

THE FICTION OF GRAHAM GREENE

by

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Abbreviations of Greene's works as cited in the text

- BOC      A Burnt-Out Case      New York, Bantam, 1962.
- BR      Brighton Rock      Middlesex, Penguin Books,  
1962.
- C      The Comedians      London, Bodley Head, 1966.
- CA      The Confidential Agent      Middlesex, Penguin  
Books, 1965.
- EA      The End of the Affair      Middlesex, Penguin  
Books, 1962.
- EMM      England Made Me      London, Heinemann, 1951.
- GS      A Gun for Sale      Middlesex, Penguin Books,  
1962.
- HM      The Heart of the Matter      Middlesex, Penguin  
Books, 1962.
- IB      It's a Battlefield      London, Heinemann, 1962.
- JWM      Journey Without Maps in The Travel Books of  
Graham Greene      London, Mercury Books,  
1963.
- LC      The Lost Childhood      Middlesex, Penguin Books,  
1964.
- LR      The Lawless Roads in The Travel Books of  
Graham Greene      London, Mercury Books,  
1963.
- MBH      May We Borrow Your Husband?      London, Bodley  
Head, 1967.
- MF      The Ministry of Fear      Middlesex, Penguin  
Books, 1963.
- MW      The Man Within      London, Heinemann, 1962.
- NA      The Name of Action      London, Heinemann, 1930.
- OMH      Our Man in Havana      Middlesex, Penguin Books,  
1962.
- PG      The Power and the Glory      London, Heinemann,  
1949.
- QA      The Quiet American      Middlesex, Penguin  
Books, 1955.
- RN      Rumour at Nightfall      London, Heinemann,  
1932.
- SR      A Sense of Reality      London, Bodley Head,  
1963.
- ST      Stamboul Train      Middlesex, Penguin Books,  
1963.
- TMA      Travels With My Aunt      London, Bodley Head,  
1969.
- TOS      Twenty-One Stories      London, Heinemann, 1965.

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"He who despises himself, nevertheless  
esteems himself as a self-despiser."

NIETZSCHE

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In an essay on de la Mare Greene defines the creative writer as "a victim: a man given over to an obsession",<sup>(1)</sup> This seems a good starting point for a discussion of Greene's own work. A reading of almost any one of his books will suggest that the author is a man given over to an obsession, or to a number of related obsessions: despair, loneliness, the feeling of being hunted, the impossibility of happiness, the inevitability of pain, the inevitability of guilt and a deep sense of life's injustice.

Greene is noted for being a highly topical writer. In one sense his novels are contemporary in the way that newspapers are contemporary. In the thirties his subject matter was often of the sort that made the daily headlines: strikes and communist unrest in It's a Battlefield, the machinations of international financiers in England Made Me (Krogh is modelled on Kreuger), race track gang warfare in Brighton Rock, the Spanish civil war in The Confidential Agent. In the forties and early fifties Greene produced three novels with World War II as the background, and a film set in post-war Vienna. And from the fifties onwards he seems to have deliberately sought out the world's most disturbed areas to provide the settings for his novels: Vietnam, the Congo, Cuba and Haiti under 'Papa Doc'.

There is another sense, however, in which the novels are not contemporary at all, but Greene's attempt to describe what he feels to be man's

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(1) "Walter de la Mare's Short Stories", in LC p.87

essential situation. He is often curiously indifferent to the politics or 'history' of the conspicuously political settings from which he derives his chronically seedy local colour. In the preface-dedication to A Burnt-Out Case, for example, he writes that the novel "is an attempt to give dramatic expression to various types of belief, half-belief and non-belief in the kind of setting removed from world-politics and household preoccupations, where such differences are felt acutely and find expression." This setting, "removed from world-politics", is the Congo just before the Belgian withdrawal. And The Heart of the Matter, a novel set in a British colony during the war, displays little interest in either colonialism or the war. The war plays a part in the action, mainly by throwing up a group of survivors of a torpedoing. But these people are seen primarily, not as victims of war, but as symbols for innocently suffering humanity. In The Confidential Agent the Spanish civil war provides the impetus for an action which takes place in England. Spain is never named or discussed, but supplies a generalised, symbolical condition of violence, treachery and suspicion. In The Ministry of Fear, a thriller like The Confidential Agent, World War II provides the background and a set of villains, a rather perfunctorily invented Nazi spy-ring. The main interest of the novel, however, is centred on a man obsessed with his private guilt (inescapably part of the human condition for Greene), the Nazis providing a convenient yardstick for him to measure it by.

Even when Greene does display an interest

in 'local politics' his interest is never confined to the particular situation he is describing. The situation is always used to exemplify what he insists is the state of the world. In The Power and the Glory, which at one level is about the communist suppression of the church in Mexico, the main part of the action is set in one state (unnamed, but probably Tabasco) where the persecution is fiercest. The state, described as "a landscape of terror and lust" and an "abandoned land" is clearly a microcosm of the world. At various points the symbolism is made quite explicit, as for example when the hero is thrown into a particularly foul prison:

"This place [the prison] was very like the world: overcrowded with lust and crime and unhappy love: it stank to heaven."<sup>(1)</sup>

Again, in The Comedians, set in Papa Doc's Haiti, one of the characters speaks of "the wild world we live in now (I do not mean my poor insignificant little Haiti)."<sup>(2)</sup>

The world which Greene describes is always the same world, despite the apparently different places, times and situations which typify it for him. It is a world of brutality, violence, injustice and pain. Its characteristic décor is derelict or seedy, whether with the seediness of civilisation or of the primitive. Its climate is at one extreme or another: enervatingly hot, bitterly cold or endlessly raining. Its characteristic faunae are repulsive: unwanted

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(1) PG p.161

(2) E p.312

prostitutes blue with cold if the setting is urban, vultures clanging on tin roofs, cockroaches and dead pye dogs if tropical. The inhabitants have internal disorders, boils, carious teeth and their breath is unpleasant. Life is uncomfortable, painful, sordid and it awaits death.

Critics have called this world 'Greeneland', a term which (implying as it does that Greene's world is the product of his own lacerated imagination) annoys Greene intensely: "I can't help wondering where these critics live", he says in an interview, "what sort of lives they live. I mean the Vietnam War is seedy, yes. The rule of Batista in Cuba belonged to that seedy world - dirt, torture, people half-starved. Where do these critics live? Do they live in Kensington and watch the traffic going past the window and then have a cocktail party with friends? That I think is a worse world than 'Greeneland', and less true."<sup>(1)</sup>

As far as Greene is concerned, life can be objectively described as Hell. He had discovered this by the time he was thirteen, at his school, Berkhamsted, where his father was headmaster, and in the surrounding town. He gives a vivid description of both in the prologue to The Lawless Roads, the travel book about his journey through Mexico.

The school lacked privacy: "'There by reason of the great numbers of the damned, the prisoners are heaped together in their awful prison...'" quotes Greene.<sup>2)</sup> It was a place of

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(1) Christopher Burstall: "Graham Greene Takes the Orient Express", in The Listener, 21.11.68, p.622

(2) LR p.5

singular depravity:

"... one met for the first time characters, adult and adolescent, who bore about them the genuine quality of evil. There was Collifax, who practised torments with the dividers; Mr. Cranden with three grim chins, a dusty gown, a kind of demoniac sensuality; from these heights evil declined towards Parlow, whose desk was filled with minute photographs - advertisements for art photos. Hell lay about them in their infancy."<sup>(1)</sup>

The note of depravity was echoed for Greene in the town, which, incidentally, has been described by one of his critics as

"... a little country town in Hertfordshire, set in pastoral country within a crescent of the Chiltern Hills. I must have passed through, or paused at this pleasant-looking country town a dozen times before, one afternoon, halting at one of the pubs for a drink, and observing a couple of men who were obviously schoolmasters chatting amiably over beer, I realised that this was the hideous

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(1) Ibid. p.4

town anathematised in the opening pages of The Lawless Roads."<sup>(1)</sup>

In Greene's version a mist hangs heavy over the Chilterns. The town's High Street is drab and dim. Photographs "peer out"<sup>(2)</sup> yellowly from the window of a photographer's shop. The window is genuine Elizabethan "but you couldn't believe in it because of the Tudor Café across the street."<sup>(3)</sup> At the newsagents they sell "a game called Monopoly", a sign of an acquisitive and materialistic society. "'The object', the rules said, 'of owning property is to collect rent from opponents stopping there.'"<sup>(4)</sup> A shabby little shop offers for sale second-hand copies of a fetishistic magazine. Irish servant girls make "assignments for a ditch".<sup>(5)</sup> "They couldn't be kept in at night. They would return with the milk in a stranger's car."<sup>(6)</sup> A girl cuts a branch off a tree, her "expression abased and secretive".<sup>(7)</sup> In an evening paper is an account of a woman who has murdered her husband. A boy of twenty and a girl of fifteen are found headless on a railway line. She was expecting her second baby. (This tragedy reappears in two of Greene's novels: in Brighton Rock as a symbol for sex, and in The

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(1) Sean O'Faolain: The Vanishing Hero. London Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1956. p.79

(2) LR p.8

(3) Ibid. p.8

(4) Ibid. p.9

(5) Ibid. p.9

(6) Ibid. pp.6-7

(7) Ibid. p.10

Power and the Glory as a symbol for human love. In the former novel when Pinkie's friend, Dallow, tries to defend the sensual life from Pinkie's vilification of it, he steps uneasily into a little pile of dog's ordure and is made to pursue his inadequate arguments, ignominiously scraping his foot against the pavement edge.)

An alternative version both of school and town is supplied by Peter Quennell who was one of Greene's contemporaries at school. Quennell remembers the school as dull and the town as drab. But the latter had a broad and pleasant High Street "which included some dignified ancient houses." Most of the school buildings were ugly, but in the middle of them was a "venerable Tudor hall". The countryside around the town was entirely charming.

"These same prospects I find strangely transmogrified in my distinguished contemporary's recollections. The school that we both attended proves to have been a place of almost unfathomable iniquity ... But I was conscious neither of the hellish atmosphere of the pedestrian life I lived at school, nor of the signs of spiritual degeneracy that I might have run to earth among the adjacent streets. I never glanced into the windows of the shabby little shops that sold second-hand copies of the fetishistic weekly paper; and I remain unaware of 'Irish servant

girls' (twice referred to by my friend the novelist)... Perhaps I was unduly simple-minded, perhaps unusually self-centred; but the intimations of Evil that seem to have coloured Graham Greene's youth, and that since then have had so profound an effect on the shaping of his creative talents, failed somehow to enrich mine."<sup>(1)</sup>

Quennell refers to the schoolmasters, among whom Greene found monsters of depravity, as being mostly "respectable, if somewhat uninteresting men".

There is something unbalanced and hectic about the tone of Greene's recollections, which, even without Quennell's and O'Faolain's more genial descriptions of his childhood environs, suggests a mind predisposed to looking at experience in a certain way, rather than concerned to give an objective account of it. One feels that if Greene found that life held nothing but pain, it was because he was looking for nothing but pain (it is noticeable that the worst things in his account of Berkhamsted life - the murder and the adolescents' suicide - are taken from newspapers); and that if he found evil and depravity in his surroundings it was less because they were there than because he was determined to find them. The most innocent things are made to appear sinister: photographs "peer out" of a window; sawing a tree looks "abased and secretive"; a sour reference to

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(1) Peter Quennell: The Sign of the Fish. London, Collins, 1960. pp60-62

Monopoly is sandwiched between references to murder and fetishism, as though Monopoly parties, "very popular locally", were measurably degenerate. The "Irish servant girls" play an extraordinarily large part in Greene's recollections; the presumably respectable households from which they made their nightly excursions no part at all. One can't enjoy beauty (the diamonded Elizabethan panes) because there is ugliness (the Tudor café) across the way. A misty day is chosen for a description of the town as though the sun never shone.

In the middle of his description Greene quotes Marlowe, "Why this is hell, nor am I out of it." and asks: "Why Mexico? Did I really expect to find there what I hadn't found here?"<sup>(1)</sup> The answer, of course, is 'no'. He expected to find hell in Mexico, and he found it, as he found it also in Brighton, Battersea, the Gold Coast and wherever else he travelled. Greene hated Mexico, but when he got back he wondered why he had loathed it so much; England was just as awful.

Whenever, in one of Greene's novels, life seems to be comparatively pleasant, it is turned over like a stone to reveal the teeming horrors beneath. It is the horrors that are real life; the stone is simply the smooth, disguising surface. In Brighton Rock, for example, there are two distinct Brightons. The one is the cheerful holiday resort filled with happy, laughing crowds, where the sun shines down on a sparkling sea. This is the Brighton to which Ida Arnold belongs. The other Brighton is Pinkie's

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(1) LR p.8

Brighton, a sordid and painful underworld. The weather changes and the sea turns "poison-green". "Of course there's hell, flames and damnation," says Pinkie, "with his eyes on the dark shifting water and the lightning and the lamps going out above the black struts of Palace Pier, 'torments,'" (1) It is Pinkie's hell which is the authentic Brighton. Pinkie who is evil is "spiritually real" and knows what life is about. Ida Arnold "knows nothing"; her Brighton is an illusion, the illusion of the crass and imperceptive. When looked at closely, the crowds aren't happy at all: they are grimly bent on extracting the least ounce of cheap pleasure from a brief holiday which is the only alleviation in their miserable lives. The individuals have spots, are selfish, their hair is unattractively crimped. Trying to lose himself amongst them is a tense little man with bitten-down fingernails who knows that he is going to be murdered. When Ida looks out of a window she sees "only the Brighton she knew; she hadn't seen anything different even the day Fred died." (2)

Hell is the landscape of Greene's novels, a setting for a spiritual drama which remains essentially unchanged though its accidents, like the landscape's, differ enormously from book to book. The drama - although this is never overtly the point of the novels - is one of innocence, sometimes of saintliness, maligned, persecuted, tormented and unjustly accused.

At first sight Greene's central characters

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(1) BR p.53

(2) Ibid. p.73

may appear to be an integral part of the depraved and derelict world they inhabit. Whenever, in his novels or out of them, Greene talks about human nature, he talks in tones of acutest gloom of a corruption which is inescapable. "Goodness has only once found a perfect incarnation in the human body and never will again, but evil can always find a home there",<sup>(1)</sup> he writes in an essay called "The Lost Childhood". And there is one point in The Power and the Glory where the unsavoury half-caste, who is to betray the hero, a priest, to the anti-religious authorities, is offered as a typical specimen of ordinary human corruption - this just after he has forced the priest to listen to a spectacularly lurid confession. "'I've taken money from women ... I've given money to boys - you know what I mean... Once I had two women - I'll tell you what I did...'"<sup>(2)</sup> The half-caste, apparently, is Greene's idea of l'homme moyen sensuel: "He had an immense self-importance: he was unable to picture a world of which he was only a typical part - a world of treachery, violence and lust in which his shame was altogether insignificant. How often the priest had heard the same confession..."<sup>(3)</sup> A little later in the same scene the priest, who drinks and has a daughter and is a coward, puts himself "with his lust and his pride and his cowardice"<sup>(4)</sup> in the same

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(1) "The Lost Childhood" in LC pp.14-15

(2) PG p.123

(3) Ibid. p.123

(4) Ibid. p.126

spiritual category as the half-caste. He feels that evil runs "like malaria" in his veins, and that he is "just one criminal among a herd of criminals".<sup>(1)</sup> Not surprisingly, numerous critics have accused Greene of taking a perversely low view of human nature and human possibilities.<sup>(2)</sup> This sort of criticism is actually the result of a misreading of his novels, though an understandable one. Humanity as a whole is viewed by Greene with a very jaundiced eye. At the end of The Power and the Glory the captured priest bears no grudge against his betrayer "because he expected nothing else of anything human".<sup>(3)</sup>

Greene's central characters, however, do not belong to an order of humanity of which the half-caste is a "typical part", although they may appear to, and although, like the whiskey priest, they usually think they do. On the face of it they are as corrupt as other people, and at times they may even appear more so. The priest has a daughter; Raven and Pinkie are murderers; Anthony in England Made Me would blackmail his sister's lover if she would let him; Conrad in It's a Battlefield sleeps with his brother's wife; Andrews in The Man Within, Greene's first novel, betrays his friends and succumbs to the temptations of the Flesh (the latter being the more heinous offence in this unwary work); Fowler in The Quiet American stands selfishly aside

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(1) Ibid. p.166

(2) e.g. Sean O'Faolain, Arnold Kettle, Martin Jarret-Kerr, Martin Turnell, etc.

