

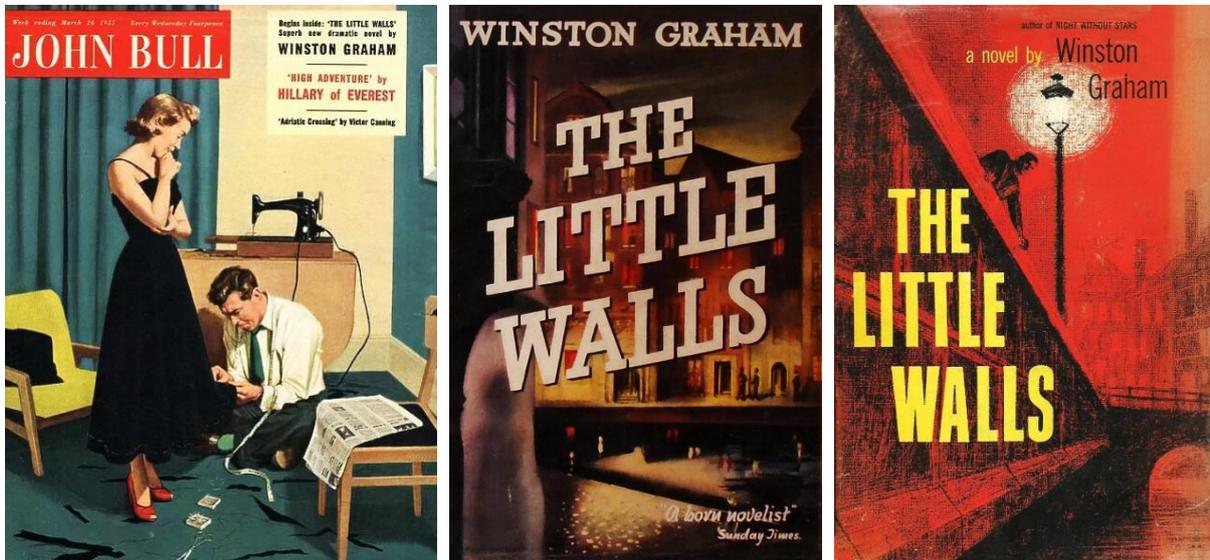
## ***The Little Walls* – WG's Marmite novel**



Sold since 1902, Marmite is a British savoury food spread which tends perhaps uniquely to polarise opinion; few, when asked what they think of it, will say "It's not bad" or "It's alright". What you're more likely to hear is either "It's delicious; I love it!" or "Ugh – I can't stand the stuff!" And that seems to be the way with *The Little Walls* too. This 1955 novel was the only one of WG's to win a major literary prize (more on this below) which you'd think would make it very well-known and universally well-received. Yet it flies under the radar, seemingly read by few, and has proved over the years amongst those who do decide to try it to divide opinion. On Amazon as of March 2023 it has only six ratings (with an average score of 3.9) and no reviews. Yet *Fortune is a Woman* (1952) and *The Sleeping Partner* (1956), the Hodder novels written either side of it, have 113 ratings (also 3.9) plus fourteen reviews and 118 ratings (4.0) plus thirteen reviews respectively, whilst *Marnie* (1961) has 401 ratings (4.3) plus 107 reviews and *Ross Poldark* (1945) 6,906 ratings (4.4) plus 1,608 reviews – thanks to TV, in a different league entirely. On Goodreads a similar pattern emerges: compared to *The Little Walls*, both *Fortune is a Woman* and *The Sleeping Partner* have achieved average higher scores from more than twice as many ratings.<sup>1</sup> What's more, the novel's divisive tendency seems to have been present from the very start.

WG had a first draft of *The Little Walls* completed by February 1954. As per his usual practice at that time, he then gave it to his friend and mentor Tom Attlee (1880-1960) to read and critique. Previously – in respect of *Cordelia* and *Fortune is a Woman* in particular – WG had found the older man's acute observations and mild criticisms most helpful. But Attlee's response, dated 11 March, to this latest manuscript must have given its author pause for thought, for it was not only less fulsome than ever before but also more trenchantly and overtly censorious. Attlee advised that in making Philip the novel's narrator, WG had set himself "an impossible task" because Philip "is an egoist and though the exploration of an egoism is a legitimate and fruitful theme for a novel, the narrator must not be the egoist." [For all he wrote, see [ATTLEE](#), pp. 21-24.]

It is probably no coincidence that, although WG drafted four more novels during Tom's lifetime, *The Little Walls* seems to have been the last to undergo this pre-publication third-party vetting procedure. And so the ground was laid for what was to come.



Publication in 1955: (i) *John Bull*, 26 March; (ii) Hodder and Stoughton, 23 June; (iii) Doubleday, 25 August

The first readers to see it were those of **JOHN BULL** magazine, which ran a serialisation in eight parts from 26 March to 14 May 1955, with publication of the novel by Hodder and Stoughton in the UK and Doubleday in the USA following soon afterwards (see dates above). The praise it garnered – some extravagant, some muted – was widespread though not universal:<sup>2</sup>

*Winston Graham is one of the most intelligent as well as competent of the comparative newcomers and has achieved the quite remarkable feat of making a compelling and even exciting book out of the clash of two opposing philosophies ... The compulsion lies in Mr. Graham's ability to draw character and in what he has to tell us. This seems to me a book which in its genre it would be hard to praise too highly. (Francis Iles, *Sunday Times*, 26 June 1955)<sup>3</sup>*

*An absorbing story, a brilliant study of psychology and an acidly witty characterisation of believable people. (Francis Grierson, *Daily Mail*, 7 July 1955)*

*Although neither a detective story nor a thriller in the accepted sense, [The Little Walls] is packed with suspense ... The tale is engrossingly told, the backgrounds have the touch of authenticity and the people are real and individual. (George W. Bishop, [Daily Telegraph](#), 22 July 1955)*

*... Good backgrounds and dialogue, nicely arranged pursuit and love, a villain who attains a certain grandeur, and subtle ambivalence in personal interplay mark this as a superior suspense item. (Anthony Boucher, [New York Times](#), 18 September 1955)*

*Winston Graham, who has alternated some superior suspense stories with his Cornwall tetralogy, is again at his best in this form of entertainment – a drama which is sybilline and svelte ... The conflict, in which Philip tussles with certain fixed moralities, gives this a certain substance and it is, at all times, a most attractive distraction. (Kirkus, 25 August 1955)*

*Winston Graham writes both historical novels and suspense stories, but not, if *The Little Walls* is a prime example of the latter, with equal facility ... Mr. Graham's last novel of old England crackled with eighteenth-century huggermugger. *The Little Walls*, on the other hand ... is disappointingly static and cluttered with irrelevancies. (Martin Levin, [The Saturday Review](#), 1 October 1955)*

*This is an English entertainment, reminiscent of *The Third Man*, but far below it in skill and suspense ... There is much banal dialogue and long, slack stretches in the story. Nevertheless, the final quarter has good suspense and action of a melodramatic sort. In his handling of intellectual discussion, is author is pretentious and shallow. At other times, his style is flat and commonplace, actually including a few elementary errors in grammar. In general, it is the product of a second-rate talent that might give some excitement to the undiscriminating. (Best Sellers, the University of Scranton, 15 September 1955)*

*An outstanding new novel of romance and adventure*

# THE LITTLE WALLS

by *WINSTON  
GRAHAM*

**W**HEN MY BROTHER committed suicide I was in California. It was nearly two weeks before I could get away, and I then flew back and made straight for his home near Dorking, where the cable had come from. But when I got there the house was closed, and a neighbour said that Grace was staying with my eldest brother Arnold in Wolverhampton. So I spent a night in London and drove up by car the following day.

