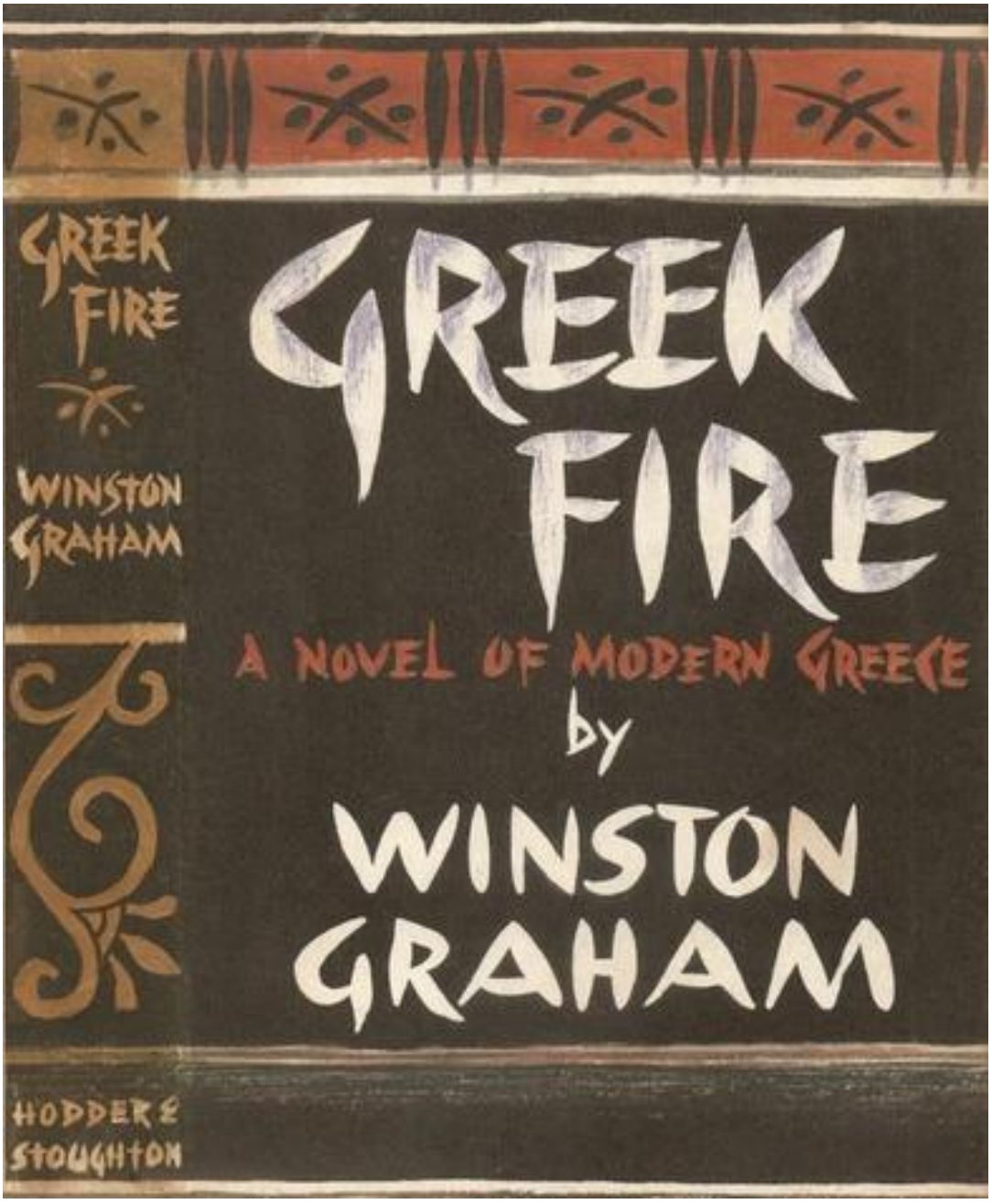
In the classic tradition : *Greek Fire*

After serving a long and arduous but ultimately successful apprenticeship with Ward, Lock & Co., for whom he had written seventeen novels, most later disowned, Winston Graham came to the end of the 1940s on the cusp of becoming the author he always imagined he could be: celebrated, courted, the world his oyster. He began the new decade with not only a new novel and a new agent, but also a new publisher – Hodder & Stoughton – who "promised to publish [him] with the greatest possible enthusiasm and put their whole publicity and sales force behind [his] books".[1] In the next ten years he published eight novels: *Night Without Stars*, which was filmed for the cinema from the author's screenplay; *Fortune is a Woman*, also filmed for the cinema, from a Gilliat / Launder script; Poldark romances *Jeremy Poldark* and *Warleggan*, which were both filmed for television in the 1970s and again in the 2010s; *The Little Walls*, which in 1955 won the inaugural Crime Writers' Novel of the Year Award; *The Sleeping Partner*, filmed for both cinema and television in the 1960s, and, arguably best of all, *The Tumbled House*, which Granada TV hoped to serialise in seven parts but finally could not (although it was successfully dramatised on national radio).[2] WG's other 1950s novel, slipped unobtrusively in among those better-known high achievers, is the over-looked,[3] eclipsed, undramatised poor relation, *Greek Fire*.

It was also in the 1950s, with post-war austerity loosening its grip on a weary nation and his own fortunes on the rise that WG began seriously to indulge his love of travel. That the principal setting of *Night Without Stars* is the French Riviera, the action of *The Little Walls* moves between Amster-dam and Capri and the plot of *Greek Fire* unfolds in Athens and the Grecian hinterland suggests that the sights and sounds of the Mediterranean were sampled at an early stage, and probably more than once. Indeed, this contemporary book jacket copy appears to confirm as much:

> *Winston Graham is known for his masterly novels of excitement and suspense, which have been widely acclaimed. Born in Manchester, he has spent most of his time in England, but he is also a great traveller and his books reflect the many aspects of life he has absorbed and experienced.*[4]

While it is true that WG described foreign places – Estoril, Bucharest, Prague, Venice, Milan, Madeira – in some of his earlier novels without having visited any of them ("Successful novel writing depends not on the quantity of your experience but on the quality of your imagination," he said at the time)[5], one senses in his '50s Southern European stories the persuasive patina imparted by personal experience.



Hodder & Stoughton, January 1958. After they met at a party, WG sent Victor Gollancz a copy of his new novel, but only after removing its "pretty terrible" jacket.[6]

But though you might holiday in Greece and enjoy it, there surely needs to be more to stimulate the impetus to embark on a novel. The milieu of *Greek Fire* is politics, in particular the threat of the reins of government falling into the hands of unscrupulous left-wing sympathisers, and it was surely the turbulent history of Greece's recent political past – a history of failed and successful *coups d'état*, the schizophrenic lurching between kingdom and republic, the post-war Communist uprising that precipitated three years of bitter civil war, the enduring instability of a state described as "a house of cards kept in being by money from the West"[7] and the seeming inability of any political ideology to subdue the will of a fiercely independent and self-reliant people – that attracted the writer. And where better to set a tale about democracy in peril than its birthplace? The pre-eminence of the Athenian city state's place in ancient history – long gone but not forgotten – adds extra piquancy.

The cast of WG's mind when he drafted the book was confirmed in a letter sent to Max Reinhardt in 1969. With Max's Bodley Head then in the final stages of preparing the text for republication, WG wrote:

> *I have been considering whether to include an abbreviated foreword in the new edition of GREEK FIRE. After changing my mind forty-seven times, I think I will have it included, if there is still time ...*[8]

There was time – just. The book went to the printers the following day with this last-minute foreword added:

> *Dictatorships are repulsive in any form. This novel of Greece was written in 1956 when the danger of a left-wing coup was much greater than of a right. That it happened in a contrary fashion eleven years later* [he refers to the right-wing coup of 1967] *does not invalidate what I wrote then.*
>
> *WG.*

The protagonist of the novel, Gene Vanbrugh, is a fourth-generation Greek-American who, based in Paris, serves as the European representative of New York publishers Muirhead and Lewis. About thirty-five, he was studying at the University of Athens when the Germans invaded Greece in

1941, fought against them and then, after the war remained to support the British and American-backed Greek government in its ultimately successful campaign to subdue and disarm ELAS, the Greek People's Liberation Army, who wished to impose Communist rule. His deep-seated antipathy to their cause is communicated to George Lascou, leader of the supposedly centre-right EMO who, after the forthcoming election plans to stage an Army-backed coup:

> *I've seen Communism at work. I've seen the cold mass slaughter, the children dying, the brutality to women, the absolute ruthless callousness in gaining one set objective. Above all, I've seen the lies – so that no words have any meaning any more. Nothing that's worth living for has any meaning any more … That's what I want. Just to stop you. Just to stop that ever happening in Greece again.*

But from where does this character spring?

First published in January 1958, the novel is dedicated "To Gene" which, in light of the leading character's name being Gene Vanbrugh, is surely significant. However, of the twenty-four first edition dedications WG made in his long career, this is much the most impenetrable. Others relate to his wife and family, special friends, employees and various helpers, but, aside from being yet another sly nod to Jean (of which Gene is a homophone, which probably pleased him), this one gives little away. Too little, he may have concluded, for, in the novel's 1970 Bodley Head reprint, the dedication is tweaked to read "To Gene Van Dee" – and this same unusual name crops up again in a detailed, undated character sketch found in one of the author's notebooks:

> *Gene Van Dee: Aged about 40, would pass for 24. Slight build and insignificant; a tight, almost mean mouth; hair that has receded at the temples but not in a way to make him look old; very deep set pale eyes. A way of being off-handedly witty. He talks from between rather tight lips and his smile is almost toothless. One eye not quite the same colour as the other. He has a nervous habit of clearing his throat and another of passing a hand over his sleek brown hair. The most significant thing about him is his insignifi-*

> *cance. But at close quarters one realises that he has very sad eyes. The impression that he is a little squirt of an American out after a girl dissolves after a few minutes talk.*[9]

So, did WG consciously draw his protagonist from this particular man? Speaking in 1937 about the extent to which authors tend to base their characters on real people, he said:

> *Do authors take characters wholesale from life in the manner they are widely supposed to? I should say in respect of minor characters, yes, but in respect of major ones, no. I am frequently asked whether my own characters are found in this way or are they, rather, always purely creatures of my imagination? Contradictory as it may seem, my answer is yes to both. I seldom take major characters straight from life to insert into a story for the simple reason that they will seldom fit [but] what I do do a great deal is observe characteristics of people around me, which then frequently attach themselves, either spontaneously or by design, to some character on whom I am working ... It stands to reason that a character in a novel is convincing in proportion to the extent to which he comes to life and behaves naturally, and that must depend first upon the quality of the author's imagination and second upon the truth of the author's observation of the people around him. But to say that you have taken a living person and put him into a book only means that you have taken the externals, the shell of some person you know and breathed into it the seed of your imagination where by the character assumes individuality and a life of its own. But that that life and that character correspond in actual fact to the life and character of the person who has served as a model I don't believe the greatest insight can ensure.*[10]

So, getting down to cases, it seems that WG noted in Gene Van Dee and then jotted down a range of traits and characteristics including an indeterminate age – *about 40, would pass for 24* – very deep set, pale eyes, an almost mean mouth with rather tight lips, and a seeming personality

deficit – *the most significant thing about him is his insignificance* – which, on the second page of his novel, transmutes into this:

> *Vanbrugh was the sort of man you wouldn't notice in the street: he could have been twenty-five or forty, and his tight rather craggy face, his deep-set, pale-eyed inner containment made no substantial first impression.*

Thus, from a few words pencilled in a notebook leaps a character vigorous enough to carry an idea, the bones of a plot, ultimately an entire novel. So, who was Gene Van Dee?

