain Raymond checked out at eight. Bill, having risen early, considered over breakfast what Fodcarre might do. He wanted to see him caught, not out of vengeance but because, until taken, he would continue to pose a threat to Mary. Having remembered the cryptic reference in one of the letters to "Victor's house" and "the second cow after Southampton", he sets off for that town.

(28) Bill spends a fruitless day trawling round Southampton, Hythe and the Isle of Wight then, with a policeman, roaming the decks of a ship about to depart for Le Havre. In the evening, at his hotel, he chances upon a photo of "the house used by Victor Hugo when in exile on Guernsey" and the meaning of the cryptic message finally becomes clear.

(29) Having been told by the doctor that Mary is on her way to Bournemouth, Bill travels there and meets her on a bus. He shows her a report in the morning paper of Fodcarre's arrest on Guernsey. She asks why he didn't tell her who

he was. He says he couldn't without "breaking a solemn undertaking to someone else". She says the pilot's name was Howard. Yes – after the smash he changed it by deed-poll. The promise he made was to his cousin, Robert Clapton, the medium. Bill offered to donate "a lump sum" to his society if Clapton would "receive" certain messages which Bill fed him. With Fodcarre standing trial in England, Bill won't get any reward from the Sûreté but can clear all his debts by selling the Bentley. He has enjoyed his period of posing as an amoral gambling man-about-town, finding in it an antidote to the bitter frustration of his injuries, but that pose of artificiality, the need for it at last obviated, with her help, is now behind him. He's been promised a staff appointment by the airline he flew for. He loves and wishes to marry her. "If you want me," she says quietly, "you can have me."

## Reviews

If one has any complaint against Mr. Graham in "KEYS OF CHANCE" it is that he almost overweighs the excitement. From the beginning, there is the sense of confounding issues, and the reader becomes so intrigued that he knows no peace until light begins to dawn.

[From the opening scene] the story bristles with thrills. Entering the house in St. John's Wood as secretary to the wealthy Mr. Veerson, [Mary] stumbles on further clues, and also comes up against a dangerous French criminal, Fodcarre. There is a breathless escape, and a most exciting denouement when Bill Raymond, Mary's lover, joins in the chase. Indeed, there is not a dull moment in the whole book.

*The Daily Telegraph*, 17 January 1939

There is no lack of exciting incident in this story, the plot being worthy of an accomplished author, who may always be relied upon to provide entertaining reading. Those who have read [his previous books] will appreciate the power and virility that impart such charm to Winston Graham's novels, and in "Keys of Chance" we have a tale that maintains in every way the high standard of previous efforts from this talented writer. Mystery and excitement are here in plenty, and there is also running through the book a neat romance, treated

with considerable skill. The whole leads up to a dramatic climax. An aeroplane crash with a suggestion of sabotage, a seance, in which a medium claims to be in touch with one of the victims of the disaster, and many other intriguing situations, ensure a quick-moving story, and there is little doubt that "Keys of Chance" will increase still further the already large circle of readers who admire the works of Winston Graham.

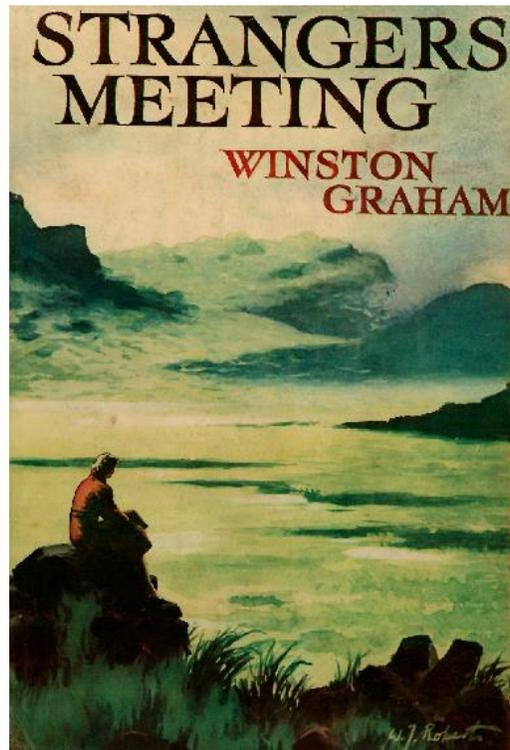
*The Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 13 January 1939

### **Comment**

Another run-of-the-mill thriller featuring an ill-matched couple, a pleasingly dark villain, pre-war London (its artful rendition confirming that the past is indeed a foreign country), a skilfully-drawn dog, a smattering of execrable Cockney dialogue and another highly improbable story that – typical of the genre (see also *Without Motive* above) – relies rather too much on convenient coincidence. Having said all that, it's a book, once started, most readers will see through to the end and then close with a satisfied smile, even though in a week it will be forgotten.

\* \* \* \* \*

**(8) *STRANGERS MEETING* (WL, October 1939)**



In the mid-1930s WG wrote a play called *Forsaking All Others*. After failing to get it produced, he reworked its content into his eighth novel *Strangers Meeting*. Its 320 pages are divided into three books of unequal length, reflecting, no doubt, the three-act structure of the source play.

**Plot**

**BOOK ONE**

(1) Cape Town, South Africa: at a friend's birthday party, Susan Grey (almost twenty-one) meets Gerald Tollis (thirty-six). Confident, assertive, "a lady's man", he courts her ardently. She is an orphan – her English mother died when she was young, her South African father, a prospector grown wealthy, more recently. She grew up with her much older half-sister (born of the same mother) in England: the half-sister, Helen Herridge, lives in Norfolk with her architect husband and their two children. The day after the party, Susan and Gerald go riding together and he is introduced to the aunt with whom she

lives. He asks Susan to visit him on his Port Elizabeth farm. Though repelled by his pushiness, she feels irresistibly drawn to him.

(2) At Mrs. Thompson's house in Stoke, another birthday party is underway: Norma, her youngest daughter, is twenty-one. Sheila – fresh-complexioned, compact, attractive, twenty-two – is late home from work. She looks tired; fortunately, next week is the start of her holiday. She tells her family she is off to Weston again, with Joan, but faces a dilemma – perhaps the most important decision of her life – for William Fawcett (about forty-five), leather works owner and her boss, wants her to go away with him, on the quiet, anywhere she likes. "Everybody does it these days," he says. He presses her for an answer. She promises one within twenty-four hours.

(3) The Herridges – father John (forty), mother Helen (thirty-six), Michael (ten) and Philip (eight tomorrow) – are at breakfast. We learn that mother and father will shortly leave for Cornwall where they are to meet "Aunt Sue" and her new fiancé Gerald; also that this is Helen's second marriage; at twenty she wed a young tea-planter called Harvey and went out to India with him. Soon after becoming widowed at twenty-three, she met John and they have now been happily married for eleven years.

## BOOK TWO

(1) The action moves to and hereafter remains in Trembeth, a remote west Cornwall fishing village, population 83. At Mrs. Spargo's Guest House, long-term resident Peter Crane (late twenties, quasi-consumptive, poet) is to be joined this mid-May day by John and Helen Herridge (returning after a visit the previous year) and William Fawcett and Sheila Thompson (posing as Mr. and Mrs. Fawcett) with Gerald Tollis and Susan Grey due tomorrow.

(2) Having been dropped off by their taxi, the Herridges walk the last mile to the Guest House. Though Harvey was "a queer case", Helen says, she doesn't altogether regret marrying him, since the "bitter experience" that followed has made her all the more appreciative of the good fortune she has enjoyed since meeting John.

(3) Helen observes but does not comment on a marked deterioration in Peter since she saw him last. Poor health forced him to give up bacteriological studies; at the turn of the year he published a small volume of poetry which the Herridges bought and admired. In receipt of a modest allowance from his uncle, he is staying at the Guest House "indefinitely". The Herridges talk to the couple from Stoke – Fawcett proves "a crashing bore" and Sheila hamstrung by a nervous hostility that gets in the way of an underlying natural friendliness. On a cliff walk, Helen, though not cold, gets the shivers.

(4) Although Peter's father, a bankrupt, committed suicide, we learn that Peter has never "soberly contemplated trying it" himself. Out walking before breakfast, he sees Sheila dive into the sea and swim away from the shore. Having waved her back, he warns her of the dangers posed to unwary swimmers by adverse currents hereabouts, but his brusqueness offends her and she returns to the water. In spite of himself, something about her "breathless, defiant womanhood" impresses him deeply; once back in his room, he writes two poems and contemplates a third. Later, Peter is with Helen in the dining room when the car carrying Susan and Gerald pulls up outside. She sees it and faints. Peter revives her with whisky, upon which she insists, though still groggy, on leaving the house by the back way so as to avoid any kind of embarrassing scene.

(5) John welcomes the newcomers; Gerald eyes him curiously. Helen comes in; more greetings are exchanged; John notices she is strained. She claims to have turned her knee in a rabbit-hole, then, realising they can smell the whisky on her breath, alleges a passer-by gave her some from a hip-flask. The new arrivals announce that they plan "an early wedding".

(6) Having seen eight towns in a day, Fawcett wants to move on tomorrow, but Sheila talks him into staying. She bumps into Peter. He apologises for his attitude on the beach, she concedes the fault was as much hers as his and they chat amiably.

(7) Since her fainting fit, Helen has been ill for two days. On Monday afternoon, John and Gerald drive into Penzance to buy her some grapes, leaving

her alone with Susan. Susan has sensed that Helen doesn't like Gerald and asks why. Helen says it's because he's considerably older than she imagined. Susan states they're to be married in July and that he's not after her money because he proposed before knowing she had any. When Helen suggests a trial separation to confirm their love for one another, Susan becomes indignant. The men return. To John, Helen admits frankly that she doesn't like and is suspicious of Gerald. When pressed to state why, she says he reminds her of Harvey, whose crime was to strip her of all illusions and destroy her sense of values. Like her aunt said: "It wasn't our Helen who came back from Mysore."

(8) Gerald, Susan and the Herridges go on a day trip to St. Ives. To help offset the evident constraint between the half-sisters, John asks Peter to come with them, which he is persuaded to do. In a café there they meet the Fawcetts and the seven dine together. Fawcett is crass, Gerald condescending, Helen and Sheila both noticeably quiet. It emerges that, during the afternoon, Sheila bought *Revolt*, one of Peter's two volumes of verse (the other called *Shadow Show*). What most struck Fawcett about the book, we learn, is the number of its blank spaces.

(9) When Gerald and Susan separate from the others to stroll, his caddish nature comes to the fore. He needles her; when she suggests waiting until September to marry, he won't hear of it; when the subject of Helen comes up, he forces an admission from Susan that her half-sister doesn't like him. He suggests that, in reality, she probably likes him too much. He suspects she's more than ready for "an adventure" with him or someone else. We learn that on the ship from South Africa the couple had "a ghastly quarrel ... to do with a woman". Gerald tells Susan he's heavily in debt and only marrying her for her money. The lightness of his tone leads her to dismiss as banter what, to the reader, has the ring of truth.

(10) John and Helen walk through the village to meet a man they met last year called Victor Penrose. Later, Susan, irritated and uneasy, is about to go to bed but returns to the lounge for her magazine. There she finds Gerald and Helen chatting by the fire, her eyes "lit by an unusual glitter". Next morning, when

Peter enters the lounge, he finds the same couple talking by the window. On the stairs, Sheila apologises to him for Fawcett's comments in the café. Impulsively he invites her to walk with him to the cliff and back. Though little is said, there is amity on both sides. She tells him she'll probably be here until Saturday. He asks if they might "arrange a walk sometime". "Yes," she says. "I'll manage it."

(11) The same afternoon, with Fawcett gone to Penzance alone, she walks with Peter to Poundstock Wood. She confesses to being single; to having come away with her boss for "a fortnight's freedom". The thought of a loveless marriage, children and drudgery – her appointed lot – oppresses her. "Life's too short ... too sweet," she says, "to have it all screwed out of you." She's a misfit, thinks Peter – like him.

(12) That night low spirits pervade the dining room. After the meal, Sheila helps Mrs. Spargo with the washing up then wanders into the writing room, where Helen sits alone. Sheila opens a book of poems, finds within an old photograph and sees in it a familiar face. Helen snatches it from her, then confides a story about someone she knew. He was married; one of a strange family. He could be the kindest and most thoughtful of men, or cruel and deliberately wicked. It wasn't in his capacity to be faithful to one woman because he couldn't control his desire for conquest – but even when you hated him, you felt his attraction. He owned an estate abroad, became entangled with a woman, ran into debt, tried to get out of it in "not very respectable ways" then, one night, just walked out and left his wife. Hmm – who can it be?

(13) In the lounge Sheila comes on Peter, Gerald and Fawcett with, between them, a "detectable tension". As Gerald and Peter leave to go to the King's Head for a drink, Helen enters and exchanges with Gerald a significant glance – "inscrutable but attractive, hostile but provocative". At the pub, Gerald tells Peter of his travels in Rhodesia, Ceylon and Mysore. Later, in their room, Sheila asks Fawcett what happened downstairs. He tells her that when he came back from Penzance and she wasn't in the house, he went out looking for her and saw Gerald and a woman he thought was Susan on the sandhills

together. When he mentioned this to Tollis, he arrogantly denied it; Susan, with "a voice like death" said she'd been in with a book all afternoon.

(14) After a sleepless night, Sheila goes to the beach with Fawcett and tells him she's not going back to Stoke with him but staying in Cornwall. Tollis has taken to his bed with "a touch of fever".<sup>11</sup>

(15) Peter too slept little but, after struggling with a pre-lunch letter to his uncle, accepts an invitation from the restless Gerald to go down to the pub again. Once there, the South African is gratuitously rude to Victor Penrose, sneers at Peter's poetry – his "kindergarten slops" – and rails at the sameness of women; at their predictability. When Peter asks if there has been a tiff, he's told to mind his own business. "Fate," says Tollis, "has its own special jokes and it's not fair to spoil them" – a sentiment with which Peter wryly agrees. On their way back to the Guest House they encounter John, come to meet them. When Peter innocently mentions Mysore, Gerald cuts him off.

