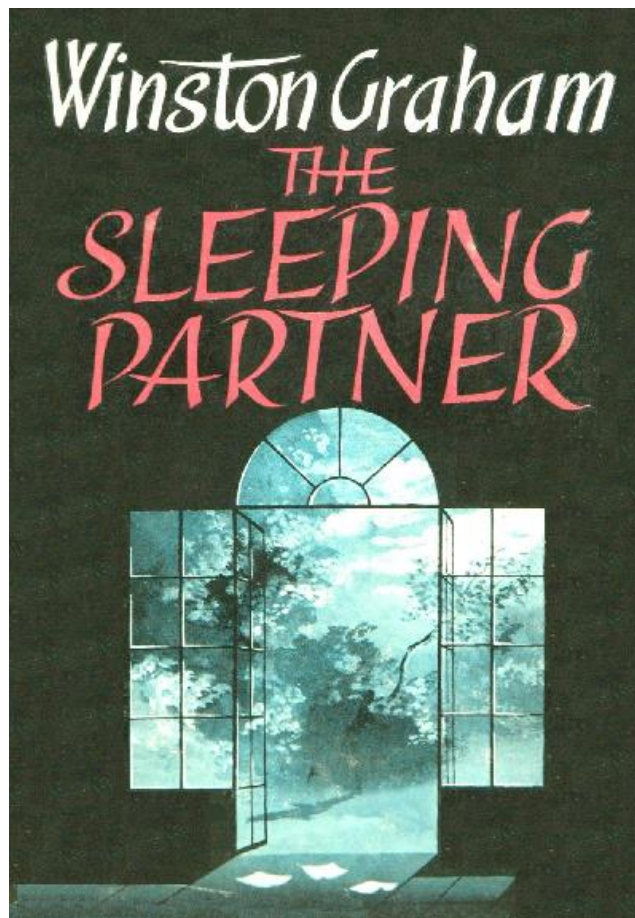


The Sleeping Partner : two screen treatments

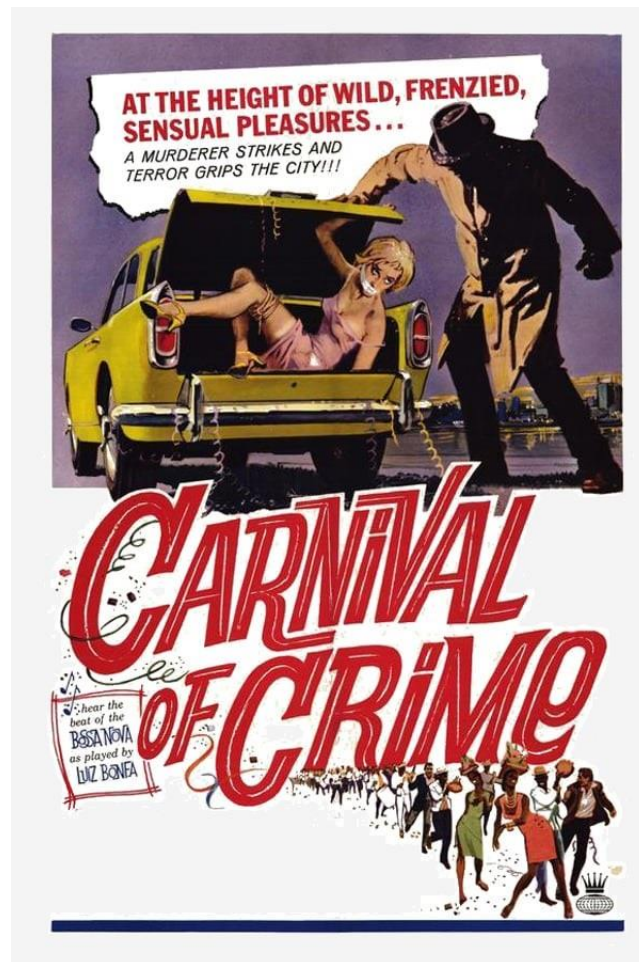
In a long professional career, Winston Graham published fifty books across a range of genres: modern fiction, period fiction, short fiction, history and autobiography. Some – most notably *Marnie* by Alfred Hitchcock in 1964 and *The Walking Stick* by Eric Till in 1970 – were filmed; others – his *Poldark* novels most enduringly – were adapted for television. But strangely, his first television adaptation, an ITV Summer Playhouse production screened in 1967, and *Carnival of Crime*, least-known of the six films associated with his work, both spring from the same book: his 1956 novel *The Sleeping Partner*.