(3) PG p.256

from humanity's pain and when at last he becomes involved, it is at the expense of another man's life; Scobie works his way methodically through all the mortal sins the Church has to offer. Yet all these characters are viewed sympathetically, and more than sympathetically. The whiskey priest and Scobie are saints, and so, in their own ways and at a secular level, are Conrad and Fowler. Andrews has a soul above his "cowardly, lusty body" although he is too modest to realise it. Anthony and Raven and Pinkie are all sympathetically presented as victims of life. Spiritually maimed and stunted by childhood experiences which determine their later lives, they are in no way responsible for, or even capable of understanding the significance of their actions.

I used to think it was a quality of moral generosity in Greene that enabled him to present corrupt characters with understanding, and to depict sinners who had not lost a kind of inward integrity, or weak characters who could overcome their weaknesses to act heroically and well. But I have since come to see in his novels less generosity than a kind of dishonest over-involvement with heroes who are only superficially being presented as complex, erring figures. Their failings are not, in fact, seriously being offered as failings at all, but, surreptitiously, as rather unconventional virtues, or else as actions which have been forced on them by life, or circumstance, or even their own goodness. They are made to reproach themselves for actions which Greene goes to extraordinary lengths to condone; for breaking moral rules which Greene shows (covertly) are meaningless and

irrelevant; and for weaknesses which their own self-reproaches are disingenuously designed to prove they do not possess.

## CHAPTER II: THE NOVELS: 1929-32

The vivid portrayal of the more depressing aspects of the contemporary scene only became a feature of Greene's work with Stamboul Train in 1932. His first novel, The Man Within (1929) is set in early nineteenth century Sussex in a world of smugglers and Bow Street Runners. The novel displays no particular sense of period <sup>(1)</sup> and the background is of little interest beyond the fact that it provides the frame for the real focus of the novel: the soul-searching of its central character, Francis Andrews.

The main theme of the book, one of perennial interest to Greene, is what he was later to call "the divided mind"<sup>(2)</sup>, by which he means the gap that exists between the ideal conception which man has of his moral obligations and the actual impulses of his limited human nature. Nearly all of Greene's characters are involved in an interminable and exhausting conflict between their weaknesses and their sense of duty. Even the apparently sceptical heroes of his more recent novels find themselves - to their own surprise - engaged in the

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- (1) In fact there are several obvious anachronisms, such as the hero's amazement at finding the heroine a virgin. "God, you're respectable," he cries derisively. MW p.21.
- (2) In an address delivered to a Catholic Conference in Brussels in 1949: "But if we surrender all idea of perfection - even of the struggle for perfection - what marks do we expect to find that separate the Christian from one of the Pagan civilisations? Perhaps all we can really demand is the divided mind, the uneasy conscience, the sense of personal failure..." Quoted in Allott and Farris: The Art of Graham Greene. London, Hamilton, 1951. p.57

struggle. In the later books this concept of the "divided mind" is thoroughly absorbed into Greene's thinking and is a submerged principle according to which his harrassed and guilt-ridden characters work out their lives. In the first three novels and particularly in The Man Within it is a subject of direct interest, explicitly and rather theoretically handled. The central characters tend to be split into clearly definable halves of Good on the one hand and Evil on the other, and to become involved with simplified, abstract Morality-type figures, who correspond, like Good and Bad Angels, to the warring higher and lower elements of their natures. In The Man Within, Andrews' mind is quite literally divided into two parts: a lower nature, cowardly, lustful and self-pitying; and an inner voice, a conscience, which is like a separate personality that stands aside from everything he does, watching and criticising. (Hence the epigraph and title from Sir Thomas Browne: "There's another man within me that's angry with me.")

The main interest of the book lies in Andrews' search for wholeness and peace, in his struggles to become his better self. And the exterior action - such as it is, for there are long pauses for soulful dialogue and solitary self-questioning - is straightforwardly designed to flow from or lead to the various phases in his spiritual development.

Andrews is a member of a gang of smugglers who has betrayed his comrades by an anonymous letter to the authorities. When the book opens, he is on the run, pursued by the three smugglers, including the leader, Carlyon, who have escaped arrest. In

his panicky flight, he comes across a young girl called Elizabeth, who shelters him in her cottage.

The meeting with Elizabeth marks the beginning of Andrews' spiritual growth. Up to this time all of his actions have been prompted by the attributes of his baser self, by cowardice, lust or sentimental self-pity. The only sign of virtue in him is the cold, self-despising voice of his conscience. He has just enough moral sense to hate himself for what he is, not enough to let it influence his actions. So ineffectual is his inner voice that he sometimes doubts its value and even its existence as a real part of him:

"What a Pharisee this other part of him was. It never took control of his mouth and spoke its own words - hard, real and trustworthy. It only stood on one side and listened and taunted and questioned...Perhaps that other part of him remained silent... because it had no words to speak. There was nothing in him but sentiment and fear and cowardice."<sup>(1)</sup>

His greatest bar to virtue is in fact a paralysing sense that he is incapable of it; and what Elizabeth gives him, primarily, is a much needed faith in himself.

The process is gradual. It begins with his discovery that in her company he does not seem as despicable as he had thought himself to be. His lust, for example, which he (with Greene) considers to be one of his most disgusting traits, is at first

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(1) MW pp.17-18

abashed by his awed sense of her purity and then lost in growing tenderness and regard. And there are moments when his sentimental self-concern gives way to disinterested compassion, an emotion he had not thought he was capable of. In the growing intimacy which develops between them, he becomes aware of moments of peace when the discordant self-awareness which has tormented him since childhood disappears. "His second criticising self was silent, indeed he was that self."<sup>(1)</sup>

His sense of peace, however, is far from complete or secure. His lust appears to have been conquered; but he still has frequent lapses into melodramatic self-pity, and his feelings of cowardice and inferiority remain unexorcised.

Eventually he confesses to Elizabeth his betrayal of his comrades and the shameful mixture of resentment and fear which had prompted it. His cowardice and lack of physical stamina had made his life as a smuggler intolerable. And its miseries had been increased by the contempt of the other smugglers who had measured his inadequacies against the standard of brute courage set by his dead father who had been their leader. Betraying these men to the Gaugers had at once been a twisted way of asserting himself ("I've shown them I'm of importance now," he said.<sup>(2)</sup>), a means of bringing to an end a way of life that he hated, and an act of complicated revenge by which three separate scores were paid off. He has got back at his companions for their scorn, at his father who when he was alive

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(1) Ibid. p.53

(2) Ibid. p.77

had bullied him and now that he was dead seemed to haunt him like a mocking ghost, and, more obscurely, at Carlyon who had been his friend, for being a finer person than he was himself.

The better side of Andrews recognises that his triumph is a shoddy one, and Elizabeth, in telling him, "Don't you see that by all this nameless work of yours, this flight, you've made the whole pack of them... better men than you are" <sup>(1)</sup>, is speaking with the voice of his own inner critic.

At this point she makes a conscious effort to help him get rid of his tormenting sense of inferiority. Nothing can alter the fact that he is an informer, but he can at least show courage and a kind of belated honesty by laying his information openly. And so she urges him to go to Lewes where the Assizes are being held and testify against the smugglers at their trial.

Andrews is not convinced that he is capable of meeting such a test of his courage: to go to Lewes is to court danger both from the smugglers and from the people of Sussex who sympathise with them and hate informers. But because he has grown to love Elizabeth and because there is something in him which acknowledges the justice of what she says, he sets off for Lewes, though not very resolutely.

His journey is occupied by a struggle in dialogue between the two halves of his nature. His baser self temporises weakly that merely travelling to Lewes is dangerous enough to be a test of courage and that simply to reach it and turn back would prove something. But his inner critic, strengthened by

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(1) Ibid. p.90

contact with Elizabeth, "speaking more firmly than usual and denuded for once of reproach"<sup>(1)</sup>, urges him to take the full risk.

He arrives at Lewes still undecided, but once there, the decision is in a sense made for him. A series of coincidences throws him into the hands of Sir Henry Merriman, the prosecuting counsel and an additional motive for appearing at the trial is supplied by Sir Henry's mistress, Lucy, who (rather implausibly) offers herself to Andrews in return for his evidence. If he will testify against the smugglers she will sleep with him after the trial, she promises. Andrews agrees.

This considerably complicates his spiritual progress which up till now has been undramatic but steady, moving towards the climax of his appearance at the trial, which was to have been an unambiguous victory for 'the man within'. Now he has conquered his cowardice, but by an upsurge of lust not virtue. It is not long before he suffers the torments of revulsion:

"He was doing for a wrong reason what he had refused to do for a right. He had turned a deaf ear to what his heart supported by the critic within had asked him, but he had capitulated at the first hungry wail his dirty, lusting body had uttered."<sup>(2)</sup>

It is at this point, with lust and shame struggling for dominance in his breast, that Andrews'

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(1) Ibid. p.99

(2) Ibid. pp.129-30

battle with himself becomes most furious. Sex is nearly always a matter for spiritual discomfort or unhappiness in Greene's books (virtually the only exceptions are the rather grotesque alliances between eccentric elderly ladies and their young negro lovers in the two most recent novels, The Comedians and Travels with my Aunt). But the difference between the later novels and this one is that the mature Greene provides his characters with circumstances which more or less adequately account for their guilt or disgust - a husband, a wife or a vow of chastity to betray, or an emotional crippling which makes any sort of personal relationship impossible (Raven, Pinkie, Brown, etc.) - while here (and in the two succeeding novels) sex is presented undisguisedly as a subject for hectic and half fascinated revulsion.

Greene draws a clear line separating off love (which is good) from desire (which is evil) and relegates them firmly to the higher and lower compartments of Andrews's mind. For Elizabeth he feels a tender and purely spiritual passion; for Lucy, who appeals to the lower part of his nature as strongly as Elizabeth had appealed to the higher, a guilty, despicable lust:

"Never had he desired a woman so much. No, not Elizabeth. There was a kind of mystery in Elizabeth, a kind of sanctity which blurred and obscured his desire with love. Here was no love and no reverence. The animal in him could ponder her beauty crudely and lustfully as it had pondered the charms of common harlots, but with the added spice

of reciprocated desire."<sup>(1)</sup>

Andrews struggles manfully against temptation and just before the trial manages to reject the lower motive for his appearance in the witness stand. He endures his long and humiliating ordeal, sustained by the image of Elizabeth which he carries "like a close banner at his heart".<sup>(2)</sup>

Once the trial is over, however, there is another falling off from grace: holding a note of invitation from Lucy in his hand, he thinks,

"Didn't I renounce this morning with perfect sincerity this very reward? I did then what I did for Elizabeth and why should I not take any small benefits which might come after?"<sup>(3)</sup>

The lapse is not immediate. His experience at the trial has strengthened 'the man within' and he is conscious that the desire to return to Elizabeth is more compelling than the mere physical desire for Lucy. "Andrews stood in the room where the previous night he had held Sir Henry's mistress in his arms and watched with tired curiosity one star."<sup>(4)</sup> The star he naturally identifies with Elizabeth. He feels that he can never see her again - it would be too dangerous and he means nothing

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(1) Ibid. p.128

(2) Ibid. p.149

(3) Ibid. p.173

(4) Ibid. pp.172-3

to her (or so he thinks). "Must I therefore never know another woman," he asks<sup>(1)</sup> and tries unsuccessfully to revive his lust for Lucy:

"He imagined her naked and in disgusting attitudes and tried to whip his body into a blind lust which would forget for a time at least the dictates of his heart. Yet strangely even his lust seemed less strong. What have you done to me he cried despairingly at the lonely star."<sup>(2)</sup>

In the end it is fear more than lust which sends him to Lucy rather than Elizabeth. His appearance at the trial has not been sufficient to secure a conviction against the smugglers from a prejudiced jury who have no wish to believe his evidence. Now the whole gang is free and intent on revenge against him; and, as he soon learns, against Elizabeth whose sheltering him has come out in cross-examination. Vital though it is that he should return to her now to warn her, nothing could be more dangerous, and all Andrews's cowardice rises up in revolt against the thought. Shamefacedly, half reluctantly, he makes his way to Lucy's bedroom and even then he nearly turns back. Lucy needs every bit of her seductive power to keep him, but she succeeds and he spends the night with her.

Paradoxically, it is this total surrender to the lust and cowardice of his lower nature that gives Andrews the strength to go back to Elizabeth

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(1) Ibid. p.173

(2) Ibid. p.174

the next morning. He awakes to a self-disgust which overwhelms all fear and desire:

"He felt no fear of death, but a terror of life, of going on soiling himself and repenting and soiling himself again ... He was hot with shame and self-loathing."<sup>(1)</sup>

He returns to the cottage, barely conscious of the danger, to warn Elizabeth that the smugglers intend to punish her for helping him. She insists on staying to face them; and Andrews, to his amazement, finds he cannot desert her in spite of his fear. They spend one idyllic day together, in the course of which they declare their love; and Andrews, secure in the promise of a lifetime at her side, finds peace and strength.

Again, however, strength is short-lived. With the onset of dark and the imminence of danger, fear comes flooding back. Andrews becomes tense and irritable, and Elizabeth, seeing this, sends him away from the cottage on a pretext when she hears the smugglers arrive, sadly giving him the opportunity to betray her. Andrews accepts it and runs away, though he tries to convince himself that he is simply going to fetch help. Eventually recognition and remorse send him back, but too late. Elizabeth is dead. Andrews gives himself up as her murderer, letting Carlyon go free. He sees the justice of this: in a sense he is responsible for her death; "It's true," he thinks, "I did kill her!"<sup>(2)</sup> And he nerves himself to face his final ordeal, suicide, which he sees as the only way, now that Elizabeth is dead, of

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(1) Ibid. p.184

(2) Ibid. p.244

destroying his lower nature.

The decision to kill himself is presented as a victory for 'the man within'. Once it is made, Andrews feels a welling up of confidence and a final sense of the unity that he has been striving for:

"He need no longer be torn in two between that [base] spirit and the stern unresting critic which was wont to speak. I am that critic, he said, with a sense of discovery and exhilaration."<sup>(1)</sup>

The Man Within is an extremely subjective novel. There is a lack of adequate psychological distance between Greene and his central character and, despite the apparently complex and critical nature of the theme, a complete lack of objectivity in his handling of Andrews's moral position.

Andrews is clearly meant to be a complicated figure. He is neither simply wicked like Lucy nor simply good like Elizabeth. He has to fight his way through the weaknesses of his nature to a difficult and hard-won virtue and is in a state of continuous spiritual flux. His moral victories, his appearance at the trial and his return to the cottage to warn Elizabeth, are only temporary triumphs over his lower nature. On both occasions he slips back into the morass of cowardice and self-pity from which he has struggled to emerge; and his lapses are then followed by repentance and fresh efforts to redeem himself. He is a tricky character for a novelist to handle because he must be sympathetically treated

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(1) Ibid. p.245

without a sense of his genuine weakness ever being lost. And in his attempt to maintain the difficult balance between sympathy and detachment Greene fails.

