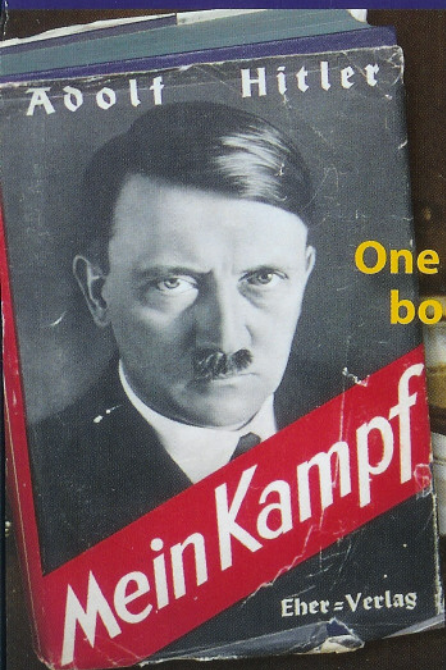


BOOK AND MAGAZINE COLLECTOR

APRIL 2009 No.306 £3.50
www.bookandmagazinecollector.com

OVER
10,000
BOOKS FOR SALE
AND WANTED!



**One bad
book**

**No Wonder
We Won**

**Nobel prize
for literature**

Still only
£3.50

**Second Sherlock Holmes
Competition**

More prizes to be won

Welcome to Hard Times
Collecting in a recession

Swinburne
Victorian poet

Alan Moore
Great Graphic Novelist

William Goldman
Hollywood novelist



WARNERS GROUP PUBLICATIONS PLC

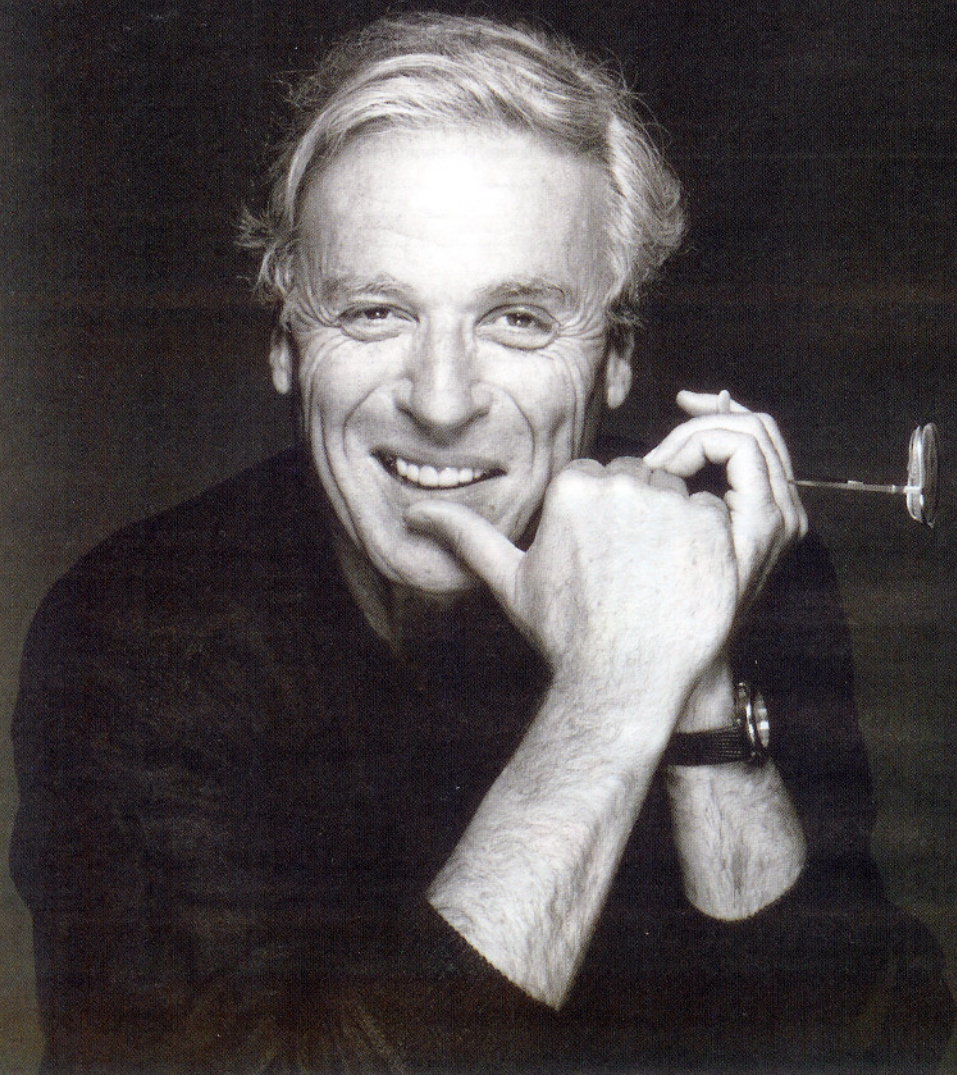
PART OF THE

Collectors
of Great
Britain
Club

WILLIAM GOLDMAN INTERVIEW

By Sean Egan

“All of a sudden I stopped, and if you asked,
‘Why did you stop?’, I have no idea.”



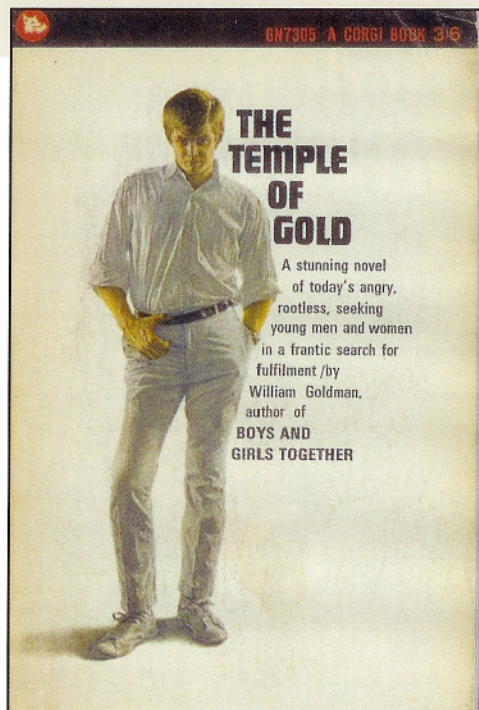
These are the words of William Goldman about his abandonment of the novel form more than two decades ago. These days, Goldman's fiction writing is restricted to screenplays. Yet while his CV is littered with some of the most famous pictures in modern movie history, Goldman did for several years run parallel novelist and screenwriter careers. With *Brothers* (1986), though, his novel writing sputtered to a halt completely. His leaving the novel behind robbed American letters of a giant. Goldman has published sixteen works of fiction. Almost all are worthy and some - especially the epic *Boys and Girls Together* (1964) - are superb.

He was born on 12 August, 1931 and grew up in Island Park, Illinois, outside Chicago. He harboured an ambition to be a writer as a youth. Yet as Goldman tried to make his way in the world as a wordsmith, he found he was far from being hailed as a great talent in the making.

"I don't think anybody that's had a career as a writer came from further behind the starting line than I did," he says. "I had written some short stories that were all rejected. I had taken a writing class at Oberland and gotten the worst grade in that. I took a writing class at North Western University and gotten the worst grade in that."

After graduating college and serving in the army for two years, Goldman found himself under-qualified for a PhD and the only job offer on the table an unappealing one to teach high school in Minnesota. He recalls, "I went home and I wrote *The Temple Of Gold* in two weeks and it was a desperate time because I remember thinking, 'I have never been beyond page 15' and suddenly I was on page 50, and then page 80, and then whatever, and then I had this novel."