In the early 1950s (and bearing in mind that Gene Vanbrugh was the Paris-based representative of American publishers Muirhead and Lewis), Eugene "Gene" Van Dee was the Paris-based representative for MPAA, the Motion Picture Association of America. His name crops up numerous times during this period in *Variety*, *Blow-Up* and other trade magazines, where his attendance at the Venice, Cannes and other Film Festivals is noted. In 1952, he helped re-negotiate with the French government the Blum-Byrnes Agreement which, when first signed off in 1946, allowed for the opening of French markets to American products (including, most controversially, Hollywood films) in exchange for the liquidation of war debts. In 1947 Van Dee worked in Poland for the MPEA (Motion Picture Export Association, from which the MPAA evolved), handling "distribution for all the major American studios in what were regarded as troublesome areas in Europe and elsewhere abroad"[11] and in 1953/4, relocated, still with MPAA, to Rome. But his presence in London is also recorded: on 7 October 1943 he married Erika Weichselbaum, an Austrian refugee, in Paddington and the couple's two children, Karen and Peter, were born in Marylebone in 1945 and 1950 respectively.

Born Eugeniusz Domachowski to Polish immigrant parents in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1919, but raised in Oak Park, Illinois, Van Dee[12] had a remarkable war. After education in Paris and Poland, in 1939, at the age of twenty, he found himself in Warsaw when the Germans began bombing the city on 1 September and, having recently secured a job as editor-broadcaster of English and French programmes on Polish short-wave radio, his was "the voice heard round the world" that reported first-hand what

was happening.[13] After being forced to flee the city, he returned via Italy to the USA, where he began advocating for US intervention in the war. He then enlisted (under his mother's maiden name) in the Canadian Royal Air Force, but, following a training accident in Scotland, was invalided out of the service before seeing any action. He next joined the BBC in London, helping to devise and develop propaganda initiatives, at first full-time and then, after being recruited by the American Office of War Information (OWI), on a part-time basis until OWI posted him back to Warsaw as their Information Officer.



Gene, Erika and Karen Van Dee, March 1950[14]

Following the dissolution of OWI in September 1945, its international operations devolved to the U.S. State Department's Information Service, for whom Van Dee continued to work in the immediate post-war period, but when the American film industry asked him to become its manager in

Poland, he left the diplomatic service for MPEA. He resigned as MPAA's rep in Italy and Spain in 1955.

So where did WG meet him? Possibly in Paris, which he visited with Anthony Pelissier to audition actresses for the part of Alix in *Night Without Stars* or, equally likely, at the Savile Club through mutual film-world friends. The only thing certain is that we'll never know.[15]



Greek Fire was written, as noted above, in 1956, copyrighted in 1957[16] and published on 9 January 1958 and, while of its time, still reads well. It's a short novel – less than half the length of *The Grove of Eagles* or *Bella*

Poldark – tightly plotted, its taut prose evoking from the outset in its presentation of Athens the *cosmopolitan*: a Turkish doorway, a mandarin's hat, a Lithuanian hostess, Macedonian singers, a Corfiot Comte, a Yugo-Slav ballerina, an Italian maid, Spanish dancers, a French song, the sad nostalgias of Seville and Castile; the *historical*: stone steps cut before Charlemagne, the old Turkish quarter at the foot of the Acropolis, a first century B.C. tower put up by Cyrrhestes, a two-and-a-half-thousand-year-old play, a three-thousand-year-old letter opener cum murder weapon, the marble ruins of Cimon and Pericles, a temple rebuilt by Croesus, robbed by Nero, restored by Domitian, where Plutarch was a priest; and the *cultural*: Byzantine madonnas, beauty by Byron out of Polyclitus, a quote from Aristotle, an imagined audience of Euripides, Aristophanes, Socrates, Democritus, maybe Plato – "in a sense, the first Communist" – with his mother and father. Named city locations and landmarks – Ommonia Square, Kolonaki Square, Zappeion Park, Lycabettus – help put us there.

WG also touches in character traits with deft economy, thus Gene: a lean slant to his jaw, restless bony hands ... [who walks] like a mean-natured cat expecting trouble; Anya, whose eyes weren't black, they were brown but, made darker by their lashes ... had a sort of fronded brilliance which was quite devastating; Mme Lindos, who has certain architectures of forehead and nose and cheek-bone which defy the erosions of age, and General Telechos, a political ally with all the cunning of the slightly stupid man, and all the obstinacy.

The fundamentals of locale are imparted:

> *In spite of its history and in spite of all the glitter of Athens ... I know the other side all too well. I know it's badly-governed, poverty-stricken, unenterprising, part-East, part-West with a dash of the Balkans shaken in to make it more difficult.*
>
> *Under the surface prosperity, we have a food shortage, except for the rich, and the old, old bogy of inflation – and unemployment, or under-employment everywhere. Many of our people – perhaps two million, perhaps more than a quarter of us all – have to live on less than two thousand*

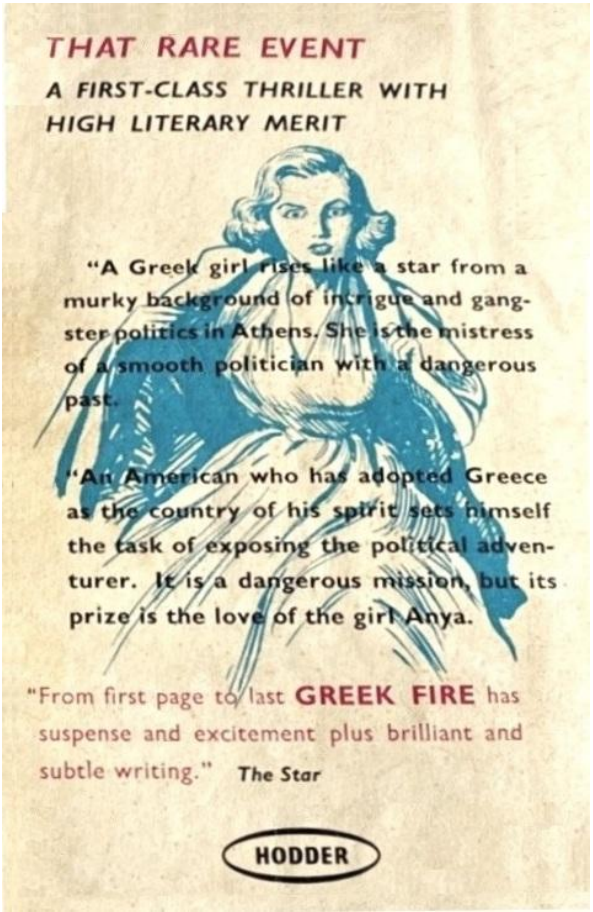
> *drachmae a year. What is that in your currency? Seventy dollars? That is what we have to face and have to cure.*

Even the glimpse from a speeding car of a wayside village leaves a clean impression:

> *Inevitable café, inevitable yellow mongrels, tiny Byzantine church, eucalyptus trees, tattered buildings, black-clad idlers staring.*

The "thriller" elements of the plot – blackmail attempted by one and effected by another, two (possibly three) murders, a manhunt and a betrayal – are all made subservient to the love affair which, while central to all the rest, is the story's least persuasive part, with stage-smart dialogue aplenty unable to convincingly explain away the lady's implausibly inconsistent behaviour. This uneasy dichotomy is reflected in the contrasting ways the work was subsequently promoted, with some art departments choosing to stress the sensational:





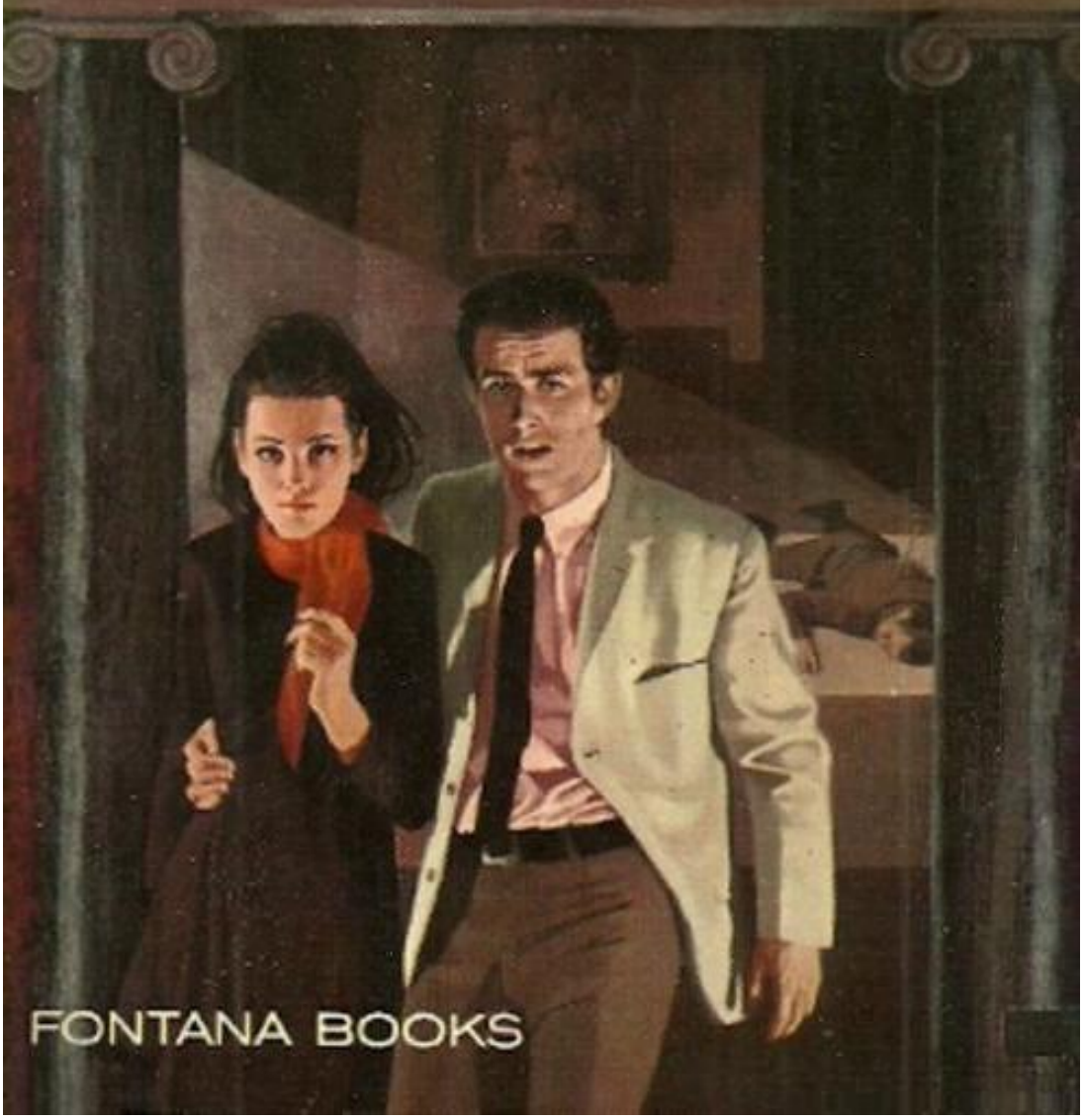

MURDER!
VENGEANCE!
SUSPENSE!
PASSION!
JOHN BULL Scoops!
WINSTON GRAHAM'S
New Suspense Serial
"Greek Fire"
Only in JOHN BULL can you read as a serial, before book publication, Winston Graham's gripping story of a mysterious Englishman wanted by the police, by a ruthless politician and by one of the most beautiful women in Greece.
Also in this Enlarged Issue
8-page Extra
HITLER'S SPIES IN BRITAIN
More Startling Disclosures
HURRY!
Give your Newsagent a standing order today
JOHN BULL 4d.
OUT TOMORROW

WINSTON GRAHAM

GREEK FIRE

Another gripping novel of suspense
from the author of MARNIE

"Rips along" DAILY TELEGRAPH



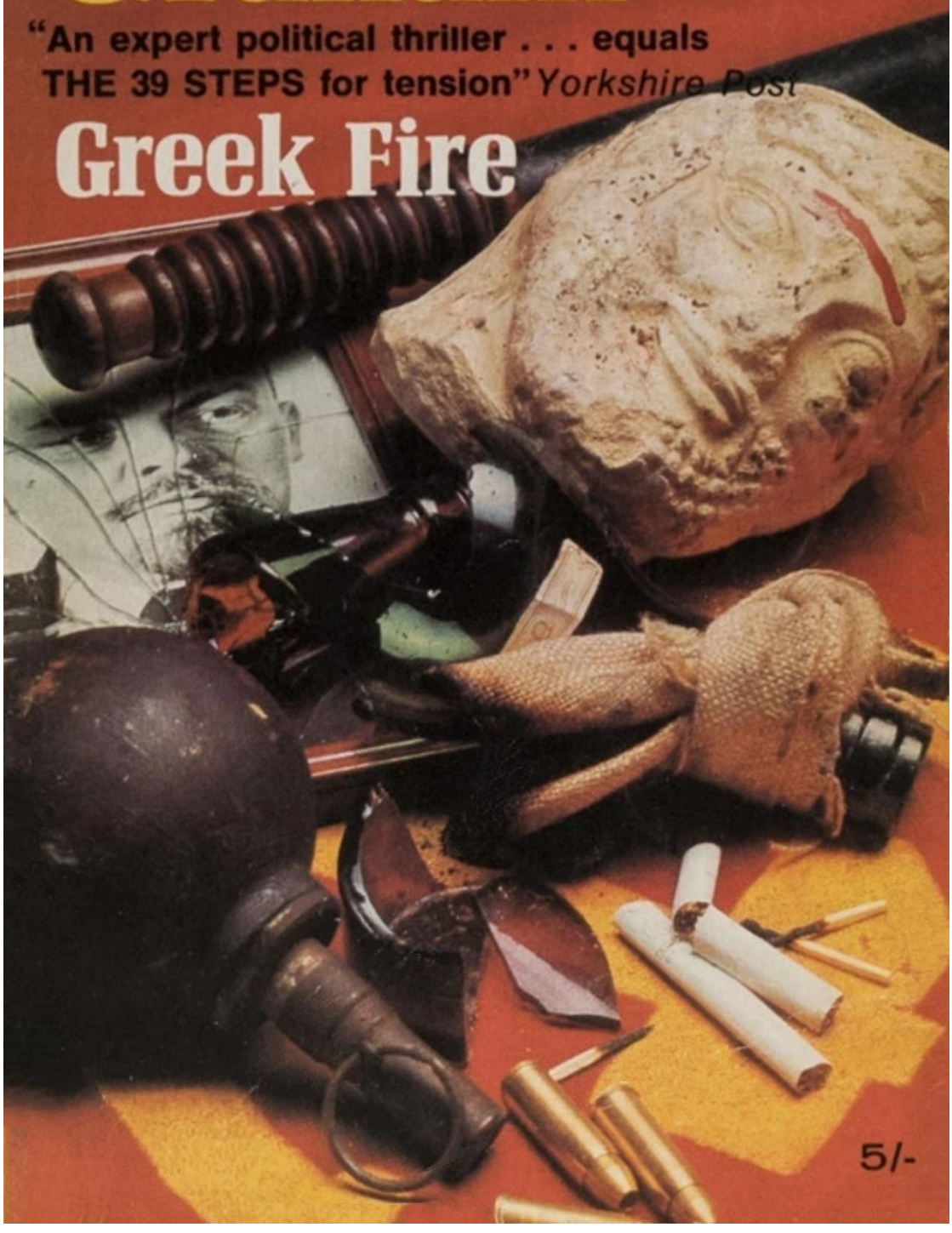
FONTANA BOOKS

Winston Graham

Fontana

"An expert political thriller . . . equals THE 39 STEPS for tension" *Yorkshire Post*