Hodder and Stoughton, 1956

These two productions will now be considered individually to see to what extent they remain faithful to WG's original concept and whether either or both merit further attention.

(1) *Carnival of Crime* (Crown International Pictures, USA, 1964; previously released as *Sócio de Alcova*, Brazil, 1962)



Cast

Jean-Pierre Aumont (Mike Voray)
Alix Talton (Lynn Voray)
Tônia Carrero (Marina Silvera)
Luis Dávila (Ray Donato)
Alberto Dalbés (Manuel)
Nathán Pinzón (a police commissario)
Jardel Filho (Paulo)
Norma Benguell (Kiara)
Norma Blum (Dolores)
Alicia Bonet (a prostitute)

Other parts by Laura Suarez, Paulo Monte, Francisco Dantas, Joao Goulart, Agildo Ribiero, Sadi Cabral, Noelia Noel, Luiz Bonfá, Billy Davis, Oscar Uboldi and Angel Zavilia

Screenplay: Bill Barret, from Winston Graham's novel *The Sleeping Partner*

Director: George M. Cahan

Running time: 90:25

Plot

Mike Voray is an architect married to Lynn. They live in a smart Rio home attended by a young servant named Carlos. Lynn's mother Liz is a merry widow (or possibly divorcée) who runs around with a young gigolo called Vincente. Mike and Lynn's friends include Manuel, a photographer and his model / girlfriend Kiara and Ray, a songwriter engaged to marry Margot Du Caine. Mike's work colleagues include heavy-drinking, womanising associate Paulo, a free-spirited receptionist called Dolores and a darkly pretty assistant named Marina Silvera. Mike is involved in the development of Brasilia – soon to become Brazil's capital city, but presently little more than a very large construction site. He is worried because "Building Eleven" is ten days behind schedule with penalties to pay for overdue completion.

After opening in Mike's Rio residence then moving to his office, where Mike and Marina decide to fly down for the day to Brasilia, the film takes a bizarre extended turn down a blind alley. We're introduced to two Americans, Tom and Magill, standing lookout in the jungle for Hibusco, a "two-bit revolutionary" who, because he objects to the "millions" being spent on Brasilia whilst people within two miles are starving, blows up buildings and yachts using dynamite and a clockwork timer. Eventually the trackers spot their man and, after allowing him to remove three sticks of dynamite from a stash in the undergrowth, chase, grapple with and shoot at him before he gets away.

Mike and Marina arrive in Brasilia and the camera takes the opportunity to show off its spacious but otherwise largely imaginary charms to the viewer

(see screenshot below). "A modern city arising out of the wilderness; a new version of the pyramids," extols Mike. "I wonder if it will last as long?" He and Marina have such a busy day addressing the problems posed by Building Eleven (which she decides should be faced in pink, because "everybody loves pink") that they miss the last plane back to Rio. This proves fortuitous, since, soon after take-off, it is destroyed by a bomb planted by Hibusco and plummets to the ground – but this aspect of the story is not developed or even subsequently mentioned even once and the film would be considerably more coherent without it (see COMMENT below).



Mike and Marina decide to stay over in a hotel. While she goes off to book rooms, he tries to ring his wife, but, though we see her sitting among half-packed suitcases in her bedroom as the phone rings, she declines to answer. Marina returns to report that the hotel is fully booked, so Mike tells her he'll drive her back to Rio there and then. Along the way, as in WG's novel, the car breaks down, leaving the man and woman stranded in the middle of nowhere. But once again, inexplicably, the script ignores the possibilities of the situation in favour of cutting immediately to Mike returning to his Rio home and letting himself into an empty house. In his bedroom he finds the two half-packed cases we saw earlier, but no sign of his wife. He calls his photographer friend

Manuel, who reports that he last saw Lynn a week ago, when she happened to mention an impending visit to her cousin, but he has no idea where she may be now. After hanging up, Manuel discloses to his model / girlfriend Kiara that Lynn "helped him a lot" and that "he owes her many favours". Meanwhile, Mike picks up a ring from Lynn's dressing table and lets his thoughts drift back ...

FLASHBACK #1: Mike walks through a party at a large swimming complex. After speaking with Liz, he comes upon Ray, a songwriter friend, and his fiancée Margot, who tells Mike that she and Ray plan to marry "in about three months ... at carnival time". Lynn then emerges from the water and Mike presents her, by way of an apology for recent neglect caused by over-working, with a ring.



