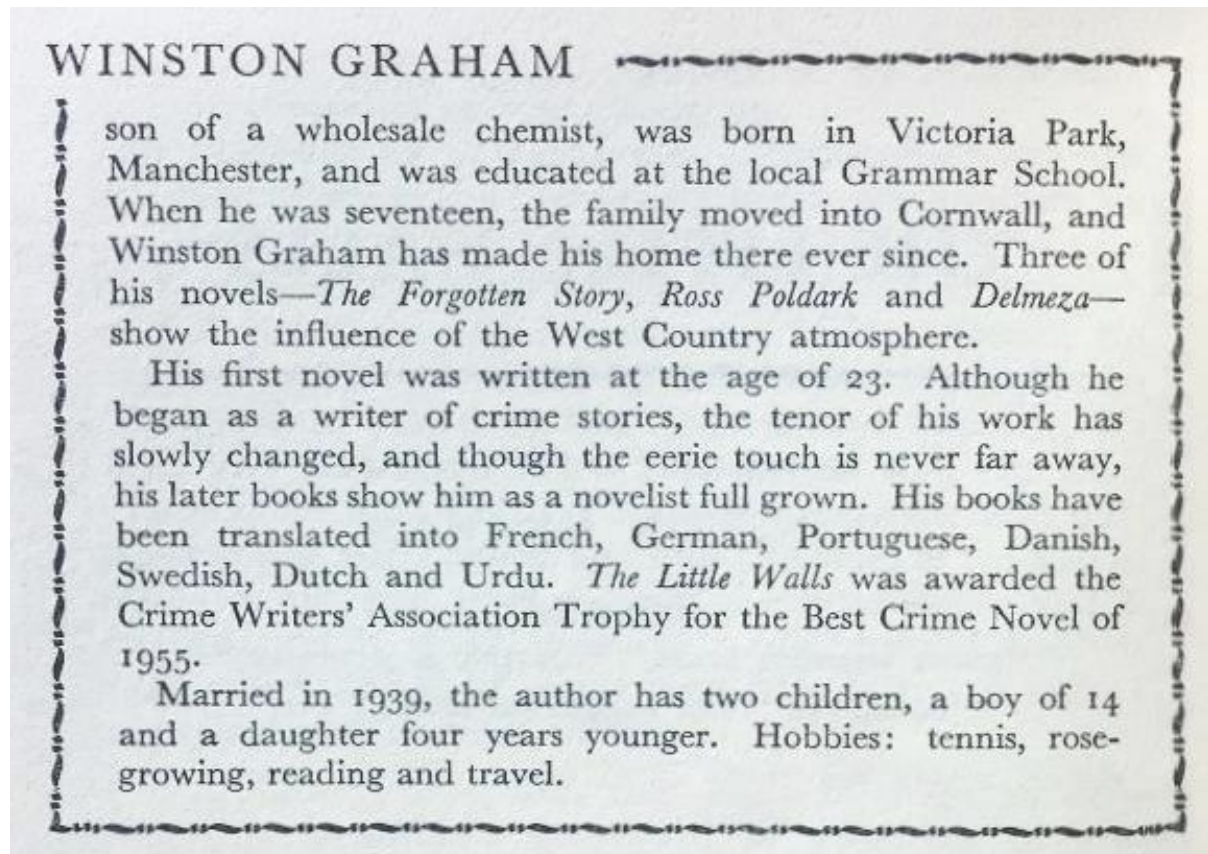


WG in Urdu translation

The story of WG in Urdu – the national language of Pakistan, although spoken in parts of India and elsewhere too – begins in 1956, when an abridged version of *The Little Walls* published by Odhams Press in their *Odhams Condensed Books, Seventh Series* omnibus was accompanied by this mini-bio:



The revelation that "His books have been translated into ... Urdu" prompts the question: *which*? No WG Urdu novel exists, from either the fifties or any other time, which suggests that only magazines or newspapers were involved and, given their ephemeral nature, little or no hard evidence from the period is likely to have survived. Still, it's not hard to speculate: by 1954, WG's 1952 novel *Fortune is a Woman* had been serialised in newspapers in Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and the Australian outback, so why not Pakistan too? 1950's *Night Without Stars* was also serialised in both Scandinavia and Australia, so perhaps it was one of those two novels, or possibly both. The archives of literary agent A. M. Heath might hold the answer – but, sadly, they're not telling.