I could guess the sort of shock it had been for Grace, so I thought I would see Arnold first. His letter had told me precious little more than the original cable. Nor had the American papers had a lot to say. They had stated rather vaguely that the Amsterdam police were satisfied that Grevil's death was an accident. That left me feeling cleaner than a more precise story might have done—especially in all the circumstances.

What had happened, so far as I could make it out, was that Grevil, on his way home from the Far East, had stopped off for a few days in Holland and had apparently thrown himself into a canal in one of the back streets of Amsterdam. It made as much sense to me as if I'd been told he had hanged himself with his bootlace in his own back kitchen.

I drove the car to the works and round to the side entrance, noticing the

I stood there, looking down into the dark waters of the canal. Here my brother had been found drowned. I couldn't believe that it was suicide

ILLUSTRATED BY ZELINSKI

The opening page of *John Bull's* serialisation of *The Little Walls*  
(illustration by Zelinski)

\* \* \* \* \*

Formed just two years previously, by 1955 the fledgling Crime Writers' Association was ready to bestow its first annual Best Crime Novel of the Year Award, and the recipient they chose (from among titles published in the year June 1954 to May 1955)<sup>4</sup> was WG's *The Little Walls*. On 5 April 1956 he was duly presented with the CWA's Crossed Red Herrings Trophy, so becoming the first of only five men ever to possess one (since in 1960 it was superseded by The Gold Dagger). The guest of honour on the occasion was Agatha Christie, so WG was keeping august company – but, then, so was she!



The Crime Writers' Association's Crossed Red Herrings Trophy. WG was the first of only five recipients (the others Edward Grierson, Julian Symons, Margot Bennett and Eric Ambler). The one above was awarded to Julian Symons in 1958 for his 1957 novel *The Colour of Money*.<sup>5</sup>

The epithet "award-winning" seems to act like catnip on radio and TV writers and producers, whose adaptations of WG's novel have resulted to date in three productions and one near miss:

On consecutive Thursday evenings from 4 October to 8 November 1956, the Light Programme broadcast a **six-part dramatisation**; episodes titles were Death in Amsterdam, The Clue in Capri, The Recognition, Leonie Explains, Buckingham is Explained and The Reckoning; the producer was Norman Wright with scripts by Denzil Roberts.

Anglia Television's head of drama John Jacobs directed a **90-minute screen adaptation** of WG's *The Sleeping Partner* (the author's small-screen debut) which, co-written by Anthony Steven, was broadcast on 3 July 1967. Jacobs then let it be known that Steven had similarly adapted *The Little Walls*, which Jacobs hoped to direct also. Over a three-year period from October 1968 the prospect was mentioned in *The Stage* seven times. On the last of these occasions (13 January 1972) Jacobs advised Patrick Campbell: "I have an adaptation [by Anthony Steven] of a book by Winston Graham, an exciting, dramatic story that would really be what I would call a BBC 90-minute play. It would be very difficult to cut down to fifty-two minutes." Sadly, it never was.

On *Woman's Hour* on BBC Radio 4 on weekdays from Thursday 1 to Friday 16 September 1983, a Jack Singleton **abridgement of the novel** was read by David McAlister in twelve parts.

On Radio 4 on Saturday 2 November 1991, with repeat broadcasts two days later and several times since, **another dramatisation**, this time in a single 90-minute presentation (one of a series featuring Gold Dagger-winning works), written by Juliet Ace and directed by Ned Chaillet.

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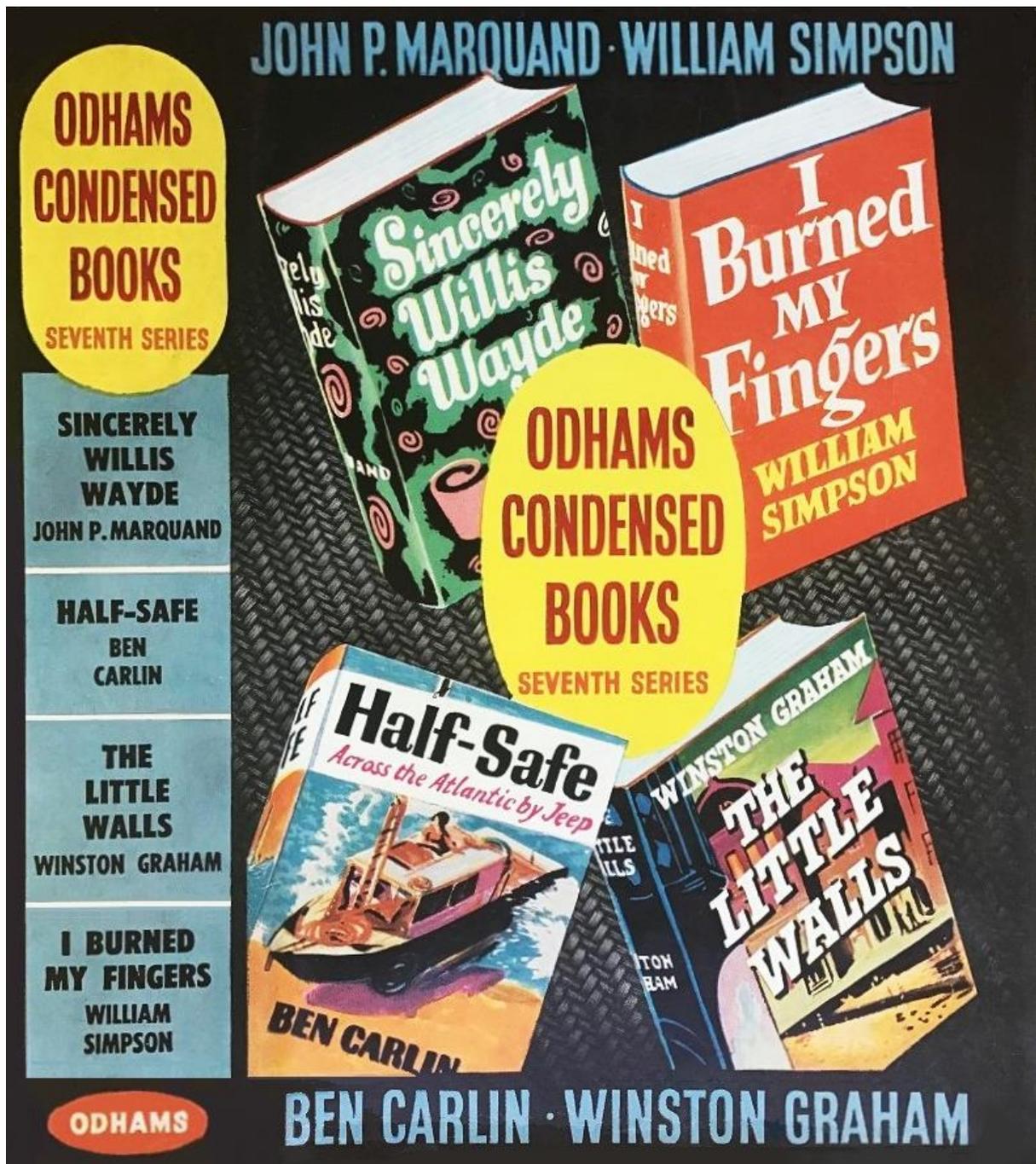
Monetisation of the property involved the international print media too, with the story running in Danish daily *Aftenbladet* as *Den Sorte Gade* (*The Black Street*) in thirteen weekly parts from 20 September to 20 December 1956 [first image below], in Swiss magazine *Pour Tous* (*For All*) as *L'homme d'Amsterdam* (*The Man from Amsterdam*) in twenty weekly parts from 15

December 1959 to 26 April 1960 (which constitutes the only rendering yet of the story into French) and in Swiss daily *Thuner Tagblatt* as *Zwischenfall in Amsterdam* (*Incident in Amsterdam*) in thirty-three parts from 28 May to 6 July 1977.