[Alix Talton as Lynn and Tônia Carrero as Marina](#)

Back in his bedroom, Mike calls Liz, who also professes ignorance of her daughter's whereabouts. Paulo arrives to talk about Building Eleven. He doesn't know where Lynn is and assumes, on being asked, that Mike and his wife have had "a family squabble". He leaves.

Mike is woken in the night by sounds of someone creeping about the house, but, by the time he gets downstairs, sees nothing but a car departing at speed. It is too dark to tell whose.

Next morning Mike receives a letter in the mail from Lynn telling him she's leaving him. Carlos, the family servant, admits having posted it at Lynn's request the previous day. Mike gives him money and tells him to "take a few days off", which Carlos seems happy to do.

Mike calls on Ray, who tells him he last spoke to Lynn three days ago. Mike soon divines that there is a girl in his apartment. Ray tries to hustle Mike out, but, having smelled "the perfume Lynn uses", Mike insists on remaining. Margot emerges from the bathroom, clad only in a towel. We learn that her family don't approve of Ray.

Mike goes to his office and confides to Marina that Lynn has left him. She thinks back eighteen months to the time Mike won his current construction contract ...

FLASHBACK #2: Mike enters the office, full of good cheer. Paulo emerges from an adjoining room, soon followed by Lynn, whom Mike is surprised to find there. Lynn exchanges words with Marina which suggest that Lynn is suspicious of Marina's intentions towards Mike.

Mike goes to see Liz, who denies knowing where Lynn is. "There are two kinds of people," she tells him, "the seekers and the sought. Feel sorry for the seekers, especially when they get to be my age, because then they start wondering if they will ever find it – that something called love." She suggests that Lynn has had lovers – "We're talking about an appetite that's very hard to quench, and that does not want to be quenched," she says – but tells him she doesn't know any names.

Mike calls on Kiara, the model who replaced Lynn in Manuel's affections. She imagines that Manuel still sees Lynn because "he never likes to give up a good thing". Mike says he'll be through with Lynn in due course but first needs an explanation of her behaviour. She advises him that, even if he gets one, it won't satisfy him. She then thinks back to the night of Mike's engagement party on the beach ...

FLASHBACK #3: Liz has thrown a beach party for engaged couple Mike and Lynn. Mike wants to know where Lynn is and Liz asks Kiara to find her. Hearing Lynn's voice on the other side of the rocks, Kiara wanders near and overhears Lynn telling someone she's going to try and put him out of her heart; also that she'll buy him the car he wants so badly. "That smile—I wish it didn't disturb me so," she says. Who was the man, muses Kiara – Manuel, Vincente, Paulo, Ray?



Jean-Pierre Aumont as Mike

Night has fallen. Mike arrives home to find Marina waiting on his doorstep. They go in. She tells him that Paulo has arranged for a deferment of the Building Eleven completion date. He asks if anything has been going on between Paulo and Lynn while he's been away in Brasilia? "I suspected it a few times," she concedes, but is sure that Lynn "has never been in love with Paulo." "Nor with me either," he says. Someone is at the door. Mike admits Lynn's attorney, Lopez Carmero. Marina leaves. Carmero tells Mike that Lynn had an appointment that afternoon to sign divorce papers but did not show up; also that "the reason for the divorce [i.e. Marina] just left." He wants to

know where she is. Mike forces the attorney with the threat of violence to disclose Lynn's accommodation address in town. Carmero leaves. Mike then phones Manuel, Vincente, Ray and Paulo in turn and tells each of them to meet with him and Lynn at her apartment in one hour. As he leaves the house and drives away, a neighbour's German Shepherd runs through the grounds of the property and stands barking beside the trunk of a car. The neighbour opens it to reveal inside a body.

Mike enters the apartment in town and tries the light switch, which will not work. He is attacked by a figure in the dark and attempts ineffectually to fight back. The figure leaves through an open window. As Mike looks round at Lynn's things, he hears the property owner approaching with two policemen, summoned after she heard the noise of the scuffle. Mike slips out of the window and away into the night.

Back at Mike's home, a policeman questions Carlos and the dog-owning neighbour. Carlos surmises that Mike will probably now be with Senorita Silvera and, yes, he knows her address, since it is in Mike's desk.