(16) Susan looks for but does not find an opportunity to talk to Gerald; he seems intent on ensuring she doesn't catch him alone. When they walk with the Herridges down to the harbour, Gerald and John lead the way, talking and laughing, while the half-sisters trail behind in silent discord. Sheila asks Mrs. Spargo where "a friend" might find a job in these parts – a question Peter overhears with exasperation. Mrs. Spargo complains that all her guests seem "fidgety" and ill-at-ease – except for Mr. Tollis. "Yes," says Peter. "I've noticed that." Later, in the garden, she hears through the dining room window Tollis ask someone whether they're not bored by "respectability"; by "eleven years of mediocrity" and, in response: "Don't touch me, please" and "I couldn't get away tonight ... That's final. No!" The second voice, though but an undertone, was not Susan Grey's.

(17) At dinner, more evidence of things not right: at the Herridge table only Gerald talks, at the Fawcetts', sulky silence from him and preoccupation from her, and Peter picking at his food, finishing early and leaving the room. A little later, going to the village to post his letter, he encounters Sheila, who suggests coming with him, but he chokes her off, saying he'll be returning a different

way. Fawcett then comes down to say that Gerald and Susan are upstairs arguing. He tells Sheila he's off back to Stoke in the morning but she's adamant she won't go with him. Tollis then adds to his annoyance by striding off towards the cliffs after more glib and disrespectful remarks. Helen and John speculate on the reasons for and seriousness of the "bust-up", which he'd seen coming. In need of air, she wants to walk over to the Penroses. When he suggests going with her, she says that Susan might need support and certainly wouldn't welcome it from her, so he'd better stay behind. He consents; she sets off alone.

(18) Susan sits in the twilit lounge alone. Sheila comes in and they talk stiffly. John enters – "I've just been as far as the gate," he says. The rising wind bursts open the french doors; Susan, wan and shaken, leaves. Now Sheila and John chat stiffly, until she asks disarmingly: "Have you ever been so alone you don't know where to turn?"

(19) After posting his letter, Peter has two pints at the King's Head, leaves with Victor Penrose then, after Penrose branches off towards his cottage, turns back past the church to strike inland. He thinks of Sheila – the girl he'd considered it diverting and safe to flirt with, but was not. For two days he had lived in a fool's paradise before her confession jolted him back to earth. As he tramps through the night, the wind howls across the moor to the sea. He cuts down through Hope Quarry, picking his way carefully along the dim-moonlit path. Something stirs in the shadows. He looks and sees, framed against a piece of old tarpaulin, the face and unwinking eyes of Gerald Tollis.

(20) Susan, nerves shredded, re-enters the lounge to find Fawcett there. John comes in and the men start to talk of banalities while she rehashes in her head the row that led to her breaking her engagement. Was it as much her fault as his? Or Helen's? Twenty minutes ago, John had found his wife being helped, drawn and tired, up the stairs by Mrs. Spargo, who thought she was ill. In their room, Helen gave an explanation to her husband he did not believe but did not question. Mrs. Spargo answers the doorbell, then, face flushed, asks to speak to John. After conferring briefly with her in the hall, he returns to the lounge to tell Susan that Gerald is dead.

## BOOK THREE

(1) At the inquest in the village school, John, the first witness, informs the coroner that, as far as he knows, Tollis's circumstances were "quite comfortable" – though he'd only known him five days. The local doctor, who examined and then autopsied the body, reports that death was caused by a broken neck, an injury quite consistent with a fall down a quarry face of eighty or ninety feet. There was evidence that the deceased had taken a considerable amount of alcohol during his last day, probably related to the flare-up of malaria he was known to have suffered, for which spirits were a recognised "combative". Peter Crane testifies to having found Tollis, barely conscious, three or four minutes before he died. At the last, he was able to say just one word: "Susan". Sergeant Gribble examined the spot where the body was found and the cliff immediately above. He couldn't say why anyone might have been up there, except for one thing – twenty yards beyond the point he must have fallen from stands an old workman's hut with, inside, evidence of recent use: a swept floor, ashes in the grate and three burnt matches. These were of the kind torn from a matchbook – and Tollis had such a book, part-used, in his pocket.

(2) Back at the Guest House, Fawcett tries for a final time to persuade Sheila to return with him to Stoke. When she refuses, he asks her to marry him. This offer, too, she politely declines. He drives off in high dudgeon, alone.

(3) Sheila, who has confided in Mrs. Spargo who and what she is, is going to stay in the short term with the older woman's sister in Penzance. We learn that, just before the inquest, Susan had had a violent argument with Helen in which she laid the blame for Gerald's death squarely at her meddling half-sister's door. It had taken John twenty-five minutes to calm Susan sufficiently for her to agree to attend the inquest at all.

(4) Peter leaves the inquest before it is over, not concerned that his evidence was less than wholly accurate. Hollis had not said "Susan" before he died, but "Helen", and other "queer stuff" besides, all of which he chose to suppress out of "common decency". Back at the Guest House, he meets Sheila. She

tries hard to talk him into linking his future with hers, but he won't. Hat-box in hand, she leaves.

(5) Alone in his room, Peter has second thoughts. Helen, back from the inquest, tells John everything – that she knew Tollis twelve years ago, that he had this week been blackmailing her "not for money", that she'd gone on Thursday night to meet him at the hut but had rejected his advances and left him there. She speculates that he must have known all along who Susan was and used her with callous calculation for his nefarious ends. John sees that the rehabilitation of his wife, not to mention the reconciliation of the estranged half-sisters, will be a ticklish proposition. But he will try.

(6) Sheila wanders glumly through Poundstock Wood. No sooner has she freed a rabbit from a gin than Peter finds her (drawn by the rabbit's cries) and together they bind the wound on its leg. He tells her he loves her and can't let her go. It looks as though they will have some measure of future together after all.

(7) The Herridges are about to depart. We learn that the inquest verdict was "death by misadventure". Peter comes in and suggests, on the strength of what he was told in the pub, that if Tollis proves to have no relatives in South Africa, it might be worth enquiring in Mysore. He then observes that John's brown sports jacket has a new button. "Yes," says John, "I lost the other somewhere. I got this in the village. It's not a frightfully good match." Peter hands him the lost button; John asks with surprise where he found it. "In Gerald Tollis's hand," Peter replies.

## **Reviews**

This is a novel which would do credit to almost any author. Winston Graham has accomplished the rare feat of the perfect story in "Strangers Meeting." Plot, characters and background, when treated with such uniform care and skill, make an irresistible combination, and the result is wholly satisfying to the fiction epicure.

*The Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 25 November 1939

Readers who like their books full of drama, acting, love and good writing will be interested in this story. Mr. Graham handles it in such a masterly manner, vivid and brisk, and with such real understanding, not only of human nature, but of his characters, that it is a delight to read. It is a brilliant study of human character and an entrancing story, well worth reading.

*The Dudley Herald*, date unknown

## Comment

A "perfect story"? A "brilliant study of human character"? WG didn't think so. In *Memoirs*, he scathingly dismissed *Strangers Meeting* as "the worst novel I ever wrote".<sup>12</sup> Given that artists are notoriously poor judges of their own work, is Mr. Graham's disavowal of his eighth novel justified? Well, yes and no. Its romance is tepid, its intrigue thinly veiled and its tragedy telegraphed as to victim and cause. Having primed his pot, WG lets it simmer interminably without ever quite bringing it to the boil, resulting in a stew that, while palatable, is undercooked and not very sustaining. So, an undistinguished book? Perhaps, but one also that reads easily, is no less satisfying or accomplished than any of his first four, or seventh, or ninth, and ends with a pleasing reveal. Finally, although it's been several years since I last read *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy's description of Vronsky's first sight of Anna at Moscow's Petersburg station has never left my mind, and, unlikely as it may sound, WG writes a similarly striking first encounter scene in *Strangers Meeting*:

*He waited until she had reached him, wading up rather breathlessly out of the sea. She was wearing a short blue costume. Although they had not previously spoken, she recognised him and smiled enquiringly ... .. The water was standing out like little blobs of perspiration upon her fine skin. The costume clung to her compact young figure. Tiny rivulets of water trickled down her arms from shoulder to elbow and then onto the wrist. He saw that she had coloured ... .. Perhaps the background was largely responsible: the blue-grey waste of sea framed in rock, a cold-blooded life, beating slow and*

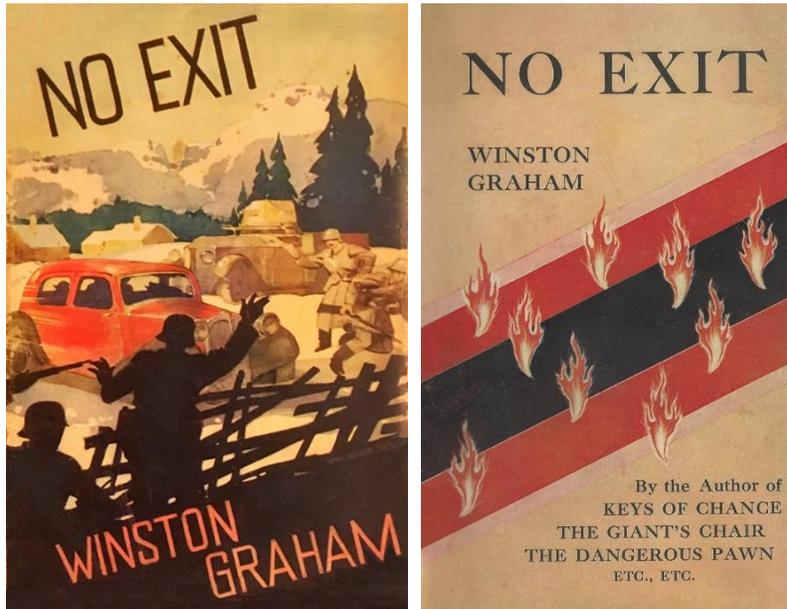
*impersonal upon the sand. But then the foreground consisted of this woman, whatever her name was. However detached one might really be, she remained the focal point of any picture his mind was concerned with, her face bereft of its softening hair, a clear-cut, youthful oval; her breast rising and falling deeply with the exertion of her swim, the inadequate blue costume; her wet skin gleaming whitely against the curtain of the sea. It was in a sense symbolic, he told himself. Her face, particularly the eyes and lips, was expressive of warmth and courage and individuality; seemed to be typical of humanity in its continuous struggle against inanimate force. At least he could bring himself to regard it as that.*

While assuredly not WG's finest novel, neither is *Strangers Meeting* anything like his worst and, like *The Dangerous Pawn* and *The Giant's Chair* before it, has merit enough to warrant resurrection.

NOTE: previously deployed in *Without Motive* (see page 27 above), the device of linking the pasts of two supposedly disparate characters by the chance discovery of an old photograph is used again here – though with a little more subtlety this time, it still feels like something of a cheat.

\* \* \* \* \*

**(9) NO EXIT (WL, 27 June 1940)**



Book One: eleven chapters; Book two: seventeen chapters; Epilogue; 316 pages.

**Plot**

**BOOK ONE**

(1) The story opens in Bucharest's Hotel Splendide. We meet some of the guests: German Fritz Kortner who reports to owner-manager Constantin Inescu that one of his six-strong "textile delegation" is ill (though no outside help is needed as one of their number – Dr. Ernst – is medically trained); M. de Bonne, a Frenchman, who checks out and so misses a letter sent to him; American ladies Mrs. Standing and Miss Pym; Dr. Dunbar, a Scot; English commercial traveller Miss Violet Smith (corsets her line) who has too much to say and tall, thirty-two-year-old civil engineer John Carr who has nothing to say at all. The date is Wednesday 8 March 1939.

(2) Carr is in the country to inspect a bridge built by his firm that requires repair after flood damage. In his room, which is 202, having read a letter from his mother, he is about to retire for the night when he hears a Morse Code

message being transmitted via the hotel's noisy plumbing system. He takes it down and reads: *VITAL IMPORTANCE TURKISH RESTAURANT AVENUE GALATI KRETZULESCO SAY NO EXIT*. The sender identifies himself as *DE BONNE, ROOM 304*.

(3) Having finished his bridge inspection and not due to leave Bucharest until noon the next day, when he's due to take a train to Prague, Carr has time on his hands. 304 is one of three rooms occupied by the German textile delegation. Carr goes up to the third floor and loiters; while there; a procession of two nuns, two hotel staff and some of the Germans emerge from the room with a coffin, which they manoeuvre down the hotel's back stairs to the street below.

(4) Carr, sneaking behind, engages a droshky [i.e. a horse-drawn taxi] to follow the two cars ahead, carrying the Germans and their cargo. He trails the *cortège* to a cemetery where, after a short service, the coffin is buried. Kortner speaks with Carr and informs him the dead man's name was Schmidt. Later, Paul the desk clerk tells him it was Gellert, which Carr confirms by glancing at the register. There he also sees the name of Jacques G. de Bonne. We hear about Marjorie, Carr's girlfriend of three years, at home in England. Educated at a first-class school and with an accent that showed it, she plays tennis for her county and beats Carr at golf every Sunday; every Wednesday they go to the pictures; their relationship, an "understood thing" (though more by outsiders than between themselves) sounds as vibrant and full of promise as a dead halibut. Back in Bucharest, after a fruitless visit to the British Embassy, where, after explaining what he knows, he is advised to "drop it", Carr hails another droshky and sets off to find Avenue Galati.

(5) In the Turkish restaurant, Carr learns that the head waiter's name is Kretzulesco and gives him the message "no exit" without eliciting any visible response. Though he wants a meal, after two cups of coffee Carr is ushered into a Turkish bath-house associated with the restaurant and induced to bathe. After completing his ablutions, he dries off, puts his clothes back on and departs the premises, noting on his way out Fritz Kortner and another German sitting at a corner table.

(6) At an adjacent restaurant, Carr finds his wallet has been searched – while he was having his Turkish bath, of course – although nothing is missing. On the contrary, an envelope has been added to his papers, containing a second envelope plus slip of paper bearing instructions in German, a name – *Jan Rezek* – and an address – *12 Stefan namesti* – in Prague. A police car arrives and Carr sees Kretzulesco led out of the Turkish restaurant under arrest and driven away. Kortner also emerges with a stab wound in his arm. Back at the Splendide, Carr absent-mindedly asks for key 304, then, finding it won't open his door, heads back to the desk to exchange it for the correct key. But the stairs go both down and up – and the Germans, he'd noticed, had all been in the bar ...

