

## More on WG's revising habit

*Writing is in your head all the time.* (WG, 2002)<sup>1</sup>

(Publisher abbreviations: WL = Ward, Lock & Co., Ltd.; H&S = Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd.; BH = The Bodley Head, Ltd)

Winston Graham became a published author in October 1934, but (ignoring translations) became a *republished* author in 1951 when Doubleday issued an American edition of *Ross Poldark* (WL, 1945) as *The Renegade*. *Ross* was a novel dear to its author's heart – arguably his "breakthrough" novel; a novel he had laboured all through the war years to perfect, even whilst others (*Night Journey*, *My Turn Next*, *The Forgotten Story*) were started and finished on the fly.

When the manuscript of *Ross* was submitted for publication, WL advised WG to "cut 20,000 words from (its) first half";<sup>2</sup> after he had declined to do so, they published it without further quibble as was. Yet at some point during the next five years, a more mature, dispassionate, objective WG came to appreciate that the advice had been sound; that the novel would indeed benefit from a more honed, taut, focused text. He thus took the opportunity of the book's republication to revise it very substantially, with the result that *The Renegade* and *Ross Poldark* read quite differently. When Doubleday republished *Demelza* (WL, 1946) in 1953, that book was revised more thoroughly still. [\[For more on the early Poldark revisions, see IN PROFILE \(PART TWO\)\]](#). So began a revising habit that seems never to have left him. The fact that a text had already been published did not, in his view, place it beyond the possibility of revision. On the contrary, he told Arthur Pottersman in 1967:

*Any novel can be read after ten years with a much more detached view and improved a little.*<sup>3</sup>

But if no piece of writing is "finished" beyond the possibility of improvement, whether published or not, the inevitable result is that, following revision and republication, texts will exist, as *Ross* and *Demelza* above, in, multiple, sometimes notably different iterations. So which is to be preferred? If texts were uniformly improved by reworking, the answer should

always be "the more recent". Hmm – if only it were that simple. In the period 1966-88, WG revised and republished four of his first dozen novels – *Night Journey* and *The Merciless Ladies* under their original titles; *The Giant's Chair* as *Woman in the Mirror* and *My Turn Next* as *Cameo* – yet not one of the four revised texts reads better than its prior iteration and both *Night Journey* and *Cameo* are distinctly weaker. [For more on this octet, see [IN PROFILE \(PART ONE\)](#) under the relevant book titles.]

But why, after publication, revise at all? Other authors manage to resist the temptation, so why not WG? Writing in 1983 about the need to focus on essentials in order to tell an effective story, he concluded implacably: "What's not relevant is irrelevant"<sup>4</sup> and this rigorous logic seems to have been applied not only to original material but also, retrospectively, to his back-catalogue. Certainly he revised both *Ross Poldark* and *Demelza* with that dictum in mind – the primary reason to revise, then, the perfectionist's ceaseless search for satisfaction; his vain, driven quest to snare the Muse. In 1959 he told William G. Smith:

*A man is born with certain talents and realising those talents is a very exacting job.*<sup>5</sup>

WG worked tirelessly at that job, and achieved success – but at what cost? Would writing for more than seventy years without ever finishing anything (an exaggeration, but with a point), not tend to drive one mad? Or was the never-ending struggle's cut and thrust the very thing that kept him alive? These closing lines from *Memoirs* suggest as much:

*Perfection is a full stop.  
Give me the comma of imperfect striving,  
Thus to find zest in the immediate living.  
Ever the reaching but never the gaining,  
Ever the climbing but never the attaining  
Of the mountain top.*<sup>6</sup>

Back in 1967 he put it more simply, acknowledging with disarming frankness that he chose to revise

*more for my own pleasure than anything else.*<sup>7</sup>

WG did *not* revise all of his books prior to republication – for instance, in the case of period novels *The Forgotten Story*,<sup>8</sup> *Cordelia* and *The Grove of Eagles*, which, because period-locked, did not need chronological adjustment, no changes appear to have been made between editions. And there are a number of books on which I cannot comment since the task of cross-matching first and all subsequent editions across his entire canon is one too forbidding to contemplate. But below are the results of some further comparisons that have been made:

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### ***The Merciless Ladies (1944)***

Chapter twenty-five of the first edition of *The Merciless Ladies* includes on page 210 the following passages:

*No, they'd only lived here a matter of two years, up to that they'd lived in a cottage up the valley. This place had belonged to a man and a woman who'd come down in the world – she said this with a wrinkled nose – the woman had been all right, took in visitors; he was a good-for-nowt, took the visitors on climbing expeditions and carried on with the young girls. Then one day he slipped on a buttress and it was two days before they recovered his body.*

... ..

*Paul did nothing but talk about the valley. If only he could drop everything and go up there and paint. But I still had that first impression of unearthliness; the silence and the bubbling stream, then the interior of the old cottage with its dirt and its air of having been something better; the woman's rigid narrow peasant face and her story of the people who had been there before, and all round the sloping brown mountains.*

In the first (1944) and all subsequent reprints, WG revised them thus:

*No, they'd only lived here a matter of two years, up to that they'd lived in a cottage up the valley. This place had been nice enough once but had been let to go down and had been empty for years before they took it. It would be empty again when they left. You couldn't farm this land. No, she didn't think much about the scenery. It was all right for*

visitors who saw it fresh-like, but when you lived in a place one view was much like another.

... ..