An agent secured interest in Goldman's debut from Knopf. "They said they wanted a rewrite. I doubled it in length and they

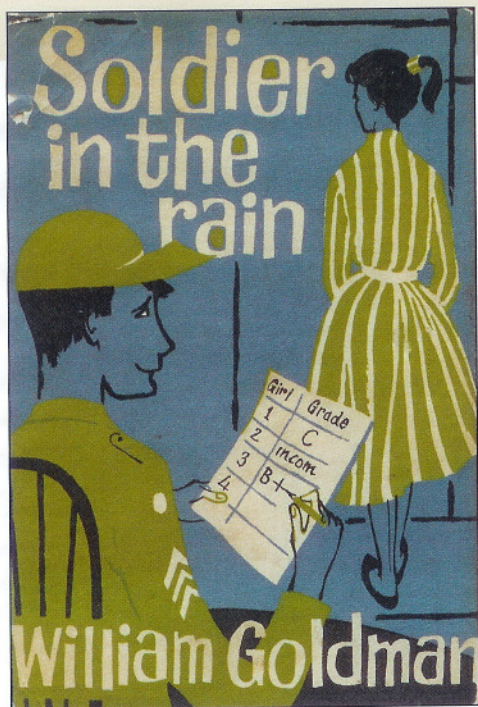


published it to my stunned amazement in 1957 and all of a sudden I was a writer."

The Temple of Gold was an unsteady start to Goldman's career. A lightweight and gauche book, it received a certain amount of undeserved praise - and possibly only achieved publication - because of its proximity to the publication date of another, far better novel, Salinger's *The Catcher In The Rye* (1951), which had created a market for adolescence-themed fiction like *Temple...* Nonetheless, first editions of this and Goldman's next two books are now rare and fetch prices around the £200 mark.

"I had this nutty feeling that I should write a book a year," Goldman says. "The next book I wrote was *Your Turn to Curtsy, My Turn To Bow*. Very short, depressing etc. I wrote that in ten days and in the rest of the year I went to the movies."

What with its themes of first love and sexual confusion and a scene where a successful young athlete who has developed a Christ complex



nails himself to a cross, this 1958 publication certainly has interesting subject matter but it was squandered by the haste in the rendering Goldman mentions. *Soldier in the Rain* (1960) was a different matter altogether. Though it is a book with narrow horizons, this black comedy about military life (which actually predated *Catch-22*) set in a domestic army camp at the end of the Korean War is absorbing and admirable. It also feels like the first Goldman book in which he is not playing to the gallery. When this is put to him, Goldman denies any such calculation.

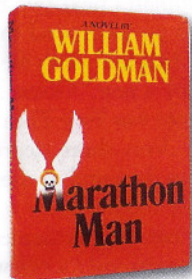
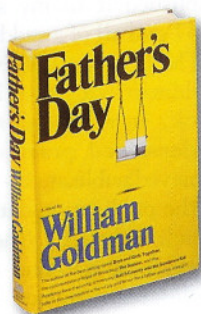
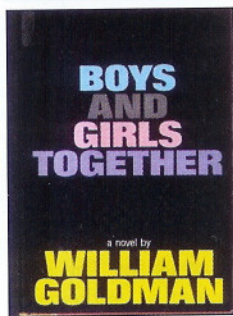
"I'm totally instinctive, I don't know what I'm doing, I never have. I'm always amazed when I can write something."

The follow-up was Goldman's book masterpiece. Published in 1964, *Boys and Girls Together* is a sprawling but gripping snapshot of American life in the early 1960s. His occasional stylistic flippancy and a gratuitously dispiriting ending make it fall short of classic status, but only just. Yet Goldman hated writing it.

"I felt, I don't know why, that I should write a long novel," he says. "I spent years writing that thing and my advice to all young writers is never write a long novel."

During its four-year gestation period, Goldman secured some Broadway work: a doctoring job on *Tenderloin* (1960), then the writing of a play with his brother James (1961's *Blood, Sweat and Stanley Poole*, whose subject matter was very similar to that of *Soldier In The Rain*) and *A Family Affair*, a 1962 musical with his brother in collaboration with composer John Kander, to which Goldman contributed lyrics. Goldman: "It meant that I was away from my book for, oh I don't know, a year. When I went back to it, I was blocked, which is the worst thing that can ever happen to any of us."

At this point, an idea came to Goldman for a novel related to the Boston Strangler murders occurring at the time. The idea



revolved around a current theory that there were in fact two stranglers. Goldman wanted to write it but was worried that this was just a displacement activity to prevent him working on *Boys and Girls Together*. Friends told him that if he was going to do the strangler book, he should do it fast.