Marina lets Mike into her home. She tells him Lynn's body has been found and that he is the prime suspect in her murder. He wants to leave so as not to "drag her into this" but she says she's already in and bids him stay. As she walks to a local chemist's and back, she is followed by a detective. He enters her home but finds Voray not there. Paulo arrives; the detective departs. Paulo is not surprised to hear that Lynn has been murdered – because, he says, "Mike called earlier tonight and he talked wild." He then asks whether Mike ever mentioned knowing that he (Paulo) and Lynn saw each other "once in a while". "Was it once too often, Paulo?" Marina probes. "I like you better during office hours, Marina," he says – and, as to where he'll be later: "Just look for a bottle. I won't be far away from it." He leaves.

From the street, Mike phones Marina and tells her he's left an envelope on her desk containing a receipt he found in Lynn's apartment. He asks her to go to the jeweller's that issued it and find out what it was for. Then she must go to his office and look through the cancelled cheques of his joint account with

Lynn to see if there is one used to pay for an automobile bought around the time of their marriage. Having rejected her advice to go to the police, he hangs up and walks off. Accosted by a prostitute, he engages to hire her room for the night, in which he will sleep alone while she stays with "a friend".

Carnival time: the streets are thronged. The police are in Mike's office and note that his cancelled cheques have recently been looked through. Mike rings and asks for Marina, who is not there.

The police commissario questions Vincente who acknowledges spending time with Lynn "in places such as cabarets" – he is a good dancer and, yes, "there is sometimes more" – but Mr. Voray is on the run and he is not ...

Marina enters the office. Dolores has left and Paulo is leaving. "The dream is over," he says. He admits associating with Lynn but says he was "way down at the bottom of her list ... an occasional need." Mike rings. Marina tells him that Lynn sold her "large and fancy ring" and bought a car for Ray Donato. Mike asks when Ray's wedding is. "Today at St. Christopher's at ten o'clock," Paulo advises.

Mike makes his way to the church but finds it empty. He pushes through the carnival crowds to Ray's place to learn he is not married since "the bride-to-be changed her mind". And why did he kill Lynn? "You never knew Lynn, did you, Mike," says Ray. "She was many women rolled into one, always searching for the unknown, without caring ... completely amoral, devoid of any restraint as far as her pleasure was concerned." When he tried to break from her, she demanded to see him. "I should have stayed away ..."

FLASHBACK #4: In Lynn's bedroom, Ray tells Lynn he's going to marry Margot, because she's rich and Lynn knows he needs lots of money. "I will not give you up," she says. "I'm calling Margot and telling her all the things I'm sure you haven't told her." He takes the phone from her and turns to leave. She comes at him with a sharp implement, at which he catches her by the throat, pushes her down on to the bed and strangles her.

As his confession ends, Ray sees the police commissario standing in his doorway, having heard all. Ray leaps from his window and runs off through the carnival crowds with Mike giving chase and the commissario strolling at a more leisurely pace behind. Eventually Ray enters some building (it is not clear what), ascends a spiral staircase and, with Mike still on his tail, falls to his death, landing conveniently at the commissario's feet.

In Brasilia, Mike steps off the plane with Marina by his side to be told that Number Eleven is finished. "You've finished," he says, "and we" (looking at Marina as the camera looks at Brasilia) "are beginning."

COMMENT

Carnival of Crime is definitely the strangest WG screen adaptation for several reasons. The title of his source novel was a subtle one, for Lynn was her husband's sleeping partner in both his bed and his firm; when she disappeared he came to suspect she was the sleeping partner of some other man too; she was also, unknown to him, "sleeping" under the coals. But the two titles used for this film – *Sócio de Alcova* (i.e. *The Bedroom Partner*) and *Carnival of Crime* – manage to jettison all of that subtlety while making only empty promises in return. For though the first suggests a steamy excursion into *Emanuelle* territory and the second a *Bonnie and Clyde*-style hoods-on-the-rampage bloodfest, and though the film's subject matter is indeed promiscuity, philandering, betrayal and murder, the end result is surprisingly, disappointingly, almost defiantly tame. Though we are, in its last flashback, shown Lynn Voray's demise, a less brutal, shocking or convincing "murder" has surely seldom been put on screen.

This delicate sensibility may have been influenced by the filmmakers' primary intention, which seems to have been to showcase the nascent Brasilia as a major project in the process of glorious realisation and therefore, by association, Brazil as a progressive and forward-thinking country. The closing line of dialogue pulls no punches on that score, and to have attempted delivery of that message in a gritty, X-rated, *film noir* package would have been to exclude half its target audience. The natural beauty of Rio's setting

and the excitement of its carnival are also hinted at, albeit artlessly and perfunctorily. One senses a minuscule budget.