Paul did nothing but talk about the valley. If only he could drop everything and go up there and paint. But I still had that first impression of unearthliness; the silence and the bubbling stream, then the interior of the old cottage with its dirt and its air of having been something better; the woman's rigid narrow peasant face and her story of disappointment and failure, and all round the sloping brown mountains.

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### **Take My Life (WL, 1947)**

WG's first UK republication was a 1953<sup>9</sup> WL paperback re-issue of their 1947 novel *Take My Life* and the author's revising hand is again in evidence. But if his primary aim with the Poldarks was a less flabby, more cohesive narrative, his motivation this time was different. In the six years between the first and second publications of *Take My Life*, the UK had seen a change of monarch (in 1952, when Queen Elizabeth II succeeded King George VI) and an end to clothes and most food rationing. So eight of fifteen text-tweaks here were to remove period-related references of that kind and thereby keep (at least for a few more years) his story current. Thus a reference to an audience standing for "the King" (i.e. for *God Save the King*, the national anthem) is removed from the end of Chapter One; three pages later a reference to clothing coupons is written out; "a meal of scrambled (dried) eggs and coffee" has the word in brackets cut; the line "'Will you kindly leave me alone,' he said, as if she were a tout" loses its last six words; the Second [radio] News becomes the Nine O'clock News and three explicit references to food-rationing are expunged.

But at the same time WG could not resist tinkering for no better reason than to "improve" his text: thus one word (*against*) is italicised; "fairly angry" becomes "really angry"; "darned irritable" becomes "insufferably irritable"; a line ("I am writing myself to-morrow," said Fleming evenly) and two phrases (you know / she guessed) are cut and another line – She knew nothing of prep. schools – is revised to She hesitated a moment.

When *Take My Life* was republished again by BH in 1965, a further **two**

*hundred* textual amendments were made [for detail and comment, see [TML COMP](#)], giving readers at least three iterations of this novel from which to choose (and the Mayflower, Doubleday, Bantam, Fontana and/or Pocket editions may differ again).



*Take My Life* : WL 1947 and c1953; BH 1965 : texts all differ

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### ***Fortune is a Woman* (H&S, 1952)**

A comparative reading of the H&S first edition and a 1967 Fontana reprint reveals over 130 textual variations – for more, see [FORTUNE](#).

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### ***The Little Walls* (H&S, 1955)**

This novel won for its author the Crime Writers' Association's inaugural Best Crime Novel of the Year Award (then called the Crossed Red Herrings Award; later the Gold Dagger) – yet that didn't stop him, when he had the chance, wanting to buff it further still. No surprise, then, that a comparison of the H&S first edition with BH's 1972 re-issue shows circa fifty textual changes. Two typos – there / [their](#) (H&S, page 158) and [protrait](#) / [portrait](#) (178) – are corrected (unfortunately, two others – at [breakfast](#) / [Breakfast](#) (61) and he fumbled in his / [his](#) pocket (64) – are introduced) with all other

amendments comprising either the removal of words, phrases or sentences or their recasting / **revision**:

[on entering an office] I was shown up / **in** (6)

[to render more natural speech] "... this–this / **this** woman ..." (13)

She looked confused. "I wish I hadn't said that now. I shouldn't have said it, you see, I haven't any other reasons at all, this time. Nothing more than the unexplained letter."

It took a second or so for the sting to begin to work. "You mean there have been other times?"

"One other."

I turned away from the window. "I'm sorry."

"I shouldn't have told you."

"It was much better that you have."

"It was years ago ..." (14)

*The / **the** Manchester Guardian* (16)

Dark hair greying a bit. (28)

He glanced at me and sucked his knuckles and spat. (52)

When I got down to / **reached** the cove ... (93)

"Oh, idle curiosity. I – "

"Do you think curiosity is ever idle? I've / **I have** always doubted that."  
(93)

I threw my cigarette over the side and ... **got** / **took** out another. (96)

... a speck of ash had gone into my eye (97)

Sandbergh had carefully ignored me since the conversation in the cabin, but I could tell he was very well aware of me. (99)

... lit by a fiery sort of light (101)

Now I wonder if partly sincere. / [he is sincere!](#) (106)

"And the day before?" she said pleasantly, after a moment. (117)

I wondered it that was / [were](#) true. (128)

[re Augustus] "One of the great men of the world, in spite of Voltaire. A pity Gaius didn't live to succeed." (133)

He said rather irritably ... (136)

I ... put on a blue seaman's jersey and a pair of grey flannel bags / [denim trousers](#) and started off. (139)

When at last I got to / [reached](#) the last hairpin / [hair-pin](#) ... (139)

"Go on, swim. I'm sorry I can't join you." (146)

She glanced at me. "You know which way I mean." (149)

When I got back / [returned](#) to the hotel ... (156)

"But surely that is the chief aim of psychiatry, to take away the sense of guilt – and one of the reasons why it is so popular ..." (165)

I watched him. "The old prohibitions?" I said gently. (167)

She didn't answer for a bit. Then she came down two more steps until our heads were level. (173)

"We've [informed] the British police / [Interpol](#) ..." (191)

Crossing the Alps by plane always reminded me of Operation Moon a century ahead of its time. I stared at Mont Blanc ... (192)

He ... stood with his hands in his pockets for a minute or so. (201)

... his tennis pumps / [deck shoes](#) were steaming on his feet. (214)

I thought I could make sense / *sense* out of it. (218)

"... throws it away for a gesture, throws it away. / *away!* That's what I can't get over. He throws his life away. / *away!*" (218)

The crowd dwindled like sand in the neck of an hour-glass, fifty grains, twenty grains, and then ... gone. (228)