The trouble is that he is not detached. The novel's overwhelming impact is of having been designed to give a much better impression of Andrews' character than the one Andrews has of himself, in a way that is not complex at all. That is to say, Greene's version of Andrews' character does not contain and transcend Andrews' own version; it simply ignores and even contradicts it. Throughout the novel Andrews curses and reproaches himself; and throughout the novel, even when Andrews acts badly, Greene condones, minimises or veers away from his faults.

This is particularly evident in the involved middle section of the book where Andrews passes Elizabeth's test of his courage, falls from grace into Lucy's arms and returns repentant to Elizabeth to a crucial scene of confession in which the moral implications of the preceding events are defined and evaluated.

It is obvious that despite all his hesitations and despite his temptation to appear at the trial for the wrong reason (i.e. Lucy), Andrews passes the test well, doing not only what Elizabeth has told him he must do, but adding heroic embellishments of his own along the way: when he sets off for Lewes, he leaves his knife at Elizabeth's cottage because she may need it, although he is walking into danger, and it is the only weapon he has; and later, at the Assizes, he rejects the opportunity to give away Cockney Harry, one of the members of Carlyon's gang who has escaped arrest, and is watching the trial from

the public gallery. This is a particularly courageous thing for Andrews to do because not only would Harry arrested mean one enemy less for him to contend with, but Harry allowed to go free will provide Carlyon with proof (which he does not yet have) of the identity of his betrayer. Greene leaves us in no doubt as to what to think of this action:

"You fool, you fool, you sentimental fool, he taunted silently in his heart, and his heart marvellously, miraculously, did not care. It was light and drunken with its triumph over his cowardly body and carried with pride like a banner the name of a girl. This will cost you your life, he told himself, but that distant trumpet and that close banner at his heart gave him courage. I will win through, he answered, and she will praise me. This is the first foolish thoughtless thing which I have ever done."<sup>(1)</sup>

Andrews' cowardly hesitations serve only to underline the extent of his heroism in overcoming them; and in the same way, his near-distracted from virtue by Lucy is used ultimately to heighten the sense of his nobility when he rejects her. The prose in which Greene describes this rejection has an artificial, romantic, over-dramatised quality which suggests his essential complacency about the progress his hero is making:

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(1) Ibid. p.149

"It was not fear so much as disgust and regret that filled his mind to the exclusion of any clear thought - disgust at his actions and his words the night before, disgust at the young lustful woman who had come between him and a strange, purifying dream, regret that he was going to face death for so mean a reason ... Was it too late? He flung himself on his knees beside the bed and prayed for the first time for many years, with a disjointed passion. 'O God, if you are God,' he implored, 'give me courage. Forgive last night. I will try to forget it. I will try not to see that woman again. I will not take her reward. Give, give me back the old motive.'"<sup>(1)</sup>

and, at the trial:

"'Are you Francis Andrews?' It was Sir Henry Merriman who spoke but the question struck the witness like an accusation, like another blow on the cheek. His blood quickened to meet it. Elizabeth had said to him, 'Go to Lewes, go to the Assizes, bear your witness and you will have shown

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(1) Ibid. pp.133-4

yourself to have more courage than they.' You are here for the lust of your body, the inner critic murmured, but with a gesture of the hands visible to those in Court, he renounced that motive and that reward. 'No,' he whispered, his lips moving, 'for Elizabeth.' The sound of her name gave him courage. It was like a trumpet blown a long way off by a pale courageous spirit. He raised his eyes.

"'I am,' he answered."<sup>(1)</sup>

Andrews, himself, apart from a momentary glow at the "first foolish thoughtless thing" he has ever done, is never allowed to recognize his triumph. The trial over, he is immediately distracted from examining the implications of what he has done by a total capitulation to his baser self and consequent paroxysms of hysterical remorse; for him his triumphs are completely overshadowed, even discounted by his failure:

"He had been treading, he felt ... on the border of a new life, in which he would learn courage and even self-forgetfulness, but now he had fallen back into the slime from which he had emerged ... is there no way out of this slime?"

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(1) Ibid. pp.147-8

he thought silently. I was a fool and imagined I was escaping, but now I have sunk so deep that surely I have reached the bottom."<sup>(1)</sup>

For Greene, however, Andrews' moral victories (established so ecstatically with trumpets, banners and enigmatic gestures of the hands "visible to those in Court") have not been cancelled out. There is something disingenuous in his treatment of his hero's moral hangover. The really serious aspect of Andrews' night with Lucy, the fact that Elizabeth has been left ignorant of the danger she is in, is completely ignored. Andrews wakes to a purely sexual guilt. And even this guilt is handled in an ambiguous way, so that it comes nowhere near to providing the counterweight to Andrews' earlier triumphs that it is ostensibly intended to provide. In the first place, the lust which provokes the guilt has been presented in a heavy, romantic and sometimes falsely literary vein which takes the edge and real harshness from the sense of sin ("the animal in him could ponder her beauty crudely and lustfully as it had pondered the charms ..."etc<sup>(2)</sup>) And in the second place, Andrews' self-reproaches are clearly designed to be less a genuine evaluation of his behaviour than an indication that his moral sense is still alive and strong. It is given, ineptly, to Lucy (any normal harlot would be insulted and outraged at the things that in his frenzy of sexual disgust he has been saying to her) to make this point explicit:

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(1) Ibid. pp.182-3

(2) Ibid. p.21

"How curious. You are one of those people - I've met them before - who can't rid themselves of a conscience."(1)

But it is implicit in Greene's presentation of the entire scene: in his emphasis on Andrews's sense of loss and his still persistent striving ("the borders of a new life"; "is there no way out..."), and even more clearly in his tendency to arrange Andrews in what are obviously meant to be attractive and noble postures of repentance. This is Andrews just after he wakes up:

"He eyed first her body and then his own with disgust. He touched her shoulder gingerly with his hand and she opened her eyes. 'I should cover that,' he said ..."(2)

Evidently, whatever Andrews may say about the slime into which he has fallen, Greene is regarding him with a good deal of surreptitious approval.

If there can be any doubt of Greene's real attitude to Andrews's moral status at this point, it is dispelled in the subsequent scene at Elizabeth's cottage. Andrews returns to Elizabeth to confess total failure - which is clearly excessive, but which might have been acceptable had Greene himself shown any sign of accepting it. But the whole scene is patently designed to undermine Andrews's continuously reiterated self-reproaches.

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(1) Ibid. pp.183-4

(2) Ibid. p.182

The confession is precluded by a self-reproach on Elizabeth's side: "'When I came down the other morning I was sorry that you'd gone. I felt guilty. I shouldn't have persuaded you to go to Lewes. I had no right to make you risk yourself. Do you forgive me?'"<sup>(1)</sup> The effect of this is to emphasise what has been established in the trial scene, Andrews' great heroism in appearing in the witness stand; and to emphasise it, moreover, at a point where it conveniently contradicts Andrews' own sense that his triumph no longer matters.

Andrews' response to the implied praise<sup>(2)</sup> in Elizabeth's statement is to assume that she is laughing at him, which provokes her to say:

"'You are twisted ... Why should you think that? No, we are friends.'"<sup>(3)</sup>

The word, friends, strikes another chord of guilt in Andrews' brain:

"'I have only one friend and I betrayed him. I don't want to betray you.'"<sup>(4)</sup>

This elicits further praise from Elizabeth, praise which Andrews gruffly disclaims:

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(1) Ibid. pp.198-9

(2) Her praise is inadvertent at this point; she doesn't yet know that he has been in Court - later in the scene, much is made of it when she learns that he has.

(3) MW p.199

(4) Ibid. p.199

"'You will not betray me,'  
she said. 'You left your knife.'

"'I thought you might need

"'You knew you might need it.'

"He turned his back again and  
kicked the coals in the fire. 'I  
was a fool,' he muttered. 'Just  
sentimentality. That means  
nothing.'

"'I thought it brave,' she  
said. 'I admired you tremendously  
for that.'

"Again Andrews coloured.

'You are laughing at me,' he said.

'You know that you despise me,

that I'm a coward.'"(1)

This is transparently dishonest. Andrews' persistent claims to weakness are simply being written away by Greene, who is using Elizabeth to provide an evaluation of Andrews' character which contradicts everything he says about himself. There is a curious, indulgent, pseudo-masochistic air about all this. Andrews' protestations of guilt and disclaimers of virtue, clearly not intended to be taken seriously, seem designed more than anything else, to provoke comforting denials from Elizabeth. Elizabeth implies he is brave; he insists she is laughing at him: Elizabeth says she is his friend. Andrews says he betrays his friends: Elizabeth says he will not betray her; he has already shown selflessness and heroism in leaving her his only weapon. 'I thought

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(1) Ibid. p.199

you might need it,' he says, overlooking his selflessness and heroism . 'You knew you might need it,' she says, emphasising them again. 'It was nothing,' he mutters, 'Just sentimentality,' denying them again. 'I thought it very brave,' she says, bringing them back into the spotlight. 'You are laughing at me,' he says, 'You know that you despise me, that I am a coward.' The pattern is clear: Andrews flagellates in order to have Elizabeth apply the salve.

The scene progresses. Andrews moves from a general avowal of guilt to a confession of particular failures:

"'I've betrayed you twice in Lewes, and I'm betraying you now if you only knew it. Don't mock me by pretending admiration. You women are cunning. No one but a woman would think of that turn to the screw.' His voice broke. 'You win. You see it's successful.'

"Elizabeth rose from the table and came and stood beside him at the fire. 'How have you betrayed me?' she asked.

"Andrews without looking up answered, 'Once with a woman.'

"There was a pause. Then Elizabeth said coldly, 'I don't understand how that's a betrayal of me. Of yourself perhaps. What other betrayal?'

"'It came out in Court that you sheltered me.'

"'In Court?' she asked. Her

Her voice trembled for a reason which he could not understand.

'Were you there?'

"'I was in the witness box,' he said gloomily. 'Don't praise me. It was only partly you. And the other parts were drink and a harlot. What do you say to that?'

"'Well done,' she said.

"He shrugged his shoulders. 'You go on too long. You are not as cunning as I thought you. I'm getting used to that mockery. You must change your tack.'

"'That woman,' Elizabeth asked, 'who was she? What was she like?'

"'She was my equal.'

"'I thought you said she was a harlot. Tell me, was she better looking than I?'

"Andrews looked up in astonishment. Elizabeth was watching him with an anxious smile. 'I'd never compare you,' he said. 'You belong to different worlds.'

"'Yet I should like to know.'

"He shook his head. 'I can't. I could only compare your bodies, and I can't see yours for you.'

"'I'm like other women, surely?'

she asked sadly.

"'No,' he said, his voice soaring in sudden enthusiasm. 'Like no other woman.'

"'I see,' her voice was cold again. 'Well, tell me more of your betrayals. Why am I betrayed because you loved this woman? You are the kind of man who does that often, I imagine.'

"'Not love,' he said ...

"'Tell me - you spoke of a third betrayal. What was that?'

"The moment had come. 'I came to warn you, and I've been putting it off and putting it off.'

"'To warn me?' Her chin went up in a kind of defiance. 'I don't understand.'

"'Carlyon and the rest mean to punish you for sheltering me. They are coming here today or tomorrow.' He told her Cockney Harry's message. 'Apparently it was not a trap,' he added.

"'But you thought it was,' she said curiously, 'and yet you came.'"<sup>(1)</sup>

It is interesting to note what is happening to the three betrayals that Andrews is confessing to. The first of these, the sexual lapse, is overlooked. Elizabeth's coldness is clearly due to jealousy, not disapproval. Later, after the scene has moved to its predictable climax, a mutual declaration of love, the 'sin' is dismissed in a sentence or two

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(1) Ibid. pp.199-201

(after all Andrews' fuss). Andrews, still energetically proclaiming his vileness, says,

"I wish you could realise how unworthy I am of you. Don't laugh. I know every man says that. But it's true of me. I'm a coward. It's no use shaking your head. You can never wholly trust me. I told you that I was with a woman last night. I'm dirty, I tell you, soiled.'

"Did you love her?'

"You are very young after all, aren't you? Men don't go with harlots for that.'

"Then it doesn't touch me. Look,' she spread out her arms and her chin again tilted upwards with that instinctive fighting gesture, 'I will stand now forever between you and them.'"<sup>(1)</sup>

And at this point the sin is completely overshadowed by Andrews' second confession which isn't really a confession at all<sup>(2)</sup>, but a cover of spurious moral dejection for what is actually an admission of triumph:

"It came out in Court that you sheltered me.'

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(1) Ibid. pp.208-9

(2) It was not Andrews' fault that Elizabeth's name came out in Court, and nowhere in the book does Greene seriously try to suggest that it was.

"'In Court?' she asked. Her voice trembled for a reason which he could not understand. 'Were you there?'

"'I was in the witness box,' he said gloomily. 'Don't praise me. It was only partly you. And the other parts were drink and a harlot.'"

This is certainly not the way Greene presented Andrews' experience in the trial scene; and, again, he uses Elizabeth to make his real attitude to Andrews explicit: "What do you say to that?" Andrews asks; and Elizabeth replies, "Well done."

The first betrayal doesn't matter; the second betrayal is not a betrayal after all. Now we come to the third betrayal, the delay in warning Elizabeth. Here Andrews clearly does have serious grounds for self-reproach - but Greene ignores them. He appears to have forgotten the length of the delay, which included the whole of the previous night. Andrews' "'I've been putting it off and putting it off'" refers only to the hour or two spent in the cottage. And his fault is clearly intended to be outweighed by his virtue in returning at all:

"'He told her Cockney Harry's message. 'Apparently it was not a trap [for me],' he added.

"'But you thought it was,' she said curiously, 'and yet you came.'"

Despite the ostensible concern for the implications of the delay - this is, after all, presented as the highlight in the series of

confessions ("The moment had come ..."), and a little later Andrews says, "I've spoilt the only decent thing I've done"<sup>(1)</sup> - it is obvious that for Greene, and for Elizabeth, his spokesman, Andrews' belated heroism more than compensates for the fact that his initial cowardice and subsequent reluctance to confess it have left her in ignorance of danger. There is something naively solipsistic in the morality of this. Clearly Greene's interest is not in the consequences to Elizabeth of Andrews' actions, but in the unspotted state of Andrews' soul in relation to standards of behaviour which are entirely arbitrary and self-centred.

The same disregard for the serious moral consequences of Andrews' actions, combined with the same apparent concern for them, is displayed in Greene's handling of the other two important betrayals - the betrayal of Carlyon and the final betrayal of Elizabeth which results in her death.

Keeping in mind that Andrews' betrayal of Carlyon is a major source of his continuous, guilty self-reproach, it is illuminating to look at the scene in which Elizabeth offers him a means of redeeming himself. Andrews calls himself a Judas and murmurs,

"If only there were some way I could retrieve ...' he gave a small hopeless gesture with his hands ...

"If you can't undo what you have done, follow it out to the end,' she said.

"What do you mean?'

"You were driven to the side of the law,' she said 'Stay there. Go

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(1) MW p.201

into the open and bear witness against the men they've caught. You've made yourself an informer, at least you can be an open one.'

"'But you don't understand,' He watched her with fascinated, imploring eyes. 'The risk.'

"Elizabeth laughed. 'But that's the very reason. Don't you see that by all this nameless work of yours, this flight, you've made the whole pack of them ... better men than you are.'

"'They were always that,' he murmured sadly under his breath, his head bowed again so that he could not see her firelit enthusiastic eyes.

"She leant forward excitedly towards him. 'Which of them,' she asked, 'if he was an informer would come forward in open Court, make himself a marked man and bear the risk? ... Go to Lewes, go to the Assizes, bear your witness and you will have shown more courage than they.'

"... something in him was answering the appeal and he was afraid."<sup>(1)</sup>

Clearly, if a furtive and anonymous betrayal

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(1) Ibid. pp.89-91

can be redeemed by being turned into an open and greater betrayal (for Andrews' appearance in Court will lessen the smugglers' chances of escaping the consequences of his act) then betrayal is not the real issue at all - whatever emotional capital Greene may squeeze out of Andrews' guilt about it in other parts of the book.