(7) In 304 he finds a badly-slashed suitcase embossed with the initials *J. G. de B.*, shoes with the soles cut off and, in the bin, newspapers with heavy brown stains and black human hair inside. The Germans come back but all enter 303. Then 304's phone rings. Carr lifts off but does not speak into the receiver. He leaves the room and exits via the back stairs. After conversing in the bar with Violet Smith, who translates for him the German instructions (*Please act as you think best*), he addresses the planted envelope to himself at his Prague hotel and posts it in a letterbox in the street.

(8) Violet comes to the hotel desk to place a call to Munich, followed by Carr asking for someone to be sent up without delay to repair the broken lock on his door.

(9) After finding that intruders had slit the sides of his suitcase and the lining of his spare suit, Carr insists on moving to 201, where he spends the remainder of night. He sees in the morning paper that the Turkish restaurant in Avenue Galati is to close in a week "By Order", then, with less than two hours to go before his train leaves, is approached by Dr. Dunbar and asked, as the only other Briton in the hotel, for his help.

(10) Dunbar tells him he has worked for the British Intelligence Service in the past and, while here in Bucharest on holiday, had been asked to work for them again. It seems the Germans have had sensitive information leaked from

their Foreign Office which would be helpful to the Czechs and which the Germans have since been trying to trace and retrieve. Dunbar suspects that the trail has led to de Bonne who, though French, had a Czech mother and therefore Czech sympathies, and is now presumed dead. Carr confirms that he *is* dead; also that he's already searched 304, where he found, though did not think to retain, evidence of foul play. Dunbar says he'll be able to get an exhumation order to prove de Bonne's murder but first needs some sort of hard evidence to take to the authorities, so asks Carr to help him search 304 again. He's overheard the Germans say they're all going out at 10:30, so wants Carr to keep watch from the bar, carefully count them out and, when all are gone, meet Dunbar up on the third floor. This Carr agrees to do. Outside 304, Dunbar produces a large bunch of keys, one of which opens the door, and the two men enter the room. A minute later, Kortner and Ernst come in. Dunbar – no Scot – is their colleague. "Mr. Carr," says Kortner, "we wish to ask you a few questions."

(11) Down at the desk, three officials from the department of Police arrive and wish to know why Inescu hasn't reported the death of one of his guests "to the proper quarters"? Because, says Inescu, Dr. Ernst had assured him that he would take care of all such formalities. The men now wish to see both Ernst and the room in which the death occurred, so Inescu takes them up to the third floor. After getting no answer from 303, Inescu knocks at 304. Kortner answers, tells him Ernst is not there and shuts the door. But one of the visitors, having peeked through the crack, asks: "Who is that man being held down on the bed?"

## BOOK TWO

(1) After a two-hour police interrogation, Carr – bruised cheek, swollen neck, bandaged wrist – is released and next morning takes the mail-plane to Prague via Budapest and Vienna. At Vienna airport he narrowly escapes arrest by declining to disembark from the aircraft.

(2) After booking into his hotel, Carr claims the letter he posted to himself in Bucharest then goes off for a stroll around Prague. He comes across Stefan

namesti and delivers the letter, which proves to be in code, to M. Rezek, who invites him back at 4 p.m. the next day for tea.

(3) At four the next afternoon, Carr returns to find Rezek closeted with three colleagues: Dr. Slavata, M. Chelchicky and Professor Wagner. The letter discloses German plans to invade Czechoslovakia on 18 March (i.e. in five days time) and includes a list of forty names of those the Germans intend to "liquidate" as soon as Prague is secured. Rezek and his three friends are all on the list.

(4) Chelchicky is a provincial mayor who ordered the execution of two Germans for the murder of a policeman, Slavata is an "alienist" who published a monograph questioning the mental health of certain prominent Nazis, Wagner is a Jewish economist and Rezek writes plays "displeasing to the totalitarian mind". Rezek intends to contact all those on the list without delay to give them and their families the opportunity to flee, though he himself – Slavata too – intends to stay. Chelchicky argues with him to no avail. To Carr, Rezek contrasts the ideologies of East and West and draws parallels between the ancient conflicts between Rome and Carthage and those in the present century between England and Germany – but is the future with God or the Devil?

(5) Wednesday morning: the Germans have occupied Prague three days ahead of schedule. Carr speculates that, following the leak of their plans, this was done to minimise the chances of their wanted men eluding capture. Carr was to have seen Rezek again this evening, but, since that will now probably be too late, he decides to go right away.

(6) He walks to Rezek's house to be told the playwright was arrested an hour ago by Czech police acting under German orders. Feeling less than fully fit, Carr returns to his hotel and sleeps through the afternoon. Awakened by a phone call from Rezek, who sounds strange, Carr returns to Stefan namesti to find Rezek's home trashed and blood on the floor: the dissident has again been apprehended, this time by the Gestapo, having been "released" earlier only to see whether he would make contact with and thereby disclose the

whereabouts of any fellow dissidents. But – hark! – someone is coming up the stairs.

(7) A Secret Policeman called Munsen enters and, on learning Carr's identity, tells him that, right now, some of Munsen's men will be in Carr's hotel room going through his luggage. When Munsen begins manhandling Resek's elderly one-armed servant Joseph, Carr strikes him, first with his fist and then, after Munsen produces a revolver, with a steel-framed chair, which kills him.

(8) An S.S. guard enters. Joseph lays him out with a candlestick and is only stopped from killing him by Carr. Taking the two Germans' firearms, Carr and Joseph leave by the back way, Joseph to seek friends and Carr directed by Joseph to go without delay to the British Legation. But Carr returns to his hotel and, after collecting money left at the desk, narrowly escapes arrest. In the street, he realises his passport is still in his hotel room; in a bar, he overhears someone saying that the Germans have the British Legation surrounded to stop further exiles, Communists, Jews or anyone else they want seeking refuge there.

(9) Carr thinks of walking to the westbound railway terminus but gets lost; considers ditching the revolver but doesn't; then enters a beer shop to warm up. Can they, he wonders, provide him with a bed for the night?

(10) The "beer shop" is a house of ill repute and Carr shares the room though not the bed of a benign young madam called Hilda: "The English – what a race!" she says. She gives him breakfast, after which he ventures out to buy a large-scale map of Czechoslovakia and then get a haircut and shave. In the barber's, someone claps a hand on his shoulder. It is Violet Smith.

(11) Smith is a freelance reporter who travels in corsets as a cover (while also selling a few of those on the side) and is in Prague to file copy on the occupation. She takes Carr, despite his reservations, to a popular restaurant for lunch, where she's meeting a colleague, Miss Czernin, whom Violet calls Mo. Mo has arranged an afternoon visit to the newspaper plant of a Czech industrialist called Palske, whose paper is "sympathetic to the totalitarian

powers". As they dine, Mo tells Carr that a crop-haired young German is watching him from across the room. When they leave, Carr asks the ladies if he can come with them to the publisher's. They consent and the three board a tram together. The crop-haired German gets on with them.

(12) Palske escorts a group of eight through his high-tech plant from editorial suite to photographic room to foundry hall to printing presses to packing and dispatch area. Smith points out to Carr that the paper's relatively modest circulation could not possibly support such outlay on plant and infers that the operation is heavily subsidised, here as elsewhere, by German money in exchange for pro-Teutonic reportage. At the end of the tour, Palske picks up a copy of the edition presently rolling off the presses to show the plant's end product to his guests. In the centre of its front page they see an excellent photograph of John Carr.

(13) With a minimum of pushing, running, door-slamming and gun-waving, Carr gets out of the plant and back onto the street, Smith with him. Once clear of the area, they stop into a café to consider options over a drink and soon decide that the best plan is for Carr to go to ground for a couple of days while something can be arranged on his behalf – and Smith knows where: in Mo's flat, for which she has a key. When Carr protests that this will put both ladies in unwonted danger, Smith says she's in for journalistic reasons and that Mo – a Hungarian Jewess – is up for anything that puts a spoke in Hitler's wheel, at which Carr withdraws his objection. She tells him that the newspaper headlines state: ***Dastardly murder of German police officer. Ten thousand crowns reward.*** Once in Mo's flat, he is able to read the account beneath of him striking the policeman down from behind after being caught rifling a safe. Below this bogus report is an obituary notice for Jan Rezek, who is said to have "died after a short illness". Smith goes out, leaving a brooding Carr alone in the flat to await her return.

(14) Some time after darkness has fallen, Smith phones Carr to tell him he must leave the flat right away, as the Germans are on their way there in search of Mo, who is now also wanted and on the run. Carr gathers together his meagre belongings and opens the door to find two men standing there.

They are from Chelchicky, whom Mo told where to find Carr. He goes with them to a cellar where Chelchicky and others are running an impromptu escape committee. From the congratulations he receives from all sides, Carr realises that his killing of Munsen has had a double effect – of making him the hunted quarry of the Germans but also a minor celebrity to the Czechs, who are keen to help him accordingly. Chelchicky is "leaving for Poland tonight" and Carr elects to go with him.

(15) Chelchicky, Carr and a third man called Kornic travel through the night aboard a goods train two hundred and fifty miles east to the town of Brunn.

(16) The three travel on by passenger train to Vaclav, forty miles from the Polish border, only to find that their contact there, who was to have supplied them with a car, left town a week ago. They are directed to a Jew who has three dilapidated cars for sale, pay ten pounds for the likeliest runner and set off towards Poland. When met by a German motorised column, Chelchicky coolly gives an officer directions, made up on the spot. They then come upon a temporary checkpoint and, faced with no other option, Carr smashes through the barrier and races away across country, an armoured car in pursuit. Their car gets its back wheels stuck in the gully of a frozen stream; eventually they manage to extricate it by shoving the car's back seat and backrest under the wheels for grip. When it seems inevitable that the armoured car will catch them, it too becomes mired in the same gully, enabling the fugitives to escape.

(17) The three reach Poland, where, with anti-German feeling rife, help is on hand.

## EPILOGUE

We learn that the three had trekked for ten hours through snow and dark to cross the border with Carr carrying Chelchicky, who had a bullet wound in his back, for half of that time, so saving his life. Carr returns home and is met off the train by Marjorie, who notices some change in him. He proposes, she accepts, all very matter of fact.

## Reviews

Mr. Graham pitches his story amid real scenes. His Mr. Carr, a quiet, decent engineer, is induced by not unnatural curiosity to poke his nose into certain mildly curious happenings in the town of Bucharest and finds reasons to repent it. His grounds for sorrow are even better when he reaches Prague in the middle of the occupation by the Germans, bumps an S.S. man (Schutzstaffel, not Secret Service) into a better world, and finds himself on the run, without a passport, in a city whose language he cannot speak. It is a good, straightforward tale, which gains interest from the fact that Mr. Carr is rather an innocent – or partly innocent – victim of circumstance than a sleuth.

*The Irish Times*, 6 July 1940

Here is a first-rate novel of topical interest dealing with European events leading up to the war, and having as its main picture the German occupation of Prague. Winston Graham has cleverly contrived to climax his story in a dramatic record of the paralysis of the Czech capital and the escape to Poland of the national leaders, who were being hunted by the invaders ... "No Exit" ... is a story of the times, in which history is combined with human drama in the making of a thrilling narrative of personal adventure.

*The Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 20 July 1940

## Comment

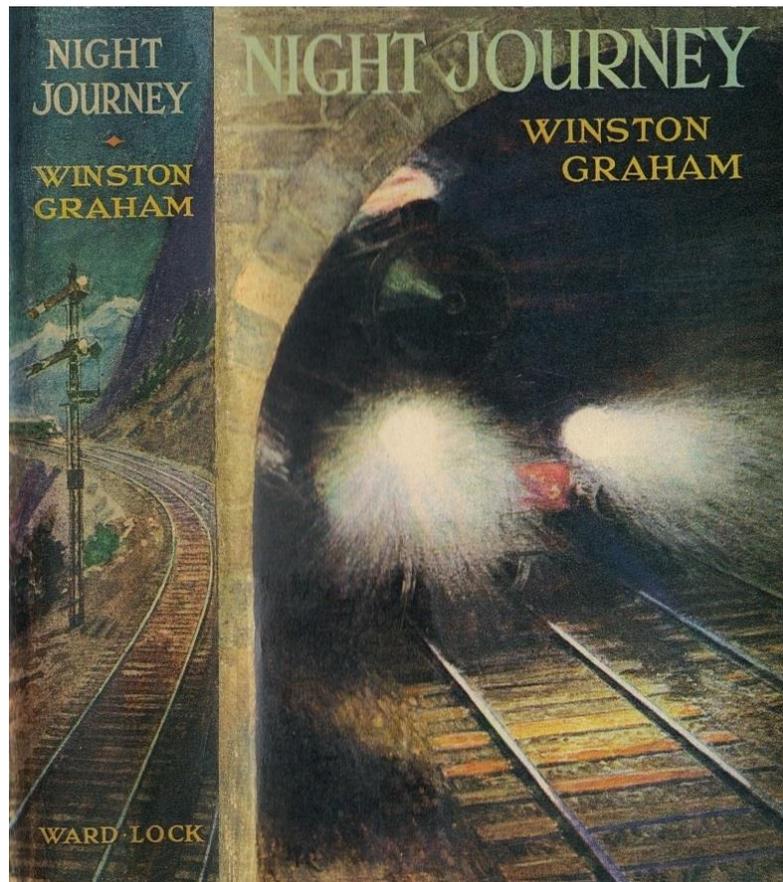
On its promise at the start of Chapter Two of "eight days of hazard and danger" *No Exit* fails to deliver. This is due principally to the nature of the author's protagonist and, in this respect, WG hoists himself with his own petard. Through the course of the novel, Mr. Carr's character is transformed by events from diffident and phlegmatic to older and wiser, but the more mature man who might have made a more compelling hero doesn't appear until the closing pages, and the other's dour, bloodless persona imparts itself to the bulk of the narrative with deleterious effect. Thus he receives a midnight message, attends the funeral of a man he does not know, has a

Turkish bath he didn't expect or want, posts himself a letter and less than enjoys a strange bedroom encounter – but he doesn't excite. The man is dull and so, for the most part, is the record of his doings. This is a *Boy's Own* adventure without thrill or colour; fiction, from this author, of a surprisingly pedestrian kind. Yet the book is worth reading – and therefore republishing – nonetheless, for, on leaving Bucharest, Mr. Carr flies north to Prague, arriving shortly before the Germans march in to occupy the city, and much the most successful aspect of *No Exit* is its effective evocation of the fraught pre-war period in which the whole of Europe seemed to wait in resigned expectation of coming conflict and turmoil. "Europe's got the D.T.'s," we're told. "For two years it's been seeing green snakes. Now, by the Lord, they're beginning to wriggle." What's more, published in 1940, *No Exit's* is a contemporary account and all the more special for that. The historical perspective superimposed on events by the author via "Rezek" and "Kornic" particularly impresses – an early indication of WG's evident love and detailed grasp of history's grand sweep. As for poor Mr. Carr, however, his usefulness as an eye-witness barely offsets his failure as a leading man; as a man charismatic enough to carry the novel. If you're like me, you'll be left with the feeling that he and the antiseptic Marjorie probably deserve each other.