"So I wrote that book," recalls the author. "Its a strange-looking book. It's got, I don't know, 60 chapters and some of the chapters are one sentence long. I was doing anything to try and make it seem longer. I wrote it in a week."

However, his editor - who wanted him to bring *Boys and Girls Together* to a conclusion - was not impressed and suggested he release it under a different name. The book was published under the pseudonym Harry Longbaugh (real name of the Sundance Kid). *No Way to Treat a Lady* was a rather low-rent thriller but interesting because it was a precursor to the suspense novels in which Goldman would specialize from 1974's *Marathon Man* onwards. It has had a sustained life, though. Not only was there a movie adaptation, but it was also turned into a most unlikely musical. Unusually, the hardback edition appeared after the story had originally been published in paperback. However, collectors still prefer the hardback, paying up to £200 for it in comparison to the £40 the paperback usually commands.

Lady... opened up a whole new world for Goldman when actor/producer Cliff Robertson read it and, mistaking it for a screen treatment (a story outline that is not quite a script), commissioned some screenwriting from Goldman. Movie work kept Goldman busy for the next couple of years, so it wasn't until 1967 that a new Goldman novel hit the stores, and a rather short one at that. However, *The Thing of It Is...* is a fine work, a hilarious comedy of modern manners that often has the reader laughing out loud.

Goldman's first venture into non-fiction

followed in 1969. *The Season: A Candid Look at Broadway* was Goldman's diary of one year on the Great White Way. Though caustic and twinkle-eyed in the inimitable Goldman style, it is also to some extent his work of the greatest gravitas, intensely researched and intricately reasoned. Despite being hard to come by, first editions are surprisingly cheap, usually fetching around £15.

Father's Day (1971) was a sequel to *The Thing Of It Is...* It follows the tribulations on father's visiting day of the now divorced couple from its predecessor. A slim volume - many pages of which are taken up with dialogue - it either demonstrates that Goldman has learnt an economy of style from scriptwriting or that he is now moving away from work that can be classified as heavyweight. If the latter, he compensates with some crackling dialogue and an ever-increasing ability to leave the reader chuckling.

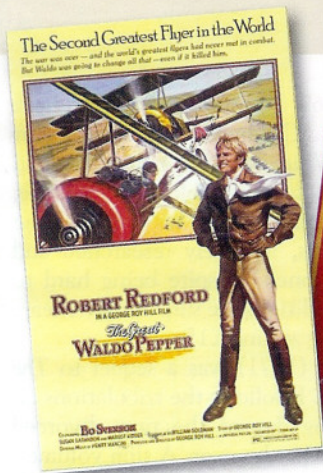
The Princess Bride (1973) is an utterly strange entry in the Goldman canon. It was presented as a re-publication of a classic fairytale by one S. Morgenstern, with intervening commentary by Goldman himself. Morgenstern was in fact fictional.

"I had all these stories but didn't know how to get there," Goldman reveals. "I was walking around the city and the book was disappearing on me and then I got the notion that I didn't write it, that Morgenstern wrote it and I had just abridged it. Once that happened the whole thing flew. It's so freaky. It was a great, great experience for me."

Not only did Goldman gain an unusual pleasure from the act of writing this work but he retains an almost unique fondness for it among his oeuvre.

"The only book of mine that I like is *The Princess Bride*," he says. "I can look at *The Princess Bride* and think, 'Yeah I wrote that - isn't that neat?'"

Does this mean he actively dislikes the act of writing?



Princess Bride and Heat.

Between those two down-and-dirty novels came a book from Goldman that couldn't be more of a contrast, *Wigger* (1974), Goldman's only children's book. It tells the tale of seven-year-old Susanna, who in an uncertain world that has seen her orphaned and abandoned clings to her comfort blanket, a pink rag she has named Wigger and who speaks to her when no one else is around. It's difficult to work out how to assess Wigger. The

"No. It's just what I do. You go with it and you wish it was better. I don't think there's anybody who walks around saying, 'Oh my God, I wrote this glorious page today'."

Perhaps fittingly, the first edition of *The Princess Bride* is the Goldman book most sought after by collectors. Prices can go as high as £450.