Greek Fire



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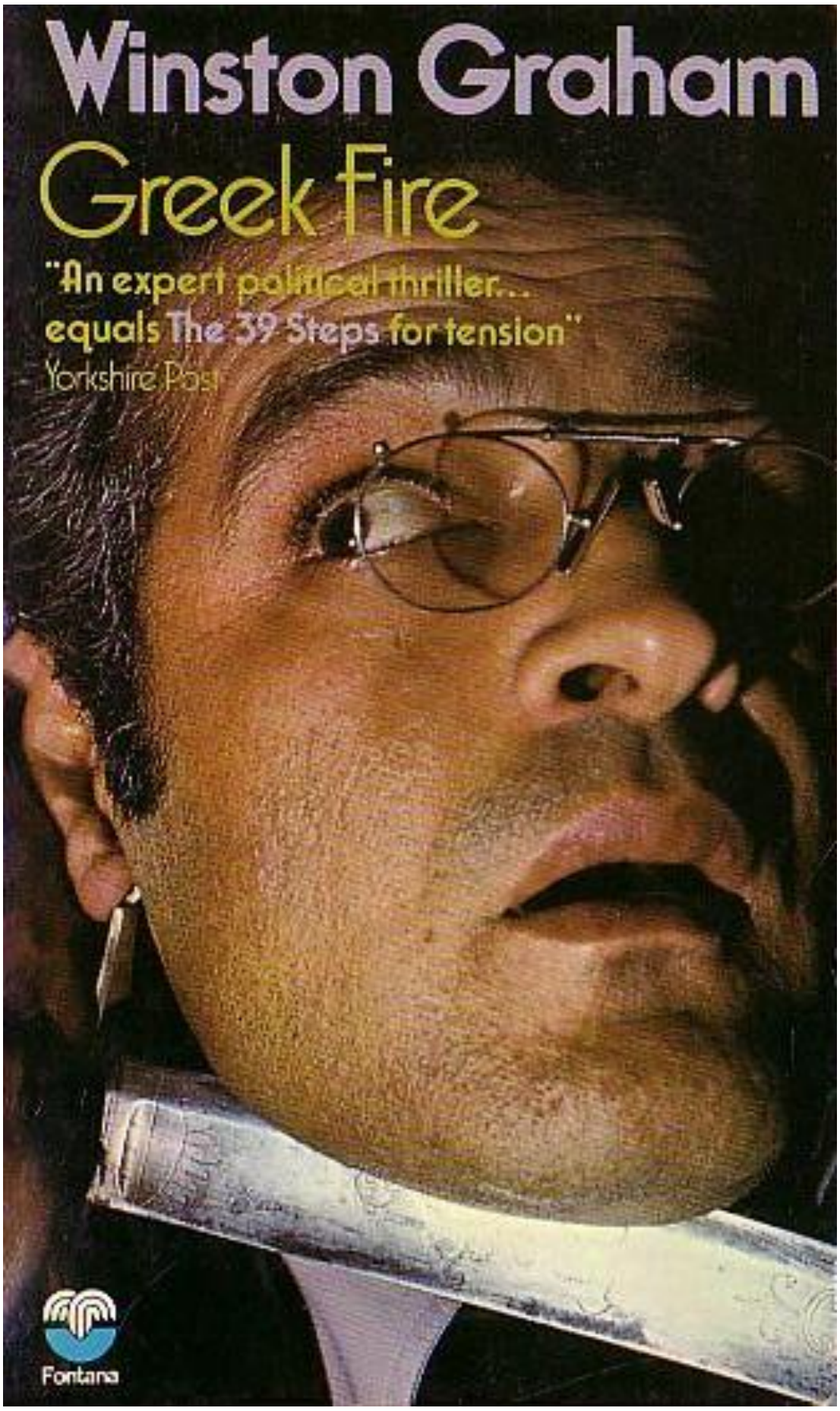
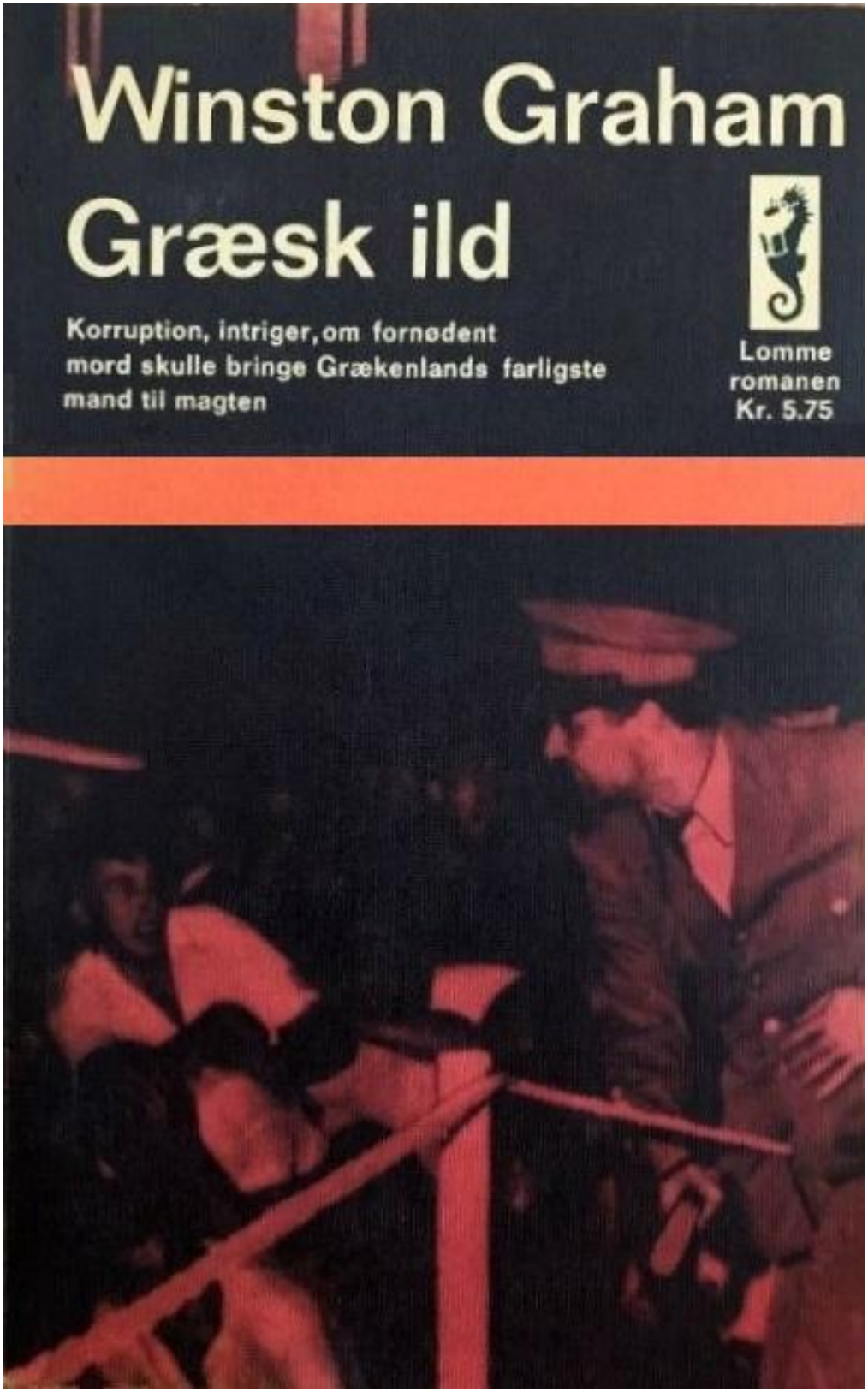
Winston Graham

Greek Fire

"An expert political thriller... equals The 39 Steps for tension"
- Yorkshire Post



Fontana



Page 10: Hodder, 1960, front and back

Page 11: from the *Daily Express* of 29 October 1957, advertising the novel's forthcoming serialisation in *John Bull*, where it appeared, pre-publication,

from 2 to 30 November 1957 in five abridged weekly parts (this WG's fifth and last such *John Bull* serialisation). The illustration by Fawcett below is from part four, 23 November.

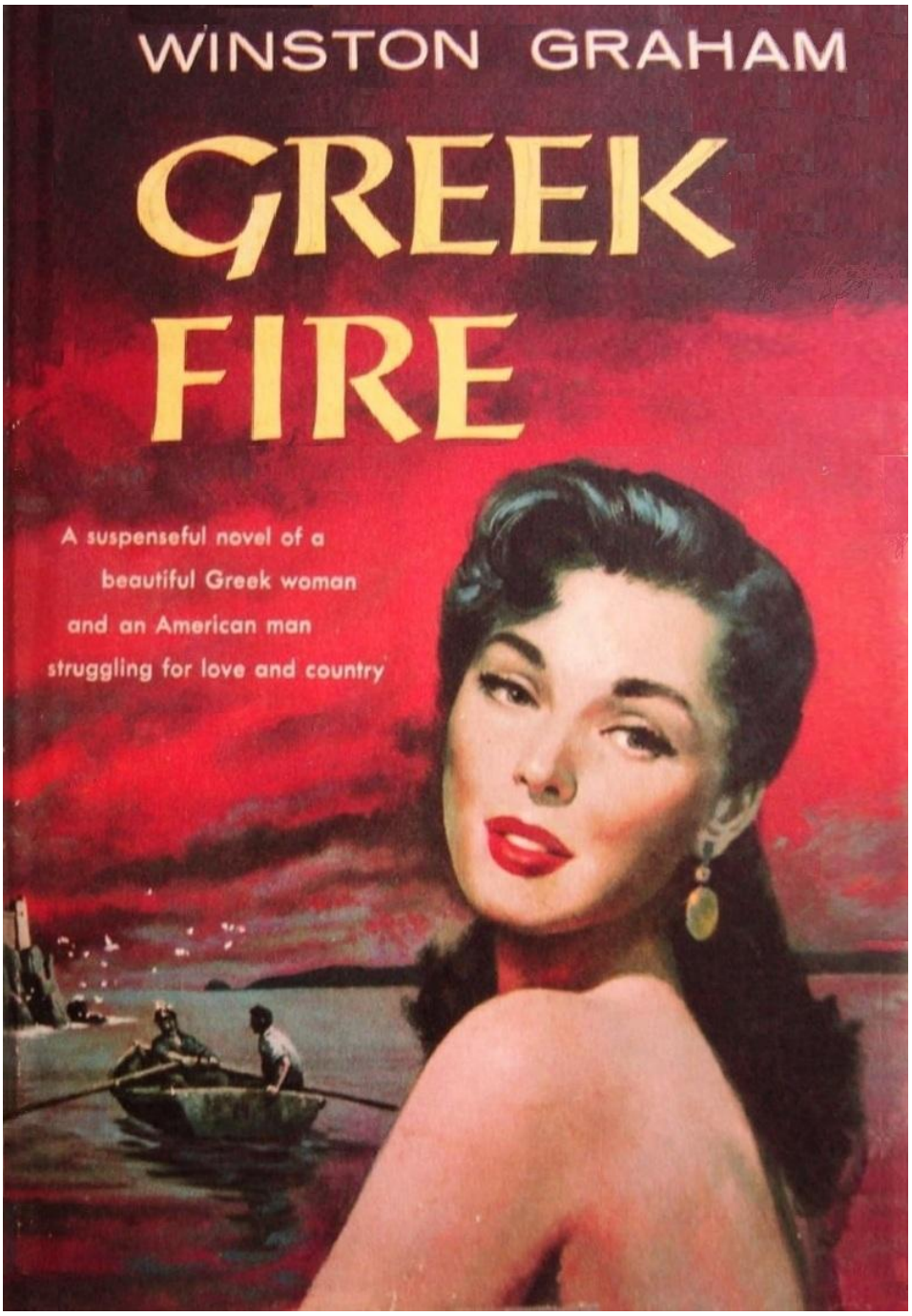


In the wall was a panel about two feet square. "In!" she hissed.