NOTE: In chapter 2.12 of *No Exit*, man-on-the-run Carr joins a tour through a newspaper plant only to find at its conclusion his face on the front page of the edition then rolling off the presses. This scenario – indeed, some of the very same text – resurfaces seventeen years on in *Greek Fire* (1957), which only goes to prove that good authors waste nothing.

\* \* \* \* \*

**(10) NIGHT JOURNEY – AN ADVENTURE (WL, November 1941)**



Twenty-four chapters; 287 pages. Republished in revised form by The Bodley Head Ltd. in 1966.

**Plot**

(1) September 1940: thirty-one-year-old research chemist and Allied patriot Dr. Robert Mencken had an Austrian father and English mother, both now dead. He moved with his sister Nina from Austria to Britain in 1938, was interned in May 1940, released in August and has now been called into his local police station to be told he is to be interned again.

(2) He is transferred from a camp in Worcester to another in Hereford and after a week there is called in to see a Colonel Brown, who tells him that, of the 73,300 German and Austrian nationals in the country, he, Mencken, is the

only one to have been interned twice. British Intelligence have been asked to provide someone to attend a conference on poison gases to be held in Milan on October 8 + 9 and he – a chemist, a German and Italian speaker and someone with a sound working knowledge of Northern Italy – is in their view the man best qualified to do it. Neither his sister nor anyone else can be told – his "internment" his cover. He is under no obligation to undertake what may well prove to be dangerous work and, should he decline, will be released. But, on condition only that his British naturalisation be expedited, Mencken accepts.

(3) Mencken travels by tramp steamer from Liverpool to Lisbon, where he is given new clothes and an Italian passport identifying him as Edmondo Bottari, then journeys across to Barcelona where he boards another coaster that lands him, four days behind schedule, in Venice. There he checks into a hotel room facing the Lagoon before venturing out to meet, albeit belatedly, his contact.<sup>13</sup>

(4) Andrews, alias wine merchant Michele Brevio, head of the British Secret Service in Northern Italy, is overweight, middle forties, sallow. He tells Mencken that six weeks ago news came through that a Professor Brayda had discovered "a new kind of poison gas" which he intends to demonstrate to a few picked men. As well as scientists at the conference, which is to be held at the Faroni works in Milan, will be representatives of the services. Captain Bonini of the Naval Staff in Venice will represent the Italian Admiralty and Mencken is to pose as his secretary. Over the past year, Bonini has run himself into considerable debt, worked off some of it by selling low-level intelligence to the British and is now being blackmailed with proof of his perfidy to do Andrews' bidding. A second man – Major Dwight, alias Berczik – arrives. Tall, gaunt and troubled with a cough ever since exposure to phosgene in 1916, he reveals that the German scientist at the conference is to be Third Reich adviser Dr. von Riehl, in Italy for two weeks to assess their "war production". Mencken is to call on Bonini at 11 a.m. the next day.

(5) The meeting takes place and goes according to plan. Having been told to return to Andrews' apartment at six, Mencken is half an hour early and receives a brusque welcome. When a girl, Jane Howard, "an Australian with American connections", emerges from an adjoining room in a dressing gown,

Andrews' frostiness – surprised with his mistress – is explained. Andrews issues a few last instructions and Mencken leaves. Outside, the girl bumps into Mencken on the street and they talk. She's been in Venice for a year (meaning, he figures, from the outbreak of war) and "lives on the Grand Canal with her step-father". Though he "knows little about women, except biologically", Mencken is drawn to her and watches her board her ferry home with "a sensation of regret".

(6) The next morning – Saturday – Bonini formally engages Mencken and tells him to report for duty at 10 a.m. on Monday when, after instruction, he is to go to Milan and book two rooms at the Hotel Calleoni in Bonini's name. Bonini will then join him on Tuesday morning in time for the start of the conference at 2 p.m. On Saturday afternoon, with time on his hands, Mencken strolls around Venice then has an early dinner. Near its end, called to the phone, he is told to take a gondola waiting for him at the side door of his hotel that "will bring you here". The woman speaker gives no name, but, having recognised her voice, he obliges. Having taken a deliberately long and circuitous back-water route, the gondolier drops Mencken at a green door along a shady cut off the Grand Canal. He pulls at the bell.

(7) Jane leads him in and tells him that all day he's been followed, perhaps by Bonini, wanting to keep an eye on him or perhaps by the local police. With Andrews in Verona and Dwight in Milan, she felt obliged to tell him, though, for further advice, he must contact Giacomo, a guide at San Giacomo church, at 6 p.m. tomorrow. They spend an increasingly friendly though chaste evening; her step-father then returns from the casino and, on being told that Mencken is "one of us", indulges in some bullish banter. Jane walks Mencken back as far as the Rialto Bridge, where they kiss under the moonlight. She leaves him, dizzy, in love with a young woman – another's mistress – he's met just twice.

(8) He visits the church, is escorted round by Giacomo and, in a dark corner, slipped a piece of paper. Outside, he reads: *Calleta Veneto No. 3. Major Berczik. Tomorrow morning at 7. You will not be followed. Go out tonight. A long walk. Destroy this.* Rather than throw the note in a canal, Mencken

decides to keep it until it can be burned. On his way back to his hotel, his pocket is picked – he loses two letters and half a slab of chocolate, but not the note, which he reduces to ashes. Next morning, at seven, he meets Dwight. Andrews is with him. They tell Mencken that an hour ago the man who was following him, and who picked his pocket, was found dead in a canal. Papers taken from him show him to have been Gestapo. Dwight believes that Bonini, who has a German wife, has disclosed his dilemma to them and that, rather than pick Mencken up, they have been tailing him to try and identify all the British agents in Venice before making a clean sweep. With that hindrance removed, if only temporarily, the plan as originally formulated is to go ahead, although, after the conference, Mencken will not now return to Venice as previously planned, but go instead to an address in Milan for swifter and hopefully safer repatriation.

(9) Mencken books into Milan's Hotel Colleoni then goes out for a meal. He notes, strolling back, that he is being followed once more. Jane Howard, he conjectures, he'll probably never see again.

(10) Mencken is woken at two by noise and light: Milan is under attack by British bombers. No sooner has the third and last wave passed than his phone rings. A voice asks for Bonini, then tells his "private secretary" that Professor Brayda's house and laboratory have been destroyed by a bomb, the Professor has been seriously injured, his assistant killed and the conference is therefore off. Mencken goes to the hotel lobby and bribes the desk clerk to drive him out to the Faroni works then wait for him there. He locates Brayda's ruined home, is told the Professor has been carried to the house of his immediate neighbour, talks his way in to the stricken man's bedside and watches him die, murmuring about his work even as he does so. Also present is Dr. von Riehl, to whom Brayda spoke for fifteen minutes before Mencken's arrival while the German took notes. Von Riehl tells newcomer Dr. Pietro that Brayda was delirious and unable to communicate anything of worth – he proffers meaningless notes to back up his claim – but Mencken doesn't believe him because (a) the notes showed to Pietro came out of a different pocket from the one Mencken saw the originals put into and (b) the Brayda he'd seen, though just briefly, had been weak but wholly rational.

(11) Mencken returns to his hotel and walks – again followed – to the station where, from a public box, he phones Andrews in Venice. He manages to relay, despite necessary circumlocution, that Brayda is dead, that von Riehl took some sort of "confession" from him and that he, Mencken, is now being shadowed by two Gestapo men. Andrews tells him to go to the Milan address, whether followed or not, between 6:00 and 6:30 p.m. – though *not* before – by which time arrangements will have been made to receive him. After dithering through the morning – breakfast, a visit to the Duomo then a barber's shop, a newspaper in the square – he takes a taxi by zigzag route back out to the Faroni works and tells the driver to wait. Brayda's secretary informs him that the conference, which wasn't only about poisoned gas, has been postponed for a week and that Dr. von Riehl will not be in attendance, since he now plans to return to Germany tomorrow. This, the secretary believes, must be because Brayda, who was perfectly lucid until he died, succeeded in conveying to von Riehl what he knew and that Herr Doctor is now taking the knowledge back to the Fatherland; in other words, is putting Germany first. A preoccupied Mencken directs the taxi back to his hotel. He notes that they seem to be taking an unfamiliar route and looks more closely. It is not the same driver.

(12) The taxi is being followed by a limousine with Mencken's two Gestapo shadows inside. As the taxi slows, Mencken tries to open the back door to leap out, but by braking then accelerating sharply to throw him off balance, the driver prevents this. The limousine then draws alongside and one of the Gestapo men steps onto the taxi's running board and climbs in. As he draws a gun with silencer attached, Mencken kicks out the glass panel of the taxi and wrenches the driver's head back, causing the vehicle to swerve, crash into a wall and overturn. When Mencken comes to, he is being argued over by an Italian doctor, who wants him to go to hospital – an ambulance is on its way – and the two Gestapo men who wish to take their "friend", who is on important Government business, to their nearby home. The doctor prevails, and Mencken is loaded into the newly-arrived ambulance. In the hospital, where he is diagnosed with concussion and lacerated hands but nothing worse, a doctor bids him swallow a drink which proves to be a sleeping draught; by the time Mencken resurfaces, it is past six. He finds his clothes

under his bed and struggles into them, telling the protesting nursing staff that he is on important war-work which they must on no account interfere with. Back on the street, he foils an attempt by the Gestapo to bundle him into a "taxi" by falling to the pavement, so drawing the attention of a policeman, who puts him in a genuine taxi which Mencken directs to his bolt-hole, a dress shop called Lorenzo & Co. on Via Monte Rosa. He arrives with the Gestapo still on his tail. Groggily Mencken walks to the door of the shop. It is closed.

(13) After being sick and wishing he had the means, rather than submit to capture, to end his life, Mencken darts along an alley beside the shop and bangs on a side door. An old woman opens it and is reluctant to let him in but, as the Gestapo men draw near, he pushes past her and slams the door shut. Her "reluctance" merely an act to deceive onlookers, she leads him upstairs, where he hands over his hat, suit and shoes and is given others. The plan is for a man of similar build to leave the shop wearing his things, so (helped by the twilight) drawing off followers, whilst Mencken makes his escape in another direction. He is escorted across town on foot and by taxi by the old woman to a warehouse where he finds Dwight waiting.

(14) Mencken wakes after five hours sleep to find Andrews and Jane have arrived and, after a quick wash, he tells them all his story. As he does so, Jane tenderly rebandages his hands. A mole called Dorio has managed to copy the telegram sent by von Riehl arranging for his return home this day (since it is now past midnight) on the 5:40 p.m. train from Milan via Basle to Berlin. As far as Mencken can judge from the few words of Brayda's he overheard, the gas is not so much anything new as an "improvement" on an existing formulation of mustard gas, giving it longer persistence and more potent blistering properties. If a report containing details of its manufacture is on its way back to Germany, either the report must be destroyed, or, preferably, its carrier (who, if left alive, might simply reproduce it). Andrews is gung-ho to act, Dwight reluctantly persuaded and Jane and Mencken told it is not their province.

(15) Von Riehl's entourage comprises two secretaries – one a fully armed S.S. guard – and a "lady friend" called Fräulein Volkmann. She is to spend the day

in Garda before travelling by train to Milan to join von Riehl on the 5:40 to Basle and the plan Andrews proposes is that he and Dwight board the Basle train to take care of von Riehl *en route* while Jane and Mencken should go to Garda with the object of ensuring by whatever means possible that Fräulein Volkmann does *not* catch the Basle train, so giving the others one less problem to deal with. Mencken, who can scarcely credit his luck, is given a new identity – that of forty-one-year-old Yugoslavian timber merchant Peter Lansdorf. Dwight and Andrews argue over which of them should kill von Riehl – Dwight, because a gas victim, claiming it as his "right" and Andrews, nominally the other's superior, demanding that it must be one or the other as circumstances allow.

(16) "Peter Lansdorf", wearing woolly gloves, spectacles and a hat one size too large, with hair short and dyed grey at the temples, leaves Milan undetected or suspected. Having travelled separately, he and Jane meet in a Garda café. She has quickly established that Volkmann is to leave her hotel at 2 p.m. to motor to Verona then catch a train there at three to arrive in Milan at 5:30. But how to delay or stop her? If done in any way that puts her on the alert or arouses her suspicions, she will warn von Riehl that something's afoot and make it harder, if not impossible, for the others. So no fake telegram or tampering with the car or attempting to "buy" the driver. But Jane has an altogether different idea. Talk turns personal and the two find they are deeply mutually attracted. He learns with relief that she is not and never was Andrews' mistress. Coded messages are sent from Lorenzo & Co. in Milan embroidered into the patterned neck or hem of frocks and dresses and whenever one is delivered to her, she wears it round to Andrews' apartment so he can decode it – and nothing more. Once their present assignment is over, Mencken wants Jane to return with him to England – but she refuses to countenance giving up her work until the war is over, or until "America comes in", in which case she would be forced to leave Italy in any case. All being well, they will both be free this night and may have to be content, for now, with whatever happiness they can snatch together then.

(17) Mencken and Jane travel, posing as strangers, in the same compartment of the Verona to Milan train. Towards the end of their journey, she rises to

leave, stumbles over his feet and "accidentally" pulls the communication cord, so stopping the train. After he pays her fine, the train eventually proceeds to Milan, arriving half an hour late. But due to bomb damage on the line, the Basle express is running an hour late, so Volkmann will make her connection after all.

(18) Andrews and Dwight are in Switzerland and plan to join the train once it has crossed the border. Having failed to delay Volkmann, Mencken and Jane decide to take it too. Jane dashes by taxi to collect Mencken's "Edmondo Bottari" passport, which has a Swiss visa, from Lorenzo's warehouse. He spots one of the Gestapo men who tailed him all yesterday, waiting at the Platform 11 ticket barrier. They avoid him and catch the train just as it leaves the station.