\* \* \* \* \*

Abridged versions of the novel were published in the UK by Odhams Press in 1956 and in the USA by Mercury Publications, New York in a 129-page "authorized abridgment" released in their Bestseller Mystery series under the title *Bridge to Vengeance* on 13 February 1958.



Odhams Press, undated, circa December 1956

Next page: Mercury Publications, 1958

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Bestseller Mystery



# Bridge TO Vengeance

(THE LITTLE WALLS)

BY *Winston Graham*

"...a superior suspense item." *NEW YORK TIMES*

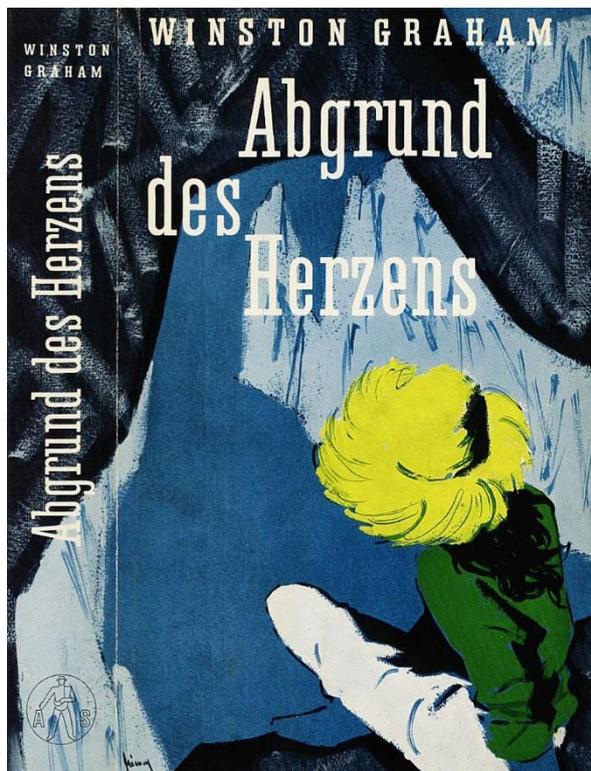
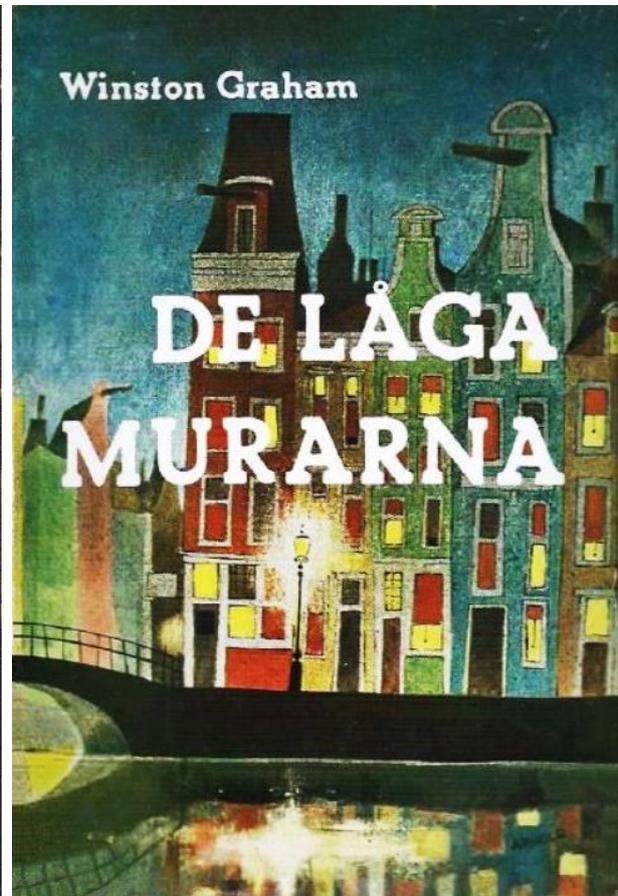
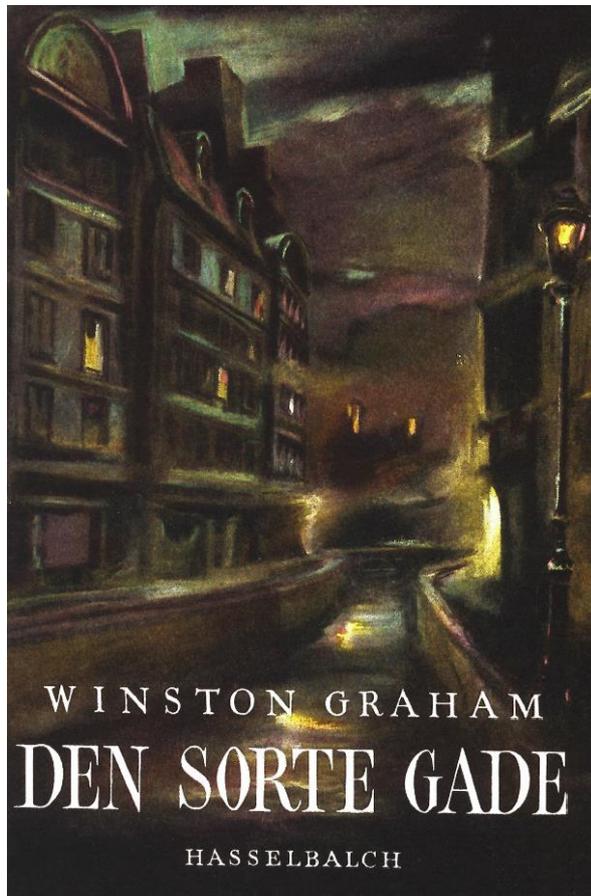