The real issue is, in fact, that Andrews must prove more courageous than the men he has betrayed, and the betrayal itself, the initial subject of this exchange, is simply lost sight of in the rising excitement of Elizabeth (and Greene) contemplating Andrews' future heroism.

Similarly, in the last pages of the novel, Andrews' initial cowardly abandonment of Elizabeth to the smugglers is overshadowed by the heroism of his return. ("Andrews remembered that Carlyon had lost his ship ... he was riding to a man whom he had robbed not only of his livelihood and sole mistress but of his only dream ... One of us will be dead tonight, he thought, and the horse as though in alliance with the shrinking body slowed its pace. 'Faster, old boy, faster.' O, to be there before his courage again departed," etc.<sup>(1)</sup>) And the guilt which he feels when he is too late is at first obscured in a heavy emotional wash of despair,

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(1) Ibid. p.235

sentimental regret, muddled introspection<sup>(1)</sup> and emergent heroism; and it is finally lost in gathering intimations of an immortality to be shared by the soul of Elizabeth and the higher nature of Andrews, which is expected to survive the death that destroys his baser self.

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The Man Within was followed in 1930 by The Name of Action which takes up and develops a theme touched on in the figure of Carlyon in the earlier novel. This theme is the death of romantic illusion. To Carlyon, Andrews' betrayal had meant more than the loss of livelihood and freedom; it had meant the destruction of a dream. During the scuffle with the Gaugers which had followed Andrews' anonymous letter, an officer had been killed. And for Carlyon this had turned smuggling from a heroic and glamorous adventure into something sordid and mean. 'Doesn't it seem mean to you,' he bursts out to Elizabeth, 'that a man should be shot dead over a case of spirits? What a dull, dirty game it makes it all appear.' 'It must have been that all along,' she answers. With Carlyon's reply, 'Yes, but I didn't know ...'

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(1) This includes a signal attempt at sloughing off the responsibility for Elizabeth's death onto his father whose bullying ways had caused his cowardice in the first place: "His father had made him a betrayer and his father had slain Elizabeth and his father was dead and out of reach. Out of reach. But was he? His father was not a roaming spirit. It had housed itself in the son he had created. I am my father, he thought and I have killed her." (p.238); and later, with a significant reversal of emphasis, "And yet it is true - I did kill her or my father in me." (p.244)

Should I thank him for my enlightenment?<sup>(1)</sup>, the idea is allowed to tail off desultorily. But that it is important to Greene is suggested a little earlier in the book when Andrews, listening to Elizabeth and comparing her to Carlyon, thinks of their voices as "two musics come in conflict for the mastery of his movements. One was subtle, a thing of suggestion and of memories; the other plain, clear-cut, ringing. One spoke of a dreamy escape from reality; the other was reality, deliberately sane."<sup>(2)</sup>

The hero of The Name of Action is also offered "a dreamy escape from reality". Oliver Chant, a rich young man, depressed by the meaningless social life he lives in London ("lunch with Peter Remnant, dinner at Mrs Meadmore's, breakfast with himself"<sup>(3)</sup>), is fired with enthusiasm for the revolutionary ideals of Kurtz, an exile from dictator-ruled Trier. Kurtz manages to persuade him to place himself and his fortune at the disposal of an underground movement which exists for the purpose of overthrowing the dictatorship and setting up a republic in its place. And, inspired by the catch-phrases of rebellion - freedom of thought, of speech, Liberty and the rest - Chant innocently sets off to Trier for what he believes will be a high heroic adventure. Kurtz's patriotism and his fervent speeches on injustice have seemed to open up for him a world at once moral and simple, where Good and Evil are clear-cut, where uncontaminated Good,

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(1) Ibid. p.66

(2) Ibid. p.57

(3) NA p.7

in fact, exists, and there is something in life worth fighting for.

He has another, also romantic, reason for going to Trier. He has become infatuated with a picture in one of the glossy magazines of Anne-Marie Demassener, the dictator's wife. Immediately after the interview with Kurtz, he hunts out the photograph, and, getting a little frisson of excitement at the idea of her being his 'enemy' (as Demassener's wife), he luxuriates in the thought that soon he will be able to gaze on the living person behind the image.

Greene makes it clear in his opening chapter that Chant's romantic expectations are doomed to disillusionment. While he is being intoxicated by Kurtz's reiteration of the word 'freedom', Chant doesn't notice other things which Kurtz says, things which indicate that the revolutionary movement is not going to provide the unambiguous opportunity for pure-spirited heroism that he hopes for:

"[Freedom] was the word on which he harped to Chant ... He had two friends, Kurtz said, a poet and an artist. Because they were republicans their works were banned and they found it hard to live. But they waited at Trier, believing in the future of their movement. 'All that is required is money, money for arms, money - it is regrettable, perhaps - for bribery.' But it was to the word 'arms' and not to the word 'bribery' that Chant had responded, his heart beating

with a desire that his brain  
had resisted - a desire which  
conquered at last when, his  
fingers on the door, his brain had  
capitulated and he said,  
'I'll go to Trier.'"(1)

And later, when Chant is on his way to Trier, we see  
him unconsciously inventing and idealising the  
characters in the situation before him:

"And now in the carriage  
three figures danced in the mirror  
to the motion of the train and  
seemed to speed it on the last  
stretch to Trier - Demassener's  
wife as she appeared in the  
photograph, but a little idealised,  
a certain rectitude in her slanting  
eyes to make her a more worthy enemy,  
and his two allies, the poet, Joseph  
Kapper and the artist, Peter  
Torner. To these two he  
attached his conceptions of poet  
and artist - a young man like  
Marlowe, impetuous, with flushed  
face and ready weapon and an  
older man like Rubens, the  
splendid courtier ... Demassener ...  
when he had pictured him at all,  
it was as a strong and stupid  
man."(2)

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(1) Ibid. p.14

(2) Ibid. pp.17-18

It is not long after his arrival in Trier that Chant's disappointment begins. At first the situation seems to be as he imagined it. The place is beautiful, the people are charming and there is evidence of the Dictator's oppressive rule. There is a curfew and concerts are banned. The laws are rigidly imposed: a shopkeeper nervously refuses to sell Chant something because the Town Clock is striking seven - the hour at which he must legally close. "All shops had to be closed at seven. He could delay no longer, the shopkeeper explained. A policeman might come down the street at any moment. He flapped his hands and drove Chant ... out into the street."<sup>(1)</sup>

Once Chant makes contact with the revolutionaries, however, his illusions are badly jolted. They are far from being the heroic, romantic figures he had dreamed of. Kapper, the poet, their leader, is a mean, furtive, sidling creature; Torner, the artist, whom Chant had imagined as another Rubens, turns out to be a nonentity. None of the conspirators has the least desire to fight; each seems to be using the revolutionary movement to further his own ends. 'The pen is mightier than the sword',<sup>(2)</sup> says Kapper unctuously and tries to persuade Chant to use his money, intended for the purchase of arms, for the printing and distribution of his own lampoons against the dictator. The 'Revolutionary Art' which the conspirators are engaged in producing, and which represents the full extent of their revolutionary activities, consists of Kapper's scurrilous verses

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(1) Ibid. p.24

(2) Ibid. p.34

and Torner's caricatures of Anne-Marie, offering "her body and with it black stockings and pink ribboned corsets to a French Officer."<sup>(1)</sup>

An accidental encounter with Anne-Marie leads to a meeting with the Dictator; and again Chant finds his convictions being severely shaken. The noble revolutionary heroes of his imagination have turned out to be mean and corrupt; the 'villain' proves even more unexpected. Demassener is a tired and courteous man, actuated, as the rebels, absorbed in their personal ambitions, are not, purely by a genuine love of Trier. In a long conversation with Chant, he explains the need for his repressive policies. He hates freedom, he says, because "freedom means freedom for the animal in man. I would bind him in clean chains."<sup>(2)</sup> Trier was "a foul place"<sup>(3)</sup> before he had cleared away its brothels and cabarets and introduced censorship. And the banning of music is explained:

"Do not think," he said, "that I have no understanding. It is because I do feel music that I will not have it here. Music cuts away the ground, opens impossible vistas, so that the only thing which seems worth while is to travel always in those green spaces. Water and

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(1) Ibid. p.125

(2) Ibid. p.78

(3) Ibid. p.60

leaves and light. But I have to tackle brick, brick ... And I've got to make people work for the State ... and how can I do that if all they want is water and leaves and light." (1)

The scene is actually a little silly, and some of Demassener's speeches, such as his disquisition on the dangers of music, are conducted in a vein that is too vague and fanciful to be very persuasive. But it is evident that Greene sympathises with him and with the determinedly pessimistic view of human nature which underlies his politics. The studied, rhetorical style of his utterances suggests, as similar stylistic inflations did in The Man Within, the extent of Greene's sympathy: "I would bind him in clean chains", and, at another point, "It sometimes seems to me that I am the only man existing who can see these things as they must appear to a God who is not smirched by living in the world." (2) And throughout the book the 'reality' with which Greene confronts Oliver Chant's romantic idealism fully endorses Demassener's vision of life as nasty, brutish and short.

Chant desperately tries to resist the truth of Demassener's statements. He argues to defend "his mission, his only hope of escape from a life of which he had grown inexpressibly tired, a life without meaning, without risk, without beauty." (3)

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(1) Ibid. pp.63-4

(2) Ibid. p.78

(3) Ibid. p.79

But an incident on the way home reinforces the lesson.

He leaves Demassener's grounds after curfew (having waited in the garden amongst the magnolia blossoms, hoping to catch another glimpse of Anne-Marie) and is pursued by a policeman. The chase is oddly unfrighting and seems to Chant to have almost the quality of a game. Eventually, he takes refuge in a darkened alley, but the policeman is attracted to this hiding place by the sound of a cat sharpening its claws against a wall. He shines his torch into the alley, sees the cat, and laughs, thinking he has made a mistake. As he bends down to stroke the cat, Chant sees his face in the torchlight: it is friendly and attractive, with "a number of small lines round the mouth indicating not age but an easy mirth."<sup>(1)</sup> Later, having shaken off the policeman, Chant again becomes aware that he is being followed, but this time the footsteps are furtive and he is genuinely afraid. Retracing his earlier route, he runs back towards the policeman who now represents friendly protection. As the policeman moves forward to find out what is wrong, he is shot by Chant's sinister pursuer. Appalled, Chant turns round - to see Kapper, the leader of the rebels. 'Why did you do it?' he demands. And, callously, Kapper replies, 'I could not have you taken ... You would have been sent out of the country.'<sup>(2)</sup> There follows an ugly sequence of scenes in which the body is disposed of and the traces of the crime covered up.

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(1) Ibid. p.102

(2) Ibid. p.108

Chant decides to leave Trier, his dreams of idealistic heroism, of "barricades and shots fired openly in a good cause"<sup>(1)</sup> reduced to a reality of squalid violence in a cause which no longer seems good at all.

He returns to the palace to say good-bye to Anne-Marie, the beautiful, mysteriously unhappy wife of the dictator. Her undisguised indifference to his departure goads him into a declaration of his love. She remains unresponsive: bored, unhappy and coldly cynical. Sarcastically, she asks him if he is propositioning her:

"'Is this a proposal of - it can't be marriage,' she said with a kind of feline, self-conscious amusement, 'for I am already married. This, I suppose, is what novelists used to call an infamous suggestion. Mr. Chant of - South West London - offering the post of mistress to the wife of the Dictator of Trier. Doesn't it strike you as amusing - as,' she added fiercely, 'impertinent.'"<sup>(2)</sup>

Her contempt hurts Chant, and, prompted by a desire to inflict pain in return, he retorts, "'Has it occurred to you that your husband might not

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(1) Ibid. p.125

(2) Ibid. p.147

always be Dictator?"<sup>(1)</sup> She continues to be scornful, but underneath her mockery, Chant senses a weariness mingled with suffering, and his earlier desire to hurt gives way to pity. Most mysteriously, this pity results in a decision to stay on in Trier and lead a revolution.

"[Earlier] he had thought... that she seemed ready for a sword-thrust rather than a word. Now between lids which half-dropped in sudden weariness, her eyes showed that she had become only too accustomed to words. She was ready to go on as long as he chose to stay, parry and thrust, parry and thrust, in this mock-medium, holding her own ... words, words, words, he thought, hate giving way before a renewal of a love that was in part pity and a boundless admiration. It was shameful that the world and he should so treat her. He at least would show her that she deserved deeds ...

"I won't tire you with any more talk. I'd rather fight for you," he added at the door in a wave of romanticism."<sup>(2)</sup>

This scene concludes the first part of the

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(1) Ibid. p.148

(2) Ibid. p.149

novel. At the beginning of Part Two, we find Chant back amongst the conspirators, whom he has sworn to have nothing more to do with, urging them to active and immediate rebellion. Having forgotten all that experience has taught him, he is trying to realise his romantic dreams of fighting heroically for a noble cause, though the cause is no longer justice, but, obscurely, the honour of Anne-Marie.

The kind of romanticism which involves honouring a lady by activating a rebellion which has so clearly been shown as dishonourable, invites heavily ironic treatment. But this section of the novel is marked by a great deal of confusion and an increasing lack of critical awareness on Greene's part. Before dealing with this in detail, it will be helpful to analyse Greene's attitude to Chant's romanticism in the earlier section of the book.

The main subject of interest in the first part of the novel is Chant's political romanticism. Here Greene appears to be maintaining a certain amount of critical detachment from his hero. The action is designed to show Chant's notions, certainly as unrealistic, perhaps even as a little silly. We see Chant blinkered by his illusions from the reality of what Kurtz tells him about the situation in Trier. And we see him on his way to Trier naïvely romanticising what lies ahead. Once he gets there, his heroes turn out to be nasty and his villain turns out to be good. Where he had expected to find oppression, he finds the necessary repression of the worst elements in human nature; and where he had expected to find heroic resistance he finds the worst elements of human nature given free reign. The incident involving the death of the policeman seems intended both to crystallise the

implications of the preceding action (the policeman is friendly and attractive and represents a highly desirable state of order and security, while the rebel is sinister and violent) and to take the criticism of Chant's notions of rebellion one stage further:

"Chant felt sick and ashamed.

For the first time he had found himself responsible for a man's death."<sup>(1)</sup>

After the body has been thrown into the river and the pools of blood in the street covered over with a tray of raw liver intended to look as if someone had dropped it, Kapper says,

"'We [i.e. the rebels] do not want bloodshed. That was your way, Herr Chant, not mine' ... He held up one hand as though he would mesmerise Chant with the sight of soiled fingernails ... 'Your way, Herr Chant,' and his twisted mouth seemed to call bitter attention to a young face dead, a body twisting with upturned rump upon the Moselle, and a pile of raw liver flung on a dirty street."<sup>(2)</sup>

The indulged nastiness of this and, in fact, of the scenes that have led to it, makes it clear that Greene is trying to create a situation that forces Chant into the recognition of something he has overlooked: that the "barricades and shots" that feature so attractively

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(1) Ibid. p.107

(2) Ibid. p.124

in his dreams of glorious revolution, in real life mean blood and ugliness and the death of innocent people.