(19) Von Riehl's compartment is easy to locate by virtue of the S.S. guard posted at its door. Andrews and Dwight, disguised as bearded alpine climbers,<sup>14</sup> board the train and are surprised when Mencken joins them. He brings them up to date, telling them that both Volkmann and Jane are on board also. The agents' plan is to move against von Riehl when the train passes through the long St. Gotthard tunnel. Jane lures Volkmann into a lavatory behind the door of which Mencken lurks; after a tumultuous struggle the fräulein is subdued. The train rushes into the tunnel.

(20) After Andrews knocks the guard unconscious, Dwight enters the compartment and shoots von Riehl. Then, as the guard, von Riehl's secretary, Volkmann (transferred with difficulty from the lavatory) and a Swiss witness to events are all securely bound and gagged by the other three, he begins tearing up the German's papers and throwing the pieces through the carriage window. Of von Riehl's corpse there is no sign – apparently (though improbably)<sup>15</sup> it too has been disposed of through "the off-side window". It then transpires that, on first entering the compartment, Dwight was shot in the back by the secretary, whom he had assumed was unarmed, and now believes himself dying. He urges the others to alight at the next stop. Andrews orders Mencken and Jane to do so, together, while he will do so with Dwight, as a separate pair. The train stops, and Mencken and Jane get off as ordered,

but Andrews and Dwight do not. So, as the train begins to move, they jump back on.

(21) Dwight is dead. The three others prepare to get off at the next small mountain halt but Andrews decides they would be better advised to stay on until Lucerne – the stop after, twenty minutes away – as the town is bigger and so easier to go to ground in. Once the bound and gagged group is discovered, it will also help that they believe the three got off *before* rather than at Lucerne, so throwing pursuers off the scent. While calmly removing his false beard, Andrews gives Mencken and Jane Lucerne addresses to seek. As the train pulls into the station and the three prepare to alight at last, Volkmann begins to scream.

(22) All three exit the station successfully after which Mencken and Jane make a tearful parting. Mencken is then smuggled through Switzerland into unoccupied France, where he makes his way to Marseilles. Fixed up with an exit visa by a contact, he arranges with a tramp steamer skipper to be taken to Barcelona.

(23) When boarding his ship at dawn (even though it's not due to sail until noon), Mencken is arrested and taken before the *Commissaire de Police*, who tells him that special instructions have been issued to watch for men trying to slip away on cargo boats. After his papers have been closely inspected and many questions answered (some none too persuasively), the *Commissaire* seems satisfied – but one last thing: he must check Mencken's palms, as the authorities are looking in particular for a man with newly healed scars on his hands. With resignation, Mencken holds out his hands, on both of which scars are plain to see – and is instructed by one who "does his duty as a Frenchman" to join his ship.

(24) Mencken sails back into Liverpool to be met and debriefed by Colonel Brown, who tells him that Andrews is back at work in Venice and that, following a raid on Lorenzo's, the Milan dress shop, Jane's cover might be compromised such that Andrews has requested her withdrawal from active service. For the lovers, then, perhaps, a happy ending after all.

## Reviews

None. Though adverts such as this one:



appeared in *The Nottingham Journal* of 5 December 1941, *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* of 12 December 1941 and elsewhere, the single sentence of copy presumably comes from the book's publisher. I've never seen any more formal review of either *Night Journey* or *My Turn Next* (see below). With a war on, column inches (and newsprint) were thought too precious, perhaps, to waste on such ephemera.

## Comment

When in the mid-sixties WG finally decided to reach back and rehabilitate one of his discarded first dozen novels, *Night Journey* was his choice, which, on the face of it, is strange because, while readable enough, it is by no stretch the best of them. Since his intention was to publish a thriller, perhaps he thought this story likeliest to boil down into the type of book he had in mind – though *The Giant's Chair* would have had an equal if not stronger claim – or perhaps he felt he wanted to write about the war – but then what about *No Exit* or *My Turn Next* – or maybe it was the "spy" element that appealed. Then again, *Night Journey* was WG's first first-person narrative and possibly it was that challenge (so problematic when writing *Marnie*) which drew him. The likeliest reason is also the most intensely practical: the type and sheets of the

book were destroyed in an air-raid when only 700 or so copies had been sold,<sup>16</sup> making *Night Journey* (1941) much the rarest and least-read WG novel. All the more reason, then, to give it another life; less chance, too, of a sixties reader thinking to himself: "Hang on, haven't I read this before?"

The book, like 1942's *My Turn Next*, was written during the war (in fact in 1940)<sup>17</sup> and set in a world at war, giving it, as a contemporary account of a historically important period, a special value. In undertaking its revision, WG was alive to the danger of losing this unique historical perspective, stating in an Author's Note prefacing the 1966 edition:

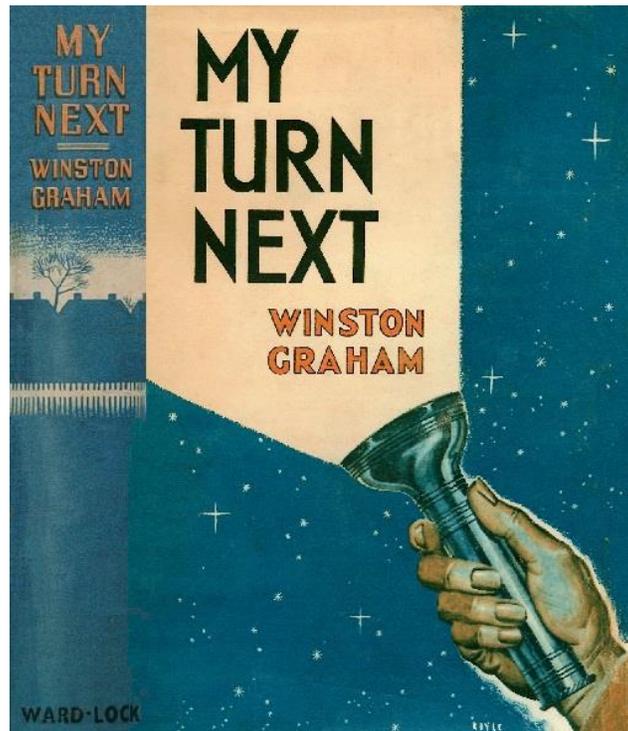
*I have revised [Night Journey] for this publication, but have not attempted to alter its judgements with the superior hindsight of twenty-five years.*

Commendable though that statement is, however, the tone of the book *is* subtly altered – indeed, how could it be otherwise, with the outcome of the war a matter of record in 1966 but a matter of conjecture in 1940? Britain stood alone then, its future uncertain, America a year away from entering the fray, and this sense of backs-to-the-wall uncertainty pervades the first book more noticeably than the second. In both editions the vileness of war<sup>18</sup> is stressed; so, too, the tempering effect it can have on men's souls. Both are worth reading. WG's characters are three-dimensional – only some of what they are made to do raises the odd eyebrow – and his writing in both cases is stamped with its familiar, clear-sighted, knowing hallmark.

The other thing about having two editions to hand is the rare chance it gives to contrast and compare; of viewing the writer at his work. The 1966 edition of *Night Journey* tells its story in the way its author came to want it told; read between the lines of the 1941 edition (if you can find one) to discover a tale slightly different on more levels than one.

\* \* \* \* \*

(11) **MY TURN NEXT** (WL, July 1942)



Thirty chapters; 224 pages. Republished in revised form as *Cameo* (Collins, 1988).

### Plot

(1) Late April 1941, 3:30 a.m.: Squadron-Leader Andrew Halford, with five days leave ahead of him, returns to his parents' empty house in the London suburb of Northcote to spend the remainder of the night after an evening on the town with five fellow pilots. Sitting before the dressing table in his mother's bedroom is a young woman, her coat draped over the end of the bed. She doesn't move. He touches her hand. It is cold and stiff.

(2) Noting that *rigor mortis* is just starting to pass off, he estimates she's been dead for two days. Her bag and pockets have been emptied, even the makers' labels removed from her coat and shoes. Then he feels and retrieves from inside the lining of her coat a small object that has fallen through the split seam of an inner pocket. It's a ticket recording that Miss J. Ward pawned a

gold watch for £2–5s–0d on 18 April. Halford next notes in the side of the lady's neck "a small scorched hole". He confirms that this is *not* his parents' house – a combination of too much bubbly and the difficulty of navigating through the black-out has led him astray: right number, wrong Avenue. He rejects his first instinct – to go to the police – because becoming embroiled in a police inquiry would eat up too much of his precious leave. He departs the house and later calls in to the police the location of the body without giving his name.

(3) In the Three Archers night club we meet Louis Baker, who possesses forty-four unused, consecutively numbered pound notes, Pat Forrest, whom he invites to go with him to the Hippodrome next Tuesday, and others.

(4) Baker calls to see Jack Portman, a second-hand car dealer with an eye for the ladies, intent on claiming back the £10 deposit he made on a hire car, now returned – but the back seat and carpets are missing (stolen, says Baker) so he receives back only £6–10s–0d.

(5) Pawnbroker and music lover Jacob Lewistein sees the RAF officer come into his shop and lets Belle, his daughter, serve him. In exchange for ticket and money, she hands over Miss J. Ward's gold watch and also, somewhat indiscreetly, Miss Ward's address in Wayfield Street.

(6) Andrew Halford calls to find young, slim, pretty Jennifer Ward at home, alive and well. When friend and flatmate Paula Krissen asked her for money, Jennifer, short herself, loaned her gold watch to pawn instead. The dead girl, Paula, was a semi-demi-monde actress and dancer who went off for a few days last Tuesday with a new boyfriend she'd met at the Blue Peter, a club off Berkeley Square. "He must have been well off," says Jennifer, "because he bought her one or two jolly expensive presents." Impulsively, Halford decides, rather than turn the matter over to the police, as he knows he now should, to look further into it himself – with Jennifer's help, of course. Since the office where she works as a typist has just been bombed, leaving her at a loose end, she is happy to oblige. The pair agree to start this evening with dinner followed by a visit to the Blue Peter.

(7) Paula's father was German and her mother Hungarian, both naturalised British. She was mostly a bright, happy-go-lucky sort, but would periodically suffer from fits of depression and headaches. When that happened, she would travel across London to Shadwell, where she used to live, to see Dr. Norley, who would put her right. That someone would choose to journey so far to seek medical help rather than simply change doctors strikes Halford as suspicious and he resolves to see Norley the next morning. The pair learn from the Blue Peter barman that Paula's most recent boyfriend was "a tall man with curly hair and a big laugh" called Roger Carson. Two Polish pilots from Halford's squadron – Witold and Stephen – drop by. Halford starts to have feelings for Jennifer and invites her to spend the following afternoon with him, which she agrees to do.

(8) Thirty-year-old Louis Baker goes to his mother's to celebrate the wedding of his younger sister Hilda. We learn that, despite his "grandmother being the daughter of a general", he's a bad lot – sacked from his clerical job seven years ago after £90 went missing (which his mother had to repay to prevent his prosecution), then, three years back, taken in by the local police for questioning, soon after which he left home. He describes himself as a "commission agent", though also does a week now and then of engineering work just to avoid being called up. "At present," he tells his mother, "I take orders, but soon I'll be giving them." Oh, and he has a "hearty laugh". He gives Hilda an expensive gift: "a cigarette case in red enamel and silver with an embossed silver floral design". Arthur and Hilda are to honeymoon at a secret location.

(9) Halford calls on Dr. Norley, who works both in private practice and at the Commercial Dock hospital. The doctor confirms that Paula is still his patient and agrees to give Halford's address to her the next time he sees her. Norley, then, is either unaware of his patient's death or pretends to be so.

(10) A ten-year-old London lad called Arthur Rupert Jones, evacuated to a farm in Hertfordshire, finds hidden at the bottom of a ditch, and covered in blood, the back seat of a car – but when he tells his adoptive parents, they don't believe him.

(11) Andrew and Jennifer set off towards Buckingham and Oxford for a Sunday afternoon drive. She has looked through Paula's letters and brought one to show him. From Paula's Aunt Nell in Birmingham, it refers to Paula being "bothered and bullied with troubles" and mentions "Carl and Emmy". After briefly exchanging life stories – he, twenty-seven, is from Bristol way, she twenty-one, from Sussex – the two agree to drive on to Birmingham (further than they had intended) to look up Aunt Nell. Neither notice that a black car is following them.

(12) The car, which contains two men wearing goggles and RAF uniform, draws level with them as if to overtake but then deliberately forces them off the road into a ditch, where they roll almost over. Andrew struggles out then, as the car bursts into flames, pulls Jennifer clear. Though professing to be okay, she has hurt her knee, and faints.

(13) He carries her away from the car in case their attackers return, then, once she's recovered, they walk across country to a convenient hotel, speculating as they go who might have wished them harm, and why. Andrew arranges for tea, dinner and someone to look at Jennifer's injured knee, after which they'll decide what next.

(14) Though it would be possible to get back to London by hire car and train, they would not arrive until the early hours, so, having agreed it would be more sensible to stay the night at the hotel, Andrew books two single rooms. Jennifer rings her landlady to reassure her she's safe, to be told that two men called round for her at seven and, finding her out, said they'd return the next day. The single rooms, next to each other, have a connecting door. After some tender kisses, Andrew tells the girl he loves her. "Everything will look different in the morning," she suggests. Though thinking this "rot", he wishes her goodnight and leaves her to get some sleep.

(15) At 9 a.m. on Monday morning in a Piccadilly restaurant, Louis Baker meets a man called Armitage (not his real name; others know him as Gissing, though that is not his real name either). It becomes clear that Baker murdered Paula under instruction for the sum of £50 and that someone called Carl will

shortly be giving him a different kind of commission. These men look forward to "the new state that will be set up at the end of the war"; they deal in information and dark deeds; they work, in other words, for the enemy. Baker is concerned to know who telephoned the police about the whereabouts of Paula's body. Gissing tries to bolster his courage.

(16) At breakfast, still smitten, Andrew quotes two stanzas of A. E. Housman<sup>19</sup>, but she doesn't like poetry. Bacon is only served "on even dates"; "Have you brought your own marmalade?" asks the waiter. (When they say no, he serves them a "smear".) No sooner have they agreed to go on to Birmingham than Jennifer spots at the next table a woman fingering a distinctive red and silver cigarette case exactly like one Paula was given by her new boyfriend.

