

Winston Graham Goes A Second Round

by Joan Geoghegan, *Opelousas (Louisiana) Daily World*, 25 June 1978

Author Winston Graham achieved notoriety in the U.S. as the author of the Masterpiece Theatre series "Poldark." As of June 4, "Poldark II," a second instalment of adventures of Ross Poldark, also written by Graham, is running for thirteen consecutive Sunday nights on the Public Broadcasting Service.

Slightly bruised from an argument in [\[with?\]](#) a London cab, the greying Mr. Graham ushered us into his New York City hotel suite with his left hand. Luckily, he joked, he wasn't planning on signing any autographs.

Winston Graham did not write the Poldark series for television. Rather, he wrote four novels – "Ross Poldark," "Demelza," "Jeremy Poldark" and "Warleggan" – from 1947 (*sic*) to 1953. He explained:

"I wrote the four books back in the ice age. They completed a cycle: the relationship between Ross and Elizabeth. It's the story of a man who is deprived of the woman he loves, then discovers, once he has her, that he is really in love with his wife."

His inspiration for the Poldark family saga came from his home soil. "I was rather an ailing young man," he said. "My family moved to Cornwall when I was seventeen. When I was nineteen, my father died. Mother, fortunately, had a small private income, and she staked me for a few years.

"Writing worked very quickly for me. I had no difficulty in getting my first book published. I did have the greatest difficulty in finding readers.

"I'd been in Cornwall a number of years. I love sand and sea and cliffs. It took me a while to get to know the Cornish people and for them to get to know me. They're a rather clannish Celtic race.

"I read history and found that eighteenth-century Cornwall was more important. They had forty-four members of Parliament as opposed to five now. However, they were all 'rotten boroughs' owned by the gentry.

"Any writer uses what he is and where he is," continued Mr. Graham. Since he was living in Cornwall, its people, its history and its landscape became the Poldark novels.

Are the characters in the Poldark series based on real people?

Mr Graham answered: "Elizabeth and George are based on people I knew. Most are composite characters. I got Ross's appearance sitting on a

train opposite an aircraft pilot with a scar on his cheek. He had the melancholy air, which Poldark exudes.

"There are exact parallels to Elizabeth and George, but no one is exactly parallel to Ross Poldark."

After the first four novels were published, Mr. Graham went back to writing modern novels. However, the Poldark series never went out of print, and the author continued to receive letters begging for a continuation of the saga.

In 1963 he published a history (*sic*) of sixteenth-century Cornwall, then wrote "The Walking Stick," "Angell, Pearl and Little God" and "Marnie" (*sic*), which Alfred Hitchcock made into a movie.

In returning to the Poldark series he decided: "It would never be the same Poldark, but going back and trying again was like fighting* the sound barrier. It took five years to write the second series – 'The Black Moon,' 'The Four Swans' and 'The Angry Tide.' All are united by the theme of the parentage of Elizabeth's child."

Winston Graham had just finished "The Four Swans" when the BBC made a series of the first four books.

He wasn't involved in the production of the first series and admitted, "I didn't approve of certain changes in the beginning and the ending. They were historically impossible. Burning of Trenwith would never have happened in England, nor did you ever see Cornish people turned out of their lands."

With the second Poldark series, however, Mr. Graham made it a condition that he have script approval.

"I didn't write the scripts because I was working on the third novel. I did drive very carefully when I was abroad." He feared that a sudden death would precipitate an inaccurate production.

Although he was dissatisfied with some aspects of the first "Poldark" series, he conceded: "I shouldn't shoot the first series down. It was a tremendous success."

However, once he finished "The Angry Tide" in March of 1977, he travelled to the BBC's Cornwall location to oversee the entire shooting of "Poldark II."

He raved at the BBC's technical expertise and insisted that every last person was dedicated to his job.

"In the first episode Ross comes back from the war. He is riding home in a red cloak and a hat worn Wellington-style, pointing forward. The day

after the scene was shot, the research girl discovered hats were worn Napoleon-style, pointing sideways, at that time. They re-shot the entire scene."

Are any of his other works up for a Masterpiece Theatre production?

Mr. Graham answered that many of his modern novels were made into films and very little material remains available for television. However, his novel, "The Tumbled House," was just bought by Granada Television in England for a miniseries-type production. If American viewers are lucky, the show may find its way to U.S. TV.

Since viewer response was responsible for the second "Poldark" series, will rave reviews of "Poldark II" precipitate a "Poldark III"?

"I think I've been working too hard," Winston Graham responded. "I wrote four novels in the sixties; a history of the Anglo-Spanish War, short stories and five novels in the seventies – also a play, which will be produced in Salisbury, England, this October."

And, no, he doesn't think there will be any more "Poldark" novels forthcoming.

"Poldark II" takes place between 1794 and 1799, and features the swashbuckling hero struggling with the corrupt Warleggan in Cornwall, and as a Truro representative in Parliament, struggling for social reform.

Winston Graham insists that Captain Ross Poldark is not too good to be true. "People in Parliament were trying very hard. There were people like Ross. Some of Ross's battle for penal reform was taken directly from Howard's book of 'Penal Reform.'"

The understated, greying author may be a citizen of the twentieth century, but he clearly admitted, "Ross reflected the ideas of the author looking back on the day."

Winston Graham has given his readers and viewers a romantic hero who champions the underdog and rights social wrongs. Ross Poldark is a refreshing addition to the 1978 season.

* Ms Geoghegan wrote "fighting" but the word WG probably used (as on several other occasions) was "breaking".

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