In 1967, the claim that WG could be read in Urdu was made again, this time in the July edition of US book club magazine *Literary Guild Preview*:

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

WINSTON GRAHAM was born in prosaic Manchester, but soon moved to more exotic Cornwall, scene of many of his novels. Today he lives with his family in comfortable Sussex and enjoys a reputation for suspense from Sweden to Hindustan (he's been translated into Urdu). A sizable bit of his worldwide fame rests on *Marnie*, which Alfred Hitchcock made into a memorable movie.

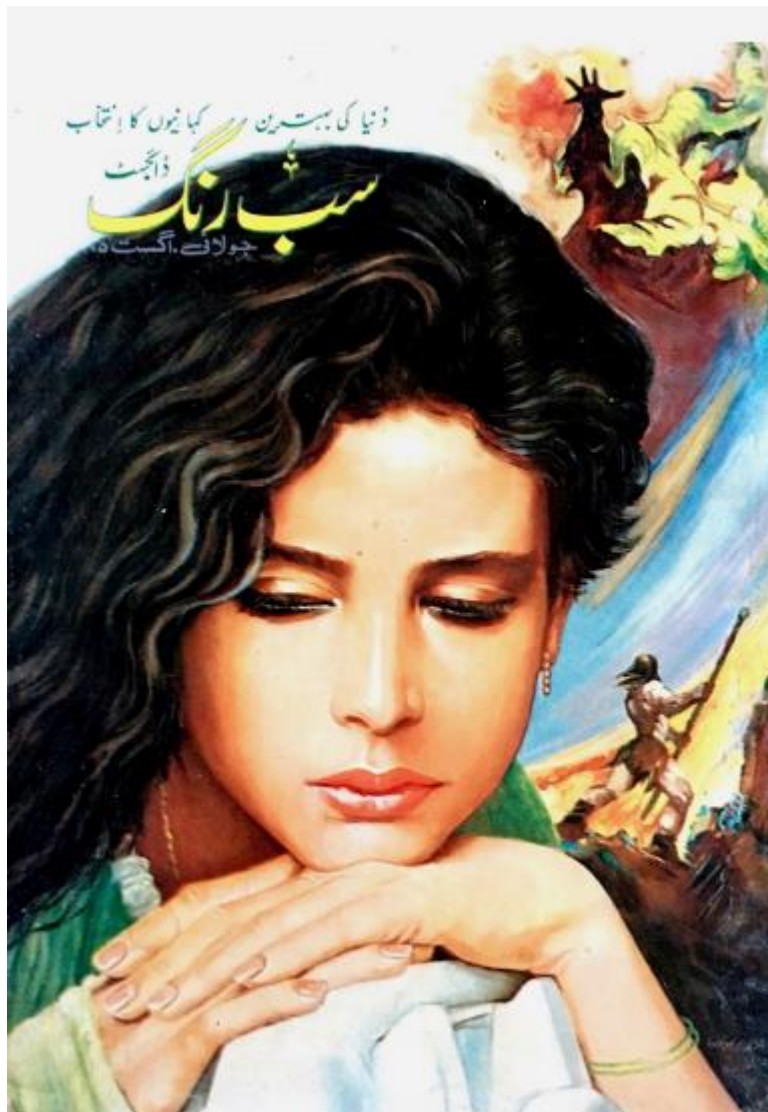
Once again, although hard evidence is lacking, it's tempting to speculate. The unprecedented worldwide success of *Reader's Digest*, published in the USA since 1922 and internationally since 1938, encouraged imitators in a number of countries, including Pakistan, where *Urdu Digest*, launched in Lahore in 1959¹, was the first though far from last such title. By the end of the 1960s, it and two others – *Aalmi* [International] *Digest* and *Sayyarah* [World] *Digest* – had come to dominate a crowded home market. So was a condensed, bowdlerised *Marnie* serialised in one of these, or some other Urdu digest? The release in Pakistan of Hitchcock's 1964 film of the book would undoubtedly have stimulated interest in WG's source text, so a mid-sixties digest serialisation of the novel would make sense – although, finally, once more, in the absence of proof, only guesswork remains.