Pages 12-14: Fontana, 1967; 1969; 1972

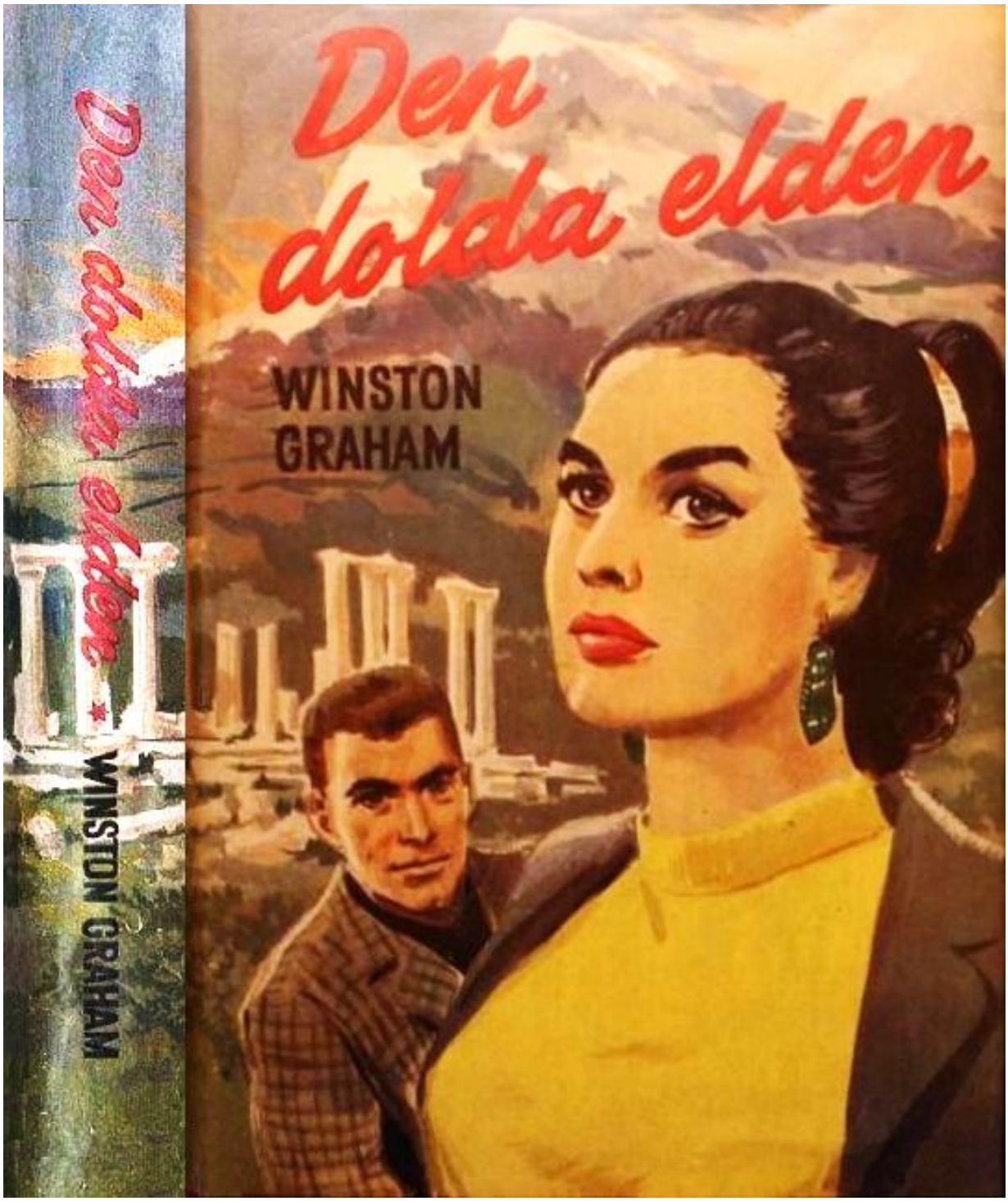
Page 15: Danish, Lomme, 1965. The tagline reads: *Corruption, intrigue and, if necessary, murder would bring Greece's most dangerous man to power*.

and others the romantic:



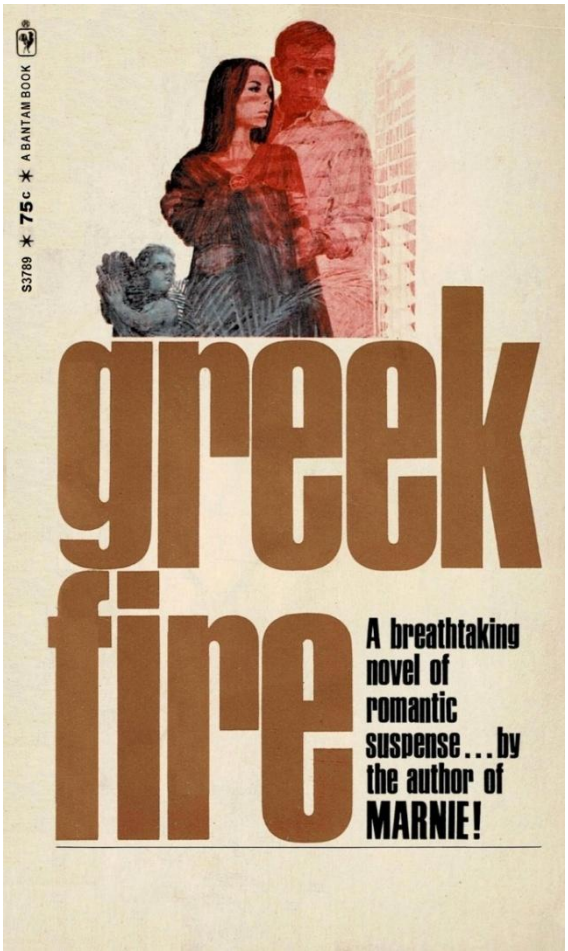
Doubleday (USA), 1958. In Chapter Three of the book, the brother of the first murder victim misidentifies Gene as a "reporter", as, too, with less

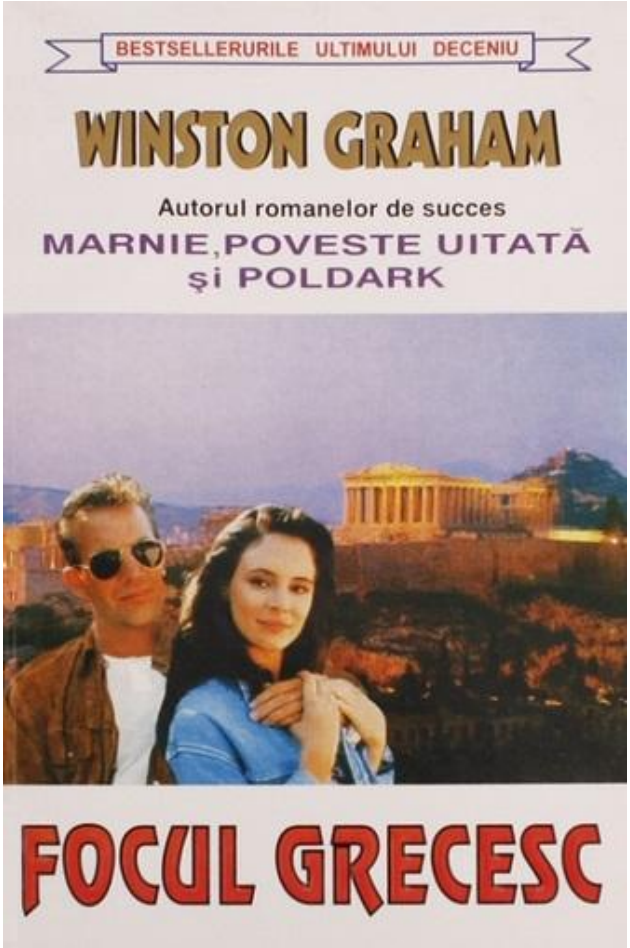
excuse, does the author of the blurb on the front flap of this jacket. Given the task, he or she clearly skimmed the book and dashed off a few paragraphs without once thinking it might be a good idea to actually read it. Not to be outdone, on the back cover, WG implacably informs readers that he "lives peacefully in Wales"! Curiously, whilst other editions of *Greek Fire* comprise 36 chapters, this one, by splitting Chapter 14 in two, runs to 37.



Previous page: Swedish, as *The Hidden Fire*, Wahlströms, 1960

Below: Bantam, 1968 and Romanian, Orizonturi, 1996





* * * * *

Contemporary reviews from the UK, US and Australia indicate that the novel was generally[17] well-received:

> Greek Fire *is a sophisticated, fast-moving thriller on contemporary lines, about a quiet American in Athens. Though Gene Vanbrugh fought with the Greek Resistance, and later against the Communists, he is, at the time of this story, strictly a lone wolf; and pure altruism draws him from his publishing office in Paris when he gets wind of another attempt at a Communist coup. The smiling villain of the piece is mystery man George Lascou, whose new centre party, with high-sounding ideals, threatens to sweep the*

polls at the next election. Vanbrugh is in search of proof that Lascou is a Communist, written proof that, via a troupe of entertainers, has found its way to Spain. He induces the Spaniards to part with the letters, and at the same time works on Lascou, not entirely disinterestedly, through his mistress. There are the proper number of alarms and counter-alarms, murders and escapes; there is the necessary and effective idyll on Mount Parnassus. In fact the book is nearly a model of its kind, and if it has a flaw it is that the meaning of the incriminating letters when they are read out is not immediately clear. Mr. Graham's plot is excellent, and his characters are attractive, but his story-telling still needs a little more incisiveness, a little less ambiguous under-statement. (*Times*, 9 January 1958)

Greek Fire *delves deeply into local Greek politics, sometimes brilliantly illuminating issues, sometimes merely obscuring ... Mr. Graham takes his characters through much of Greece, and by means of a dinner party conversation enters into spirited and rewarding dissections of its classical ideals, literary, political and aesthetic ... Mr. Graham lets philosophic abstractions and political details loom too large in the foreground, with the result that the emotions of his characters tend to appear unreal and over-simplified when they are eventually suggested.* (From *Preoccupations in Greece* in *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 January 1958)

HELLENIC INTRIGUE

Why is it, asks a character in Greek Fire*, "that a respectable publisher should come to Greece and stay at a third-rate hotel ... and then move on from one dingy apartment to another so fast that the police cannot catch up with him?" Why, indeed, unless said publisher is a central figure in a novel of suspense – in which case his behaviour is hardly exceptional. Gene Vanbrugh, the shifty publisher, has evidently more on his mind than signing up new authors, and once one accepts his quixotic motivation, Winston*

Graham's latest novel moves along with compelling pace and authority ... Greek Fire *is Mr. Graham's best book in some time*. (Martin Levin, *Saturday Review*, 1 March 1958)

An expert political thriller and a gripping novel of conspiracy. Equals [John Buchan's] The Thirty-Nine Steps *for suspense. Mr. Graham really knows Greece.* (*Yorkshire Post*)

Less intelligent than Ian Fleming and altogether more naïve, Winston Graham is nevertheless a true artist in the Fleming genre. (*Spectator*, 10 January 1958)

That rare event, a first-class thriller with high literary merit ... From first page to last, Greek Fire *has suspense and excitement plus brilliantly subtle writing*. (*Star*)

A beautifully written thriller. (Alan Fairclough, *Daily Mirror,* 10 January 1958)

A superior thriller and a first-class novel of character. (*News Chronicle*)

The drama is tremendous and you will find yourself completely immersed in the story. (*Southern Daily Echo,* 25 November 1967)

* * * * *

Some time in the late 1950s, WG was interviewed by Douglas Muggeridge, who was producing a radio programme for the BBC's Home Service called *The Art of Suspense*. Talking about *Greek Fire*, WG told him:

I'd often had the idea of writing a novel in which a man is wanted by the police and to escape them he joins a party which is being shown round a newspaper and as the newspaper is being printed so they come gradually to the end and the proprietor of the newspaper proudly takes a paper off the press and there is a photograph with WANTED