... the mouth / *head* of the steps (230)

He looked like a saint come to miraculous liquefaction. His face didn't have any expression. (231)

... when we got to / *reached* Sorrento ... (235)

There'd been some sort of a boat-load of new arrivals ... (236)

... da Cossa, shifting his aim for a bit, began to ask, how was Rome? (241)

"And I thought ... But it doesn't matter ..." (248)

"But don't / *don't* go back to Martin because ... "It isn't enough / *enough*, Leonie ..." (248)

She looked at me then. (251)

\* \* \*

Conclusion: WG's careful revisions don't much change the experience of reading *The Little Walls*, which, despite being an award-winner, I have never enjoyed in any iteration (agreeing in that regard with his mentor, Tom Attlee – see [ATTLEE](#)) – so try whichever edition comes most readily to hand. Though WG wrote some of his most pleasing novels in the 1950s, I don't regard this as one of them. Others, I'm sure, will disagree, which is as it should be.

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## ***The Sleeping Partner (H&S, 1956)***

A study of the BH 1969 reprint reveals more than sixty emendations to the original text, with the first indicative of the degree of scrupulous care applied. The original line reads:

*just a boiled egg on a napkin-tablecloth spread on the corner of the kitchen table.*

By the simple expedient of shortening "tablecloth" to "cloth", the number of "tables" in the sentence is reduced from two to one. Similarly, when later in the book "the following night" and "the following week" are juxtaposed, the former is revised to "the next night". Elsewhere:

- Single words or phrases are removed or **changed**:

"Sit down," he said, "and don't talk rot / **nonsense**."

"The rot / **nonsense** was yours ..."

"You're not a murderer. You've too much imagination. And gentleness / **tolerance**."

... with clear rather deep-set brown eyes.

"Sorry. Shouldn't I have said that?"

I got up. "For Pete's sake, let's **Let's** go."

She said: "Go on."

He leapt at / **picked up** the chair in front of him ...

- Some changes are made with *anachronism* in mind:

I borrowed some pennies / **change** from the driver ... [After UK decimalisation in 1971, payphones would not take "pennies".]

"It means an extra £3 / **£4** a week."

"There was a book of his mentioned in *The Sketch / Country Life*."  
[The *Daily Sketch* ceased publication in 1971.]

- Seven sentences that end with an interrogative phrase (isn't it / had she etc) have their full stop replaced by a question mark. Similarly, five sentences that seem to demand an exclamation mark (To hell with the cottages / If we're not careful we shall be lost etc) are given one.
- Other meticulous revisions:

For Heaven's / [heaven's](#) sake; ash blonde / [ash-blonde](#); It hit me today ... / [last week](#) ...; Do you / [D'you](#) mean ...

- A few changes are made to correct errors, avoid repetition or maintain textual consistency:

Due to an oversight, in the original text minor-character colleagues Burgin and Piper are both named Joe; in BH, Burgin is renamed Jack.

"corney" is corrected to "corny".

"He collapsed about five this morning. They've given him a blood transfusion." [Cut because the transfusion is mentioned again later.]

Two "tonight"s and one "tomorrow" are revised to "to-night" and "tomorrow" for consistency's sake.

- A few changes seem rather arbitrary or unhelpful:

[of a car journey] We made Lewes / [Uckfield](#) with seven / [twelve](#) minutes to go.

fair-sized / [fairsized](#)

[of a luminous dial] scraped clean / [clear](#)

If something / [Something](#) followed up the stairs ...

"phone" is changed to "telephone" at least three times – and the revision of "If Mike phones ..." to "If Mike rings ..." may also have been to reduce "phone" usage.

"When I saw him this afternoon he gave me his reasons. Not / No proof as we need it ..." [In this instance the original text reads better.]

- Finally, and most importantly, a total of circa thirty-two lines are cut from fourteen places in the text, with trimming particularly prevalent in two pivotal scenes involving Mike and Stella. A few examples:

I was looking at her again.

She said breathlessly: "Don't they make tubeless tyres now?"

"Yes, but if the rubber is badly slashed ... They're not absolutely proof."

"Not absolutely proof against bad punctures?"

"No.

It was too dark now to see her face clearly, but her eyes glimmered with what seemed to be their own light. "It isn't fair, Mike, it isn't fair."

I said: "I know. I'm deeply sorry, and yet glad."

"Glad?"

"Oh, heavens yes, glad, glad, glad."

Her hand seemed to want to get away from mine ...

A bit startled by the way I said it, she told me. Her face was so young that being dead tired only refined it.

Even in practical terms my visit to the cottage hadn't been thrown away. If I hadn't been there John Curtis would have died on the floor.