But the story of WG in Urdu moves on. In January 1970, Karachi-based Shakeel Adilzada quit his job at *Aalmi Digest* to launch his own title. Initially published monthly, *Sabrang* [All Colour] *Digest* promised its Urdu readers "the best fiction from around the world". Quickly gaining popularity, within seven years *Sabrang* had achieved a circulation of more than 160,000² (and this at a time when fewer than one in ten adult Pakistanis could read) which was and remains an Urdu journal record. But from the late seventies, delays in publication (sometimes of more than a year) led to a decline in the title's standing until, in 2007, Adilzada, then sixty-nine, opted to sell out.³ The new owners struggled on until 2011 when the now loss-making enterprise closed for good.

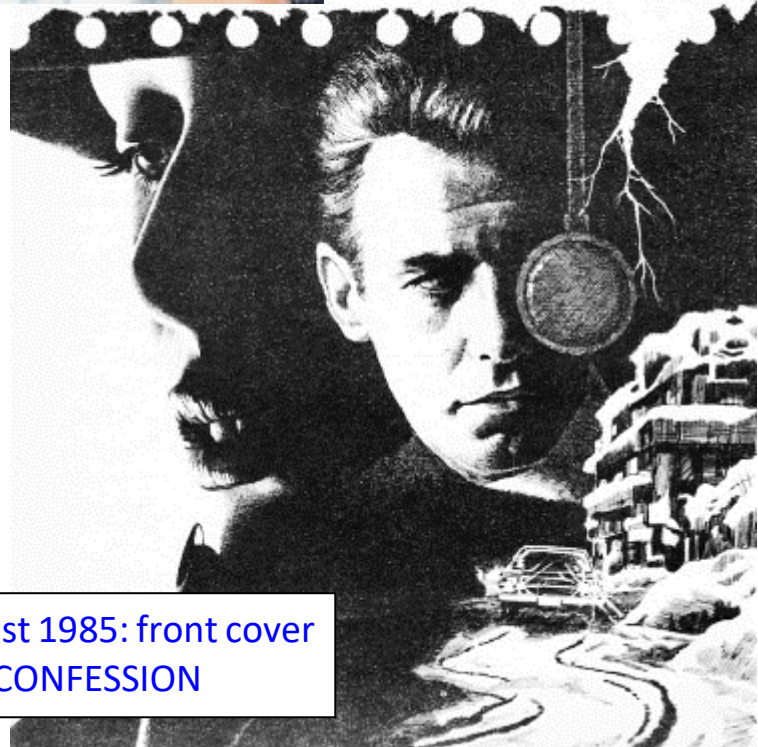
Two WG stories were published in *Sabrang Digest* – THE MEDICI EAR-RING (as THE EAR-RING) in September 1972 and AT THE CHALET LARTREC (as THE CONFESSION)⁴ in July/August 1985:



Sabrang Digest, September 1972: front cover (top) and part of the opening page of THE EAR-RING



لڑو یا۔ دو ادبی میری دوسے بیچے اپنے گھروں سے ملے اسے ' آپ کو اپنے
 اُن سے ملے ہو اگر اس کا کوئی نام اُن کیلئے ہے، اس سے آگے
 دئے گا کوئی نام، کیونکہ وہ ہے اور وہ یہاں سے پندرہ کلومیٹر دور
 کی اور اُن کی



Sabrang Digest, July/August 1985: front cover
 and illustration from THE CONFESSION

After its record-setting thirty-eight-year run and despite troubled later times, *Sabrang Digest* is fondly remembered. It is perhaps for this reason that Book Corner, a publisher based in Jhelum, Punjab agreed to embark on the production of multiple volumes of *Sabrang Kahaniyan* [All Colour Stories], with *Volume 1* in 2020 the first of six (to date) handsome hard-backs which collectively anthologise 190 of the stories previously published in *Sabrang Digest*. Compiled by Hasan Raza Gondal and edited by Shakeel Adilzada, featured authors include (among many others) Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Somerset Maugham, Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Conan Doyle, Guy de Maupassant, James Thurber, Agatha Christie, H. G. Wells, Franz Kafka, H. H. Munro (*aka* Saki), Aldous Huxley, Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, O. Henry, Katherine Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jack London, Cornell Woolrich, Irwin Shaw, Frederick Forsyth, Damon Runyon, Ray Bradbury, Roald Dahl, Raymond Carver, Jeffrey Archer and Winston Graham, who penned the first of the thirty-five stories in *Volume 5*, published on 15 June 2022.