Around this time, Hiram Hayden, the editor who had looked askance at *No Way To Treat A Lady*, died. Says Goldman, "When he died I began to write, for good or ill, a different kind of novel. I loved thrillers, and *Marathon Man* is a thriller and *Magic* is an odd book."

The two books Goldman mentions (published in 1974 and 1976) are respectively about a naïf who unwittingly gets caught up in a former Nazi's attempt to recapture stolen loot and a ventriloquist whose years of failure make him chillingly dependent on his doll. Their fast paces, pared-down prose and stylish violence effectively reinvented Goldman as a quintessentially Seventies writer. They also marked for the first time an intertwining of Goldman's film and prose writing: excellent movie versions written by Goldman appeared within two years of the publication of each book. (Earlier movie adaptations of his work, *Soldier In The Rain*, 1963, and *No Way To Treat A Lady*, 1968, were written by others.) Later, Goldman would adapt his own novels *The*

7-10 age group at which it is aimed will quite possibly find the book as heart-lifting and charming as it is clearly intended to be. That demographic will presumably be too young to worry about the plot and logic inconsistencies that the adult brain registers.

Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that it was voted a Book of the Year by the Child Study Association. Long out of print, it is among the rarest of Goldman's books and can fetch up to £150. A Goldman book somewhat less likely to fetch such a tidy sum is a curious publication from 1977, *The Story of 'A Bridge Too Far'*. A small paperback with a large quotient of photographs featuring extended notes by Goldman on the making of the titular war movie for which he wrote the screenplay, it was written at the request of ...*Bridge...* producer Joseph E Levine. It's hardly a masterpiece, nor are you likely to be asked to part for even as much as £10 for it, but copies in good condition are hard to come by. To sidestep common issues of split spines and loosened pages, you should seek out an unread copy.

Goldman's next novel was *Tinsel* (1979). Not only had he written the screenplays of *Marathon Man* and *Magic* in the time between this novel and his previous one, he had also come up with the scripts for *The Stepford*



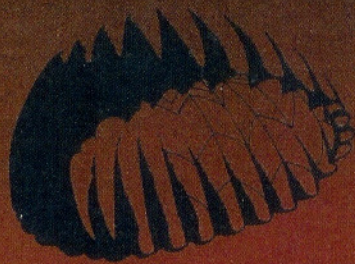
CORONET

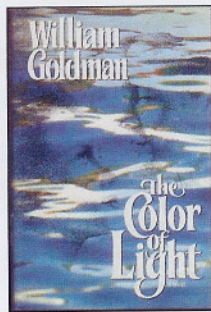
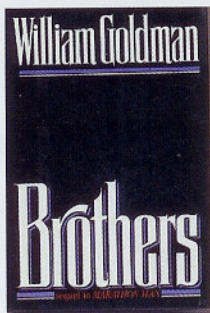
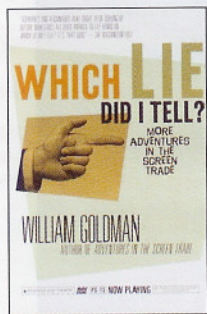
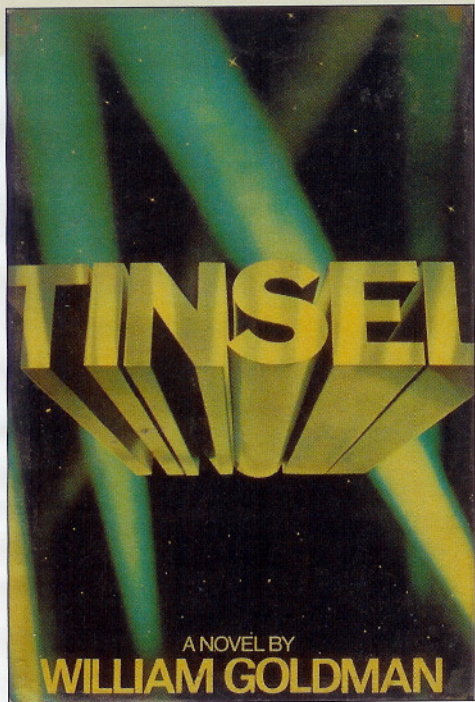
THE MOST SPECTACULAR WAR FILM EVER MADE!