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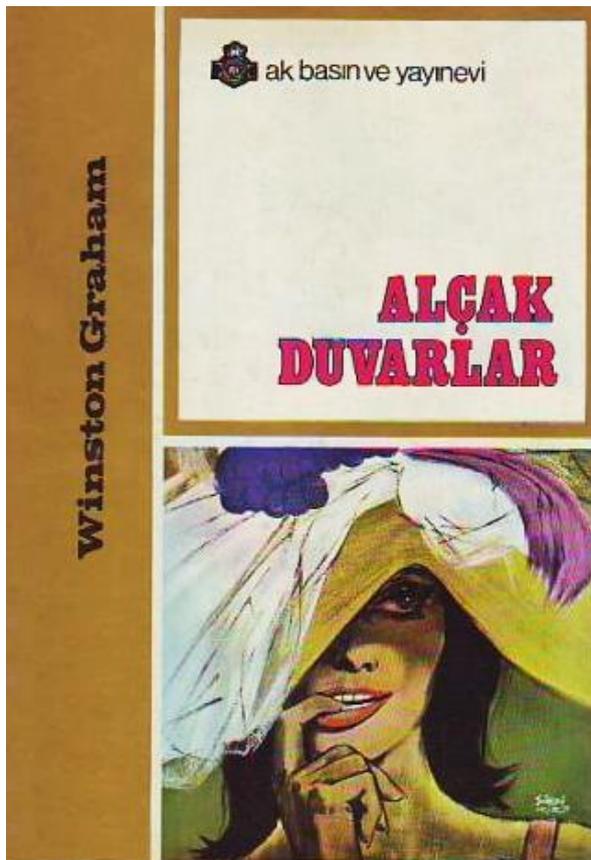
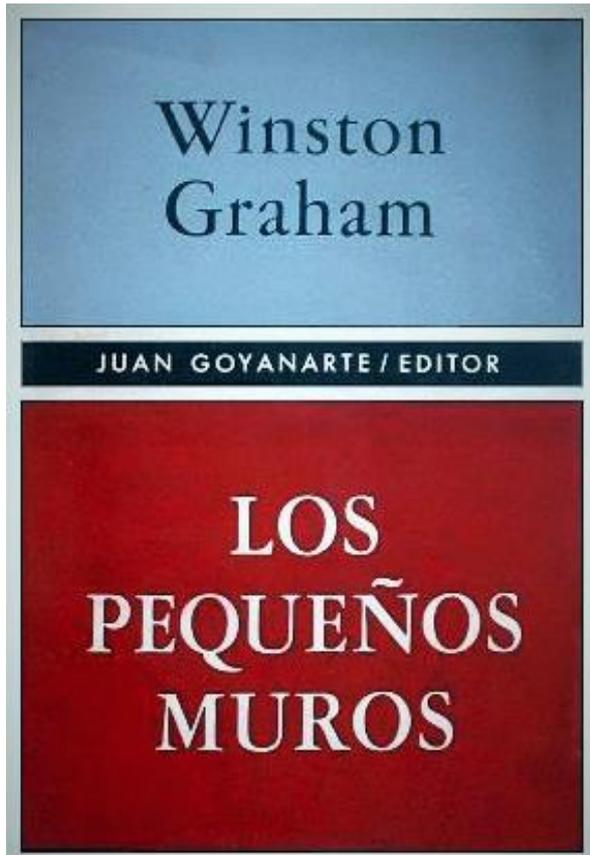
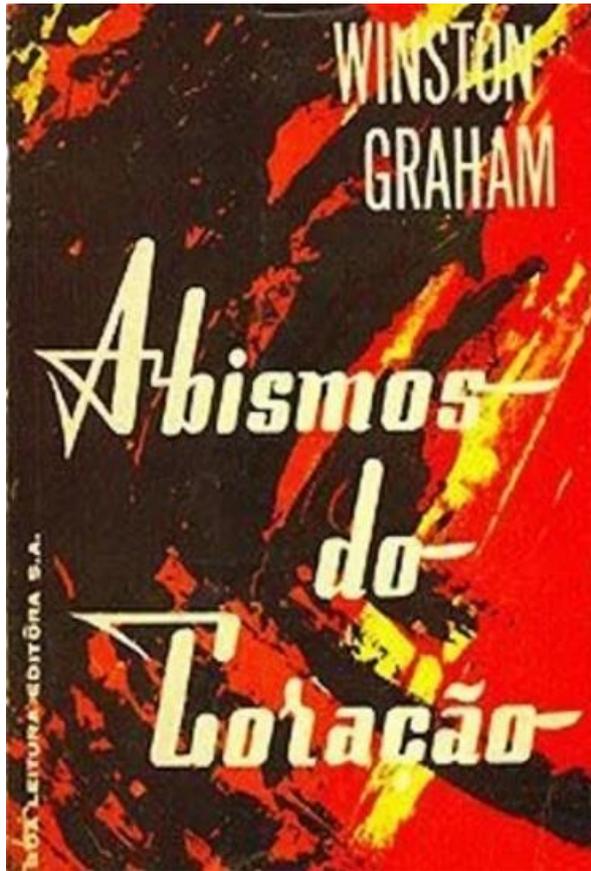
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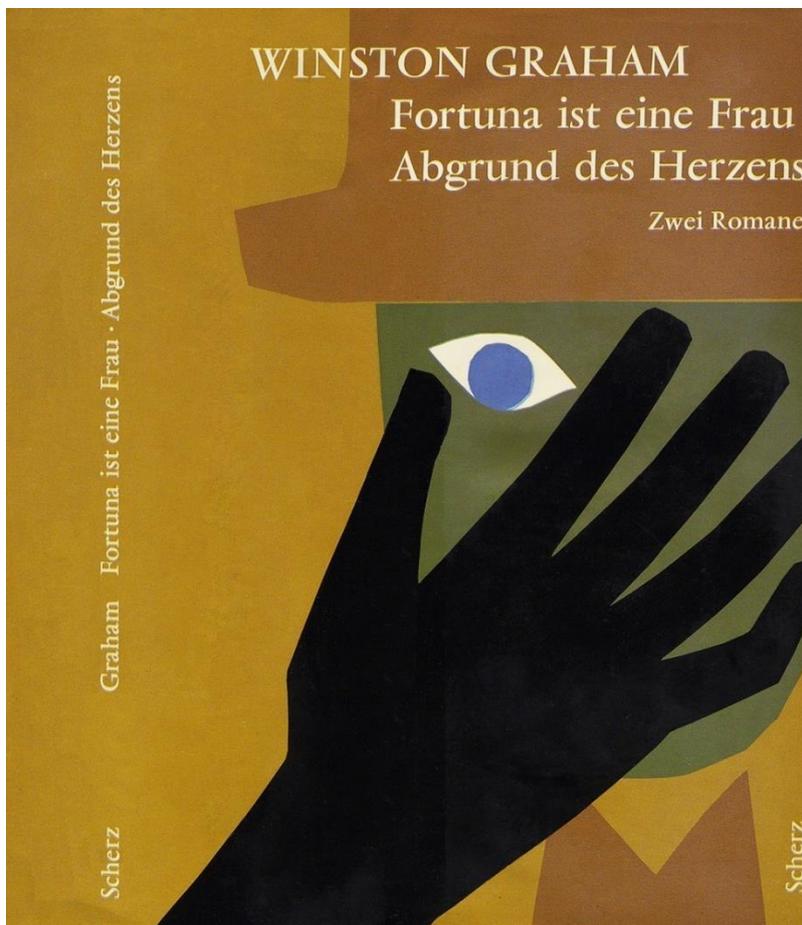
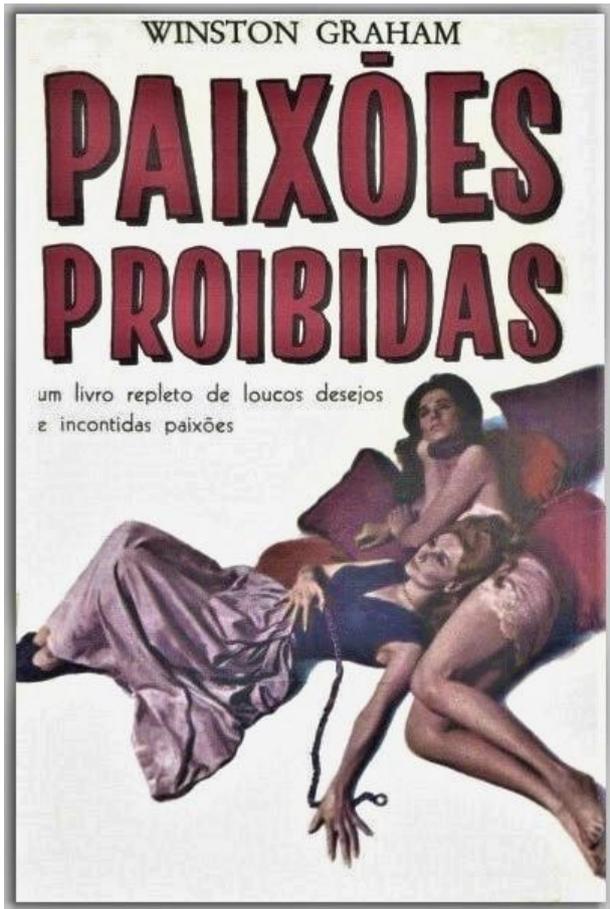
Overseas readers were favoured with editions of *The Little Walls* in Danish, Swedish, German, Portuguese, Spanish, Turkish and Russian:



Danish (as *The Black Street*), Hasselbalch, 1956; Swedish, Linqvist, 1957; German (as *Depths of the Heart*), Scherz, 1959



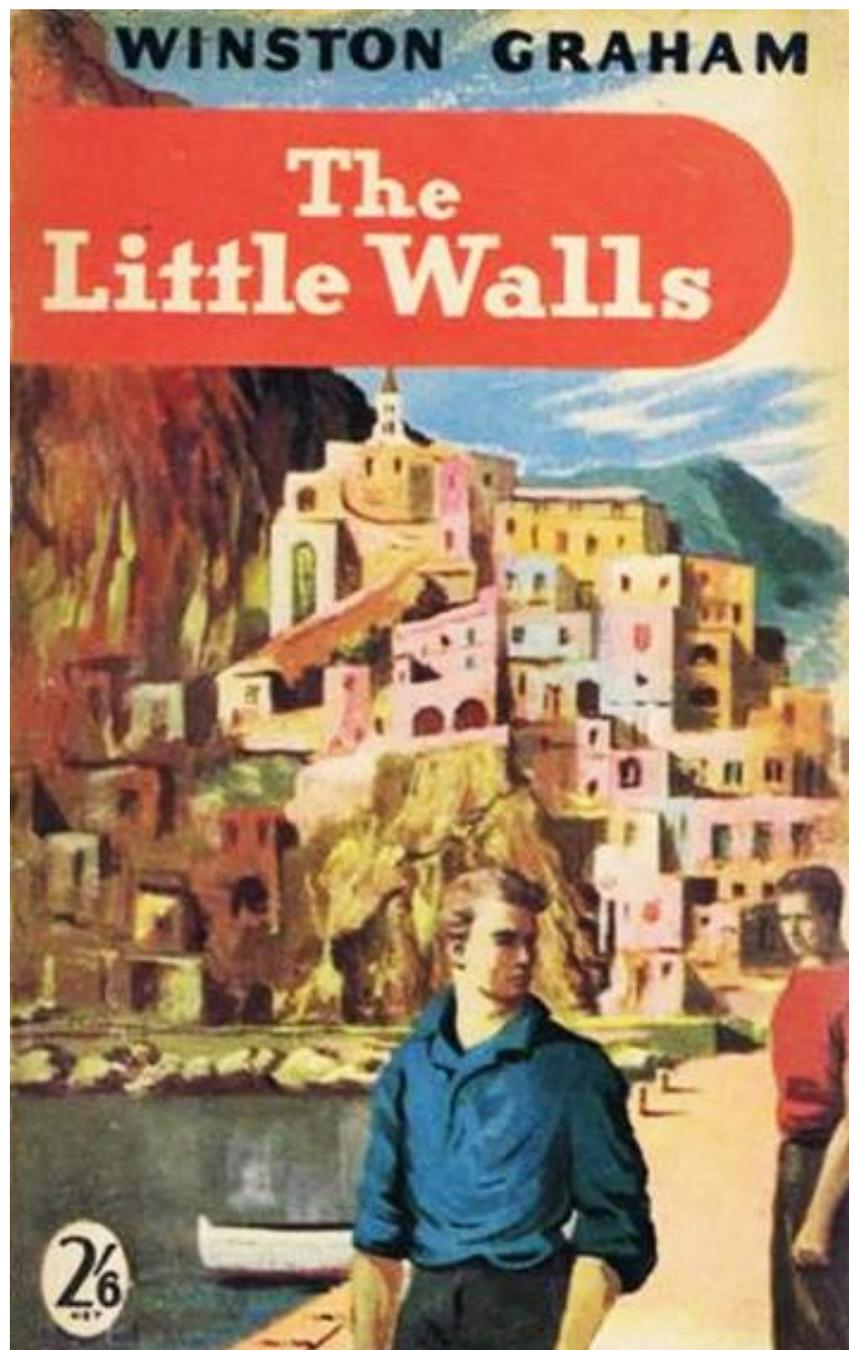
Portuguese (as *Depths of the Heart*), Boa Leitura, 1960; Spanish, Goyanarte, 1964; Turkish, AK Basin, 1971; Swedish, Linqvist, 1964