Greene is not consistently critical, however. Chant's disillusionment with the life that he knows in London seems scarcely less romantic than his illusions of fighting for freedom in Trier - and this disillusionment Greene clearly shares. Certainly it provides him with a number of opportunities for posing Chant elegantly in languid attitudes of despair:

"Once again Chant warmed towards this town and to this people for whom he would fight with a better will than he could ever fight for his own land. Englishmen as a generalisation what were they? Stupid hunting squires in red coats and with inflamed faces; little sniggering Cockney clerks; heavy witted, bestial farm laborours; Peter Remnant, Mrs Meadmore. One could fight perhaps for England as a country, if one kept one's eyes on Autumn beeches, a pond with cows drinking ... But how one wearied of the constant, careful harbouring of small impressions."<sup>(1)</sup>

At another point Chant asks Kurtz, "Why didn't you fight?" and Greene writes that for Chant the word 'fight'

"possessed a personal meaning gathered from books and from brooding and in some degree

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(1) Ibid. p.27

from hopes. It meant death,  
the kind of death that dignifies  
the most unworthy object with  
the immortality of no further  
change."<sup>(1)</sup>

Because this elegant brooding over death and the "constant, careful harbouring of small impressions" play such an important part in Chant's yearning for heroism and a noble cause (his dreams are his only hope of escape from a life of which he had grown inexpressibly tired, a life without meaning, without risk, without beauty) his romanticism is to a large extent condoned.

Greene's attitude to Chant in this part of the novel would appear to be somewhat confused. On the one hand, his ordering of the action suggests a degree of critical detachment, and in one scene, at least, he appears to be fully aware of the lethal implications of Chant's particular brand of romanticism. On the other hand, an underlying sympathy with Chant's dreamy idealism persistently seeps through, colouring the style and suggesting that the disparity between Chant's illusions and the reality he tries to evade is a matter for pity rather than reproach.

In Part Two confusion gives way to chaos. Here we have Chant, who has just learnt how ugly violence is in real life, rushing off to shoot people in honour of Anne-Marie. If this is romanticism (and it looks more like criminal imbecility) then Chant is badly in need of a lesson on the disastrous effects of romantically inspired behaviour in real life

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(1) Ibid. p.7

situations. This, however, is not what he gets.

Parts of this section are simply devoted to morally neutral thriller-type material, in which Chant, having set a date for his uprising and more or less organised his reluctant revolutionaries into a fighting force, sets about smuggling in arms from Coblenz. These scenes make little contribution to the theme of the novel. Although his preparations for attack represent Chant's misguided attempts to mould reality into his dreams of "barricades and shots fired openly in a good cause", this implication is obscured in the excitement of battling against a variety of odds and the uncomfortable tension of narrow escapes from discovery.

Interspersed with the smuggling scenes are Chant's daydreams about Anne-Marie, muddled analyses of his motives for fighting and occasional half-promptings of self-awareness. These scenes do relate to the theme of the novel: they contrive to cover it in a good deal of confusion.

Chant, like Andrews, has been given an 'inner critic', though one which makes only sporadic appearances. Very occasionally it points out to him that what he is doing is somewhat less glorious than what he had dreamed of doing. At one point he thinks of "the cause that had once been so selfless, but had now become so confusing a mixture of his own love and hate."<sup>(1)</sup> At another point he causes a car accident and is afraid that the driver might have been killed: "'Have I been responsible for another death?' wondered with a sense of shame the organiser of a revolution.

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(1) Ibid. p.167

But there was a difference, he protested to his own self-mocker and self-critic, between death in fight and these slow, unintended dribblets of decease."<sup>(1)</sup> Here it is not entirely clear which is to be given more weight: Chant's conscience or his romantic self-justification. The irony of "wondered with a sense of shame the organiser of a revolution" is obscured by Chant's protest that there is a difference between "death in fight and these slow, unintended dribblets of decease". It looks as though we might be meant to accept this, though we cannot be sure, for as events turn out there is no "death in fight" in the book. As for "unintended dribblets of decease", this phrase is clearly an inadequate description of the death of the policeman, but its inadequacy seems less an intentional irony on Greene's part than a sentimental attempt to blur the horror of the death that Chant has been indirectly responsible for earlier on. And there is no death here for us to measure the phrase's precision by. The driver of the car turns out to be Anne-Marie, alive and unhurt, and ready, as soon as she recovers from the shock of the accident, to embark upon the seduction of Chant.

At another point, the day before the uprising is scheduled to take place - it has been planned to coincide with a fête in honour of Anne-Marie's birthday, so that the activities of the rebels distributing arms and instructions will pass unnoticed in the general bustle - Chant sees the happy crowds preparing for the fair, and with curious shortsightedness (that goes unremarked by Greene) is "touched a little by remorse

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(1) Ibid. p.252

for these preparers of an event already condemned. The booths for sweets and the booths for toys, the brightly painted chariots, had all been assigned a fate of which their owners were ignorant. They would rub their frameworks together in the same barricade, and be smashed into the same useless pile of lumber by the same bullets."<sup>(1)</sup> When the revolution comes it will not be only the booths and roundabouts which will be riddled with bullets. If Andrews's self-critic had been too violent in its reproaches, Chant's is not vigorous enough. The effect is similar: an evasive handling of moral issues which leaves the hero unscathed by criticisms which are more apparent than real.

Often Chant's promptings of awareness amount to nothing more than a self-pitying sense that his revolution isn't going to win him Anne-Marie (as if he deserves a reward for his monstrous project). This self-pity is particularly evident in a disconnected series of scenes in which a variety of motives for his leading the rebellion is offered.

It is never clear precisely what the connection is between loving Anne-Marie and organising a revolution. In the scene in which Chant made his 'romantic' declaration, all that emerged was that he was moved, by an intuition that Anne-Marie was tired of mere 'words', to pity and a consequent resolve to supply her with 'deeds'. In this scene the connection between the motivating pity and the decision to fight seems to rest largely on the semantic contrast between 'words' and 'deeds'. If Chant's romantic declaration can mean anything in this context, it can only mean

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(1) Ibid. p.288-9

'in your honour': not 'on your behalf' if the defeat of Anne-Marie's husband is what he has in mind: nor 'to win you' if his motive is pity for her.

This, however, is lost sight of in Chant's subsequent confused and self-pitying considerations of his motives for fighting. At one point he does appear to regard the revolution primarily as a competition for Anne-Marie, despite the apparent lack of connection between seeing her as an object for pity and seeing her as the spoils of war:

"I am in it to ... the end ... he thought. Now we will see who will fight best for you. But surely, he reminded himself, with bitter hopelessness, it is an unfair struggle, for if I win I do not get the prize."<sup>(1)</sup>

At another point, it seems that the revolution is simply a means of prolonging some sort of relationship with Anne-Marie - any sort of relationship, no matter how slight or unsatisfactory:

"Chant sat up in bed and counted on his fingers the days which still separated him from Anne-Marie. Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and then a hundred possibilities, any one of which must surely contain the sight of her. If he won this gamble then surely she must look to him for protection, and if he lost, would she not at least attend

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(1) Ibid. p.165

the Court Martial which would sentence him? Yet Chant felt uncertain whether even in that resort her interest would carry her so far."<sup>(1)</sup>

And, at another point, when the whole venture appears to be collapsing, yet another motive is offered:

"He had not known himself for what he hoped. Some undefined desire to make her depend on him for safety, to show her he was at least something to be regarded by the most uninterested of eyes was all that he could grasp."<sup>(2)</sup>

In this bewildering variety of explanations for Chant's behaviour, each one more self-centred, ridiculous and childish than the last ("some undefined desire to make her depend on him for safety" puts Chant's romanticism on the level of a pre-adolescent day-dream), there is no indication that Greene is either any less confused than Chant is, or any more aware of his moral lunacy. The only consistent feature in these scenes is a self-pitying sense that Anne-Marie is not going to respond to the magnificent gesture being made on her behalf.

When, towards the end of the section, the action again takes on significant shape, it is to disabuse Chant not about himself, though this is what the book's earlier (and still sporadic) irony requires, but

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(1) Ibid. p.180

(2) Ibid. p.185

about Anne-Marie. What Chant learns is not the folly of his romantic dreams of rushing off to battle in honour of a lady - but simply that Anne-Marie is unworthy of those dreams.

Anne-Marie seduces Chant. Her reason for doing this is that her husband is impotent. "All that disgusts him,"<sup>(1)</sup> she tells Chant. There have been several more or less unsubtle hints about this in the course of the book. At one stage Chant says to Anne-Marie, "I begin to think that your husband is the greatest man that I have ever known," to which she replies: "Great? He is great isn't he, in many ways ... As for man ... I'm the best judge of that."<sup>(2)</sup>

It is evident that for Greene Anne-Marie's surrender to physical desire is enough to condemn her. Chant, despite the fact that he wants her - or up till now has wanted her: his thoughts about her have become increasingly sexual - finds himself strangely reluctant to respond to her invitation. He only sleeps with her because she makes it clear that if he doesn't, she will never see him again, and he cannot bear to abandon his dream. As in The Man Within, love is offered as a 'pure' emotion divorced from physical passion.

Once their night together is over, Chant's disillusionment with Anne-Marie begins. He wakes to a room "as squalid as a harlot's lodging",<sup>(3)</sup> which sets the tone for what is to follow. He has arranged to meet her that evening at the Church of Our Lady,

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(1) Ibid. p.271

(2) Ibid. p.134

(3) Ibid. p.277

when he hopes to persuade her to leave Demassener and marry him. To pass the time, he decides to visit Frau Weber, the wife of one of the conspirators. "She is a good wife and a good Catholic"<sup>(1)</sup> and he thinks that the visit will be "both a prelude and a prophecy"<sup>(2)</sup> with regard to his meeting with Anne-Marie. Greene's real purpose in arranging this visit, however, is apparent earlier in the scene when Chant is working up to his decision: "He would have liked to make her acquaintance; he would have liked, indeed, with the night in memory, to acquaint himself with any woman who was a faithful wife, faithful not with the body only, but with a spirit which kept alive after many years a certain tenderness, even perhaps a certain passion."<sup>(3)</sup> Clearly, the fact that Demassener is impotent is to be no excuse for Anne-Marie's unfaithfulness, and, equally clearly, the meeting with Frau Weber is not going to provide Chant with the least reassurance about her.

Frau Weber turns out to be "a stout, middle-aged woman with calm, enquiring eyes"<sup>(4)</sup>, possessed of a deep serenity which comes from devoted trust in her husband and an unshakeable faith in God. No one could be less like Anne-Marie, who, Chant realises with bitter despair, will never make "'a good wife and a good Catholic' in that calm, tender, unquestioning way."<sup>(5)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.281

(2) Ibid. p.281

(3) Ibid. p.279

(4) Ibid. p.282

(5) Ibid. p.283

The meeting with Anne-Marie in the church that evening gives Greene the opportunity to pose her against a contrasting background of supernatural mystery and simple peasant faith. He makes every use of it:

"The lights were very dim in the Church of Our Lady. Slender pillars disappeared in the shadows below the roof to reappear again as they drooped to meet a new pillar across the aisle with the grace of a stem bent by the weight of a flower ...

"Two old women followed the Stations of the Cross, pushing their way from pillar to pillar, against a night which, like a dark spirit, strove to delay their attempts at holiness ...

"If the eyes were allowed to dwell for a time on a dim corner, the shadows turning sharp and angular would transform themselves into a shape, and in that darkness a wooden saint possessed as much life as the praying women ... The dead Christ was laid out for burial, the women and the Apostles bending their faces over the fallen head. The smoky last flicker of the candles shifted the shadows continually, until the figures seemed in truth to move to their taste. Even the dead Christ stirred as if at a presence

of resurrection."<sup>(1)</sup>

In this pervading atmosphere of darkness and mystery, Anne-Marie's voice, to Chant's surprise, sounds "less lovely than shrill".<sup>(2)</sup> It rings on, chattering cynically about their adultery, containing "no recognition of mystery and no trace of tenderness".<sup>(3)</sup> In the background for good measure are the old women telling their beads, and the contrast between them and Anne-Marie is heavily underlined by a careful verbal repetition.

"Click, click, click. The old women were reaching the end of their hard and difficult journey to Calvary. Soon they would be at the foot of the Cross, raising eyes with an understanding of pain, tenderness and mystery to the dim sacrifice above."<sup>(4)</sup>

When Chant asks Anne-Marie to marry him she laughs, "not abashed at all by the shadows or effigies of holiness and belief".<sup>(5)</sup> She tells him she could never live with him, that she has never loved him. Chant says,

"I think I see. You mean last night wasn't love. It was - "

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(1) Ibid. pp.289-90

(2) Ibid. p.293

(3) Ibid. p.294

(4) Ibid. p.294

(5) Ibid. p.297

"'Lust,' Anne-Marie supplied  
the word his lips boggled at."<sup>(1)</sup>

Chant leaves the Cathedral, which offers his  
grief one consolation, its age. "That a man's life  
was short could not be denied under its shadow."<sup>(2)</sup>

Part Two ends with Chant disillusioned about  
Anne-Marie. In Part Three he becomes disillusioned  
with life. His romanticism, despite Greene's earlier  
critical treatment of it, remains intact - though once  
he can no longer dream, it takes the form of bitterness  
that reality does not match up to his expectations.

The final disillusionment comes with the  
success of the revolution. It is not the revolution  
that Chant has dreamed of. In fact, it is not his  
revolution at all: it is taken out of his hands by  
Kapper and the other conspirators.

Anne-Marie has revealed Demassener's secret  
to Chant. And Chant, bitterly unhappy at her rejection  
of his love, gets drunk and, inadvertently, in turn  
reveals the secret to Kapper. While Chant is sleeping  
off the effects of the quantities of alcohol taken to  
drown the memory of Anne-Marie, Kapper sets about  
organising the revolution in his own way. He uses  
his knowledge to destroy the respect which the people  
of Trier have for Demassener. He prints and distri-  
butes thousands of pamphlets revealing the story of  
Demassener's impotence and his wife's unfaithfulness  
and organises a procession to follow a dumb show  
representation of the Demassener marriage acted out by

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(1) Ibid. p.297

(2) Ibid. p.301

effigies of the Dictator and his wife - Demassener's horned and mutilated. He also writes a 'revolutionary' song: "The song of Trier ruled by a man who hasn't even the strength to lie with his own wife."<sup>(1)</sup>

It is a nearly bloodless revolution. There is no battle, simply a deputation of Republicans to Demassener, supported by the jeering citizens of Trier, whom the police and the soldiers refuse to control, their discipline undermined by their own smirking enjoyment of the joke. Only Demassener is injured: a member of the deputation shoots him when he raises his revolver to Kapper for saying "We owe everything to Herr Chant and Frau Demassener - one might say in co-operation."<sup>(2)</sup>

The 'revolution', which is a travesty of the last of Chant's dreams, opens his eyes to the vileness of human nature. Demassener's rectitude and his years of service to Trier count for nothing against the revelation that he "has not even the strength to lie with his own wife." Freed from the restraints of Demassener's rule, the people of Trier abandon themselves to a prolonged orgy.

The novel ends with Chant taking the wounded dictator from Trier with an air of withdrawing from a dirty world. Anee-Marie, who is part of it, stays behind, appropriately contemplating an alliance with the unsavoury Kapper.

All that is left to Demassener, betrayed by his wife and his country, is a belief in God; and all that is left to Chant is envy for a belief which

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(1) Ibid. p.312

(2) Ibid. p.334

he cannot share.

The book has gone hopelessly off course. Chant has learnt a number of depressing things: that poets and artists do not correspond to the figures of romantic legend; that beautiful women are subject to physical desire and will betray impotent husbands; that there are no noble causes; and that human nature (except for his own and Demassener's) is corrupt. He has not learnt what Greene's earlier, if often precarious, irony required him to learn: that his own romanticism was foolish and dangerous. The consequences of his romanticism are never realised in the action. The disillusioning fiasco is a result of other people's vileness, not of his own mistakes.