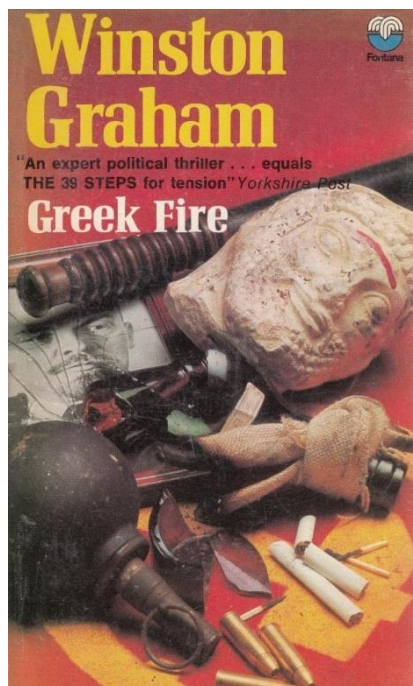
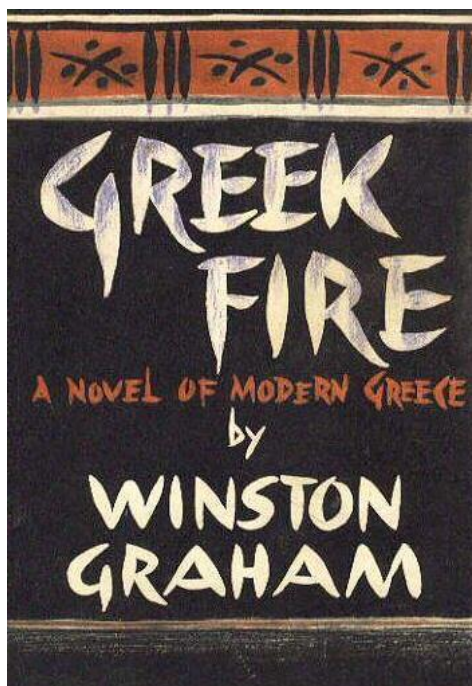
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Conclusion: whilst careful and sympathetic revision of the original text does result in a marginally improved second rendering, in truth neither iteration of this superior novel is likely to disappoint.

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## ***Greek Fire* (H&S, 1957)**

A brief perusal of the Fontana 1967 reprint of this novel confirms that once again WG couldn't resist making a few minor edits, some but probably not all of which are noted below:



martini / [Martini](#) (H&S, page 55)

She didn't say any more. The wind was dropping, as it so often does at dawn. (109)

... he withdrew it holding the smallest gun Gene had ever seen. It was about the size of a cigarette case. (131)

The lift stopped at the first floor. He got out, wedged the inner door ... / [He stopped the lift at the first floor, got out, wedged the inner door ...](#) (143)

... Slave / [Slav](#) cheek bones (147)

No way out. Buildings cast rectangular moon-made shadows. (160)

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## ***The Tumbled House* (H&S, 1959)**

The original novel carries no dedication; that of Fontana's 1969 paperback re-issue reads For DENIS and KAY HOCKING. (Dr. Hocking was a pathologist attached to Truro's Royal Cornwall Infirmary whom WG consulted whilst writing *The Sleeping Partner*, and presumably again regarding the medical aspects of this tale.)

Comparison of the two texts shows the original to have been carefully revised, with circa 100 emendations made for a variety of reasons:

- Inflation-proofing

[the rent in pounds of a London flat] five a week / **ten a week** (from a 21st century perspective, both figures are equally incredible); [when using a payphone] Peter put in his pennies\* / **money**; [ref a labourer's wages] "Don't forget you're only being paid four shillings an hour\* / **being paid by the hour**"; [after a robbery] £500 Reward / **£1000 Reward**, etc

(\* Since the story is set in 1959, when pennies *were* used in payphones and labourers *were* paid four shillings an hour, the loss of such authentic period detail is regrettable.)

- Compound or hyphenated words

good will and good-will / **goodwill**; auto vac / **auto-vac** [petrol feed]; wood wind and wood-wind / **woodwind**; bed-side / **bedside**

- Addition of removal of capital letters

negro / **Negro** (x 8); press / **Press**; Notice Board / **notice board**; martini / **Martini**; [London] Town / **town** (x 2); Evolution / **evolution**; Telly / **telly**; by Gosh / **gosh** (x 3), etc

- Insertion of question marks

After an interrogatory phrase – are they; won't he – or, once, after a name ("Mr Malcolm Sunway?") to emphasise the speaker's inquiring tone.

- Addition or removal of italics

Added for emphasis – *Michael!*; *Why?*; to *explain* etc – or, in two instances, removed from the definite article in front of *Daily Express* and *Mirror* (although this leads to inconsistency since other newspapers are still *The Sentinel*, *The Globe*, etc).

- Typos and corrections

Two corrections – queueing / [queuing](#); you've got to be on the bull / [ball](#) all the time – but unfortunately one typo – frock / [fock](#) – also.

- Words, phrases or sentences cut

"I'll make sure I've got pennies"; She went to the window herself now, still doubting, staring into the darkened garden; She smiled into his eyes, but her breath was short; the ancient right; the editorial tea; I'm terribly sorry; Shorn is absolutely first-rate in the box. That remarkable impression of sincerity and integrity; "Yes." Bennie pushed a strand of hair off her forehead as she straightened up; with the registrar and the casualty officer, a few portable antiques, etc

- Words [added](#)

A few ... asked for [the](#) latest details; It's ... talk and gab [that](#) you two specialise in; "No, you," [said Bennie](#). "Then you can help me out"; the posturings of an [indignant](#) cuckold; October, [1956](#).

- Words or phrases amended

*The Globe* / [News Chronicle](#); *The Star* / [Globe](#); a blue / [black](#) mink; Darling / [Don](#); psycho-boys / [pyschiatrists](#); the Colonial / [Diplomatic](#) Service; 1956 / [three years ago](#); The B.B.C. / [TV](#) Personality; If she'd drunk a lot she would have said to herself: "You fool, you're tight; should know better at your age; go home" / [understood it](#); but it was still pretty grim the last time I was there / [it's still pretty grim](#); coloured / [Negro](#) folk; a check shirt / [suit](#); it's not bad / [a victory really](#); very unfortunate / [a saving grace](#); an almoner / [a nurse](#); by far the biggest part of the total / [almost all the](#) costs, etc.