(17) Andrew goes alone to Birmingham. Aunt Nell, on learning of her niece's death, whispers: "I didn't think they meant it." She tells Halford that a year ago Paula was coerced into espionage work by threats made on Emmy and Carl Roosman, second cousins in Düsseldorf. But Nell knows nothing of Paula's Fifth Column associates or particulars of her treason.

(18) Jennifer has watched newlyweds Arthur and Hilda throughout the day without noting any suspicious behaviour. When Andrew tells her what he's learned, she remembers that Paula was friendly with a man in her office – she works for "an aircraft firm" – and that it was Paula who asked her to share rooms rather than the other way around. She then recalls with concern odd little things she told Paula about her work and now wishes she hadn't. Their own danger has increased – the men who arranged Paula's murder tried yesterday to kill them too – but so has their determination to strike back. Later, when Hilda goes to the end of her corridor for a bath and Arthur is out for a breath of air, Andrew walks into and searches the newlyweds' room, pocketing a used roll of film, the distinctive cigarette case and two letters from Hilda's bag. Hearing her approaching, he removes the light bulb, leaving the room in darkness. She comes in, slips off her dressing gown and asks the man she thinks is her husband to kiss her. He obliges, causing her, once released, to scream hysterically. This draws the hotel manager, Arthur and others. Halford claims coolly to have entered the room in error.

(19) Jennifer confirms it's the same cigarette case and thinks they should now go to the police. Halford considers he should apply for additional leave so he can better protect the girl from gathering danger – but for the moment keeps that thought to himself.

(20) Monday evening: in an underground station on the Piccadilly Line, Baker and Gissing meet again. Baker is ordered to kill Jennifer Ward during Tuesday night's bombing raid before she can go to the police and give away not just Baker but, possibly, through her association with Paula, other members of the organisation also. Should he fail or refuse, he will "certainly swing". He says that, after the last time, he hasn't the nerve. Gissing insists that, for the Fatherland, it must be done and that, once it is, others will take care of the interfering airman. On the escalator up to the street, Gissing bumps into Fraser, editor of a "respectable political weekly", who encourages him to write a series of short articles on the problems of post-war reconstruction and so on. The two agree to meet for dinner on Wednesday at eight to discuss the matter further.

(21) On this last day of his leave, Andrew and Jane are at cross purposes. He thinks she sees him as a devil-may-care adventurer and she's determined to conceal from him her true feelings so as to send him back to his squadron unfettered by any sense of obligation. Due to a late-running train, he can't even see her home and they part at Waterloo, from where he must take train to Aldershot. Before leaving the hotel, Andrew and Arthur had a row – at the indignant husband's instigation – into which Hilda declined to be drawn. Back in Aldershot, Andrew opens the second of the two letters he removed from her bag (the first merely a banal note from her Aunt Ida). On a single sheet is what looks like a prescription, and he's about to put it back in his pocket when his eye is caught by the prescribing physician's name: Dr. J. Norley. Andrew is granted a further five days leave but needs to clear his desk before returning to London, so, still concerned for Jennifer's immediate welfare, he rings his Polish friend Stephen in Regent's Park and asks him to call on her right away. Putting aside his own plans for the evening, this Stephen agrees to do. Andrew then learns that an air-raid is beginning. Paperwork at last squared away, he sets off for London.

(22) Louis Baker takes Dot Forrest to the Hippodrome as promised. As they talk about the war, he reveals that his great grandfather was a German general and aristocrat called von Langbein. Her contempt for name and race stiffens his resolve to do the duty imposed on him by Gissing. Peremptorily he leaves her to get on with it.

(23) On arriving back at her flat, Jennifer gets a lecture on proper behaviour from Mrs. Lawson, her disapproving landlady, who then tells her that her two callers were Captain Burgess and his son Peter – i.e. Jennifer's uncle and cousin – though in civvies and not uniform as Jennifer would have expected. She determines yet again that tomorrow she'll disclose all she knows to the police, then, restless and upset, goes out to the cinema. Programme seen through, she emerges into an air-raid and makes her way back home. As she crosses the floor of her room to draw the black-out blinds, someone slips in behind her and locks the door.

(24) Instantly she knows who he is and why he's here. He pursues her through the flat, eventually catches her in Paula's bedroom and begins to strangle her. But in the act of so doing, a bottle of Paula's scent is knocked over, which seems to unman him utterly. Dropping Jennifer to the floor, he staggers out to be met at the door by Stephen, whom he tries in vain to push past. The two men grapple, fall together against the banister and crash through to the first floor landing below.

(25) Baker lies, neck broken, in a hospital bed. With his head filled with visions of glory shot with remorse, he dies. Twenty feet away, Stephen has cracked ribs, but will recover.

(26) Andrew gets into Waterloo at 1 a.m., his train delayed by the raid. Witold meets him and tells him that Stephen and Jennifer's attacker are in one hospital and Jennifer herself in another. Wracked with guilt, Andrew pledges to avenge the harm done to her. He feels he knows enough himself of what's going on to act but not enough to take to the authorities, so briefs Witold and ropes in two other colleagues, Morsztyn and Jenks. All four then head for Shadwell to call on Norley.

(27) Following the previous night's raid, Dr. Norley and his long-time assistant Ania Harrison (38) have a packed waiting room. Some patients are genuine; others deliver zonal bomb-damage reports the doctor notes down and feeds back to Berlin. Having been tipped off that Halford and Witold are on their way to see him, Norley telephones the local police station, asking that an officer be sent round to quell possible trouble threatened by airmen on a spree. When Halford and Witold go in to see the doctor, Witold pushes him back in his chair while Halford begins searching his desk. No sooner has Norley started yelling for help than the dispensary door opens and a police sergeant enters.

(28) The sergeant, having expected to find "a few young shavers, just joined up and using their uniforms as an excuse for a bit of horse-play" is taken aback to be confronted by two officers – one a Squadron-Leader – and even more so when the Squadron-Leader says: "We suspect Doctor Norley of belonging to the German Intelligence Service, and we're looking for proof." When Norley and the sergeant protest with equal vigour, Witold knocks out Norley then Andrew and Witold together subdue and tie up the sergeant. Just as Halford finds in a filing cabinet the kind of "proof" he's been looking for, the dispensary door opens again to reveal Miss Harrison brandishing a revolver with silencer attached. She shoots Witold in the shoulder then fires at but misses Halford. As Norley starts to come round, she orders him to leave while he can, telling the others that, if anyone moves, she'll shoot the sergeant. The fugitives Norley and Harrison are being sought. The sergeant regrets [with justification] that the matter was not handed over, as it should have been, to the authorities to deal with professionally – then some of the "bigger fish" might have been caught, whereas now they may catch none at all.

(29) Fraser, dining with Gissing, is the recipient of a sustained barrage of superficially persuasive but speciously argued cod philosophy, which ceases abruptly when the host is arrested by two plain-clothes policemen for breaching The Defence Regulations. We learn that, following the detention earlier in the day of Joseph Norley and Ania Harrison, there is "ample proof". Gissing – struggling, snarling, a "half-demented captive" – is driven away to meet his fate.

(30) Andrew spends time in police stations, courtrooms and with a senior Home Office official, setting matters right, and manages hospital visits to Stephen and Jennifer (two of these, marked by constraint on both sides). Witold, slightly injured, will return to duty once his leave is up. The third time Andrew calls intending to see Jennifer, he is surprised to find her discharged into the care of her uncle, whose address no one knows. The only address Mrs. Lawson can give him is that of her lately-blitzed former place of work. He is directed by a notice there to the firm's new premises and finds game Jennifer at her desk (actually an old card table) busily typing and filing. The two are reconciled.

## Reviews

None. This WL advertising copy (see *Night Journey* above):

*A distinctive type of mystery story with an unusually effective love interest*

appeared in *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* of 24 July 1942, *The Nottingham Journal* of 31 July 1942, *The Scotsman* of 13 August 1942 *et al.*

## Comment

*My Turn Next* was the fourth and last of WG's first dozen novels to be revised and republished, in this case forty-six years after its first appearance, by which time its author was eighty. Written in wartime about wartime, the best of the book is its convincing evocation of the period – the sight, sound and smell of an air-raid, powdered milk, sweet and petrol coupons, the news from Greece, identity cards, bomb shelters, Fifth Columnists, evacuees – all told with an authentic, atmospheric immediacy via a story that, though lightweight, holds interest enough to keep the pages turning. And the re-write? Though the tale remains substantially unchanged, its telling does not. Some minor scenes are dropped, others re-ordered. Andrew's Polish airmen pals are given a higher profile, Gissing more colour. As with *The Merciless Ladies*, however, (see below), the most significant revision is of a pivotal bedroom scene – in this

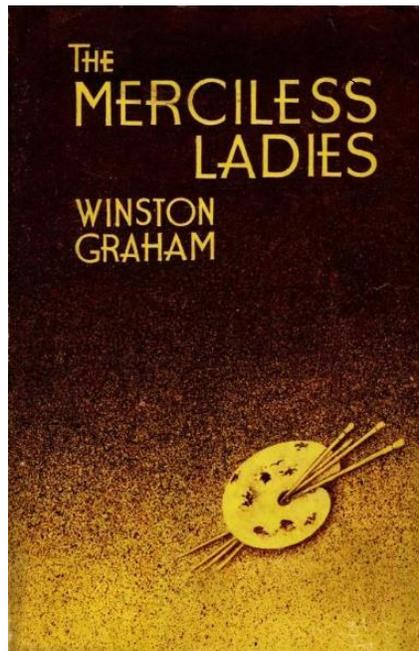
case, unfortunately, much to the detriment of the whole. The relationship between Jennifer and Andrew, chaste on one side, virtuous on the other, is central to the warm, *Brief Encounter* dynamic of *My Turn Next* and the less scrupled Lothario his *Cameo* doppelgänger becomes vitiates the earlier book's cosy sentimentality without replacing it with anything better. Oddly, a second bedroom encounter, this time between Halford and Hilda, survives intact, even though, poorly conceived, it verges (uncharacteristically and presumably unintentionally) on farce.

WG states in *Memoirs* that he took "invaluable" advice re this recycling project from his then editor Marjory Chapman,<sup>20</sup> so where ultimate responsibility for its outcome lies is impossible to know. Less problematic is this conclusion: *My Turn Next* serves up modestly gratifying entertainment upon which lacklustre *Cameo* fails to improve.



\* \* \* \* \*

(12) *THE MERCILESS LADIES* (WL, January 1944)



Forty chapters; 315 pages. Re-published in revised form by The Bodley Head Ltd. in 1979.

**Plot**

(1) An unnamed man facing an uncertain future recalls his life; at its heart, a "faded dream". He starts with the Lynns, who lived at Newton: sons Bertie and Leo were schoolfriends; Dr. and Mrs. Lynn their somewhat eccentric parents; there was also a precocious nine-year-old daughter Holly. He then moves on to Paul Stafford, whose father, a poor north country village grocer, having come into a bequest, sent him to Turstall, a minor public school, aged fourteen and a half, to give Paul the kind of chance in life *he* never had. Young Paul – slack, graceless and uncouth, but very self-willed – once saved the narrator from drowning.

(2) The narrator's name is Bill Grant. When Paul was sixteen, Bill played a trick on their maths teacher for which Paul took the blame. When his desk was turned out, a book was found containing superbly but scurrilously rendered watercolour sketches of the head plus two other masters. Between admin-

istering strokes of the cane, the headmaster asks Paul how he sees his future and tells him that, as he knows M. Becker, the principal of the Grasse School of Art in Chelsea, he'll put in a word for him.

(3) Paul, who has "drawn all his life", is admitted by the Chelsea school. Bill spends his summer holidays with the Lynns at Newton. Aged eleven, tomboy Holly falls from a tree and breaks her hip, leaving her with a slight limp she never loses. On leaving school, Bertie joins an insurance firm, pianist Leo wants to compose music, Bill to take up journalism. Bill travels to London to see Paul, who, having settled quickly into a life that suits him, is now "on the fringe of that circle of cultured society people, mainly women, who will make a point of mixing with and encouraging ... the coming writers and painters of tomorrow".

(4) Paul's rise is spectacular: by the age of nineteen, he is hung in the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition and accepting commissions to paint portraits in oils – now his preferred medium. He spends time in Switzerland and Paris, then meets Diana Marnsett. At twenty-nine, tall, dark and slender, her beauty – though perhaps little more than skin-deep – is stunning; her stodgy husband Brian is fifty-five. She takes Paul in hand, sending him to an elocutionist, a tailor and a hairdresser to "round off his rough corners". Soon gossip links their names. Becker advises Paul that, despite his "great and wonderful gift" he cannot serve God and Mammon: he can continue with portraiture and earn a good living or instead – the braver course – attempt to reach a true artistic accommodation with his talent. Paul tells Bill he's "going to the top" and doesn't intend to let "talent" stand in his way – for what good is fame after you're dead? Bill takes a job in the foreign news section of a London press agency. Leo, too, moves to London. Paul, now "just twenty-two", paints a remarkable portrait – his best yet – of the Hon. Mrs. Brian Marnsett.

(5) This most discussed painting of the season is, though dismissed by some as "idealized and romantic", for the most part generously praised. Paul becomes a name, takes a studio in the better part of Chelsea and staves off debt, the idea of which repels him, by unremitting hard work. Bill worries about his friend's drinking. Leo falls deeply in love with Diana, whom Paul says

will reciprocate as long as it pleases and doesn't threaten her but will drop him flat at the first hint of danger – and so it proves. Leo tries to take his life but Bill and Paul save him. Leo leaves London for Paris. Paul then announces he is to marry.

(6) Paul painted Olive in March and married her in May. A petite, piquante beauty with "a pleasant amateur talent for watercolour and pastel", she was as drawn to the idea of being Mrs. Stafford as to Paul himself. Bill finds her physically attractive but senses behind her bright elfin façade scheming and insincerity. Paul refuses to invite his father to his wedding because he wishes to conceal his humble origins from Olive's family especially. Bill's work takes him to Rome.

(7) Olive proves a suspicious, jealous, manipulative wife. Within a year, disenchanted, distracted and driven to speak his mind, Paul dismisses her "pretty little talent", telling her he could do better when he was eight. They separate and, despite Olive's expectation of a climb-down and reconciliation, there is none. Bill returns from Rome to find Paul seeing Diana again. Established, revelling in success, he seems assured of his place in the society in which he moves. Some think him heading for a fall. Bill had thought him "a tough nut" well equipped to prevail – but now is not so sure.