WILLIAM GOLDMAN'S

STORY OF A BRIDGE TOO FAR

THE BATTLE RETOLD IN OVER 150 EXCITING PHOTOGRAPHS





Wives, *The Great Waldo Pepper*, *All the President's Men* and *A Bridge Too Far*. It was perhaps inevitable then that he should address the world of the movie mogul in his latest work of fiction.

"I wanted to write a Hollywood novel," says Goldman. "It's such a bizarre place. I don't like California and I don't go there very often."

However, *Tinsel* doesn't just depict the backstabbing world of the movie execs, which would both be dull and make it stray far too close to Harold Robbins or Jackie Collins territory for comfort, but also convincingly deals with the lives and loves of a group of wastrel youths who are casualties of a Hollywood upbringing.

Control (1982) is essentially a science fiction work that, courtesy of Goldman's usual naturalistic style, somehow doesn't feel like one. In latter years, Goldman's novels had been increasingly marked by multiple overlapping plots and in *Control* he took this to its logical end by having plots set both in the past and the present. This technique would become highly popular amongst literary novelists in the succeeding years, although, instead of keeping the two plotlines parallel as is the custom for those works, Goldman melds the two stories with a time travel element.

A visit to Venice gave Goldman the idea for *The Silent Gondoliers* (1983), another alleged Morgenstern tale: "A bunch of gondoliers came rowing down the canal and they were quiet and I suddenly turned to [my ex-wife] Ilene and I said, 'I know why the gondoliers don't sing'. We got off the bus immediately and I went running back to the hotel and I wrote the story down in about five minutes." This is less impressive than it sounds: the book is only 100 pages, including two dozen illustrations. However, because this fable is so short, it doesn't risk outstaying its welcome and constitutes a diverting afternoon's reading.

Nineteen eighty three was also the year of

publication of Goldman's second non-fiction work and one which brought him a whole new audience. In *Adventures In The Screen Trade*, he chronicled Hollywood vanity and vacillation again but this time via twinkled-eyed memoirs of his own experiences working with producers, actors and directors. The book created a catchphrase, spawned by Goldman's belief that box office success is a crapshoot: "Nobody knows anything."

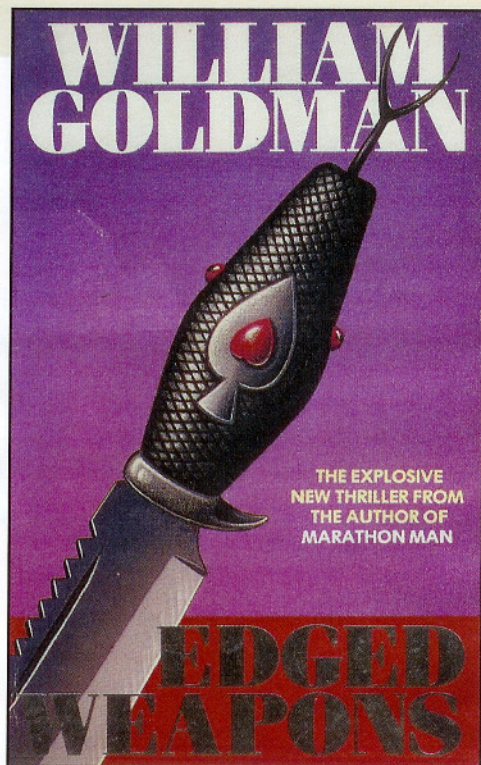
The Color of Light (1984) marked the point at which Goldman clearly began to lose interest in the form of the novel. Though a thoroughly enjoyable tale of a struggling young writer, a juncture in the book at which Goldman abandons an elaborately set-up plot strand could be attributed to carelessness or laziness were it not for the subsequent paucity of his prose writing. Kudos for Goldman incidentally for pointing out through his protagonist Chub Fuller that Irwin Shaw's *Mixed Company* (1950) is a truly wonderful and underrated short story collection.

"I was given that book the year it came out and it changed everything," Goldman recalls. "I finished the book in like two days and I was not the same ever after. He was my hero."

Heat (1985, re-titled *Edged Weapons* in the United Kingdom) is a sub-Elmore Leonard affair concerning a gambler and bodyguard with a physical resemblance to tennis player Pancho Gonzales.