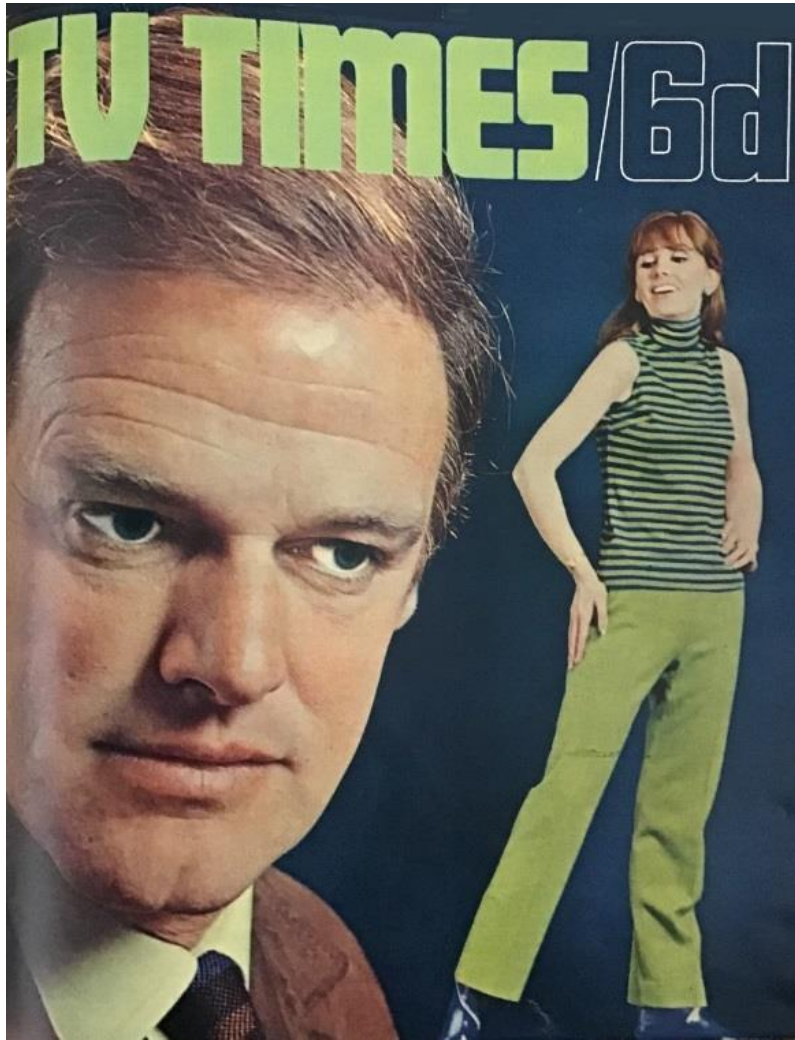
It would be interesting to know how much WG was paid for the right to adapt his book, since, had not four of his original character names (Mike, Lynn, Ray and Margot) been retained, the film's reworked and relocated plot could surely have been passed off as original with no secondary attribution considered necessary. It doesn't help that leading man Mike speaks throughout *wiz a szick Fransch accante* (though hardly his fault, since the actor is indeed French). The wacky terrorist subplot is omitted from some cuts of the film (those running circa 83 minutes) and good riddance. "John Curtis", a key character in WG's original plot, is written out of the film, but the biggest change is in Lynn Granville / Voray's nature.

When Jack Pulman was tasked to adapt WG's 1945 novel *Ross Poldark* into the first four episodes of *Poldark* (BBC, 1975), the scriptwriter famously upset the author by recasting Demelza's character – the book's young innocent became the serial's knowing little minx, who offers to "take 'em off for a shilling" – and so too here. Lynn Granville in WG's book has an affair with one man and is murdered by him when his attempt to throw her over escalates into a fight. But under the pen of screenwriter Bill Barret Lynn becomes, in the words of the film's trailer, "the world's most amoral woman, searching for love from any man ... every man ... until the 'Carnival of Crime' reveals her body!" "Her life was filled with men," it insists. "Which of them would want to put an end to her insatiable demands?"

Not surprisingly, the film seems to have made little impact either upon its release (in 1962 in South America and 1964 in the USA) or subsequently. In *Memoirs* 1.6 WG dismisses it as "an even damper squib" than 1951's *Night Without Stars*, but, since it "was taken wholly out of my hands ... I feel no responsibility for it." "Fortunately," he observed in 1967, "it has never been shown in England."¹ Even if it had, he would have been justified in laughing all the way to the bank.