(8) Dr. Lynn receives a knighthood and, perennially short of funds, undertakes a lecture tour of America. Holly, now reading maths at Oxford, takes a term off to go with him. Leo plays in a Paris orchestra and composes in his spare time. Bertie has thrown up his insurance job to accept a two-year Toc H placement in a West African leper colony. Bill bumps into Olive who seems smitten by an MP called Peter Sharble. When she invites Bill up for a drink, he realises she harbours a burning hatred of Paul and senses she's trying to curry favour with him for some dark and probably disreputable purpose. We learn that Paul is working on a series of historical paintings of kings' mistresses. Bill calls to see Paul; Diana is there. Paul has been offered the chance to help crew a yacht to the Canary Islands and, though Diana disapproves, is inclined to accept. Upstairs in Paul's studio Bill finds Paul's father, on a short visit, who quizzes him about Diana and Olive.

(9) Paul paints Diana a second time and warns her, once done, that he has "been breaking new ground and that she might find the result a little startling". Having seen the work, she tries to attack it with a palette knife and has to be put out of his flat with physical force. Her solicitors attempt to buy the canvas for four hundred guineas; he tells them it is not presently for sale. It and one other are accepted by the Royal Academy hanging committee for exhibition. Mr. Brian Marnsett then calls on Paul but can't persuade him either to sell the work or withdraw it from exhibition. Paul next receives a letter from the RA stating that, due to space constraints, they will be unable to exhibit the painting after all. Paul withdraws his second painting in protest and in a press interview criticises the committee for not being "abreast of modern ideas". He takes the Marnsett portrait round to the Leinster Galleries, where he presently has a one-man show, and hangs it prominently *in the centre of his series of historical courtesans*. When the gallery owner warns him that this will be seen as provocative, Paul insists that he's placed it in the only room with decent light and been influenced by no other consideration. Shortly before the show is to close, solicitors acting on behalf of Mrs. Brian Marnsett issue a writ for libel against Mr. Paul Stafford claiming damages of two thousand pounds.

(10) Paul seeks legal advice: he can claim "justification" which would mean proving that Diana Marnsett is a woman of light virtue and could not therefore be libelled by making such a suggestion, or he can plead "no libel" on the basis that he has done nothing but exhibit a legitimate work of art in a legitimate setting. The lawyers advise the former course, Paul prefers the latter; preliminary inquiries are to be made. Paul speculates that Mr. rather than Mrs. Marnsett might be the driving force behind the case. Bill warns Paul not to make the mistake of thinking that Olive (who knows all about Diana) wishes him well.

(11) Paul is sailing to Madeira and back with an Irishman called Connor and two crew and asks Bill to come with them. Having been granted leave from work, he accepts. They plan to be away six weeks in Connor's fifty-eight-ton ex-pilot cutter *Patience*. As they sail west out of Plymouth then south via Vigo, Paul's cares fall away.

(12) As they close on Funchal, Madeira, Connor becomes increasingly morose and when they land is taken to hospital with severe abdominal pains and a temperature of 103. Next day, his friends are told he's been operated on for peritonitis and is not expected to live. He recovers gradually but not quickly enough to be able to sail back with Paul and Bill, who both have commitments (the trial and work) looming in London. Since both crew are experienced seamen, all agree that the cutter should be sailed back without Connor, who will follow under his own steam once fully recovered. Walking through Funchal, Bill and Paul come upon Dr. Lynn and Holly. Now twenty, she is grown from girl to woman, her "Summer come". Though not pretty, or ever would be, she is tall, warm and comely. The four arrange to dine together; during the course of the meal, Paul invites the Lynns to sail back to England aboard the *Patience*, an offer they enthusiastically accept.

(13) After a pleasant first day out, the *Patience* runs into foul weather and a huge swell, causing Paul and both Lynns to be sea-sick. Paul sketches Holly a caterpillar.

(14) The huge seas and bad weather refuse to abate. Contrary winds retard progress. Paul sprains his wrist. It starts to look as if he won't be back in time for the onset of his libel action. A passing tramp steamer signals to ask if the *Patience* requires assistance.

(15) The Lynns and Paul transfer in precarious seas onto the steamer and head north for England, leaving Bill and the two crew to sail the *Patience* back, making what time they can. It is noted that Paul and Holly have started to exchange glances.

(16) After twenty-two gruelling days at sea, the *Patience* finally puts into Plymouth Sound. Bill assumes the lawsuit must be over, but, having seen in the paper that it's due to start that very day, takes train immediately to London. At ten the next morning he's seated alongside Paul "just below the judicial bench".

(17) Diana Marnsett is cross-examined at length by Paul's silk, Mr. Hart.

(18) The case for the defence opens with testimony from two artists followed by the manager of the Leinster Galleries. Bill leaves the court and encounters Olive. In the course of a long talk he tells her bluntly what he thinks of her – yet finds himself, perversely, strongly attracted to her still.

(19) Hart leads Paul through his evidence, to make his case. Diana's counsel, Sir Philip Bagshawe, calls for the offending painting to be brought into court before subjecting Paul to a searching cross-examination.

(20) After a lucid, even-handed and comprehensive summing up by the judge, the jury finds in favour of Mrs. Marnsett, awarding fifty pounds damages with the defendant, Mr. Stafford, to pay all costs.

(21) On the way to Newton to see the Lynns, Paul tells Bill that, having sold the Marnsett oil to a New York dealer for seven hundred guineas and "snowed under with commissions", the court case will ultimately cost him nothing and have done his career no harm. He also tells him he wants to marry Holly but worries that Bill may feel he has a prior claim. Suddenly oppressed by the futility of his own life, Bill says not – but expresses concern at the apparent mismatch of temperaments. Paul, eight years older, moves in and is accustomed to "society"; Holly, a comparative innocent, is not. He also foresees difficulty in persuading cat-in-the-manger Olive to agree to a divorce.

(22) The pair spend a pleasant day at the Lynns. Lady Lynn quizzes Bill about Paul and asks him to keep her informed of Paul's position *vis-à-vis* Olive.

(23) Paul goes to see Olive, who tells him that she is amenable to the idea of divorce since she herself wishes to marry again – the MP Peter Sharble her intended – so Paul agrees to provide the necessary fabricated "evidence" upon receipt of which she'll serve him with a writ; he must pay all costs. In due course the writ arrives – the co-respondent cited by Olive, Paul reads with dismay, is the Hon. Mrs. Brian Marnsett.

(24) Paul tells Bill the allegation is false – that he was never unfaithful to Olive – but that he won't defend the suit since to do so successfully would be to

deprive himself of the very thing he wants most – the freedom to marry again. Diana Marnsett, however, *does* wish to defend the suit. Paul says she must fend for herself. But then Mr. Marnsett sues his wife for divorce, citing Paul as co-respondent and claiming damages. The first case is upheld, the judge pronouncing a *decree nisi*. As a consequence, the second goes through also, with the judge awarding damages to Mr. Marnsett of one thousand pounds. Paul's and Olive's solicitors argue about the amount of maintenance he must pay. To his own future detriment, law-sick Paul takes too little interest in this negotiation. While Bill is away in Geneva, someone leaves a note for him with the caretaker of his flat. This – crucially, critically – he never receives. Paul and Holly marry.

(25) Bill takes a British Council press job in Rome. The marriage is announced of Peter Sharble MP and Elizabeth Wainwright. We learn that Sharble and Marnsett are friends and when Sharble found out that Olive could have obtained her divorce without implicating Diana he taxed Olive with having acted out of petty spite, upon which they rowed and parted. Olive gate-crashes a party to meet and be obnoxiously offensive to Holly. Whilst on a trip to the Lake District, Paul and Holly chance upon a remote valley between Wastwater and Langdale to which Paul is strongly drawn. The cottage in which they take tea is for sale. When Bill asks Paul for a portrait of Holly, Paul tells him he hasn't painted her because she to him is "a sort of touchstone for the genuine; true and without alloy" whereas "something false and meretricious" has crept into the marrow of his art. Bill returns to London.

(26) Seven years ago, after Diana had dropped him, Leo spent time with a Paddington-based Belgian prostitute called Jacqueline. We learn that she is now his wife. He performs his first concerto at Torquay Pavilion. It draws "a good deal of what sounded like genuine applause". Bill meets Paul and Holly and Dr. and Lady Lynn there. The Staffords have bought the Cumbrian cottage and had planned to take up residence next week, but, in view of Bill's return, Holly suggests to Paul postponing the move. He consents.

(27) Two days later, Holly calls to see Bill to explain why she and Paul are moving to Cumberland on Tuesday after all. Paul's approach to painting has

radically changed. He has abandoned portraiture in favour of painting experimentally, albeit at present without end product. Paul arrives and says he's been hunting sprats all his life and since the *Patience* voyage and falling in love with Holly has come to realise he should have been a deep-sea fisherman. Now he plans to turn his back on "society" and, for better or worse, see what he can catch.

(28) The Staffords move to Cumberland. Paul lets his club memberships lapse then auctions off the contents of his Chelsea home and surrenders its lease. Bill discovers that Olive now lives in an expensive central London mews apartment with no plans to remarry. He visits the Staffords. Paul continues doggedly to work out his salvation but, with no income, has fallen behind on the exorbitant maintenance payments he must make to Olive. Holly confides her concerns to Bill, who resolves, once back in London, to see what can be done. Together, from the many canvases – most unfinished – gathering dust about the house they choose twelve for Bill to take back with him to try and sell.

(29) Bill receives legal advice which recommends that Paul should apply to the High Court for a Summons for Variation to have the level of maintenance adjusted in line with his earnings and assets. Leading dealers decline to buy any of the canvases. Moving down-market, Bill manages to find someone able to sell one but, before the eighty pounds due to Paul can be paid, solicitors acting for Olive claim the money in lieu of funds owed following Paul's defaulting on his maintenance obligation. Paul won't come to London, but instructs Bill's solicitor, Rosse, to proceed with the Summons; he'll give the necessary affidavits locally and have them sent down.

(30) The case is heard: the judge adjusts the maintenance payment from £2000 to £150 per year on the understanding that, should Mr. Stafford's circumstances change for the better, Olive may seek a further readjustment at her discretion.

(31) Paul catches pneumonia and nearly dies but, attended by Holly and a local nurse, recovers to become increasingly settled in spirit. The sale of three

of his courtesan paintings in New York allows him to clear all his debts with enough left over to keep him for two years. On hearing this, Olive issues a Summons for Variation.

(32) Bill sees Olive to try and argue Paul's case – but she will have none of it, refusing to acknowledge either his "genius" or his "poverty", believing that the Staffords are secreting earnings under Holly's name. The two argue bitterly and part with reciprocal aversion and anger.

(33) Bill seeks further legal advice: first, the two parties may agree, through their solicitors, a compromise maintenance figure and so avoid the expense of a court case – but this won't work as Olive has expressly instructed her solicitors *not* to look to negotiate any such agreement. Second, Paul could defend the Summons himself, stating that he is unable to afford legal representation and, whatever the result of the variation, default on future payments and let Olive sue for her money; he could, in other words, attempt to wear her down. In view of the temperaments of the parties concerned, Bill considers this plan ill-conceived. Third, since it is a condition of the court order that the woman must remain chaste, it might be worth instituting inquiries. Bill thinks – though is not certain – that she has. He concludes that, such is the excoriating effect they have on each other, he must leave Olive alone. He then learns that Holly is pregnant.

(34) Bill phones Olive, apologises for his behaviour at their last meeting and asks her out for dinner and a show. On condition that he doesn't mention Paul, she accepts. He picks her up with no clearly defined plan and is surprised anew by her vitality; by her "untamed, elfin prettiness". As the evening progresses, they become increasingly friendly, then, in a taxi on the way back to Olive's, she tells him that, for reasons of economy, she's (i) given her maid a week's notice – tonight is her night off, by the way – and (ii) taken a cottage for the summer just up the valley from Paul's. Back in her flat, arms entwined, they exchange lingering kisses.

(35) Next morning Bill is telephoned by a work colleague to be told that, last night, Olive shot herself and that the inquest is set for tomorrow morning.

(36) The inquest hears from the police constable summoned off the street by Olive's maid, who testifies to finding a woman wearing a nightdress lying dead on her bedroom floor with a single bullet wound below her left breast and a Browning automatic pistol in her outstretched hand; from the maid, who testifies to her employer's money troubles, also to her ownership of the pistol, which she bought when, following her divorce, she began to live alone again; from the police surgeon who gives evidence as to the cause of death, and from Olive's doctor, who expresses surprise that a woman of her nature (as he understood it) would commit suicide. A police inspector then asks that the inquest be adjourned until after lunch because a fresh witness has come forward and is presently making a statement.

(37) The "fresh witness" is Bernard Sparks, employee of a firm of private inquiry agents engaged by Mr. Rosse, solicitor, to watch the movements of Olive Stafford with a view to assessing her moral character. On the night of her death, he saw her leave her flat with a man and, after dinner and a show, return with him, talking and laughing. Lights went on, first in the living room and then in the bedroom. At 11:50 p.m. both were turned off; two minutes after that, the same man walked quickly from the flat, hailed a cab and drove away. He heard no gunshot and didn't know the man's identity but would recognise him again. The tenant living immediately below Olive then testifies to hearing the gunshot just before the end of a radio programme she had on which concluded at 11:45, i.e. at least five minutes before the man was seen to leave the flat. The inquest is adjourned again, this time for a week, to allow the police to make further inquiries. A fellow journalist with whom Bill discusses the case suggests that Mr. X's best bet would be to "come forward and give his version"; after all, there can be no witnesses and Olive can't deny anything he may say. He might be able to convince the police – or a jury – that her death was accidental.

(38) Bill sets off to drive through the night to Cumberland, recalling as he goes the events of Olive's last hours. After they had made love, she had wanted him to leave and he wouldn't. He wished to await the maid's return so that, if need be, she could later testify in court that Olive had "entertained" a man in breach of the terms of the maintenance order. She had then tried to *make*

him leave. Poor Olive – his physical attraction towards her had proved no match for his deep-seated hatred.

(39) Bill spends a day with Holly and Paul. He notes with admiration and pleasure the artistic progress Paul has made and continues to make. Holly tells him that, while Paul needed her unswerving support to get where he's been going, now that he's almost there, his need is diminishing. But soon she'll have "a young Paul to think of and care about" – a fair exchange with which she's "more than content". But she also tells him that, in the two years prior to her linking her lot to Paul's, she had loved Bill and hoped he would ask her to marry him. She had even, whilst in the most intense grip of this feeling, left a note at his flat imploring him to come and join her at Oxford so she might persuade him. But this note – on which, since he has always loved her too, he might have acted – with profound consequences for all their lives, and Olive's, he never received.