"I had that main character and I had that opening sequence and I'd been in Vegas a lot, and it's such a terrible place and I thought to be a compulsive gambler and try to earn a living there..."

The novel fell flat, not even having the enthusiasm that redeemed the naiveté of the author's first couple of works of fiction. On the face of it, *Brothers* (1986) was a far more intriguing proposition. Referring to a character in *Marathon Man*, Goldman says, "I'd written one sequel before [Father's Day] and I had this notion that the Doc wasn't dead



and I thought, 'Shit I'll bring him back and see what happens.'" What happened is a book that features none of *Marathon Man's* zip and contains scenes of violence that, in contrast to the chilling dental torture scene from its predecessor, are simply gratuitous and sometimes revolting.

Reading like nothing more than contractual obligation works, these two books mark the nadir of Goldman's novel writing and will constitute an unfortunate goodbye to the medium should they transpire to be, as it seems they will, his final works of fiction. Did he make a start on another novel after *Brothers*?

"Not really," says Goldman. "It was one of those funny things. It just ended, but as I say it came as a shock to me. I don't know what happened. My wife left me the next year and that certainly was a change."

Goldman has at least continued issuing books

WILLIAM GOLDMAN

Author of *Adventures in the Screen Trade*

HYPE & GLORY



A TRUE ACCOUNT BY THE ONLY PERSON TO HAVE BEEN A JUDGE AT BOTH THE CANNES FILM FESTIVAL AND THE MISS AMERICA PAGEANT—IN THE SAME YEAR—AND LIVED TO TELL ABOUT IT!



of non-fiction and his likeable, humorous and often profane personality can be found in *Wait Till Next Year* (a 1988 collaboration with Mike Lupica in which Goldman indulged his love of professional sports), *Hype and Glory* (1990, a book that detailed Goldman's marriage break-up in passages that alternated with his diary of judging film and beauty contests), *Which Lie Did I Tell?*, a 2000 follow-up to *Adventures in the Screen Trade* but one which was more instructional for those inclined to be screenwriters themselves, and the same year's *The Big Picture: Who Killed Hollywood? and Other Essays*, a more whimsical look at the movie industry.

Another type of book that has appeared under Goldman's name in recent years is collections of his screenplays, of which there have so far been two. Though this is somehow symbolic of the way that Goldman's fiction writing has been utterly subsumed into scriptwriting, it should also be pointed out that Goldman published a film script way back when he had only six novels under his belt. In 1969, such was the astronomical popularity predicted for the movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* after its screenplay - Goldman's first original one after a couple of adaptations - had been sold for a record sum in a movie studio auction, Bantam issued a paperback of the script. Parts of it were surprisingly just as entertaining as Goldman's prose writing, especially the stage direction,

"Butch delivers the most aesthetically exquisite kick in the balls in the history of the modern American cinema". Less predictably, Goldman's script for the artistically and commercially so-so 1975 airplane movie *The Great Waldo Pepper* was also issued in book form. Subsequently, several of Goldman's screenplays have made it to print.

Strangely, Goldman is perfectly au fait with the shortcomings of the type of writing that now occupies his time to the detriment of novels.

"If you're a bestselling novelist and you write another novel of the same genre, the audience will be there for you, but that's not true in the world of movies," he admits. "That's why movie stars are movie stars." He also says of movies, "It's always collaborative. When you write a novel or a piece of non-fiction it's your baby, but when you write a movie... [it's] a crapshoot. It's terrible. One of the reasons most screenwriters become directors, if they can, is because they're going nuts having directors screw up their work."

So all that said, why not go back to writing novels? "But that assumes I know what I'm doing, but as I'm trying to say to you, ad nauseam, I don't know what I'm doing. I'm not being bullshitty when I say that to you. I've always been a totally instinctive writer in my fiction, totally. And I never basically said, 'Oh I've going to write a novel about that, I'll write a war novel, I'll write a this'. When I was a novelist I never knew what I was going to write next."

Sean Egan is the author of the forthcoming William Goldman: Marathon Man or Sprint Man? His short story collection Don't Mess With The Best, featuring endorsements from former Booker Prize winners Stanley Middleton and David Storey, appeared last year.