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The theme of the 'divided mind', so prominent in The Man Within, does not disappear altogether in The Name of Action, although in the second book it plays only a subordinate role to the hero's discovery of the nature of life. Chant is given an 'inner critic' and 'second self', if not a very persistent one; and this is some indication of a fracture of personality. There is also some attempt to show him as pulled in different directions by Kapper and Demassener, although Kapper is so consistently appalling that Chant has to shut his eyes firmly to his real nature throughout their abortive association. The appeal of Demassener is another matter. From the first, Chant feels the attraction of the puritanical dictator. And when he reluctantly allows himself to be seduced by Anne-Marie, his initial words of capitulation are "I am not Demassener", pronounced insincerely, because he too

would prefer a love devoid of physical passion. And at the end of the book Chant has moved over completely to the Dictator's side; the last pages show them isolated in their purity from the world which so sordidly surrounds them.

In Greene's third novel, Rumour at Nightfall (1932), the 'divided mind' re-emerges triumphantly as the major theme.

There are two central characters, Francis Chase and Michael Crane, two friends, who are meant to be seen as constituting, in some mysterious way, the contending halves of a single super-personality. A succession of strenuously symbolical details points to their curious relationship without ever clarifying its significance. At one stage, for example, Chase is riding in a storm, thinking of Crane, and "In a mirror of rain before him, where if there had been any reflection it should have been that of his own face, he saw the nervous attentive eyes and the lips parted to assert the wrong thing. Always the wrong thing, Chase thought, remembering with a slow pleasure, how they had never agreed on any subject."<sup>(1)</sup> And, on another occasion, the two of them stand up after a meal at an inn: "Across the board his friend's body rose at the same time but slowly, like a retarded image of himself."<sup>(2)</sup>

To add to the complication, Francis Chase, as well as being the other half of Michael Crane, is also identified, in the first two sections of the book, with another character who is not Michael Crane. With

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(1) RN p.39

(2) Ibid. p.75

an air of uncovering a deep mystery, the heroine hands him a packet of letters from Ramon Caveda, saying: "Senor Chase, we are not strangers, how can I hope to hide anything? You must know me after six months. [They have met for the first time the previous night.] Why should you not have your own letters. They are yours ... Ramon." (1) And at various points, significance is found in the facts that Caveda's gloves fit Chase perfectly, that Crane mistakes Caveda for Chase, and that an old woman who has been Caveda's nurse mistakes Chase's voice for his. At the end of the novel, Chase ceases to be Caveda and becomes Michael Crane, who at this stage is dead, Chase having betrayed him to save Caveda.

The heroine, Eulelia Monti (who is every bit as irritating as her name might suggest), also has a divided mind. She is her father and her mother. In this she resembles Andrews, who - although in a way which might at least pass for metaphorical - identifies his father with his baser self. She says to Crane:

"What am I? I am my father and my mother. If I have any virtue it is my father's. He is a good man ... And if I have sinned, it is my mother's sin ... These are excuses. There should be something in me to resist my mother when she whispers of lovers whom I might have ... Not the mother you have seen but the one in me. But

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(1) Ibid. pp.139-40

where am I who should resist.

Is there an I?"(1)

The degree of literalness with which this claim for Eulelia's identity with her parents is being made is apparent in an incident which occurs towards the end of the book. Crane, having been betrayed by Chase, is in mortal danger and rushes to the Monti home for protection. Eulelia's mother (not the mother in her, but the mother who can be seen) locks Eulelia in her room and refuses to let him into the house, with the result that he is killed. This enables Eulelia to claim her share of the responsibility for his death. Chase says,

"'I was responsible. I killed him' ... 'I too,' she said, watching the living and the dead with a kind of arid grief. But when he shook his head she protested with fierceness: 'My mother would not let him in. He beat on the door and cried to us. She had locked me in my room. What am I saying? My mother. My mother is here.' She put her fingers to her breast, and for a moment he could have believed her, for in the early light her face was grey and her hair lustreless. Her pride had vanished and taken with it all the poise of her youth."(2)

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(1) Ibid. p.195

(2) Ibid. p.296

Eulelia's father is a religious man and a recluse; her mother is a nymphomaniac. Eulelia herself, however, is far from being the complex figure that this combination would suggest. She appears to be her father exclusively, and is certainly as remote from the World, the Flesh and the Devil as he is. Her single concession to the mother within her has been to spend one night with Caveda; but her extreme distaste for this experience indicates how alien it is to her real nature. She confesses her sin to Chase and Crane (both of whom she has known, incidentally, for less than twenty-four hours: the year is eighteen seventy something and the country Catholic Spain). Crane is horrified; and Chase says, "with slight contempt", "'You've a right to your pleasure.'"

"'Pleasure, pleasure,' repeated the voice at [Crane's] ear, while the face twisted in the sunlight. 'Do you call that pleasure? It may be for the man, but for me, for all of us, it's pain, pain.' Something in the protest, something in it of fury and disgust cleared Crane's mind."<sup>(1)</sup>

Eulelia's confession is carefully prefaced by Greene with several intimations that she doesn't actually possess anything so gross as a real body:

"She was a woman whose thin body seemed no more than a veil over the active, quivering mind, and when

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(1) Ibid. p.151

that mind withdrew to contempla-  
tion, the body to all intents  
accompanied it."<sup>(1)</sup>

and:

"When he looked up again, she was  
already back in her fortress, her  
body no more than the shadow her  
mind cast outside its inaccessible  
home."<sup>(2)</sup>

And afterwards, when Crane tries to think of Eulelia  
as a whore the only alternative, apparently, to  
'virgin' or 'Catholic wife' his brain refuses to  
supply "a soiled image to illustrate his thoughts."<sup>(3)</sup>

"The only image he could bring to mind was a face  
watching him with complete candour, while the lips  
admitted with an inhuman generosity any claim he chose  
to file."<sup>(4)</sup>

Eulelia's 'divided mind' never becomes more  
than a fanciful variation on the theme. Her modest,  
though not entirely sensible, attempts to give her  
father the credit for her virtues while taking to  
herself the burden of her mother's sins are  
disingenuously used by Greene to reinforce the image  
of her entirely simple, single and saintly personality.  
The complex multiple relationship between Chase, Crane  
and Caveda, however, does have some point, at a

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(1) Ibid. p.147

(2) Ibid. p.149

(3) Ibid. p.159

(4) Ibid. p.159

symbolic, if not at a very realistic level of interpretation.

The novel sets two opposing schemes of value against each other. On the one side are the ordinary, rational, materialistic values obtaining in the modern world.<sup>(1)</sup> And on the other side is a world of mysterious intuitions and extraordinary spiritual insights to which those who are subtly attuned to the Infinite are privileged to belong. The country of Spain, by virtue of its Catholicism, is very close to the second, superior world. The characters are classified according to whether their allegiance is to the world of the senses or to the world of the soul, and Chase's mysterious progress from 'being' Caveda to 'being' Crane is based on a sort of spiritual journey from the one to the other.

Chase is a journalist who has spent two years in Spain reporting on the political situation. He is a solid, dependable Englishman, brave, sceptical, rather obtuse. Not surprisingly, Spain gets on his nerves. He complains to Crane:

"This country is affecting my nerves. The strange standards they have, the importance they put on death, the superstition. It's a dark atmosphere in the mountains, you know. Smoke and flames, the fear of Hell, no gaiety, only small, bitter songs about love betrayed

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(1) The action takes place in Spain shortly after the suppression of the Carlist rising, but Greene does not appear to be distinguishing between the 1870's and the 1930's when he uses the term 'modern'. The historical background is of no more essential importance here than it was in MW.

and death, and all day long, as they believe, God being swallowed alive in their dismal churches."<sup>(1)</sup>

Caveda is a guerilla leader, who, for reasons which are never finally explained continues to support the lost Carlist cause. Chase has never met him, and is, in fact, officially attached to the force of King's troops whose object is to hunt him out, but he finds himself becoming more and more attracted to "the faceless shadow who carried on a losing duel among the mountains."<sup>(2)</sup> The basis for this attraction is that Caveda, like himself, is an alien figure in the brooding, supernatural atmosphere of Spain. Caveda is a Liberal, and an Atheist, and, Chase believes, the one Spaniard who is capable of humour and free from superstition. It is this similarity in outlook which Eulelia translates into a literal identification when she calls Chase "Ramon". That it is meant in some sense to be a literal identification and is not simply an extravagant metaphor for the similarity of their views is made clear on several occasions. Towards the end of the book, for example, Chase thinks, with what is obviously meant to be a rare flash of insight (when Eulelia calls him Ramon he is too ordinary and obtuse to know what she is talking about),

"Broad hands, but his gloves fitted mine; small feet: are my feet not small? A readiness to laugh; I had it when I first came to this country ... a dislike of

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(1) RN p.179

(2) Ibid. p.11

of priests and their ways;  
decision ... Facts deserted him  
for a moment in the temporary  
madness of an idea. Caveda was  
in myself. He used my tongue,  
felt heat, cold, lust and satiety  
with my body ..."(1)

Crane comes to Spain to join his friend whom he finds miraculously because they are 'one'. (He has no knowledge of his whereabouts.) There is never any explanation given for the mirror-imagery effects: these, like Eulelia's 'divided mind', appear to be merely decorative elaboration.

Crane has a sensitive, quivering soul and a capacity for suffering which Greene sees as cause for congratulation: "... this pain is precious; if I had felt no pain [on learning of the loss of Eulelia's virginity] I should have been damned indeed. There would have been nothing human left in me. I should have lost every alleviation in a life of fear ... the desire for virtue and the admiration of courage."(2) He is as attracted to the supernatural atmosphere of Spain as Chase is repelled by it. Their conflicting allegiances give rise to endless quarrels and misunderstandings, which are exacerbated by Chase's awareness that Crane is rapidly becoming closer to Eulelia than to himself.

All the intangible mystery of the Other World is concentrated in the figure of Eulelia and

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(1) Ibid. p.254

(2) Ibid. p.155

Crane is irresistibly drawn to her. He speaks no Spanish and she very little English, but they communicate silently, spirit to spirit, a few broken phrases here and there all that is needed to signpost the deeper regions of their souls. (Greene, however, makes up for their long silences by devoting pages of analysis to their every word and gesture.) In his wordless communings with Eulelia Crane finds a refuge from the world and the kind of peace which has in it "the quality of timelessness".<sup>(1)</sup>

They contract a secret marriage, which lasts for less than a day, for Chase sees Crane's marriage into the Spirit World as a betrayal of himself and what he stands for and moves promptly to his revenge. The brief union remains suitably unconsummated: Eulelia and Crane spend their only night together sitting in a church exchanging beautiful thoughts about Life, God, Suffering and related matters.

The sense of betrayal which Chase feels when he learns that Crane has married Eulelia, implying, as it does, a recognition that there is a region of experience to which he has no access, is, paradoxically, the first step which he takes towards their world. His normal obtuseness tries to reassert itself. He pleads with Crane for assurance that his marriage means nothing more than companionship and satisfied desire. But Crane (whose alliance with Eulelia appears to be synonymous with conversion to Catholicism) says,

"No, you are right. This is the end between us. We believe

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(1) Ibid. p.174

different things ... If I believe that tomorrow I shall taste God and you believe I am deluded, we are so far apart - ' he raised his hand and let his eyes rest with melancholy on the wall behind Chase's head ... 'You're out of sight.'"(1)

From this point onwards, Chase hovers uncertainly between his own world of reason and facts and Crane's of "shadows ... ghosts ... [and an] eaten god."(2) When he betrays Crane he is simultaneously reaffirming his own beliefs ("You are Superstition. I am Truth."(3)) and, paradoxically, acting from the sort of super-intuition that belongs to Crane's mystical sphere of existence:

"And I have condemned Crane, he thought, for what? For an injury done to my body? I feel no pain there. If he had struck me with a knife, the scar would remind me of his act after half a century. But if I ask myself in ten years time, what did he do? will fading memories of a business of ghosts justify me to myself? He blew out the candle and lay

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(1) Ibid. p.242

(2) Ibid. p.255

(3) Ibid. p.246

down upon the bed. He was  
in the dark now to which ghosts  
belonged and he longed to be  
convinced by them. I have  
condemned him on your grounds.  
Tell me that I was right ...  
Tell me that the war between him  
and me is a real war ..."(1)

Eventually, it is Chase's guilt over his betrayal of Crane which establishes him in a world of mystery and shadow. His betrayal takes the form of inadvertently implicating Crane in a skirmish between Caveda's men and the King's troops and, after suitable inner turmoil, allying himself with Caveda instead of going to warn Crane what he has done. In the midst of battle, guilt overtakes him in a lurid and fantastic vision of Crane as a Christ personally crucified by himself:

"Crane was behind him. It  
was Crane who battered at the door.  
It was Crane who sought him in the  
smoke and the noise and the flame,  
and suddenly it was Crane who met him  
on the stairs, stumbling down with  
hands held out from which the blood  
streamed, and eyes closed under a  
forehead marked and scarred. The  
extended hands seemed to reproach  
him, like those of the suffering  
Christs in the Churches set there

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(1) Ibid. pp.276-7

by priests to win men by pity to repentance. They seemed to say to him, 'This is your doing. What was my betrayal compared to yours? Mine was no betrayal. I followed what I believed to be the truth. Why have you given me terror, pain, death?' At the bottom of the long stairs Chase put his hands before his eyes. This is a dream. I am dreaming..."(1)

A second vision, similar to the first, impels him to make a dangerous journey over roof-tops in the heat of battle in search of Crane. At this point Crane's spirit enters into him. Before this, Chase has never had the imagination to feel anticipatory suffering or fear; but now with a dangerous jump ahead of him, which normally he would take coolly and with courage, he suddenly feels what Crane would feel:

"Below the stones waited to mangle and crush his body, but his flesh shrinking seemed to experience also the pain of Crane's legs breaking, of Crane's skull cracking against the cobbles. For these seconds of sickness he was aware of a closer sympathy with Crane, a nearer intimacy than he had ever felt

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(1) Ibid. p.283

before. Then he jumped and  
landed safely."<sup>(1)</sup>

It is suggested that this is the moment of Crane's death. Crane's fear leaves Chase and he wonders "Is it ... because he is safe now with the woman he loves? is it because I have lost him to her for ever?"<sup>(2)</sup> The question is answered for him by the sight of Crane's dead body at the other end of the street. His spirit has fled from it to enjoy the eternal peace of which Eulelia has given him a fore-taste.

Emptied of Crane's fear, and belonging now to neither world, Chase gazes numbly at the corpse. Passionately he wishes for the suffering that would affirm his spirit's existence. Eulelia joins him at the body and, after a brief competition as to who is more responsible for Crane's death (Chase because Caveda killed him; or Eulelia because her mother refused to let him into the house), Chase cries out to her, "If only I could feel."<sup>(3)</sup> He means that he wants the guilt and suffering which, he has come to learn, give entrée into the world of Spiritual Reality. Eulelia, with her special gifts of insight, understands this. ("Not many, he knew, would have followed his thoughts into their obscure retreat..."<sup>(4)</sup>)

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(1) Ibid. p.291

(2) Ibid. p.292

(3) Ibid. p.298

(4) Ibid. p.298

She shows him a photograph of Caveda whom he has still never met. When he looks at the "sensual, common, lying" face with its "vulgar, plausible features"<sup>(1)</sup>, he realises with horror the utter worthlessness of the man for whom he has betrayed his friend. At last he can really suffer, and this is his salvation.

"He ... [felt] his way in darkness, among spirits whom he had believed his enemies, ecstasies he had despised, towards that deeper darkness of eternal pain, endless atonement ... San Juan faded from his knowledge, Spain faded, he was no more than a sense of loneliness in a darkening room and a sense of fear."<sup>(2)</sup>

Only one thing remains to secure Chase firmly in the Spirit World: marriage to Eulelia. He begs her to stay with him for ever so that he will never forget how to suffer, "seeing in that threat of no more pain the final condemnation"<sup>(3)</sup>. Eulelia (who, making every allowance for long significant pauses in their conversation, can have been a widow for an hour at the utmost) "flashes her spirit ... to his succour."<sup>(4)</sup> In lurid tableau effect they join hands over the dead body of Michael Crane,

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(1) Ibid. p.299

(2) Ibid. pp.299-300

(3) Ibid. p.300

(4) Ibid. p.300

"the man whom they both loved"<sup>(1)</sup> and radiantly pledge themselves to a lifetime of suffering and remembrance. "Never had a man and woman joined hands for a better reason or in more perfect accord."<sup>(2)</sup>

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Greene's first three novels make few concessions to realism. Each has a tight, internal, symbolic coherence to which objectivity and even plausibility are sacrificed. The characters are conceived two-dimensionally to fit neatly into the books' naïve symbolic patterns. They are either improbably wicked like Lucy and Kapper, or improbably virtuous like Elizabeth, Demassener and Eulelia. Even the central characters, whom there is some attempt to see as complex, erring figures, turn out on inspection to be wholly admirable.