Reviewing the book in *Hum Sub* [All of Us] on 24 September 2022, Kiran Siddiqui wrote:

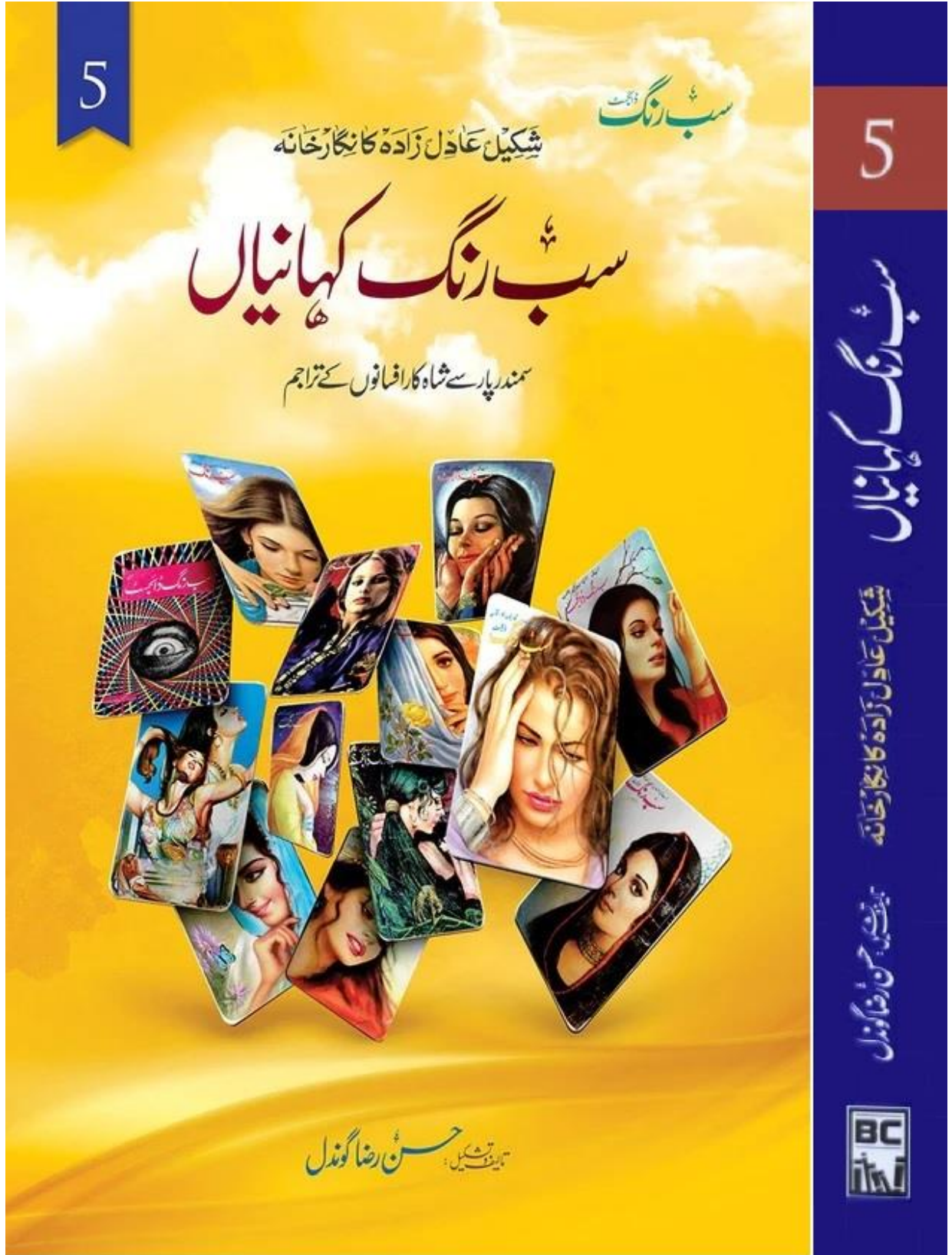
The first story in this volume, THE CONFESSION, written by Winston Graham and translated by Rajpoot Iqbal Ahmed, highlights the vindictive nature of man.