* * * * *

(2) *The Sleeping Partner* (ITV, 1967)



Above is the front cover of independent television listings magazine *TV Times*, issue date 1-7 July 1967. "Specially taken" by staff photographer Peter Bolton, it "depicts the mind's-eye picture of Mike's wife, Lynn, that he has during his dilemma."

Production company: Anglia Television

Broadcast date: Monday 3 July 1967 on the Independent Television Network

Synopsis: *When a beautiful girl disappears in mysterious circumstances her husband begins a desperate search for her and finds a net of anxiety and terror tightening around him.* (NFA Catalogue)

Cast

Keith Michell (Mike Granville)
Suzy Arthur (Lynn Granville: voice only)
Laurence Payne (Simon Heppelwhite)
William Sylvester (Frank Dawson)
Francis Matthews (Ray French)
Justine Lord (Margot Du Caine)
Maggie Flint (Mrs. Lloyd)
John Savident (Thurston)
Barbara Shelley (Stella Curtis)
Vivienne Burgess (Mrs. Carson)
Peter Jeffrey (Inspector Baker)
Fiona Lewis (Pamela Ford)
Geoffrey Bayldon (Dr. John Curtis)

Director: John Jacobs

Script: written by Patricia Highsmith and Anthony Steven and edited by John Rosenberg

Source novel author: Winston Graham

Production designer: Michael Wield

Though not commercially available, a recording of the play may be viewed by arrangement at London's British Film Institute; BFI identifier: 285862; video cassette reference: C-1331477. The play is presented in three parts running 26:03, 27:50 and 26:17, giving a total running time of 80:10.

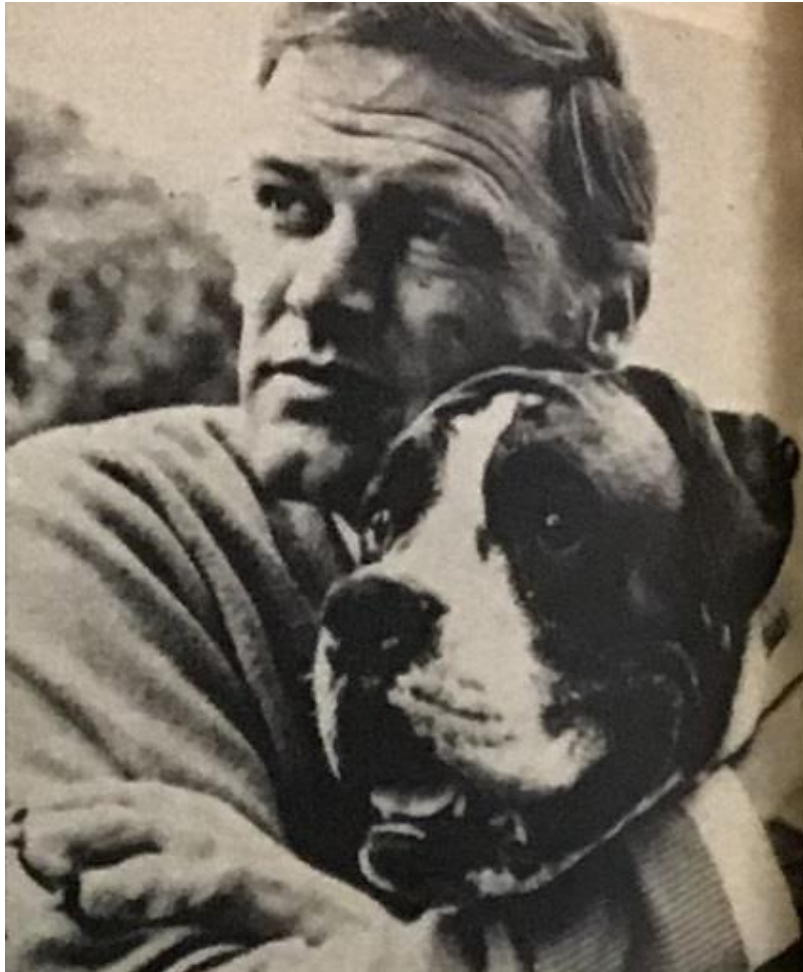
COMMENT

By the mid-1960s, four WG novels – *Night Without Stars*, *Fortune is a Woman*, *The Sleeping Partner* and *Marnie* – had been made into feature films, with a fifth – *Take My Life* – reworked from a produced film script co-written by WG and actress Valerie Taylor. In addition, two books – *The Little Walls* and *Take*