Neither the characters nor their situations are satisfactorily dramatised. There is little attempt to make the characters reveal themselves indirectly through their actions or dialogue or manner of thinking. A serious weakness (one of many) in Rumour at Nightfall, for example, is that, although the action is alternately seen from the radically opposed viewpoints of Chase and Crane, we are given no sense of any difference in the quality

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(1) Ibid. p.300

(2) Ibid. p.300

of their perception. Both see and respond to exactly the same things: the only difference being that Crane is explicitly attracted by these things, while Chase is repelled by them. Obviously, if Chase is to be in any way convincing as a character, he should not, in the first part of the book (when he 'is' the insensitive and unspiritual Caveda), even be aware of half of the mysteries and nuances and ghosts which so irritate him.

In presenting his characters in these novels, Greene frequently uses either description, crudely direct self-revelation or forced, artificial, symbolic situations and actions. The characters explain themselves laboriously to themselves or to each other; and often, as in the case of Eulelia's "What am I? I am my father and my mother..." the action makes not the slightest attempt to support what they say.

The characters seldom act out the qualities they are supposed to possess. We know, for example, that Chase is insensitive, because he says that he is and Crane tells him that he is but we see few instances of his lack of a finer awareness, and those that we do see are singularly unconvincing. One sympathises, for example, with his inability to understand what Eulelia means by so dramatically calling him Ramon. Anyone might be a little puzzled. We do, on the other hand, frequently see Crane and Eulelia being 'sensitive', but their sensitivity is also presented as undramatically as possible. We are given to understand, for example, that they are capable of communicating to each other the deepest and subtlest truths about life with a minimum recourse to such grossly sensuous phenomena

as audible words. But Greene's method of persuading us of this is to use the long pauses in their conversations for teasing long-winded and incredible significances out of their isolated murmurs. Without this elaborate aid, the murmurs themselves would suggest practically nothing.

Again, we know that Elizabeth is the embodiment of feminine, saintly perfection because Andrews says that she is; and because, although her conversation is entirely insipid, "the way in which she turned the words on her tongue till they came out with a rounded sweetness gave to their simplicity a hidden significance."<sup>(1)</sup> The final proof of Elizabeth's saintliness is that when Andrews looks at her, he sees not her body, but "a slim upstrained candle flame"<sup>(2)</sup> or "a white flower upon a slender stem."<sup>(3)</sup> On the other hand, we know that Lucy is wicked, because when Andrews looks at her he can see her body; and because he calls her a harlot; and because she herself continually draws attention to her own lasciviousness in conversation. We also know that Anne-Marie was wicked to seduce Chant: partly because he suddenly feels very pure, partly because in the holy and mysterious atmosphere of the Cathedral her voice sounds "less lovely than shrill"; and finally because she reveals her true nature by becoming attracted to Kapper. Kapper is small and mean, with a twisted mouth and dirty fingernails and a furtive habit of turning his profile and "a single

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(1) MW p.52: The words which accompany this testimony to Elizabeth's exquisite spirituality are "You've worn out your stockings."

(2) Ibid. p.7

(3) Ibid. p.78

eye"<sup>(1)</sup> to the people he is talking to. So this attraction is not very plausible, but is certainly is symbolic, and helps to prove to Chant how vile human nature really is.

The situations in which the characters find themselves are also artificial and manipulated to fit the emotional and symbolic patterns of the books. In The Man Within, life is seen simply as a series of moral tests for Andrews - sometimes undisguised, as in the trial scene. But even when they are disguised as real life situations - the test of his purity, for example, masquerades as a harlot called Lucy offering her body in exchange for his appearance in the witness stand - they are not very credible. Lucy's bargain offer ("You can boast afterwards that you've had me at a cheaper rate than any other man has done."<sup>(2)</sup>) is badly motivated. But it is needed for the novel's moral scheme. It is not enough that Lucy should sleep with Andrews out of straightforward lust. Andrews's sin needs to be in some way connected with his appearance at the trial, so that afterwards he can confess that his motives were "partly a harlot" - while Greene can insist that they weren't. Again, the use of Lucy in the prompt repentance scene to emphasise that although Andrews has fallen, physically, he remains spiritually pure ("You're one of those people ... who can't rid themselves of a conscience.") is a grotesque instance of Greene's sacrifice of realism and plausibility to the moral and emotional needs of his book.

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(1) NA p.32

(2) MW pp.127-8

(3) See above p.31

In The Name of Action 'life' is carefully designed to show Oliver Chant how nasty it is, once the "clean chains" of oppression are swept away. To this end every one except for Chant himself - and the three characters, Demassener and the Webers, who are Catholics and who therefore have an alternative to this life - is filled with an incredibly nasty sexuality. The whole of Trier was a hideous den of vice before Demassener came into power. The rebels are visibly dirty, their surroundings are squalid and their activities confined to the production of obscene verses and caricatures. Anne-Marie, although she is pale and beautiful, is not only capable of sexual desire (in itself a sign of corruption, apparently) but is able to find the unspeakable Kapper enticing. And, finally, all that is needed for a successful revolution is a stupid and brutal dirty joke - to appeal no doubt to the 'animal in man' which Demassener's clean chains have been holding in check.

In Rumour at Nightfall Greene's attempts to anchor his symbolism in anything approaching real life are minimal. Two worlds are posited: one exclusively physical, the other exclusively spiritual. Both are evoked by laboured, analytical reflection and dialogue (e.g. for some pages Chase thinks that stones are real and feels petulant about the philosophy of Berkeley), and by symbolical, but unlikely activities, such as Eulelia's two rapid marriages, which are meant to testify that first Crane and then Chase have opted for the world of the spirit.

The proportion in this novel of incident to self-analysis and symbolic dialogue is extremely low; and such action as there is is handled with a concentration on symbolism that excludes realism or

plausibility. Eulelia, chaste widow of an hour, radiantly proffering herself for the salvation of the man responsible for her husband's death is one case in point. Another is the crucial episode in Chase's spiritual career, his betrayal of Crane, which is absurdly presented in the following exchange in which he unintentionally implicates his friend in the fight between Caveda and the king's troops:

"'No,' he said aloud, 'You will never now get me to betray Caveda. You must go to Crane for that.' The last phrase had not been meant as a suggestion. It had been a relegation of Riego to the region to which he belonged. [i.e. to the world of shadow because Colonel Riego is a Catholic and a Spaniard.] He was surprised when the old man took him seriously, nodding his bearded head. 'Yes, yes. Thank you. Something might be done there. I will go to him.' Chase called out, as he began to move down the street: 'Wait. I didn't mean it seriously.'"(1)

These novels are interesting for a study of Greene's work as a whole, because their naïveté and technical clumsiness reveal an important feature of his art which his later, much more sophisticated handling of his material tends to disguise.

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(1) RN p.255

This is the secretly whole-hearted sympathy and admiration which Greene has for his central characters. They appear to be complex figures: partially corrupt, but capable of a paradoxical virtue that is closely related to their awareness of moral failure. But in fact they are simple and idealised. Their own sense of their corruption is not only left unsubstantiated by the action; it is positively contradicted by it. Such 'sins' as Greene allows them to commit are never in any way unpleasant. Only in the minor characters like Lucy or Anne-Marie is sin ugly. In the main characters it seems to be simply a prelude to guilt and repentance. And to Greene guilt is something essentially attractive: not a measure of a character's behaviour, but a mark of his exceptional spiritual refinement. The sins which provoke this guilt are often non-existent. (In The Man Within, for example, half Andrews's self-reproaches for cowardice are without basis, and, in fact, occur when he is being particularly heroic.) And even when they do exist they are condoned and their ugly implications ignored.

In The Man Within none of Andrews's sins is taken seriously. His sexual lapse is discounted - his shame is shown to be an entirely admirable alternative to literal purity. And his betrayals of Carlyon and Elizabeth are overshadowed by lingering scenes of expiation. Greene's real indifference to the betrayal of Carlyon is evident when Elizabeth offers Andrews a further betrayal in court as a means of proving his courage.

In Rumour at Nightfall guilt is quite explicitly offered, with suffering, as evidence of

spiritual sensitivity. Chase's 'sin', his betrayal of Crane, is an important stage in his progress towards true spiritual insight. The guilt which follows his act of betrayal brings suffering, and with suffering comes his first conscious acknowledgment of the existence of the spirit (the betrayal itself had implied an unconscious one). If the spirit can suffer, the spirit must exist: "It was Descartes' philosophy with a difference. 'I suffer, therefore I am.' ... The spirit suffers and therefore it exists. The statement was, he knew, to some extent a capitulation."<sup>(1)</sup> Each stage in Chase's spiritual advance is prompted by a fresh recognition of guilt. And at the end of the novel it is the full realisation of the horror of what he has done that draws him finally into the spirit world. Eulelia shows him a photograph of Caveda, and an appalled glance at the vulgar features and dishonest expression awakens him to the utter worthlessness of Caveda, of himself and of the world to which they both belong - of everything in fact for which he has sacrificed his friend.

"He looked again at the face, sensual, common, lying, which he had taken for his own and he felt the first ungrudging pain, the first unqualified humility, To the self-accusation: 'I have murdered him,' the answer, 'He brought it on himself. It was for Caveda's sake,' held an unbearable irony.

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(1) Ibid. p.277

"He said slowly, feeling his way in darkness, among spirits whom he had believed his enemies, ecstasies he had despised, towards that deeper darkness of eternal pain, endless atonement, 'The town is Caveda's.' He referred to physical things, to the flames, the shots, men dying in the square ... San Juan faded from his knowledge, Spain faded ..."(1)

He becomes pure spirit and in this form is united with Eulelia. The two of them look forward to a lifetime of guilt and suffering which they are obviously going to enjoy. "One can be happy if one suffers," (2) says Eulelia, before flourishing the photograph that will lead Crane through a maze of guilt to true spirituality.

What is missing from this abstract study of guilt and its attendant raptures is a genuine sense that there is something wrong with killing one's friends. Chase's guilt is expressed in the strongest terms - "I murdered him." - but one can't help feeling that it is rather remotely connected to his own behaviour. It's final awakening comes, not from a contemplation of his own actions, but from looking at somebody else's photograph. It is true that the somebody has been obscurely identified with himself. But there is nothing in the book to suggest that Chase 'is' Caveda to the extent of being "sensual", "common" or "lying", or that any of these qualities

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(1) Ibid. pp.299-300

(2) Ibid. p.297

have anything to do with his betrayal of Crane. On the contrary, he is a most earnest young man, solemnly striking a blow for Truth as he sees it. The betrayal itself has been presented as attractively as a betrayal could be. It is in the first place unwitting. "Wait," he calls out to Colonel Riego. "I didn't mean it seriously." And it is then backed by principle, by a deep conviction that Crane in marrying Eulelia has betrayed not only him but also the truth that he stands for. Moreover, the consequences to Crane of this betrayal are seen as beneficial rather than disastrous: Chase says to Eulelia,

"I've robbed you both of [happiness]. She leapt to her feet and faced him with anger. The flame of it lit her face ... 'Not him,' she said. 'He is happy. Look at his face. Can you doubt it?' He said: 'There's nothing to be seen there.' She accepted his words with exaltation: 'Nothing, of course. He's gone.'" (1)

Chase's guilt is clearly not intended to indicate the ugliness of his act, which has not been presented as ugly at all. Guilt, with the mental suffering it arouses is simply the source of the spiritual refining process which Chase undergoes as he moves from the rational and physical world of Caveda

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(1) Ibid. p.297

to the supernatural world of Eulelia and Crane. And the climax of guilt at the end of the novel is simply the last stage in this process. As soon as Chase sees the photograph of the worthless Caveda, guilt transforms him into pure spirit. His physical surroundings (Caveda's world) fade from his knowledge. He gropes his way in a world of "spirits whom he had believed his enemies, ecstasies which he had despised" and becomes "nothing more than a sense of loneliness ... and a sense of fear" for the spirit of Eulelia to comfort and keep pure by perpetual reminders of guilt. This extraordinary fusion of guilt and joy is clearly being offered as an ideal to be striven for.

In Part One of The Name of Action there is a more serious attempt than in either of the other novels to view the hero critically. But even here Greene's irony is partially blunted by a confusing undercurrent of complaisance towards Chant's romanticism. By Part Two, Greene's sympathy swells to proportions sufficient to rock the book off its original course, and, indeed, off any course at all. For most of this section, the writing alternates incomprehensibly between sporadic bursts of irony, which become increasingly feeble, and floods of tender-hearted condolence towards Chant's sufferings which eventually swamp all criticism of his highly criticisable activities. Towards the end of this section when the book again finds a direction it is the opposite of the original one. Greene no longer makes any attempt to criticise Chant's romanticism (which was to have led Trier into civil war in honour of Anne-Marie), but confines his censure to life for so sorely disappointing his hero's hopes of it.

Chant is seen as standing nobly aloof from its vile-ness.

In Greene's later novels, the inability to maintain a proper degree of critical detachment from his apparently complex heroes persists. The moral experience is more substantial and more intricate than in the early works, and the discrepancy between the characters' own awareness of their corruption and Greene's surreptitious insistence on their innocence less blatant. But underneath the more plausible surface complexity there remains what Conor Cruise O'Brien, writing of Scobie in Maria Cross, calls a "constant hum of tender approbation."<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Conor Cruise O'Brien: Maria Cross. London, Burns & Oates, 1963. p.66

### CHAPTER III: THE NOVELS: 1932-1936

In Greene's first three novels life is something to be eschewed. It is a condition of guilt and suffering and sex from which a Catholic death provides the only escape. Andrews in The Man Within and Crane in Rumour at Nightfall are initiated into eternity by their chaste associations with saintly Christian heroines. Elizabeth and Eulelia give them peace from the world and from themselves: the kind of peace which has "a quality of timelessness" and which anticipates what they are to experience when they die, which at the end of the books they duly do. In The Name of Action Chant's association with Anne-Marie is not chaste. He sleeps with her and promptly becomes disillusioned with human nature. At the end of the novel he is vouchsafed neither Catholicism nor death, but leaves Trier, desolately yearning for both.

The world in these novels is a hostile and painful place, pervaded with a vile sexuality. It is not very convincingly portrayed. The historical settings which Greene chooses for The Man Within and Rumour at Nightfall do not help; and although The Name of Action is nominally set in Trier in the 1920's, the vision of riotous lust with which Greene awakens his hero to the nature of reality is clearly a product of his own unbalanced imagination.

The novels from Stamboul Train (1932) onwards show Greene giving substance to his obsessions with sin and pain. He turns his attention to the contemporary world, finding in existing conditions of poverty, squalour and social injustice plenty of ammunition for what is essentially a series of attacks against life.