\* \* \*

Conclusion: as per *The Sleeping Partner*, so too here: whilst sympathetic revision does no harm, the novel's first edition still reads well enough to please, so take your pick.

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### ***After the Act* (H&S, 1965)**

A comparison of the 1971 Fontana reprint of this novel with the original H&S text shows evidence of meticulous, fussy, almost obsessive revision in a variety of ways:

- The original novel has no dedication; the reprint's dedication reads FOR ANDREW.
- At least two dozen words or phrases have a hyphen inserted:

Frostbitten / [frost-bitten](#); daydream / [day-dream](#); seagull / [sea-gull](#); waste paper / [waste-paper](#); sharp nosed / [sharp-nosed](#); bloodstain / [blood-stain](#), etc

- whilst a similar number have a hyphen removed:

osteo-arthritis / [osteoarthritis](#); hair-brush / [hairbrush](#); mid-day / [midday](#); un-level / [unlevel](#); squee-gee / [squeegee](#); twenty-past / [twenty past](#); rattle-snakes / [rattlesnakes](#); finger-prints / [fingerprints](#) [note: the original text uses both forms; the revised text consistently the latter], etc

- Other similar compound terms are recast:

blood stream / [bloodstream](#); killjoy / [kill joy](#); headscarves / [head scarves](#); half way / [halfway](#), etc

- Abbreviations (Mr, Mrs, Mme, Mlle, Dr, Rev, St) are consistently written without full stops, as here, in the original text but with full stops – [Mr.](#), [Mrs.](#), [Mme.](#), etc – in the revised.

- Almost all numbers are rendered numerically (10, 18th, '59, £20,000) in the original text but alphabetically (ten, eighteenth, fifty-nine, twenty thousand pounds) in the revised.
- Several names, words and phrases are capitalised:

Technicolor; Nembutal; Rexine; the Count; Rhesus Boy; Venetian blinds; the Ten Commandments; Madeira [wine]; Western; Eastern; Oriental; Karma, etc

- and others decapitalised:

What the Hell / hell; down South / south; Palazzos / palazzos; Third / third-party; His / his [the reference is to God and the revision introduces an inconsistency, since a mid-sentence "He", used soon after, is left extant]; For Heaven's / heaven's sake; Zombie / zombie, etc

- Some phrases are italicised:

*café filtre*; *"Ne te tracasse pas"*; *Premiere / première*; *née*; *Lemartine et fils*, *entrepreneursdes pompes funèbres*, etc

- or unitalicized:

*L'Ecu de France* / L'Ecu de France

- or similarly recast:

Melon au porto / *melon au Porto*; Répétition Générale / *répétition générale*; Procès Verbal / *procès verbal*; Officier Principal / *officier principal*, etc

- Factual and typographical corrections are made:

Avenue du Boule / Roule; Commissaire Ajouant / Adjoint; member / Member of the British Empire; masrty / mastery; iin / in; decor / décor; Millort / Millot, etc

- though typos are also introduced:



a close bracket is omitted in Book 1, Chapter 5; Because [my] relationship (1.5); choosy / choosey (2.11)

- Single words, phrases or sentences are inserted:

Good sense – she seldom talked anything else – but it set off old stirrings of irritation (1.1); just drive down somewhere towards the Ile de la Cité (1.3); A few were already gathering (1.5); What I could not wait for was to see Alexandra (1.7); her own intelligent comments (1.9); But this was early in the evening (1.9); one of the main distributors (2.3); he becomes – dare I say – almost unshockable (2.4); a fool, a clumsy fool (2.4); "Morris, this again is a matter ..." (2.4); "Yes ... I find it ..." (2.5); but it gave a sort of courage (2.5); – but more fun (2.8); an out-dated ethical code (2.8); but did not speak (2.8); there's no way out, Alexandra, no way out ... (2.8); The razors had drawn blood on both sides (2.8); Let's face this together (2.8); just pressing (2.9); more desolate (2.9); I looked at him (2.11); and smiled slightly (2.11) etc

- or removed:

We talked and wrangled amiably for a time (1.1); we ... laughed and talked again (1.4); I'll leave the gate and the door open (1.4); Some aeroplanes flew in formation low overhead (1.5); an absolute sitting target (1.8); a slight bruising (1.8); took out the two passports and handed him them both (2.1); a black ebony table (2.5); and giving the Spanish Place address (2.6); "Not my suggestion, sir." (2.9) etc

- Yet others are revised:

misanthropes / misogynists; the Hulley Gulley [Hully Gully: a type of unstructured line dance popular in the early 1960s] / the latest gyration; with skin like flaking paint / peeling; broke / had broken; further / farther; a sore spot / gathering; almost unvarying / most usual; low voltage moon / shadowy moonlight; dogged / persistent; dangerous / careless driving; five feet ten / eight; enormous / big money; washing-up machine / dish washer; judgment / judgement; sensation / sensations; seven / several years; codes / orders; ten / twelve years; savaged / ravaged; edge / edges, etc

- Lines are rewritten:

So it was some time before I glanced over Michele's bare shoulder and saw Harriet ... / So it was some time before I caught Michele glancing across my shoulder and turned casually to see Harriet ...

[lines from a play] "Well, there should be hope for you both, dear boy. When a woman has been married to you for 10 years she's already given you the worst years of her life." / "I never make love to a woman nowadays unless she's at room temperature."

[a barmaid giving change] "Twelve and six, fifteen, seventeen and six, twenty." / "Twelve and six, fifteen, seventeen, nineteen, twenty."