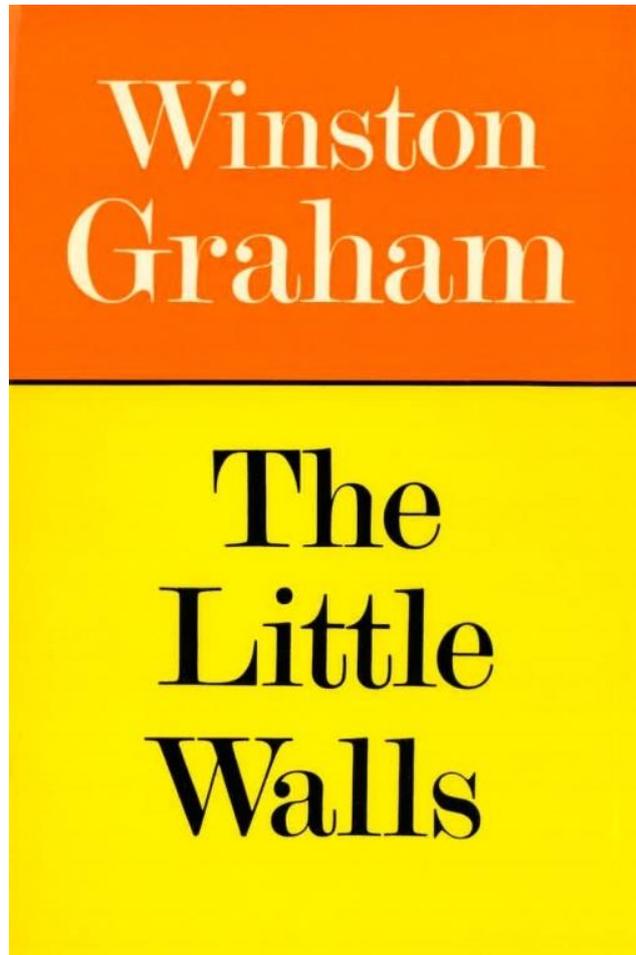
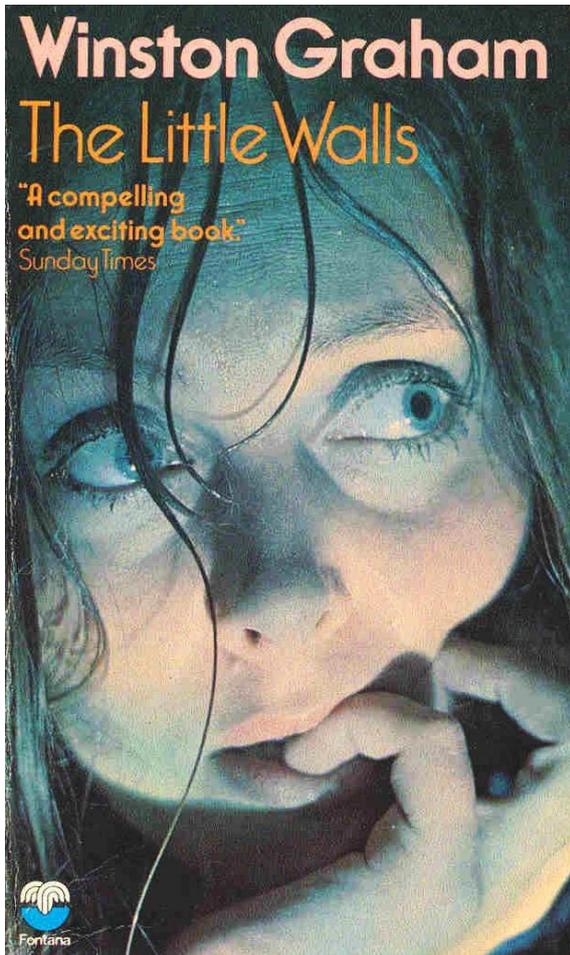
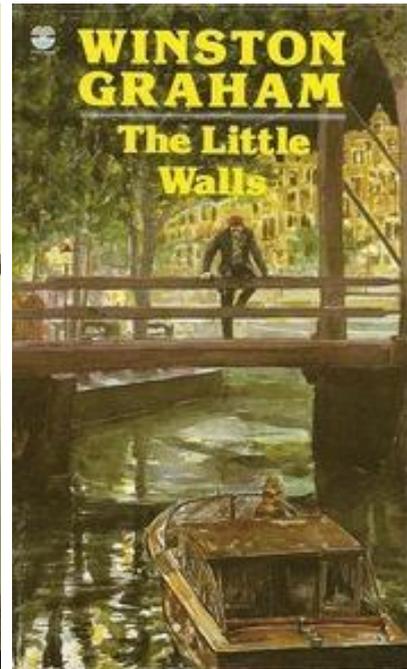
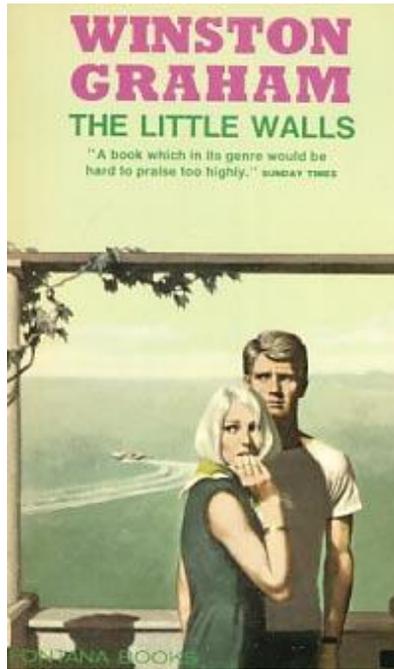
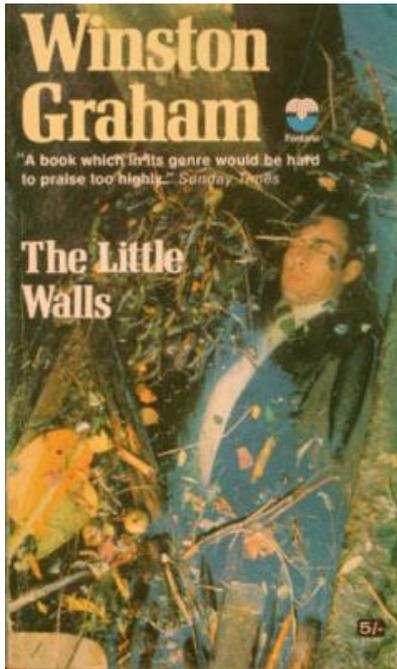
(1) Portuguese (as *Hidden Passions*), Hemus 1972;  
 (2) Russian and (3) German omnibus editions of *Fortune is a Woman* and *The Little Walls* from Art Design, 1994<sup>6</sup> and Scherz, 1962

Since the story is set principally in Holland and Italy, it is surprising to find no translation in either Dutch or Italian.

Several trade paperback editions have kept the UK market supplied, in addition to which The Bodley Head published a hardbound reprint edition in 1972. It is notable, however, that, other than the single 1958 abridgement noted above, there has been no American republication of *The Little Walls* in any format at any time.



Hodder and Stoughton, 1959



Fontana 1967; 1967; 1985; 1976; The Bodley Head, 1972

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Through the second half of the 1960s, Hodder and Stoughton published for the library trade a hardback series reprising at least thirteen of the previous half-century's "Classics of Detection and Adventure". Series editor Michael Gilbert not only selected the titles but also penned for each of them a short introduction. His choices included (possibly not a full list):

*The Mask of Dimitrios* by Eric Ambler (first published in 1939; republished by Hodder in 1965)

*The House of the Arrow* by A. E. W. Mason (1924/1965)

*Trial and Error* by Anthony Berkeley (1937/1965)

*The Lonely Magdalen* by Henry Wade (1940/1965)

*The Flaw in the Crystal* by Godfrey Smith (1954/1965)

*The White Crow* by Philip MacDonald (1926/1966)

***The Little Walls* by Winston Graham (1955/1966)**

*Heads You Lose* by Christianna Brand (1941/1966)

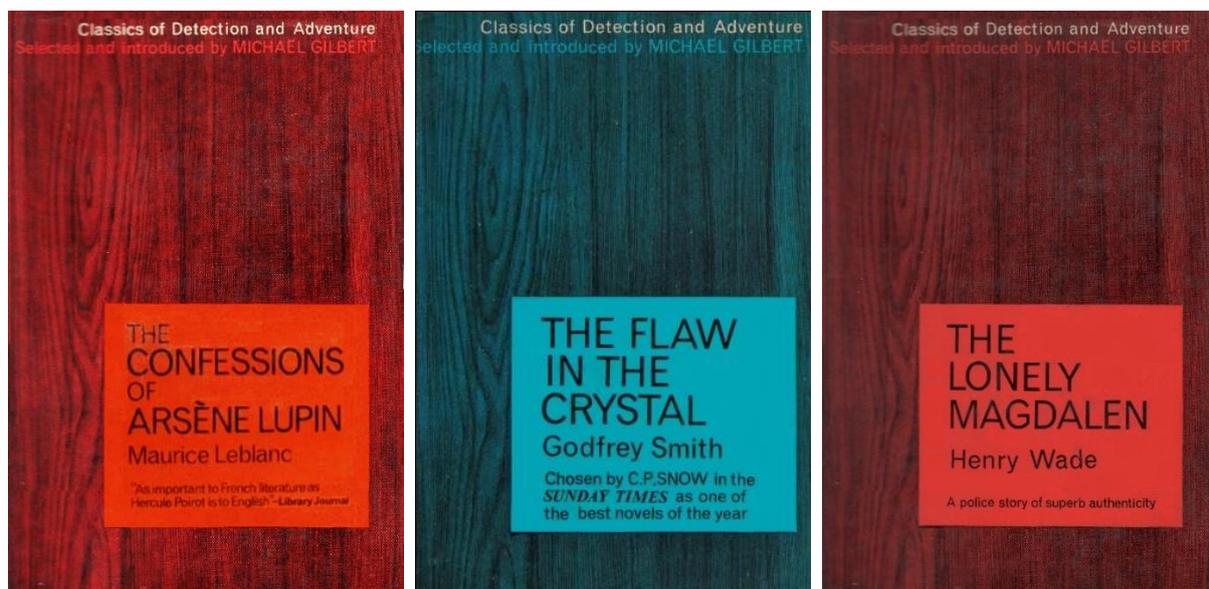
*Venetian Bird* by Victor Canning (1950/1968)