> *over the top of the man who is a member of the party. And that was rather a sort of a carrot in front of a donkey, that was something which one should work towards. But by the time I got there I nearly cut it out because it seemed to me it was striking a slightly false note. But I kept it in because it was the thing I had been moving towards.*[18]

All well and good, but also somewhat disingenuous, because WG had already used this very scenario in a previous novel, *No Exit*, published in 1940 and later "suppressed". Indeed, not only the dramatic scenario but some of the very text of the earlier novel was reproduced in the later. Thus:

> **No Exit:** *Men sat at Linotype machines setting up the columns. M. Palske began to explain again ...*
>
> **Greek Fire:** *In a room full of Linotype machines, at which men sat setting up the columns, M. Vyro halted the party and began to explain.*
>
> **NE:** *They entered the clangour of the foundry hall. Here the moulds were coming in and being thrust one by one into the giant casting-box. Beside this the great metal-pot was bubbling with molten metal; and at a signal the metal ran down the pipe into the casting-box, where it spread over the surface of the mould ... The casting-box kept opening, and men with leather gloves were picking out the semi-circular metal plates and carrying them still warm towards the subdued thunder of a distant door.*
>
> **GF:** *The group moved on to the foundry hall. Here moulds were coming in and being thrust into the giant casting-box. Beside this the great metal-pot was bubbling with molten metal; and at a signal the metal ran down the pipe into the casting-box, where it spread over the mould ... The casting-box was open, and men with leather gloves picked out the semi-circular metal plates and carried them still warm towards a further door.*
>
> **NE:** *So great was the noise that it was the reverse of sound.*

GF: *The roar of the screaming machines inside was like the obverse side of sound.*

NE: *M. Palske ... was now attempting to explain by extravagant gesture the manner in which the machines worked, how the paper raced round the plates at incredible speed, snatching the print as it seemed, and whirring down to the folders and cutters to be transformed into a completed newspaper and flipped down upon the delivery platform in quires of twenty-five ...*

GF: *By gestures Vyro himself was indicating exactly how the machines did their job, explaining how the paper raced round the plates at lightning speed, snatching at the print and whirring through the folders and cutters, to be magically transformed into a completed newspaper and flipped down upon the delivery platforms in quires.*

Incidentally, the idea of confronting a fugitive with his photo attached to the press report of a murder was probably cribbed from Alfred Hitchcock's 1935 thriller *The 39 Steps*,[19] which improved on Buchan's source novel in adding that extra twist to the tale.



THE EVENING DISPATC

WOMAN FOUND DEAD IN FLAT

Cleaner's Tragic Early Morning Discovery

VICTIM STABBED IN THE BACK

Mystery of Missing Canadian Rancher

RICHARD HANNAY

A well-dressed woman of about 35 was found early this morning by the cleaner lying with a knife in her back in a luxurious flat in Portland Mansions. The tenant,

Canada, and answered a
fortune during the time he was in that
country.

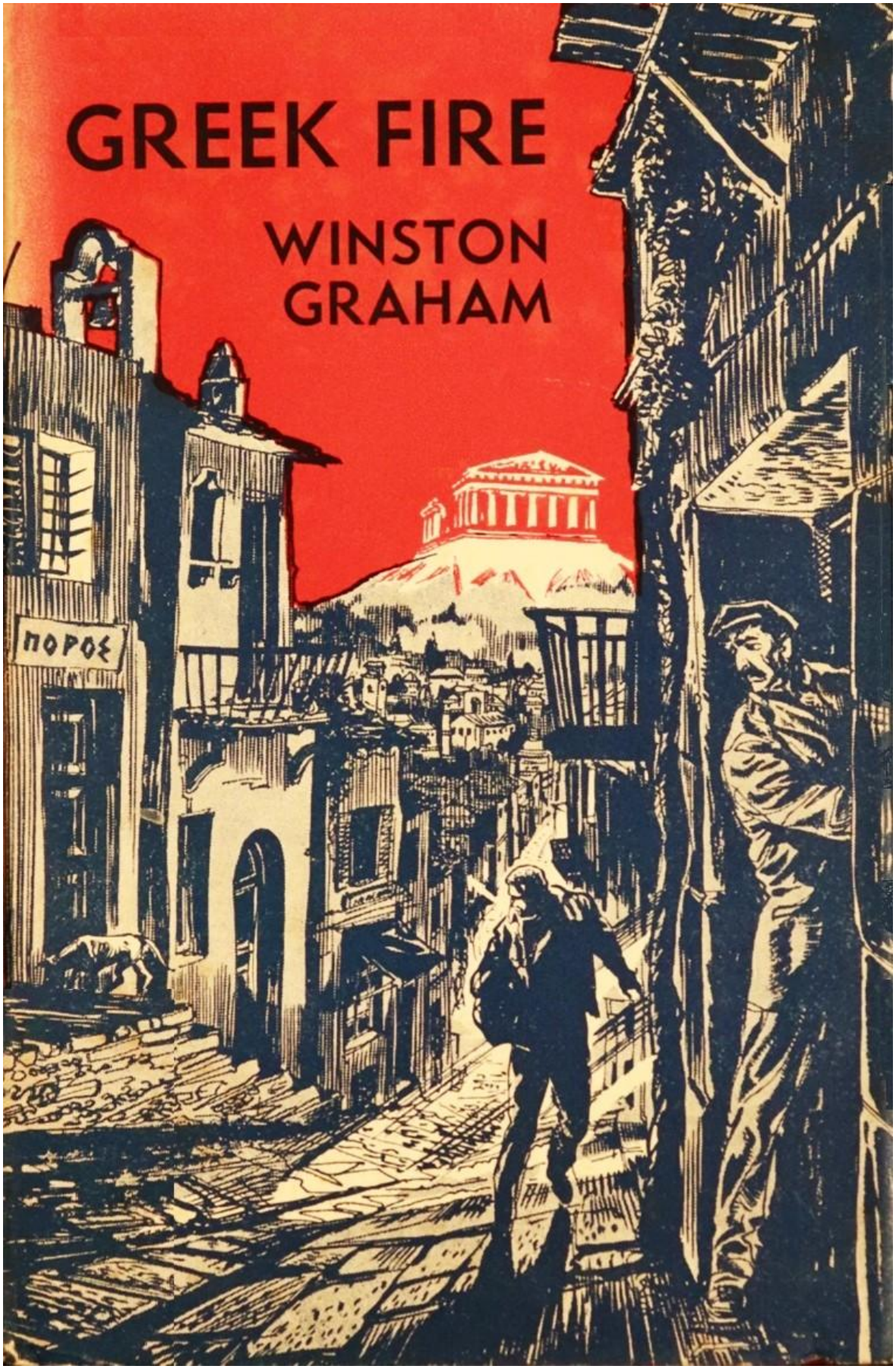
Previous page: *The 39 Steps* (1935). After being linked by circumstance to a murder in London, Richard Hannay flees north on The Flying Scotsman. At Edinburgh, a fellow passenger buys a newspaper which reports the crime alongside the fugitive's image.

* * * * *

When Odhams published *Greek Fire* for The Popular Book Club in 1959, it became the first WG novel to be so taken – although far from the last.

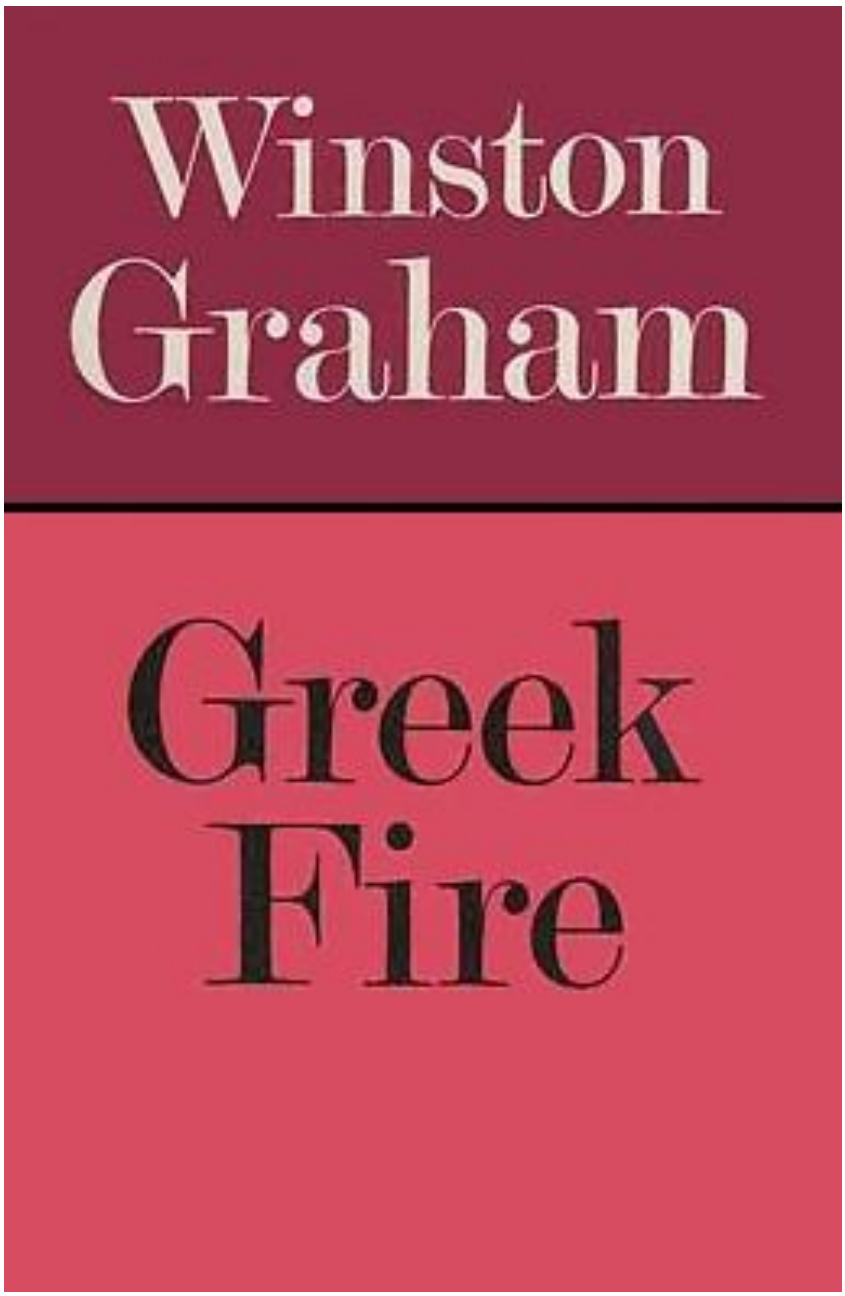


Translations appeared in Danish, Swedish, Romanian (see pages 15-19), Spanish and German (as *The Enigma of Anya Stonaris*) although, perhaps surprisingly, not in Greek. In 1970, The Bodley Head bought rights to the book from Hodder for £500 and published it in a handsome hardback edition as part of their ongoing series of Graham re-releases, which not only put bound copies back on the High Street, but also into a great many public libraries.