- and one scene tweaked [words cut in grey / added in blue]:

"When we get there ... would you like to come in?"

My mouth went dry. "You're alone?"

"Four servants."

"Oh ..."

"But they're in their own part of the house."

"If I come in ..."

"Yes."

The taxi driver slowed to look at the name of the avenue, and Alexandra leaned forward to give him directions. I realised at that moment, perhaps for the very first time, that the love I had for her was as deeply returned.

She sat back and put a handkerchief up to her lips, wiped them. Her hand was unsteady. She said: "Improper advances from young female!"

"... I asked you to think for us both."

She was silent and then as the car turned a corner she said: "I have to tell you, in case you haven't guessed, that you will be ... I have never had anyone else."

"I'd – yes, I think I knew."

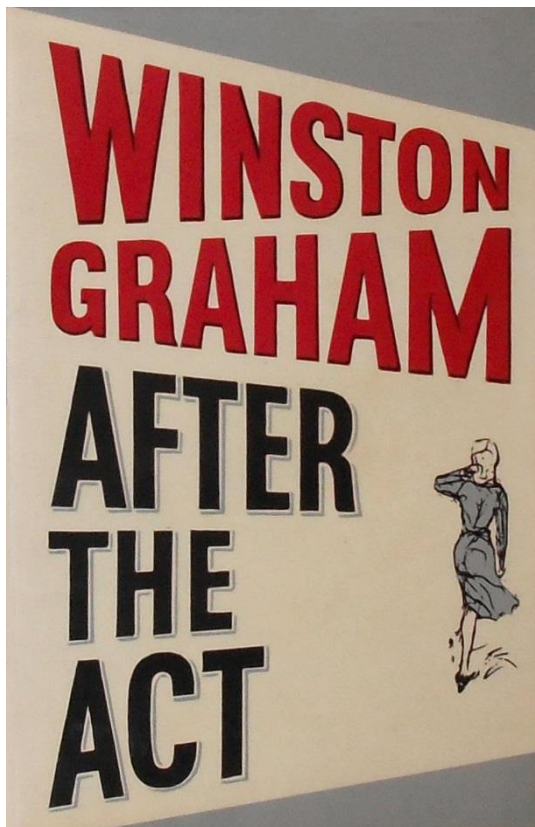
A car coming from the other direction lit up her face, made it startlingly pale, much older, as if with strain, the eyes pools of brilliance, a lock of hair falling across her forehead.

"I still have doubts," I said.

"About me? Then –"

"No, but listen, in case you don't know, I *love* you – it's not just a light thing; and to take this now, tonight when everything seems slightly fey and unreal ..."

"When you read about this sort of thing," she said, "it always seems so easy, doesn't it? One *collapses* into bed and then it's all over. Dear Morris. I have to tell you that I have no practical defences either ... I haven't even taken the trouble to find out. I've always thought I should have no interest in anyone but a person I loved and if I loved him I should marry him first. So it didn't seem necessary to burrow into all the sordid details of how to conduct an affair without running risks. All desperately Victorian! Are you terribly shocked?"



\* \* \*

Conclusion: the book is not noticeably improved by the changes, though not harmed either. Whilst the correction of typos in the original text is welcome, the fact that they are replaced by others inadvertently introduced results in no overall benefit. Favoured text: H&S 1965.

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### ***The Walking Stick* (Collins, 1967)**

A comparison of the first four chapters of the 1969 Fontana paperback re-issue of *The Walking Stick* with the 1967 first edition text shows, as with *Greek Fire* above, editing on a modest scale:

From Chapter One, one word – I couldn't properly be seen – is cut; from Chapter Two, one short line of dialogue – "Yes ... sometime." – is removed; from Chapter three, another single word – "The office ... is actually under the pavement ..." – is excised and from Chapter Four, one word – *you!* / *you*. – is de-emphasised.

Conclusion: fastidious / fatuous? You decide.

\* \* \* \* \*

### ***Angell, Pearl & Little God* (Collins, 1970)**

Settling on the most effective means of voicing this novel cost WG a great deal of effort and its writing took him three long years. You would think, after all that, he'd have been satisfied with the result. But when, just two years after it first appeared, the book was reprinted by Fontana, WG's revising hand was once more in evidence, with no fewer than forty textual changes made:

Sex is such an integral part of the human *soma* ... that few are able to escape its chains / claims entirely. (Collins page 11)

In the original text, WG names boxing's weight divisions in an inconsistent and seemingly random manner: feather weight, middle weight, bantam-weight, welter-weight, lightweight, heavyweight etc. Following revision, single words – featherweight, middleweight, welterweight – are used throughout.

People say I'm too quiet ... for nineteen / twenty. Perhaps I am. (46)

She sighed and wished her voice was easier, more assured. "Sorry."  
/ "Sorry." (56)

Godfrey ... realized that he had made a pig's ear / **real mess** out of this one. (74)

So he'd been pretty chuffed / **mad** [i.e. annoyed]. (75)

"Don't drink," he said and gave her a look that should have dried up a river-bed / **anyone**. (76)

Merrick House ... was in Godfrey's opinion a drop-out. It was as big as the orphanage where he'd been reared ... (78)

... he caught Miriam at the same game / **games** as before ... (85)

He ... looked up at the Goddam / **goddam** ceiling and wished it would fall. (87)

queuing / **queueing** (twice on page 98) ...

... and yet groovey / **groovy** (thrice on pp. 122, 170, 247)

She had not confined / **combed** her hair as much as usual ... (123)

On pae 135, two lines of dialogue are reversed:

"Some people say he's going to be a champion boxer."