*The Northing Tramp* by Edgar Wallace (1926/1968)

*Verdict of Twelve* by Raymond Postgate (1940/1969)

*The Murder on the Links* by Agatha Christie (1923/1969)

*The Confessions of Arsène Lupin* by Maurice Leblanc (translated by Joachim Neugroschel; 1913/1969)



The design of each book in the series is the same, with the title, author's name and a brief recommendation in an offset, coloured box on a tinted wood-effect background. Though I have been unable to find any jacketed

copy of this edition of *The Little Walls*, its appearance (I'm told it is green) can be surmised from the three examples shown.

The back cover of each book carries this Gilbert-penned text:

***CLASSICS OF DETECTION AND ADVENTURE***

***Edited by Michael Gilbert***

*Many people read and enjoy both thrillers and detective stories. A lot of people, also, confuse them.*

*Thrillers, or adventure stories, are as old as storytelling itself. They are untrammelled as to theme and form. There is no height they cannot reach and practically no depth to which they cannot sink.*

*Detective stories, on the other hand, are civilised and artificial products. If thrillers are the wild flowers of literature, detective stories flourish in the cultivated garden plot.*

*When they sprang into sudden and surprising favour towards the end of the First World War, it might have been supposed that they were a "sport" or freak development without the power to propagate their kind.*

*Not so. Like their academic relative, the crossword puzzle, they have demonstrated surprising qualities of endurance. More are being written and read now throughout the civilised world than at any time in the last half century. This seems, therefore, an appropriate moment to stand back and consider some of the masterpieces in each genre.*

As for *The Little Walls*, solicitor, crime writer and CWA founder-member Michael Gilbert (1912-2006; see page eighteen) had good reason to know the book well, since he was one of the select group who in 1955 chose it to receive the inaugural Crossed Red Herrings Award.

Here, lightly abridged, is how he introduced it:

*At a moment of high crisis in this story the hero, Philip Turner, remarks, "I'd never done any fighting except a bit of boxing in the navy"; and on an earlier occasion, "My contacts with officialdom weren't worth a commissionaire's salute."*

*These two comments seem to me to set the tone of the book. They are a portent, and a warning. A portent of the novel approach to the writing of thrillers and a warning that Philip Turner, although he is the narrator and, in any ordinary sense of the word, the hero of the book, has not been cast in the customary heroic mould.*

*The Little Walls was written ten years ago. It was not the first, but is to my mind one of the very best of those adventure stories which introduce what has come to be known, in critical jargon, as the "anti-hero". The expression is misleading. The only anti-hero, surely, must be the villain? But it is a useful portmanteau expression to describe someone who undertakes the hero's role, without the hero's normal equipment. A knight without armour.*

*The admission that he has no friends in high places is a particularly telling one. We have been brought up on heroes who expect to receive the salutes of commissionaires ... In a puzzle story, a who-dunnit, the device is perhaps acceptable ... Nevertheless, it is a sort of cheat. Just as much so as making your hero a superlative revolver shot, a senior wrangler and a black belt at Judo.*

*Realism is more difficult than romance. It allows of no short cuts. But it pays a handsome dividend in the end. In the first place it must greatly intensify the pleasures of self-identification [although] this point must not be taken too far. I am not suggesting that disassociation with the character which is being portrayed will deprive the reader of all enjoyment. It is quite easy to enjoy something you no longer believe. But if you can believe, how much closer and more actual the thrills. It is the difference between Cinema and Cinerama.*

*And there is a second, and possibly even greater advantage. Realism involves surprise. I don't mean surprise over what happens next but surprise over the ultimate results. In a traditional thriller you can be sure of three things. The mystery will be solved; the hero will defeat the villain; and, if the hero is a personable young man and the heroine a beautiful young lady, they will end up in each other's arms. No so in real life. Not so in a novel which adopts real standards.*



*I am prepared to wager that you will not be sure until the end of the book whether any of those propositions is going to be true. And in one case a doubt may linger in your mind even after you have read the last page. I do not mean by this that the plot is sloppily constructed or culminates in a tangle of loose ends. In fact, it has been planned with great expertise and care. If you doubt this, go back and study the exact timing of the central revelation in the book; a revelation which, I will confirm, took me entirely by surprise.*

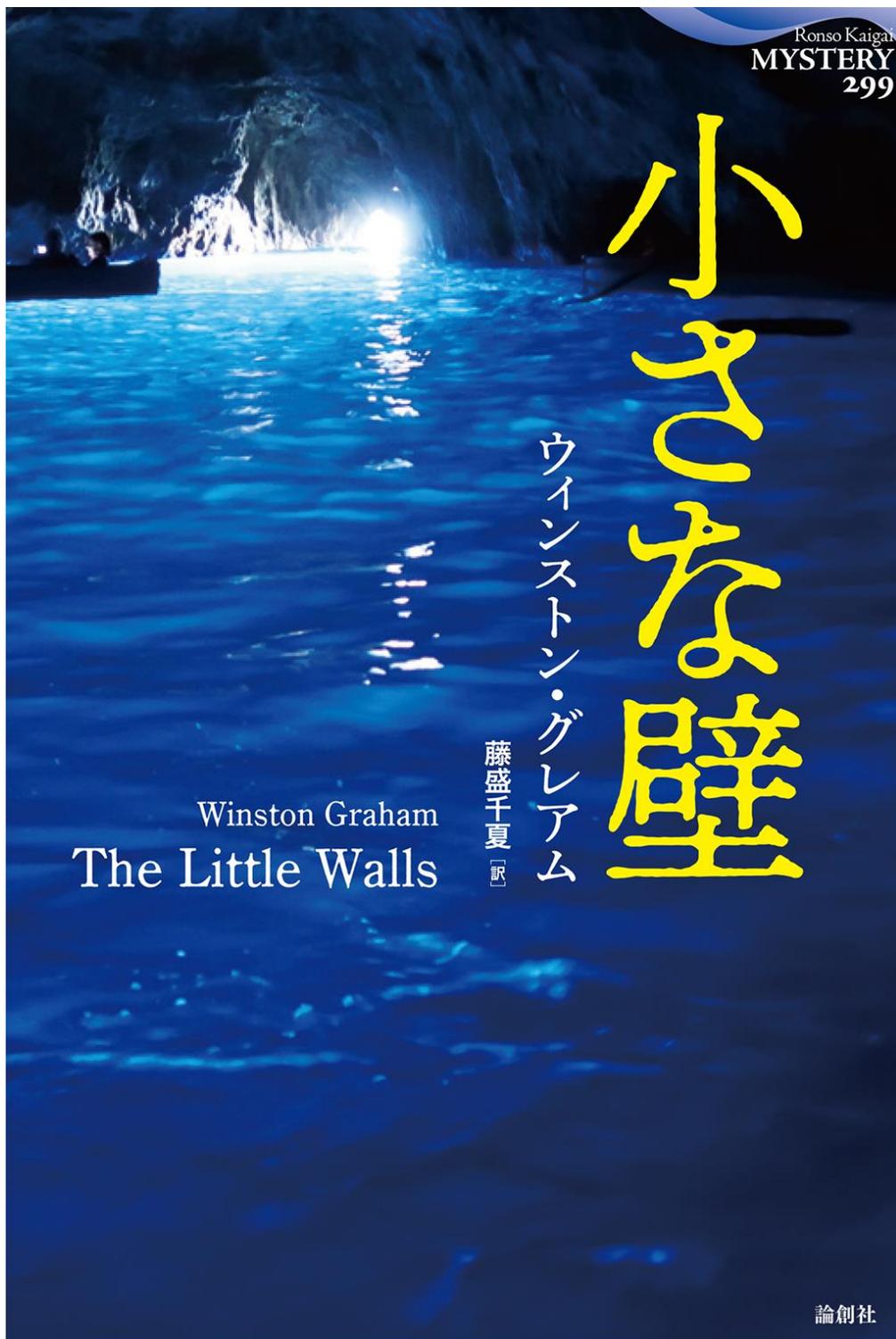
*An impatient author would have exploded his carefully laid time-bomb much sooner. A cautious one would have held it back for the denouement, in the way that a pawky bridge player hoards up his ace for the last trick. Winston Graham explodes his bomb with the accuracy of a trained saboteur.*