My Life – had been dramatised for radio in 1956 and 1964 respectively with short story *The Cornish Farm* read on air in 1947; but none of his work to this point had been produced for television. The screen debut of *Poldark* was still a decade away with HTV's *The Forgotten Story* another eight years beyond that. But, in 1967, ITV's *Summer Playhouse* season opened on Monday 3 July with *The Sleeping Partner* and WG's small screen duck was broken. Scripted from his 1956 novel by Patricia Highsmith and Anthony Steven and directed by John Jacobs, the production ran for ninety minutes (including two advertising breaks) from 8:30 to 10 p.m. across the independent television network. Though 1967 was the first year in which some colour TV was seen in the UK, this programme was recorded and broadcast in black and white.

The playwright faces a number of challenges the novelist does not: *War and Peace* runs to more than a thousand pages; *Moby Dick* to 135 chapters plus an Epilogue – but a book, of course, may be read over weeks or months; the dramatist's tale, taken at one sitting, must be succinct. A novelist can conjure up a cast of thousands from this world and, should he wish, others; the size of the playwright's cast is limited by practical constraints of cost and staging. The novelist can visit innumerable places, inside, outside, on land, at sea, in the air, either real or imagined; can, in short, go anywhere he chooses in whatever timeframe he pleases; the playwright enjoys no such untrammelled freedom. Thus, when a novel is adapted for the stage, it is hardly surprising that radical changes are frequently and necessarily made to setting, cast and plot. In the case of *The Sleeping Partner*, the novel features forty-five characters with speaking parts; the play slashes this to thirteen, of whom only twelve are seen. The novel's action moves between the Granvilles' home, Mike's works, Glyndebourne, Harwell, Quaglino's nightclub, an empty theatre, the Curtises' cottage, a Welsh aerodrome, a remote Brecon hut, occupied and vacant London flats, solicitors' offices, a gentleman's club and a hotel overlooking Hyde Park with car journeys and a rooftop chase thrown in for good measure; the play, taking advantage of the relative freedoms offered by a studio rather than theatre setting and being recorded rather than performed live, uses a dozen sets with a few minutes of introductory location footage tacked on to establish Mike's status as a prosperous (own factory, top-of-the-range sports car, grand country house) electrical engineer.

The writers remain much more faithful to the novel than was the case with the film: thus most character names and occupations are retained, so too (though uncredited) Kent the bull-terrier – albeit metamorphosed here (see below) into a boxer.



Keith Michell ("Mike") with "Kent"

"Bill Read" is written out and the whole industrial relations thread of the story jettisoned; the manufacture of a scintillometer is (perhaps no surprise), referenced minimally. Lynn's novel-friend "Hazel Boylon" and landlady "Miss Lord" are combined into the play's "Pamela Ford". Inspector Baker makes a much earlier entrance and is given a bigger role – conversely, that of John Curtis is severely reduced; an important character in the novel, with much of interest to say and a vital, self-sacrificing role to play, he becomes on screen a mere cipher. The lack of characterisation and of illuminating back-stories,

imposed by the overriding imperative to prune and pare, is dismaying. Yes, WG's basic plot is presented, but in stark, bare bones fashion. Thus Mike and Stella's life-changing journey back from Wales is reduced to a brief intimate moment (see below) in a fog-shrouded car. Ray French is intent on marrying Margot in both novel and play – but only in the book do we learn the real reason why: because a wife can't testify against her husband and, though she doesn't realise it, she knows enough about Ray's last meeting with Lynn to tie him to her death. In the novel, Mike engages in a race against time to stop the wedding; in the play that dramatic element goes unexploited. When in the penultimate scene the two come to blows, their fight is unconvincing. (Novel Ray was an ex-Commando; in the play his "hobby" is karate.)