The Popular Book Club edition from Odhams, 1959

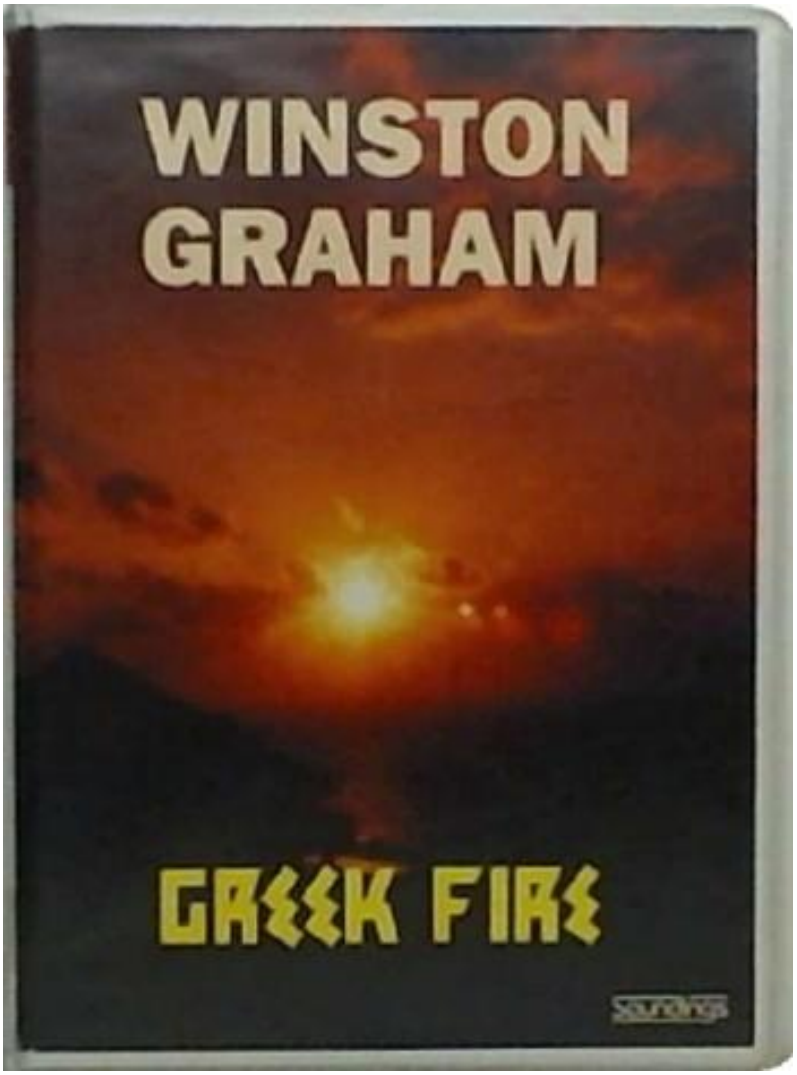
And, low profile or not, the book remained very popular. This was proved beyond doubt when Public Lending Rate statistics showing annual library loan totals began to emerge in the early 1980s. These revealed that, in the first year of the scheme's operation, the most borrowed of WG's eight 1950s novels – higher than all those more-acclaimed others listed above; higher, too, than big-hitters *Marnie* and *The Walking Stick* – was little *Greek Fire*, loaned in 1983/4 more than seventy thousand times.



All previous editions of *Greek Fire* were dedicated TO GENE, but in this 1970 Bodley Head reprint, the dedication reads, uniquely, TO GENE VAN DEE

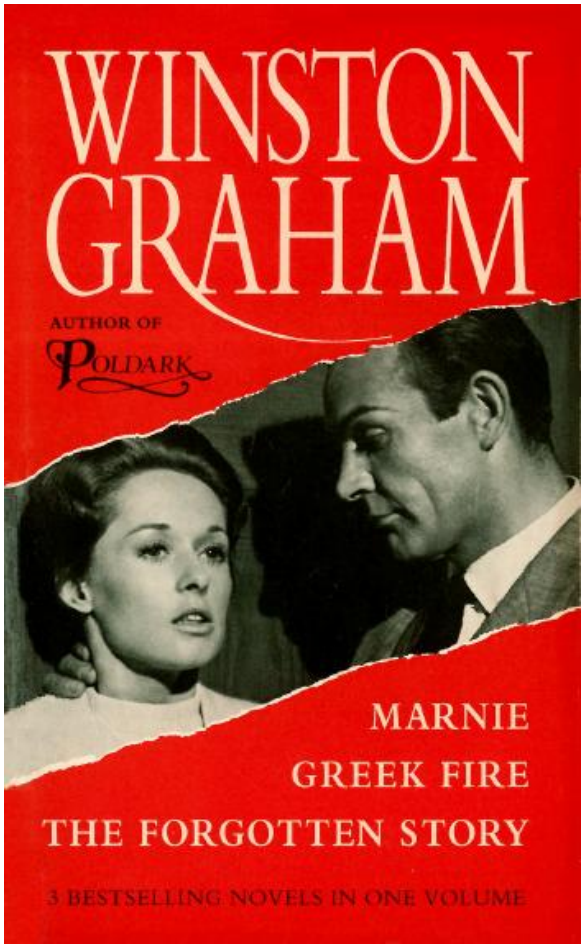
That peculiar quality of self-effacing strength that WG noted in Gene Van Dee is one he saw in himself – this is the man, after all, who, in 1962, described himself as "the most successful unknown novelist in England"[20] – and, in *Greek Fire*, he imparts it not only to Gene's *doppelgänger* Vanbrugh but to the book as a whole. Though brief, it bites. Though slick, it grips. "One of the most beautiful and sought-after women in Greece" and "a rag and a bone and a hank of hair" can be one and the same, it tells us; yes, and so, too, a fast-moving yarn and an unheralded classic. Appearances can deceive, for a while, but truth will out.

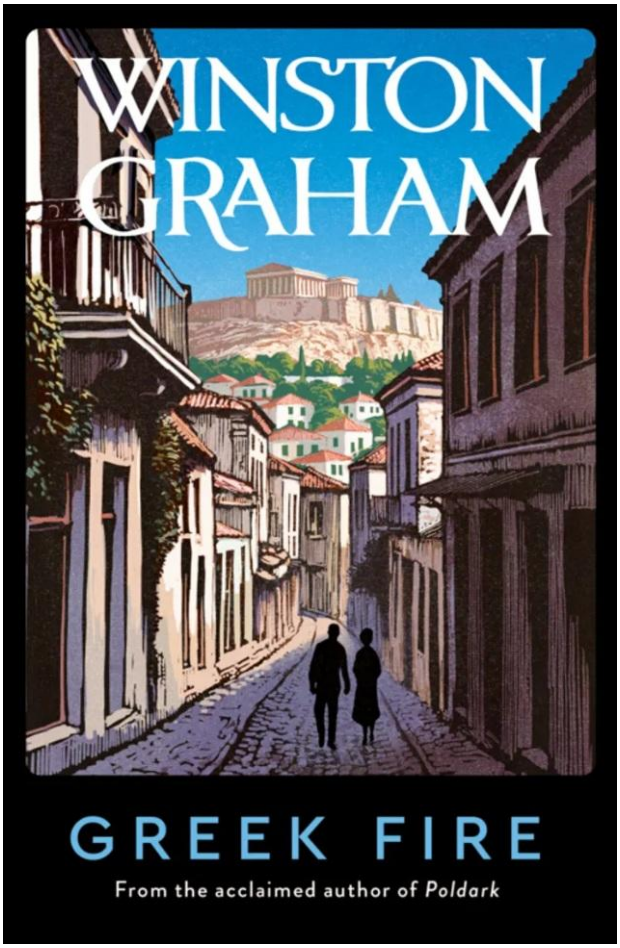
On weekdays at 14:02 from Thursday 8 to Friday 23 May 1980, the serial on BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* was *Greek Fire*, abridged in twelve parts by Pat McLoughlin and read by John Bennett, with an audiobook reading by Gordon Griffin following in 1992.



Audiobook, Soundings, 1992

Also in 1992, the novel was anthologised by Chapmans, and published in ebook form by Pan Macmillan in 2026:





Chapmans / Orion,[21] 1992 / Pan Macmillan ebook, 2026

And the *Greek Fire* burns steadily still.

* * * * *

NOTES AND SOURCES

[1] *Memoirs of a Private Man*, Macmillan 2003, Book One, Chapter Six
[2] *Saturday Night Theatre*, BBC Radio 4, 13 March 1971
[3] In *Memoirs* (see [1]) it is not even mentioned.
[4] From the front flap of the jacket of the 1959 Popular Book Club edition shown on page twenty-five.
[5, 10] From notes made by WG and held by the Courtney Library of Truro's Royal Cornwall Museum for a speech he

gave at least three times in 1936/7 on the theme of The Novelist at Work.

[6] Letter to Victor Gollancz dated 8 August 1958, held by the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick Library, Coventry

[7] *Greek Fire*, Chapter 22 of the Doubleday edition (see note at the top of page 18) or Chapter 21 of others.

[8] Letter dated 25 November 1969 from WG to MR, held in the British Library's archive of Max Reinhardt Papers

[9] RCM, Truro, Graham Archive, Notebook 3. In addition to the personal description quoted, WG records details of Van Dee's war record – the only foreign correspondent active during the [September 1939] Siege of Warsaw [note: this is incorrect: Van Dee seems to have been alone through the first week of the siege before being joined on 7 September by American photographer and documentary filmmaker Julien Bryan, who, nine days later, having been horrified by witnessing "the most dreadful slaughter of modern times", made a radio appeal exhorting President Roosevelt and the American people to "act"]; enlisted with and later invalided out of the Canadian Air Force; joined American Intelligence and was parachuted back into Poland – which confirm his "insignificance" to have been a perhaps carefully-cultivated illusion. The fictional Vanbrugh, like the real Van Dee, served through the war with distinction.