\* \* \* \* \*



On 23 December 2022, this handsome Japanese paperback edition of *The Little Walls* was published (as *Wall of Sin*) by Shincho Bunko with translation

by Kazuyo Misumi and cover art by Misato Ogiharaha. Strangely, six months later, a second Japanese translation (below), this time by Chinatsu Fujimori, was published by Ronsosha:



It would surely have pleased WG to see his work still being brought to market for a new generation of readers to discover. Long may it continue.

Not everyone likes Marmite, to be sure, but sales remain bouyant – and a great many would miss it if it were gone.

\* \* \* \* \*

## NOTES AND SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> *The Little Walls*: thirty-six ratings (average score 3.5) and eleven reviews; *Fortune is a Woman*: seventy-six ratings (3.71) and ten reviews; *The Sleeping Partner* eighty-eight ratings (3.67) and four reviews; *Marnie*: 1,357 ratings (3.8) and 187 reviews; *Ross Poldark*: 31,021 ratings (4.08) and 3,182 reviews.

<sup>2</sup> In considering this novel, I must confess a bias. Whilst readily accepting that others see it differently, it's a book I've never warmed to because, to me, the character of Martin Coxon doesn't ring true, such that his interactions with Philip, Leonie and Grevil (another unlikely cove) don't ring true either, resulting in a plot which, because flawed through the heart, not even the most adroit storytelling craft can save. That *The Little Walls* won Crime Novel of *any* Year speaks ill of the competition.

<sup>3</sup> If Iles was an admirer of WG, the feeling was mutual. In Notebook 3 in the Graham archive of Truro's Royal Cornwall Museum is the undated draft of a letter to Iles in which WG expresses doubt about the probity of him, the novelist, contacting his critic. But eventually he decides he will, and what persuades him

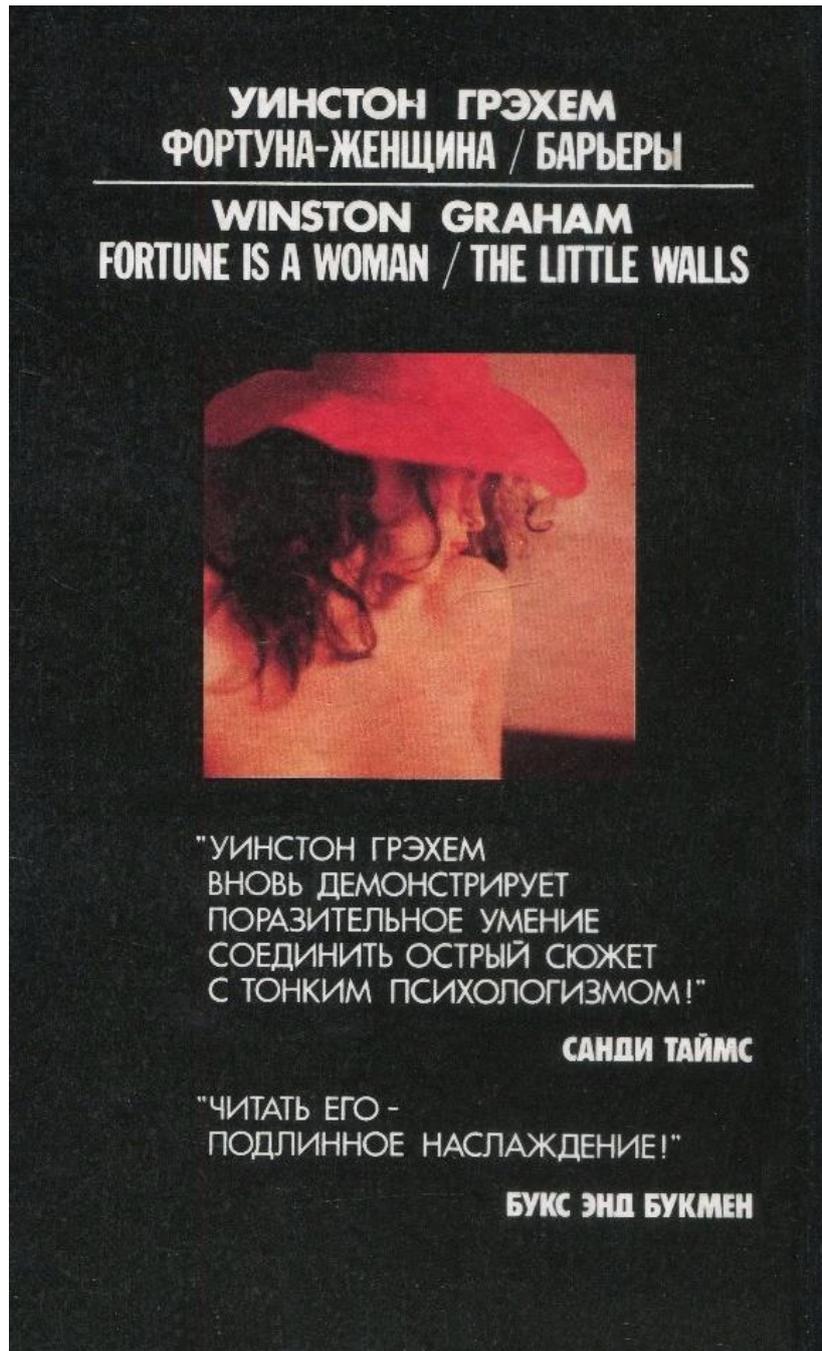
*is partly the very generous nature of [your] review but chiefly the name of the reviewer, since I have admired all the Iles books since the classic Malice Aforethought in the original Mundanus edition a good many years ago and this doubles the value to me personally of the notice.*

Whether the letter was ultimately sent is unclear.

<sup>4</sup> There is an anomaly here, because *The Little Walls* was not published by Hodder until 23 June 1955. Presumably the novel's prior serialisation in *John Bull* (which ran from 26 March to 14 May) must have counted as "publication" within CWA's specified timeframe.

<sup>5</sup> Photo from Christine Symons – with thanks

<sup>6</sup> The book's rear cover, unlike the front, shows both titles:



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