THE CONFESSION, as noted above, is AT THE CHALET LARTREC by another name. "Several more" volumes of *Sabrang Kahaniyan* are planned, with THE [MEDICI] EAR-RING scheduled for inclusion in number eight.

* * * * *

A similar though more modest re-presentation of *Sabrang Digest's* fiction also occurred in India, where in 2020 Kitabdaar Publications (Mumbai) and Arshia Publications (Dehli) both produced *Sabrang (Selected Short Stories)*, a paperback compilation by Wasim Aqueel Shah reprising fourteen of *Sabrang* texts, again including WG's THE CONFESSION.

* * * * *



Sabrang Kahaniyan, Volume 5 (Book Corner, 2022). Urdu, like Hebrew, is read across the page from right to left with the book's spine on the right. Each *Sabrang Kahaniyan* book jacket is illustrated, as this one, with a selection of *Sabrang Digest* front covers.



سب رنگ

(سب رنگ ڈائجسٹ سے منتخب کہانیاں)



*Sabrang (Selected Short Stories) from Kitabdaar Publications
(Mumbai) and Arshia Publications (Dehli), 2020*

Shakeel Adilzada (below, left, pictured in 2020) was born in Moradabad, northern India in 1938 but migrated in 1957 to Karachi, Pakistan where he gained Masters degrees in Political Science and Sociology. Between 1970 and 2007 he owned, edited and published circa 130 issues of Urdu fiction magazine *Sabrang Digest*. Stories for inclusion were chosen by a diverse team of five or six "testers" who read then scored manuscripts out of 100, with the highest-marked published and the rest shelved.⁵ At the height of *Sabrang's* popularity, Adilzada introduced *Bazigar*, a serial saga of his own set in pre-Partition India which, despite running for more than thirty years, remained unconcluded (much to the dismay of some readers) when *Sabrang* folded. The production delays which latterly beset the magazine were caused by (a) a dearth of suitable texts to print and (b) Adilzada's inability to deliver new instalments of *Bazigar* in a timely fashion. About the future of Urdu he is pessimistic: "[Urdu] does not offer prospects for employment, and a language which does not hold promise of economic well-being for its speakers does not prosper ... I have a lurking fear that Urdu [in its written form] might be rendered obsolete over the next twenty-five years."⁶



The initiative to compile and publish the *Sabrang Kahaniyan* series came from **Hasan Raza Gondal** (above, right). Born in Mandi Bahauddin, northern Punjab but now living in Birmingham, UK, Hasan developed in childhood an affection for *Sabrang Digest* which never left him. Having obtained Mr Adilzada's blessing to undertake his ambitious longterm publishing project, he now gives *Sabrang's* bountiful trove of stories new life.

NOTES AND SOURCES

¹ Several sources state 1959, others 1960 and one 1957, so take your pick.

² Once again, sources disagree, with circulations of 150,000, 157,000, 165,000 and 170,000 all claimed. What's certain is that *Sabrang's* sales peaked during the 1970s (the heyday of all the Urdu digests) then fell away over decades.

^{3, 6} *The Herald*, September 2009

⁴ The Urdu title given to WG's story is توثیق, which is clearly *not* "At the Chalet Lartrec" – but what is it? This is a tricky question to answer satisfactorily, for the word can be translated as *recognition, affirmation, validation, remembrance, recollection, (re)cognisance, acknowledgement, perception, acceptance, confession* and more. "The Confession" suits the theme of the text, so I've gone with that – but what was in the translator's mind? Only he knows.

⁵ *Dawn*, 21 December 1978

The help of Hasan Raza Gondal is appreciated.

* * * * *