WG appears to have wide of the mark regarding Van Dee's age. In 1950, when in London for the birth of his son, Gene would have been thirty-one and when *Greek Fire* was written, in 1956, he would still only have been thirty-seven, so, regardless of when they actually met, "about 40" cannot be right.

[11] *New York Times*, 24 May 1947

[12] Exactly when he assumed the name Van Dee is not clear. He was known in Warsaw in 1939 and married in London in 1943 under his Polish birth name, but seems to have been employed by MPEA as "Van Dee". So, unless it was as a child in Oak Park in the 1920s, it must have been shortly after the end of WWII.

[13] Biographical data from *Sleeping Dogs and Popsicles* by Eugene H. Van Dee, University Press of America, 1996 and *Polskie Radio, Wrzesien 1939*, Institute of National Remembrance, Warsaw, 2022. Eugene's granddaughter Vanessa also provided useful information.

[14] *Forest Leaves*, 6 April 1950

[15] As for how often they met, in a speech that he gave in Truro on 1 March 1956, WG said that it was best to use characters whom the writer had only met "once or twice" rather than those he knew well. Then, going on to talk about the extreme difficulty of producing satisfying work, he suggested it was "inevitable" that a writer's finished work would disappoint its author, for the achievement was always less than the dream. To give just one example, only that day he had completed the twelfth chapter of a new novel but had then scrapped it all to begin again at Page 1. However, he did not consider this a waste of time because he now "knew that his characters were alive and which way the story was going".

Given the date of the speech, which was reported in the *West Briton and Royal Cornwall Gazette* of 5 March 1956, that novel must have been *Greek Fire*.

[16] The UK first edition of *Greek Fire* gives the text's year of copyright (1957) but not publication (1958). Later claims that the novel was *published* in 1957 spring from a failure to appreciate that year of copyright and year of publication are not necessarily the same.

[17] Writing to Frank Swinnerton on 17 December 1958, WG told him (re *Greek Fire*): "I had a book published in January which … I was in a mood to show only to my most intimate and understanding friends, who would make allowances; but for some inexplicable reason it caught the reviewers' eyes and it received more notice than any of my more prized – or less despised – publications. They didn't by any means all like it, but they all reviewed it … In spite of this, the book has done less well than its predecessor [*The Sleeping Partner*], as I predicted it would." (Letter held in the University of Arkansas Libraries Special Collections

archive in Fayetteville, USA of Frank Swinnerton's Papers (1964-1982).)

[18] Broadcast on the BBC Home Service on 25 May 1961

[19] After Hitchcock bought the screen rights to WG's 1961 novel *Marnie*, the two men began a correspondence; at the outset, in a letter dated 4 April, Graham acknowledged his enthusiasm for the director's oeuvre: "I have been an admirer of your work for so very long, and I think I have seen every film you have made since [1934's] THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH … I thought your last film, PSYCHO, one of the most brilliant." (Letter archived by the Margaret Herrick Library, Beverly Hills, CA.)

[20] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 April 1962 *et al*.

[21] This three-title Graham omnibus was published by Chapmans in 1992, then, after they were taken over by Orion the following year, kept in production under the new owner's imprint. Original Chapmans copies are rare.

The ad on page eight is from *The Bookseller*, 23 November 1957

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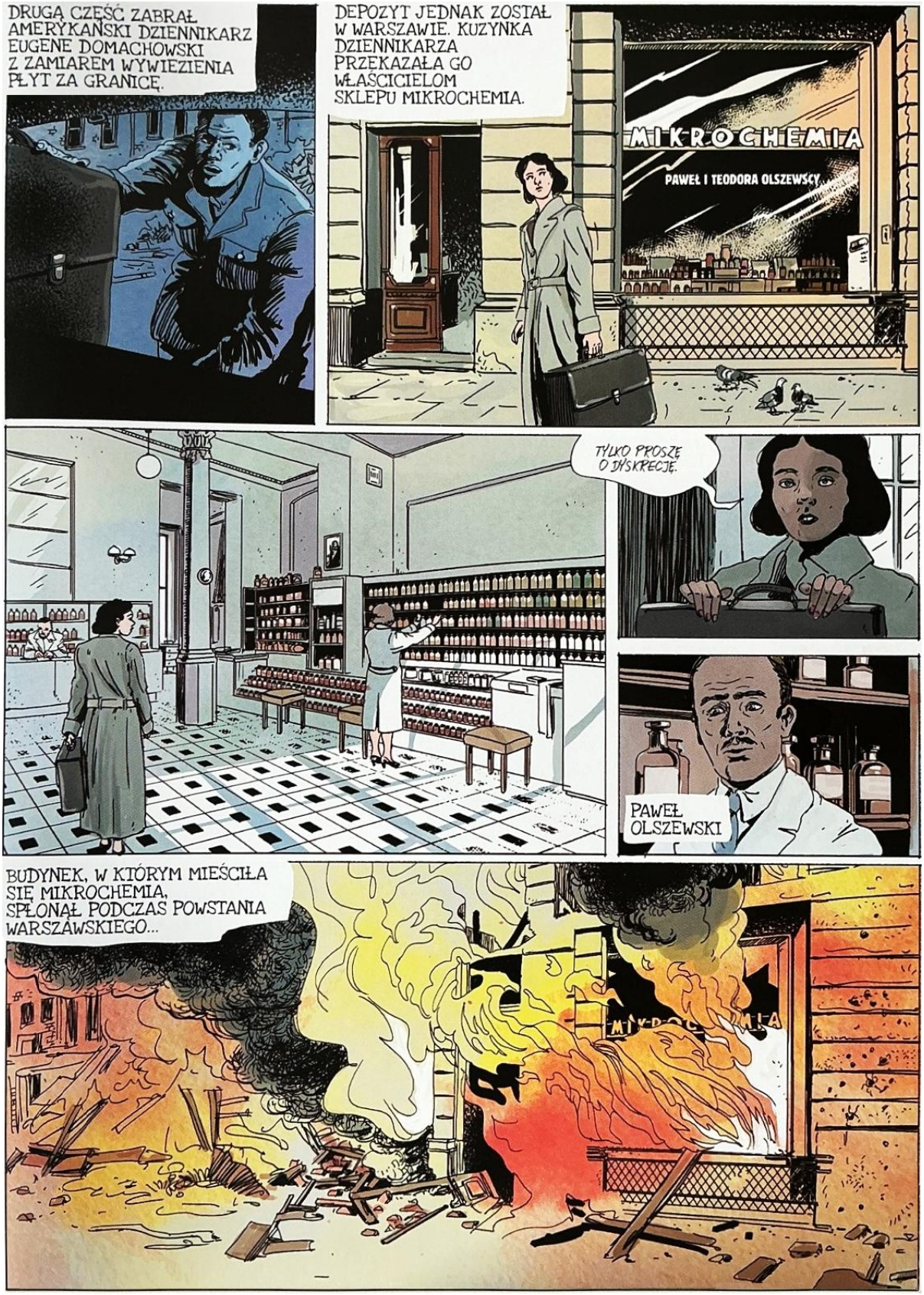
APPENDIX: Eugeniusz Domachowski at Polish Radio, 1939

By the end of September 1939, Polish Radio held more than 9,000 zinc sheet records, called metallophones, of broadcasts made in the previous five years. In the last days of September, just before the capitulation of Warsaw, when it was clear that the radio station would shortly fall into the hands of the German army, its director, Edmund Rudnicki, ordered that all the metallophones recorded in the previous month should be removed and hidden. This collection of circa 200 records, which preserved speeches by Warsaw's Mayor Stefan Starzynski, Foreign Minister Jozef Beck, Lieutenant Colonel Waclaw Lipinski and American documentarian Julien Bryan (who addressed Roosevelt and the American people) as well as directives, orders and songs broadcast to the citizens of Warsaw, was divided into three parts. The first, taken by Lipinski, survived the war and was recovered when searches were made for the "lost" archives in the late 1970s. The second



In 2022, Polish Radio published *Polskie Radio, Wrzesien 1939*, a 64-page booklet, part text, part-comic strip, in a final attempt to locate the missing third batch of records. Page 47 (above) relates Gene's part of the story.

tranche was entrusted to Eugeniusz Domachowski, an American journalist of Polish origin whose task at the radio station in 1939 was to verify the correctness of copy translated from English into Polish for broadcast. As a citizen of a neutral country (as the United States then was), it was hoped that Domachowski would be able to export and thereby preserve and enable the dissemination of these historic recordings from the first month of the war, but this did not happen. Rather, just before leaving Warsaw on 2 November 1939, he gave his part of the archive to his cousin Genowefa Domachowska, an American teacher of English. Before returning home in the summer of 1941, she passed the records on to Pawel and Teodora Olszewski, the parents of one of her students, who hid them in their Mikrochemia store at 124 Marszalkowska Street. Although the building burned to the ground during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, its basement, where the records were stored, survived, and when the Germans evacuated the city, the Olszewskis risked their lives to hide a box of records among the chemical reagents they were allowed to retrieve from the ruins of their shop. They held on to the records through to the end of the war and then, once back in Warsaw, stored them in their apartment until they heard in 1979 about Polish Radio's search for their whereabouts, upon which their son Stanislaw returned them to the radio station's record library. The Olszewskis had not known that these records were the only copies in the world – they assumed Polish Radio had duplicates – and if they hadn't responded to the appeal, finding the archive would not have been possible since no one had been told in 1939 to whom Eugeniusz Domachowski had given the records.

The third batch of records was taken by Miroslaw Panufnik, manager of the radio station's amplification plant, and hidden in his father's violin work-shop. Miroslaw died during the Warsaw Uprising and, after the fall of the city, his father was displaced to Pruszkow. Despite appeals and searches, this batch has never been recovered.

In all, 93 of the circa 200 metallophones survived to tell at least something of the tale of those fraught but momentous days. In 2022, Polska Radio issued a 5-CD set of recordings lifted from this cache, but, sadly, Gene's voice is not among them. If he did indeed broadcast in early September, as he claimed, and if those broadcasts were recorded, then those recordings must have been amongst the 100 or so now surely lost forever.