"He's very small."

**"He's very small."**

**"Some people say he's going to be a champion boxer."**

Since the lines make marginally more sense as originally written, this is probably a copywriting, typesetting or other production error.

It's too much a part of a greater / **great** complex. (147)

R.S.F. [Ref Stopped Fight] / **r.s.f.** (169)

She ... felt the gin going strongly down / **down strongly**. (169)

... because of some dispute over Lot 10, the silver was being taken first. They had to wait fifteen minutes before the jewellery came up / [the earlier lots, the later ones had been taken first. They were in nice time.](#) (155)

... with someone like Winstone or Legra / [Legra or Saldivar.](#) (175)

"We've some fresh / [poached](#) mussels, sir." (210)

"I'll have two dozen more / [another plate of mussels,](#)" he said.

"Two dozen, more / [Another plate,](#) sir?" (210)

"I want four lamb cutlets, well done, three potatoes baked in their jackets. And cauliflower. A double helping of cauliflower. And while I'm waiting for that, bring me another dozen mussels. And send the wine waitress." (211)

The 60th mussel disappeared, and Angell didn't have too long to wait before his cutlets came. (211)

"It went to you for four thousand one hundred guineas / [pounds.](#)" (twice on page 213)

... he had at last transferred some of the [poison](#) / [memory.](#) (244)

Fred / [Alf](#) Sheffield [correcting an error, since the character is "Alf" two pages later] (245)

Sheffield, a [West](#) / [west](#) Indian of 30 ... [typo?] (247)

Little bastard, get [them](#) / [the](#) potatoes out of here ... (249)

... a long conference with [counsel](#) / [Counsel.](#) (263)

... a ... sophisticated West-end / [West End](#) beauty. (270)

... he's going to be very difficult to hit. (278)

... that beastly Jap ... (303)

"I'll do for you for this." (twice on page 353)

"Were there letters? Before or after marriage?"

"No." **That note ... But she had not signed it.** (364)

Perhaps he was unused to women, perhaps she was unique. He did not know. (366)

"Now, members of the jury, you have all the facts before you, and it is for you to decide. It is only for me to instruct you in the Law of the Land. It is the law of this land that homicide is justifiable only if a person takes the life of another in defending himself, if the fatal act which takes away life is necessary for his own preservation. So you must ask yourselves, did the prisoner use the weapon in defence of his life? Before the prisoner can avail himself of this defence he must satisfy you that he did all he could to avoid this fatal act, that it was necessary to protect his own life, or to protect himself from such serious bodily harm as would give a reasonable apprehension that his life was in immediate danger. If he fired the shot because he had no other means of resistance and no means of escape, then his act will be considered justifiable." (373-4)

is replaced with

**"Now, members of the jury, you have to decide the facts and I have to direct you as to the law. The prosecution has to prove the guilt of the accused, and the standard of proof required is that you should all feel sure that his guilt has been established. The defence here is self-defence. A man is entitled to defend himself if attacked or under real apprehension of imminent attack. The real test of self-defence is that a man who is genuinely defending himself does not want to fight. The force he uses must be in reasonable proportion to the violence being offered against him. He has a duty to retreat if possible, in order to escape his assailant; but if in a confined space he can retreat no further, he is entitled to act in his own defence. The plea of self-defence having been put forward here, it is for the Crown to disprove it. If you think that it either is or may be the case that when Mr Angell snatched the gun from Brown and fired the fatal shot he feared for his life and safety or that of his wife's, he is entitled to be acquitted. It is only if the Crown satisfies you so that you feel sure that that was not the case, that you should convict."**

"He'd always got some girl or another," said Jude Davis, "hanging around. So what the hell ..." (374)

Two typos are introduced: linen / [line](#) trousers (51) and "... the body-slicer / [slicers](#) says." (304)

Finally, although UK currency was decimalised in 1971, just a year after this novel's first publication, WG chose *not* to revise its monetary references (half crown, florin, 3/6 etc) to reflect this change.



Conclusion: another sprucing-up exercise that makes very little difference to the reader experience. Recommended text: Collins, 1970.

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### **THE JAPANESE GIRL and other stories (Collins, 1971)**

Most of the fourteen stories collected in this volume had previously been published elsewhere and, in three instances, in very different form. For further detail regarding THE MEDICI EAR-RING, first published in 1935, and GIBB, first published (under a different title) in 1959, see [IN PROFILE \(PART](#)



**TWO**). The third case concerns AT THE CHALET LARTREC. This, WG's fourth published short story, appeared first in *John Bull* on 31 May 1947, then in *Argosy* in April 1967, *The Japanese Girl* in 1971 and elsewhere. But the story as first published concerns the betrayal of members of the French Resistance during WWII by one of their colleagues and what happens to him thereafter. In subsequent versions, this betrayal takes place in Hungary in 1956, thus whilst the outline of the story remains the same, its details as well as the nature of its telling do not. Both versions repay finding.