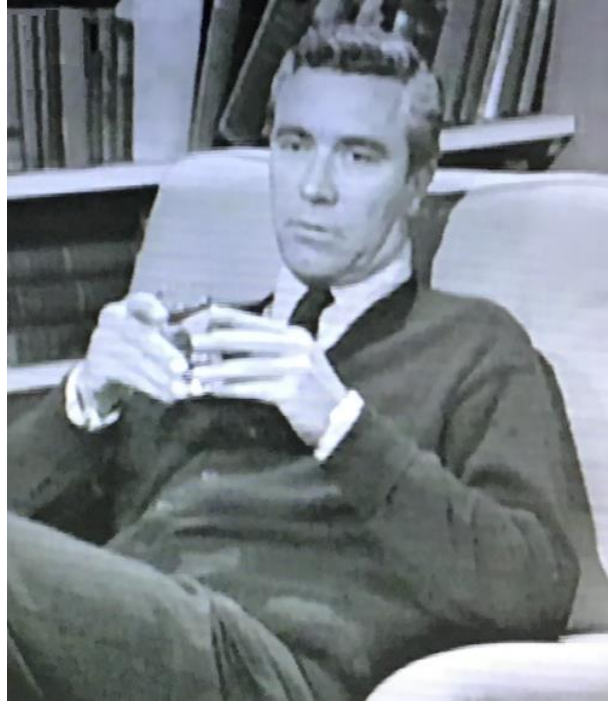
American Patricia Highsmith (1921-1995) published her twelfth novel, *Those Who Walk Away*, in 1967 (her first in 1950 was *Strangers on a Train*; her fourth in 1955 *The Talented Mr. Ripley*) so it comes as something of a surprise to find her name among the writing credits. But, though born in Fort Worth, Texas, Highsmith led a peripatetic life and from November 1963 to June 1967 lived in the eastern English county of Suffolk. In a letter to her friend Peggy Lewis dated 29 July 1964 she wrote: "Would love to learn to write for TV." Ten months later she was commissioned by the BBC to write a play subsequently broadcast as *The Cellar* on 22 September 1965 as part of their *Wednesday Thriller* series. Having read the script, her biographer Andrew Wilson declared: "it's obvious that dialogue was not Highsmith's forte."² This gives some clue concerning the division of labour between herself and co-writer Anthony Steven (1916-1990), though details are not known. After successfully bringing this project to screen, Steven wrote an adaptation of WG's 1955 prize-winning novel *The Little Walls*, which, though well spoken of over the next three years,³ was never produced.

When director John Jacobs (1924-2001) wrapped this production for Anglia Television in 1967, he wasn't finished with WG adaptations; fifteen years later he helmed HTV's six-part dramatisation of *The Forgotten Story*, first screened in Jan-Feb 1983 and repeated in 1984.

* * * * *







Eight images above: (1) Keith Michell and Barbara Shelley as Mike and Stella (2) Francis Matthews and Justine Lord as Ray and Margot (3) Ray and Mike fighting in Mike's home (4) In the book, Lynn's body was hidden under a ton of anthracite; here, Kent finds it in the wood-pile (5) Geoffrey Bayldon as Dr. Curtis (6) William Sylvester as Frank Dawson (7) Laurence Payne as Simon Heppelwhite (8) Peter Jeffrey as Inspector Baker

Book, film, play: three different media delivering three different experiences. WG's novel is a fine one, written with his usual insightful reading of nuances of character and scrupulous care. The film, shying at too many coconuts at once, ends up hitting none. Its facile plot gives Lynn four lovers and asks the viewer to choose which of them killed her but doesn't take the trouble to cast suspicion on either Mike (who would have had the strongest motive) or handsome young Carlos. Plot resolution is feeble and the whole utterly devoid of grip. With foreknowledge of the book, the narrative is easy enough to follow, but without that foreknowledge, assuredly not. The play is a much better, more faithful adaptation, retaining the spirit if not much of the detail of the source novel. But it is necessarily narrow and superficial. That should not be taken as criticism, since the writers were given a brief and delivered; their aim to entertain a TV audience for a fast-flying eighty minutes, which they did. But as with TV *Poldark*, so here, the lesson remains the same: only the novel offers the richness and depth, the subtlety and diversity that a capable author brings to the table – so, ephemeral or enduring? Shadow or substance? Film, play or book? You decide.

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NOTES AND SOURCES

¹ *Birmingham Post*, 31 March 1967

² *Beautiful Shadow: a Life of Patricia Highsmith*, Andrew Wilson, Bloomsbury, 2003

³ The project was trailed seven times in *The Stage* over a three-year period from October 1968 onwards. On 13 January 1972 Anglia's head of drama John Jacobs told interviewer Patrick Campbell: "I have an [Anthony Steven] adaptation of a book by Winston Graham, an exciting, dramatic story that would really be what I would call a BBC ninety-minute play. It would be very difficult to cut down to fifty-two minutes." So, shelved because too good!

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