(40) At seven the same evening a numbed Bill heads back south. At Lancaster he phones Scotland Yard to tell them he's the man they seek with regard to Olive's death and that he'll call at ten the next morning – the inquiry agent will be able to confirm his identity. Why did Bill make this journey? To see Paul and his pictures and to see the girl he loved. He felt that in their presence and in their happiness he might find justification and "something which would pass for resignation" – and so he did, until Holly spoke. Now, he is not afraid "for once the worst has happened there is nothing more to fear."

## **Review**

"The Merciless Ladies" is a long novel by Winston Graham, which grips the imagination at the outset and holds it with increasing interest to the dramatic end. It tells of the rise of a young artist to fame and his fight for an ideal. A broken marriage and a new romance are skilfully woven into the thread of the story, and readers will be quite as interested in the life of the artist's friend as in that of either of the others. Incidentally the power of a woman's hate adds to the forcefulness of an unusual book by this capable writer.

*The Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 11 February 1944

## Comment

In *Memoirs*, WG states that, though not published until 1944, most of this novel was written before the war.<sup>21</sup> This is reflected in the fact that, in contrast to his previous two novels (*Night Journey* and *My Turn Next*), both conceived, written and published during the war years, *The Merciless Ladies* is not about and does not feature the war (although it does include occasional references to a troubled Europe, Mussolini, etc). When it appeared, its author "thought well of it". This view was to change markedly: in later life he dismissed it as "a rather pretentious, 'literary' novel" notably inferior to *The Forgotten Story*.<sup>22</sup> Yet of the twelve novels considered here, it is by some distance the most striking, persuasive and impressive; so much so, indeed, as to mark a turning point – the first of this writer's works to stand out as exceptionally good. In view of its quality, his decision to allow it (together with all eleven of those that preceded it) to go out of print after the war might seem perverse. However, when it finally reappeared in revised form in 1979, he vouchsafed his reason:

*I have resisted suggestions that this novel should be reissued because there were one or two scenes that did not seem to me quite right, and I was waiting to find time and the mood to do something about them ...*<sup>23</sup>

The reworked edition (hereafter ML79) adds a framing device to the narrative which presents Bill, in old age, recalling his association with his "best friend" Paul Stafford. Additionally, ML79 addresses three questions not answered in the original (ML44):

### **(1) In what period was the novel set?**

In ML44, no time-frame is specified and no year named; though the events of the story take place in the interval between the two World Wars, neither is referenced even once, such that the narrative floats in an indeterminate thus somewhat artificial lacuna of time. Though the narrative is not harmed by this, its backdrop – otherwise convincingly rendered – lacks an element of the

social history of the first half of the twentieth century which, because so dominant and all-pervasive, is inevitably notable by its absence. Having said that, it is possible by indirect means to establish a time-frame since, in Chapter Seven, Bill (a journalist then working in Rome) is asked "whether Mussolini was prepared to go to war over Austria" which refers to the threat by Il Duce in mid-1934 to declare war on Germany in the event of a German invasion of Austria, and if all the events of the story are dated backwards and forwards from this fixed point, we can conclude that they occur in the period 1920 (when Paul was fourteen, Bill thirteen and Holly nine) to late 1939 (when Olive dies).

In ML79, conversely, the time-frame is clear. WG moves the story some seven years back from the one conjectured above, which leaves both Paul and Bertie old enough to serve in 1918, which they do. Since events now conclude well before the outbreak in 1939 of WWII, its advent (otherwise unignorable) does not impinge. Unfortunately, WG failed to spot one anachronism introduced by the shift: in both renditions, Paul and Holly drive through the Mersey Tunnel; this would have been in 1937 in ML44 but in 1930 in ML79, which is four years before the tunnel opened.<sup>24</sup>

## **(2) What precisely happened in Olive's bedroom to bring about her death?**

In ML44, this is not revealed; the reader is invited to conclude that Bill probably killed her deliberately (with "suicide" staged) in order to put an end to her vindictive persecution of Paul and Holly, though it is also possible that she died accidentally during the course of a struggle involving her gun. Only in ML79 is the reader left in no doubt. All is described in detail, which may please some but seems less subtly satisfying to me than the provocative ambiguity of the tale's first telling.

## **(3) What happens to Bill in consequence?**

In the opening sentence of ML44, Bill states that his "future (is) uncertain" which suggests that the narrative is being drafted after his surrender to the police but before his trial. Once we reach the end of the book and recall these

opening remarks, we don't know whether, unmanned by Holly's revelation of her former love for him, he has confessed to shooting Olive deliberately (and this at a time when convicted murderers were liable to be hanged) or whether he has acted on the suggestion of his colleague Price and claimed, whether true or not, that her death was accidental. The novel's closing sentence informs us that, though fatalistic, he fears nothing because "the worst has happened" – thus what *does* happen thereafter pales into insignificance.

Once more, however, ML79 removes all uncertainty: the death was indeed accidental, although Bill's subsequent actions, for which he must answer, remain criminally culpable. The first page of the revised book tells us quaintly that he has lately spent two years "withdrawn from the world" which we can take to mean that his part in and response to Olive's demise resulted in a relatively short prison term. Thus more is disclosed; loose ends are tied – but again, it must be said, without necessarily making for a more pleasurable or stimulating read.

In sum, whilst ML79 is not a poorer novel than ML44, it is not a better one either. ML44 stands up; it reads well; it lingers in the memory. That WG felt the need first to suppress and then to revise it speaks eloquently of his exacting standards but arguably less so of his judgement. The rewrite is enjoyable still – though hardly more so than the illustrious original. Happily, neither disappoints.

NOTE: Tom (elder brother of post-war PM Clement) Attlee was an important early friend and mentor of WG (for more, see [WEA](#) and [ATTLEE](#)). The affectionately drawn *Merciless Ladies* pair Dr. and Lady Lynn are closely modelled on Tom Attlee and his wife Kath(leen).<sup>25</sup> WG even cheekily gives Dr. Lynn the first name Clement.

\* \* \* \* \*

## SUMMARY

Under present EU law, these twelve early WG novels will not enter the public domain until 2073, so should they be lost to readers, other than in their increasingly hard-to-find original editions, until that far-off time? Their author came to see them as unworthy of his name and some are indeed not particularly good. But three at least – *The Dangerous Pawn*, *The Giant's Chair* and *The Merciless Ladies*; in other words, both "straight" novels and the best of the thrillers – merit individual re-publication and there is a case to be made for all twelve to be re-presented, perhaps in four omnibus editions – *The Early Novels of Winston Graham, Volumes One, Two, Three and Four* perhaps – each containing three novels, chronologically ordered. (For precedent, see the 1992 Orion omnibus reprising *Marnie*, *Greek Fire* and *The Forgotten Story*.) WG was a gifted writer and though it is true that he did hone and refine his talent such that, broadly speaking, his later books were an improvement on his earlier, he once thought the early books worthy of publication for sale under his name, as did the publishers who were pleased to prepare and offer them to a public motivated to buy them. And such a public surely exists still. All that's lacking (assuming the consent of WG's literary heirs) is a publisher willing to offer the chance to read books likely to pique interest and satisfy desire.

A book without a reader is a useless, worthless thing and, while WG came with some justification to regard these twelve novels as in some way sub-standard or inferior,<sup>26</sup> they are neither useless nor worthless. On the contrary, all – if only in the way of old postcards from another time; particularly war-time – hold interest; some – see above – are artistically persuasive and, taken together, they chart the fascinating evolution of a writer from struggling start to glorious efflorescence. WG's much-reiterated concern that readers should not be "conned" is, while laudable, surely not, of itself, sufficient reason to suppress otherwise honest, valid and eminently publishable work. Its appearance would not harm a reputation by now as securely established as it ever will be. And books, great or good, *should* be read.

\* \* \* \* \*

## NOTES AND SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> *Radio Times*, 4 October 1975 and elsewhere

<sup>2</sup> WG's *Memoirs of a Private Man*, Macmillan 2003, Book Two, Chapter Eleven and elsewhere

<sup>3</sup> *Wilson Library Bulletin*, Volume 30, November 1955

<sup>4, 5</sup> *Argosy*, Volume XXVIII, Number 12, Fleetway Publications Ltd., December 1967

<sup>6</sup> *Memoirs*, 2.11

<sup>7</sup> Peter Penaluna is the first of a long line of WG characters, major and minor, through to Emma Spry in 1998's *The Ugly Sister*, to share their creator's passion for gardening. (WG claims in *Memoirs*, 2.11 to have used his "interest in gardens" in only two non-Poldark novels – *The Giant's Chair* and *Stephanie* – but either miscounts or forgets.)

It is usually a characteristic of the "good" – indeed, in *Keys of Chance*, the contrast is pointedly made between Bill Raymond, the hero, who in liaison with old Joseph maintains a garden at Weatherways and Veerson, the villain, who, despite rolling in money, leaves the garden of his exclusive St. John's Wood property rank and unkempt. In *The Giant's Chair*, however, both the stalwart Christopher Carew and black-hearted Mrs. Syme are gardeners.

<sup>8</sup> *Memoirs*, 1.3

<sup>9</sup> *Books and Bookmen*, October 1959

<sup>10</sup> As 8

<sup>11</sup> In this chapter, Fawcett quotes with a mixture of bafflement and derision some of Crane's poetry, including these lines:

*Perfection is a full stop.  
Mark this the comma of imperfect striving  
So as to make ... [He is then cut off]*

WG closes *Memoirs* with this very verse (slightly adapted), which he claims was written "a few years ago" – though, in fact, more than sixty!

<sup>12</sup> *Memoirs*, 1.4

<sup>13</sup> Once he became a successful, established author, one of WG's indulgences was foreign travel: from the early 1950s, he would venture abroad – presumably with Jean – "four or five times a year". (You must write your novels in your spare time, observed one of his publishers.) But, previous to that, "war, and lack of financial resources, prevented me from travelling much" (both quotes from *Memoirs*, 2.7). It is notable that, while some of these early novels are set either in Cornwall or close to home – the Scilly Isles, Wales, London – others feature Lisbon and Estoril, Bucharest and Prague, Venice and Milan, Madeira and so on. Did the young WG visit these places or, as his words above suggest, write about them, sitting at home in Perranporth, merely on the strength of background reading and imagination? For an answer, see [NOVELIST](#).

<sup>14</sup> Having taken the sensible precaution of wearing disguises, these supposedly experienced agents then proceed to use each other's names – also Mencken's, which is not even an alias – in front of Volkmann who, though bound and gagged, is taking everything in. Most unprofessional.



<sup>15</sup> The screenshot above from Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) shows Michael Redgrave climbing through the opened vertically-sliding window of a continental passenger train. Clearly such an aperture is indeed big enough to throw a corpse out of – though, since Dwight had himself just been shot in the back, it would not have been an easy task.

<sup>16</sup> *Night Journey*, The Bodley Head Ltd., 1966, Author's Note.

<sup>17</sup> As 16. WG's activity and output during the war years is of interest. In *Memoirs*, 1.10 he declared: "Never in my writing life ... have I been able to break [off one novel for another] and finish the first one later." But like other statements in that intriguing volume, it is not supported by the facts. The idea of *Ross Poldark* was conceived in 1939 and its writing was started in the spring of 1940 – yet no fewer than four other books (*Night Journey*, *My Turn Next*, *The Merciless Ladies* and *The Forgotten Story*) were written (or part-written) after *RP* was started but before it was finished. Similarly, while most of *The Merciless Ladies* pre-dates the war, it too was made ready for publication only after several (probably four) other novels had been written in the interim. In the period 1940-1942, at least, he seems to have had three books – *RP*, *The Merciless Ladies* and first *Night Journey* then *My Turn Next* – on the go at the same time. But a writer necessarily imagines so much – so why not aspects of his own past along with the rest?

<sup>18</sup> WG relates in *Memoirs*, 1.3 winning "a special essay prize" at the age of ten, writing on "The Horrors of War".

<sup>19</sup> WG quotes the same poet again in *My Favourite Story*, ed. Denys Val Baker (William Kimber, 1977)

<sup>20</sup> *Memoirs*, 1.5

<sup>21</sup> As 8

<sup>22</sup> As 8

<sup>23</sup> *The Merciless Ladies*, The Bodley Head Ltd., 1979, Author's Note

<sup>24</sup> The first Mersey or Queensway road tunnel opened on 18 July 1934. The books contain at least two other dubious refer-

ences: in ML79, WG sends Bill up in 1926 "to cover one of the Jarrow unemployment marches". Though the Jarrow March of 1936 is remembered still, and though some "hunger marches" did take place in the 1920s, I don't believe that "Jarrow" was specifically associated with any of them. Secondly, in both iterations of the novel, Mrs Lynn is prompted by a newspaper's leading article to ask "Why don't they build the *Queen Mary*?" Construction of the ship was halted late in 1931 due to lack of finance and only started again after a government bail-out, thus the reference is chronologically correct in ML44, though not in ML79. But the ship's *name* was not revealed until its launch in 1934, which leaves her question wrongly framed in both cases.

<sup>25</sup> *With a Quiet Conscience* by Peggy Attlee, Dove & Chough Press, 1995

<sup>26</sup> On 22 December 1977 he told the BBC's Ted Harrison:

*I don't like [my early books] at all. A carpenter ... who hasn't been trained spends his time learning to use his [tools] and a writer such as myself who has never been trained and had no sort of tuition or any particular literary background, except plenty of books to go at, also has to learn to use his pen, and these books ... show too much evidence of a failure of sheer technical ability. There's nothing particularly wrong with the stories except that they're just, I think, badly written.*

But in the same year he wrote (in *The Craft of the Historical Novelist, The Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, New Series, Volume VII, Part 4):

*Possibly the only way of judging a work of art is to try to measure or judge the integrity of*

*intention. If it has that it may be a masterpiece  
or it may be a very poor and flawed work. But  
with such integrity it can't be all bad, and it  
can't be all lost.*

Although those words weren't necessarily written about  
himself – well, if the cap fits, wear it. "Can't be all bad ... "  
"Can't be all lost ..."

Just so.

\* \* \* \* \*