\* \* \* \* \*

### ***The Black Moon* (Collins, 1973; Doubleday & Co., 1974)**

(i) WG completed his *Black Moon* typescript and submitted it to William Collins – so, next stop publication? Not likely. WG's American editor, Ken McCormick, received and duly praised a copy of the script, to which WG responded with a timely word of caution:

*Please don't set [i.e make up printing plates] from the typescript you received. The bound book should be ready by September and contains a number of alterations I have made in the light of one more reading. I have also made a number of cuts in the beginning; small in substance, perhaps 1,000 words or so, but I think it may help to tighten up the opening ...*<sup>10</sup>

That was in June 1973. Seven months later, after the UK edition was out but before Doubleday's had appeared, he wrote again:

*... it has occurred to me this week-end that it might be perfectly possible to do some cutting in the early stages of the book to remove certain references to the older books and so make it easier to get into.*

*I don't know if you are already on with your type setting, in which case it might be too late. Make no mistake; I don't want the labour of this; but I'm perfectly willing to have a shot if you thought it a good idea.*<sup>11</sup>

It was too late and no further cutting just then was possible – but it wasn't, on WG's part, for the want of trying!

(ii) *The Black Moon* was first reprinted by Fontana in 1975 and, as with *Greek Fire* and *The Walking Stick* above, WG took the opportunity to make a small number of deletions, corrections and revisions to his original text – in the book's first four chapters there are seven:

Here ... was the succession he had long desired. (Collins, page 16)

chastizement / [chastisement](#) (27)

"If ye please ma'am," said Sam. "We'd Like to see your mistress."

"What do ee want with she?"

"Just tell her two friends has called." (29)

... she did not now have ambitions / [ambition](#) (37)

Not merely would this raise problems of a social nature, it might slightly alter all her contacts with the people who worked for them ... (38)

It was ... a cross-beam: seasoned oak about eighteen feet or so in length and [very nearly](#) a foot square. (61)

A thrush came down near them, balancing his fan of a tail ... (62)

\* \* \* \* \*

### ***Memoirs of a Private Man* (Macmillan, 2003)**

WG finished *Memoirs* in November 2002; by the time it was published in September of the following year, its author was ten weeks dead. But, as its dedication confirms, "most of it" was written before 1992, so dating the excerpt below is problematic. It is worth considering nonetheless, since it comprises another good example of WG's ingrained revising habit.

In October 1972 American literary magazine *Writer's Digest* published "Viewpoint in the Novel", a WG article concerning the "problems which

made (his) last novel *Angell, Pearl and Little God* so difficult to write"; in chapter 1.10 of *Memoirs* WG undertakes to "reproduce" the article and there, on pages 149 to 156, it is – except, of course, that the original and "reproduced" texts are *not* the same [grey words are cut from the 1972 text; blue words added]:

the story itself has always been the sturdy framework ...

By limiting the point of view it helps mystification (on any level – from D. H. Lawrence / Proust or Henry James to Raymond Chandler or the latest paperback writer) ...

At this juncture I knew virtually nothing about boxing, but my constant visits to the East end / End of London quickened my interest;. Several times I borrowed a seedy raincoat from the Secretary of the Savile Club, wore my oldest trilby and slouched down to the Thomas à Becket pub in the Old Kent Road, where with a stub of cigarette in my mouth I would prop up the bar; and presently, when folk had got used to me, I would saunter up to the gym upstairs and watch Henry Cooper sparring. and then a chance meeting with / Then by chance I got an introduction to one of the big fight promoters, Mike Barrett, and he generously opened every door ... I attended meetings between the various promoters when their protégés were being matched. I went to weigh-ins, sparring bouts, sat behind the scenes in the dressing rooms before and after they went up to fight. I even attended the pay-outs. The world of prize-fighting had become much more interesting to me than the world of law offices ...

etc., etc.

\* \* \* \* \*

In February 1970, aged sixty-one, and at the height of his success, WG described himself as a "(still) self doubting writer"<sup>12</sup>; looking back over his life in 1999, at the age of ninety-one, he declared: "If I had my time again I would wish for little different, except to be a better writer"<sup>13</sup> and it's hard not to see this compulsive tinkering with his work as, first and foremost, an expression of that persistent, corrosive, gnawing self-doubt. Would a more self-assured or self-satisfied author not simply have finished his books, seen

them published and moved on? Maybe so – but would he have written so prodigally, so insightfully, so memorably, or with such unstinting resolve? WG, like any other artist, must be taken in the round or not at all. Yes, he fussed and tinkered, more often than not to no appreciable avail and, yes, at times he was moved to question the merit of his work. But that he felt driven, despite acclaim, to do ever better was what kept him writing, and that right well – so I'll take him, and it, every time.

\* \* \* \* \*

## NOTES AND SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, 7 May 2002

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs*, 1.5

<sup>3</sup> *Argosy* 28, #12, Fleetway Publications Ltd, December 1967

<sup>4</sup> *Poldark's Cornwall*, The Bodley Head and Webb & Bower Ltd, 1983

<sup>5</sup> *Books and Bookmen*, October 1959

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

<sup>7</sup> As 3

<sup>8</sup> This discounts the single change made in *The Forgotten Story* which saw the name of the tale's ill-fated ship revised from *The Maid of Pendennis* to *The Grey Cat* in order that Doubleday could publish the book in 1958 with a snappier title.

<sup>9</sup> Though, like many fifties paperbacks, lacking any publication data, the book's distinctive back-cover ad (*A Bravington Ring is a Joy for ever*) also appears on a Collins White Circle re-issue of Agatha Christie's *N or M?* published (presumably contemporaneously) in April 1953.

<sup>10</sup> Letter, dated 8 June 1973, in the Library of Congress Doubleday and Company records, 1882-1992

<sup>11</sup> Letter, dated 6 January 1974 – source as previous

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Richard Church, dated 6 February 1970, held in the Church archive of the University of Manchester's John Rylands Library

<sup>13</sup> Letter to this author dated 2 August 1999

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