Greene is occasionally thought of as a political novelist who has regrettably mislaid his social conscience by the time he comes to write The Power and the Glory, where he welcomes pain as a preparation for heaven and dismisses the communist lieutenant's attempts to alleviate physical suffering as unrealistic and misguided. But there is, in fact, very little difference in Greene's attitude towards suffering in his Catholic and his thirties novels. In both it is seen as an essential condition of life and an irreversible one. It is true that the thirties novels reveal his political attitudes as being to some extent left-wing. His sympathetic characters are often taken from the oppressed and exploited poor, and their misfortunes partially attributed to social conditions. Some of them even vigorously denounce the social order. But social injustice is not the central focus of these novels; nor is it ever seen as remediable. It is a symptom of a diseased, egotistical humanity, and is part of the nature of life. "There are others, of course, who prefer to look a stage ahead," Greene writes in Journey Without Maps, "for whom Intourist provides cheap tickets into a plausible future, but my journey [through Liberia] represented a distrust of any future based on what we are."<sup>(1)</sup> In It's a Battlefield, the novel which deals most directly with social iniquities, the central character comes to realise that injustice isn't simply part of a political system: "it was as much a part of the body as age and inevitable disease. There was no such thing as justice in the air we breathed."<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) JWM p.8

(2) IB p.66

Stamboul Train (1932) is the first of Greene's entertainments, "written hurriedly because of the desperate need one had for money"<sup>(1)</sup>. It takes an assorted group of characters brought together by chance on a trans-continental express. Their interaction provides a series of more or less closely connected events, ultimately given unity by a central symbol: the train itself, which is seen to stand for life.

Early in the novel, one of the characters, a Jewish business man called Myatt, thinks of the journey as holding the travellers in a state of suspension:

"In the train, however fast it travelled, the passengers were compulsorily at rest; useless between walls of glass to feel emotion, useless to follow any activity except of the mind; and that activity could be followed without fear of interruption. The world was beating now on Eckman and Stein, telegrams were arriving, men were interrupting the thread of thought with speech, women were holding dinner-parties. But in the rushing reverberating express noise was so regular that it was the equivalent of silence, movement was so continuous that after a while the mind accepted it as

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(1) JWM. p.19

stillness. Only outside the train was violence of action possible, and the train would contain him safely within his plans for three days ..."(1)

This ironically counterpoints what is to follow. On the train things do happen. Lives are changed; violence is initiated; Myatt himself is brought to feel more emotion than he has ever felt before and, it is suggested at the end of the book, than he is ever to feel again. Events take place with abnormal speed and intensity and are punctuated by a recurring image of the train, closed and self-contained, speeding through the quiet countryside.

Near the end of the novel the symbol is made explicit. One of the most important characters, and one of the most fully and sympathetically drawn, Dr. Czinner, a socialist revolutionary, lies wounded and dying in a hut on Subotica station. The revolution in Belgrade which he was supposed to have led had started without him, three days early, and failed. His life has been a succession of failures and he is dying with nothing achieved. He tries to understand where he has gone wrong, why it is that he has continually failed, while others, less scrupulous, succeed. And he thinks to himself that life is very like the rocketing express on which he has been travelling. He hasn't adapted himself to the movement of the 'express'. He has stood too firm; he has been "damned by his faithfulness".(2) Success

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(1) SI pp. 19-20

(2) Ibid. p.91

comes from "leaning this way and leaning that, altering the balance now in this direction, now in that. One had to be very alive, very flexible, very opportunist."<sup>(1)</sup>

The characters are divided into those who are helpless in the sway of the 'train', and those who can exploit its movement. The former are the 'good' characters, sympathetically and, at times, sentimentally treated. There are only three of them. One is Ninitch, a poor soldier, one of the victims of the capitalist government he serves, and bewildered and unhappy at the brutalities he is expected to perform in the course of his duties. Then there is Czimmer himself, and finally, Coral Musker.

Coral is a chorus girl, travelling to a temporary job as one of 'Dunn's Babies' in Constantinople. Life for her, is dreary and exhausting: an endless struggle to find work in an overcrowded profession, a succession of uncomfortable lodgings and never enough to eat. She has a weak heart which she has been overstraining for years. She endures her life with resignation as as much cheerfulness as she can muster, but she is very near the end of her tether. On the train she becomes involved with Myatt, who gives her his first class sleeper when she is taken ill. Out of gratitude and a kind of naive integrity, she lets him make love to her. "Novelists like Ruby M. Ayres might say that chastity was worth more than rubies, but in truth it was priced at a fur coat or thereabouts. One couldn't accept a fur coat without sleeping with a man."<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.190

(2) Ibid. p.47

And Myatt has paid ten pounds.

Myatt is moved to learn that he is Coral's first lover. Excited by her innocence and touched by her lack of coquetry, he asks her to live with him when they get to Constantinople. Coral can't believe her amazing luck. To be Myatt's mistress means the end of her grinding struggle for existence; the promised luxuries; "Her own bedroom and going to bed at ten".<sup>(1)</sup> "'Oh,' she said in a voice of absolute trust, 'it's too good to be true.'<sup>(2)</sup>

Coral is right. It is too good to be true. The next morning when the train stops at Subotica Czinner is arrested, and Coral is taken as his accomplice because she has innocently accepted an incriminating letter that he thrust at her when he saw the military guard.

Czinner and Coral are held at the station to await the arrival of the military tribunal before whom they are to appear. After a while another passenger from the train, Joseph Gruenlich, is pushed in with them. He is a criminal running away from Vienna where he has murdered a man, and has been arrested for being in possession of a gun.

Coral is bewildered. She knows nothing about Czinner's political activities and doesn't understand what is happening. The officials who come in and out of the waiting room speak a language she doesn't even recognise. At first she is not too frightened. The train is being held up at the station for repairs and she thinks it will be a matter of

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(1) Ibid. p.126

(2) Ibid. p.127

minutes before Myatt notices her absence and comes to rescue her. Time passes and nothing happens.

At this point the action is handled with great skill. It alternates between Myatt on the train and Coral and Czinner in the waiting room, juxtaposing Myatt's activities with Coral's fading hopes. While Coral is still expecting him at any moment, Myatt is in the dining-car, finishing a cigar, doing a little work. He goes back to their compartment, is not particularly surprised by Coral's absence and falls asleep. He is still asleep when the train leaves the station, leaving Coral frozen with despair.

She tries, without much conviction, to hope that he will come back for her. She has no faith in her power of attraction and assumes that he will simply not bother. Czinner looks at her trying to pray and feels sorry for her. "His experience told him two things, that prayers were not answered and that so casual a lover would not trouble to return."<sup>(1)</sup>

Myatt, however, does come back. While the Court Martial is taking place which is to sentence Czinner to death, and Gruenlich and Coral to minor imprisonment, Myatt discovers her absence from the train and hires a car to take him back to Subotica. The three prisoners, in the waiting room again after the sentences have been passed, learn of the car's arrival. They manage to break away, but Czinner is shot. Coral turns back to help him. Gruenlich, caring only for his own skin, runs ahead and persuades Myatt to drive off immediately by telling him there is nobody with him. "'No girl?'" Myatt asks. "'No.

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(1) Ibid. p.154

No girl.' He met Myatt's gaze with a complete honesty ..."(1)

Coral helps Czinner into the shelter of a hut. They spend a long night there. Just before Czinner loses consciousness he thinks that virtue doesn't pay; that he has been "damned by his faithfulness". Coral's thoughts echo his closely. She has lost Myatt by running to Czinner's aid. She wonders whether she could make him keep his promises to her. "Why shouldn't I write to him? He might like it; he might want me still and if he doesn't, why shouldn't I put up a fight? I'm tired of being decent, of doing the right thing. Her thoughts were very close to Dr. Czinner's when she exclaimed to herself that it didn't pay. But she knew too well that it was her nature, she was born so and she must make the best of it. She would be a fumbler at the other game ..."(2)

The rest of the characters in the novel are those who are expert in "the other game". "Very alive, very flexible, very opportunist", able to follow up an advantage to themselves when they see it, they pursue their own interests without thought for the welfare of others. There is Gruenlich who abandons Coral and Czinner (to their deaths, for all he cares) and lies to Myatt to ensure his own safety. There is Mabel Warren, a lesbian journalist, permanently tipsy, but brutally efficient and capable of prompt sobriety when she scents news. She makes a scoop, based on shrewd guesswork, of Czinner's

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(1) Ibid. p.187

(2) Ibid. p.191

secret plans to embarrass the government by standing trial with the other revolutionaries. The scoop advances her own career and leads to Czinner's immediate arrest, secret Court Martial and death. Then there is Janet Pardoe, Mabel's 'companion', beautiful, stupid and entirely selfish. She casually throws Mabel over for a successful novelist travelling on the same train, and then abandons him when she sees the opportunity of an advantageous marriage to Myatt. Finally there is Myatt. He is more complex than the other egocentrics, because for a short time, with Coral, he is drawn out of his preoccupations with himself and his money into an awareness of someone else's suffering.

Basically, however, Myatt is an unattractive character. (Jews, starting with Kapper, always are in Greene's novels.) And at the end of the book he reverts to what Greene anti-semitically sees as type, when he finds that he can marry Janet Pardoe and clinch a business deal with her uncle at the same time. With some relief he forgets Coral. He hasn't been at all comfortable in the chivalrous role that her pathos has moved him to adopt.

Grimly, in accordance with his theme, Greene metes out pain to the innocent and rewards to the ungodly. Myatt and Janet move towards a marriage in which each finds cause for complacency. Gruenlich is free. Mabel Warren has her scoop and a rise in pay. She also has Coral, whom she has 'rescued' from the military authorities. This is the last disaster for Coral. First she loses Myatt through her sense of responsibility towards the wounded Czinner. Rather belatedly Greene insists that she loves Myatt, while at the same time stressing how unworthy he is of her

affection. ("She was aware ... that there was no quality in Myatt to justify her fidelity; it was just that she was like that and he had been kind."<sup>(1)</sup>) And now, too ill to resist, she is doomed to live out a sterile life as the grotesque Mabel's paid companion. Czinner is dead with nothing achieved. And Ninitch, the good soldier, is utterly crushed. Life, as Czinner and Coral came to recognise in the hut on Subotica station, destroys the innocent.

An interesting side-issue in Greene's handling of his theme is the way Czinner moves towards its exposition via a number of half-hearted essays at self-reproach. His little bursts of guilt are oddly disconnected. Only one - and that the mildest - has anything to do with the action or what we know of his character. At first his self-accusations seem to lead nowhere, and they are finally resolved - one might say dissolved - in the conclusion that he himself is virtuous and that life is to blame for his failures.

Czinner is a Catholic who has painstakingly shed his Catholicism for an agnostic, socialist creed. Once he knows he is going to die - for his decision to stand trial with his fellow revolutionaries is a quixotic martyr's gesture - he feels a nostalgia for the confessional and the peace it offers. He is burdened by a sense of guilt. At one point he finds Gruenlich riffling through his suitcase; and when he has sent him off contemptuously he is moved to reflect:

"He himself was not without dishonesty ... he was guilty of vanity, of several meannesses; once he had

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(1) Ibid. p.192

got a girl with child. Even his motives for travelling first class were not unmixed; it was easier to evade the frontier police, but it was also more comfortable, more fitted to his vanity as a leader."<sup>(1)</sup>

None of these accusations has anything to do with his character as it is presented in the novel (noble, aloof, self-effacing, idealistic, etc.), or with the action. None is mentioned again. Czinner, haunted by guilt, corners a cricket-playing clergyman, to whom he would like to unburden his soul. Mr. Opie allows his attention to be diverted from cricket to the confessional, which he talks about in a dispassionate, unspiritual way. (He is a Protestant - always an indication of a certain crassness in Greene's novels.) Czinner leaves Mr. Opie's compartment stifling his righteous anger and contempt. His guilt (like Chase's) appears to be testimony of his spiritual sensitivity and worth, and is clearly not intended to reflect very seriously on his character.

Czinner's next self-reproach, which does have some substance, is only made to be promptly withdrawn. He regrets - briefly and mildly - that he has thoughtlessly implicated Coral in his own troubles: and then reflects that life, not he, is to blame for his treatment of her. He cannot afford to have scruples which would jeopardise his cause.

"He had always recognised the need of sacrificing his own

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(1) Ibid. p.117

integrity; only a party in power could possess scruples ... But the reflection for some reason made him bitter; he found himself envying virtues which he was not rich nor strong enough to cherish. He would have welcomed generosity, charity, meticulous codes of honour to his breast if he could have succeeded, if the world could be shaped again to the pattern he loved and longed for."<sup>(1)</sup>

This paves the way for Czinner's final revelation: that he has been too virtuous for success. As life is to blame for his thoughtlessness towards Coral, so it is also to blame for his political failure. Its nature is such that only the vicious, the grasping and the cynical can make any headway. This reflection is also inspired by what starts off as an examination of his conscience. "... his Christian training took an ironical revenge ... he ... began to reconcile the events of the past few days and to wonder in what he had erred ..."<sup>(2)</sup> But, of course, he hasn't erred at all: he has been "damned by his faithfulness".

Czinner's sporadic bursts of guilt do not play a very important part in the novel, and its quality is not seriously affected by the evasiveness

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(1) Ibid. p.154

(2) Ibid. p.190

with which they are handled. But his self-accusations are interesting for their total irrelevance to the theme which they herald, which is an indication of the obsessiveness of Greene's preoccupation with guilt, and a clear example of his tendency to inflict it on characters whose actions in no way merit it. For Czinner's only trouble, as he says himself, is an excess of virtue.

Despite its occasional evasions and sentimentalities, this novel represents a remarkable advance on the first three - especially remarkable in view of the fact that Rumour at Nightfall was published earlier in the same year. Greene's whole attitude to novel-writing has changed. The early books were symbolic to the detriment of plausibility. The central characters were heavenward strivers without other features or individuating characteristics. The minor characters were good or bad angels. The plots were improbable and manipulated to fit the overall symbolic patterns. The writing was archly self-consciously literary, and showed disastrously the influence of the late, romantic Conrad. (The Arrow of Gold probably provided a good deal of the inspiration for Rumour at Nightfall.) With their lingering self-analyses and a perpetual search for nuance and mystery in every undistinguished snatch of dialogue or insignificant action, the pace of these novels could hardly have been slower. In Stamboul Train the characters come alive. They stop being symbols and give the appearance of real people with real lives to live. They think and act and speak consistently and individually. Greene suddenly reveals a talent for catching hold of a telling gesture or turn of phrase so that even minor characters flash vividly to life.

Janet Pardoe, for example, agrees with everything that is said to her "in a low musical voice" and carries on doing precisely what she wants. Myatt has a habit of thinking of people in imagery of financial value. Coral to him is like something pretty, tinselly and cheap, something of sentimental rather than intrinsic value. Janet Pardoe, on the other hand, he sees as expensive, like imported leather goods. Mabel Warren has her own characteristic style: gruff, hardboiled and crude. The plot of Stamboul Train is interesting for its own sake as well as for the sake of the thematic pattern. It is more elaborate than any in the early books, its separate episodes are handled briskly, cut off at the climax for suspense where suspense is needed, and skilfully juxtaposed for dramatic effect. Greene's style in this novel is crisp and unpretentious. The self-conscious, rhetorical quality of the earlier works suggested that he was trying to show how well he could write. In Stamboul Train style is not simply an end in itself, but a means of creating a scene or a mood or a character. Greene, from being a self-conscious and self-indulgent amateur, has turned into a thoroughly competent and workmanlike professional.

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The subject of It's a Battlefield (1934) is again Life. As in Stamboul Train, we are presented with a depressed vision of a number of different characters, most of whom are pursuing their own interests without regard for the welfare or happiness of others. The novel goes deeper than the entertainment, however; for in it selfishness is not simply an

unexplained fact of life: it is seen as arising out of the individual's loneliness and despair. There are fewer entirely unpleasant characters than in Stamboul Train; and even those whom Greene most dislikes, like the successful Communist intellectual, Mr. Surrogate, are seen as desperately trying to compensate for some basic inadequacy in themselves. There is another difference between the two books. In Stamboul Train, while the good characters are shown as defeated by life, a few of the bad ones are allowed to prosper: to be, if not precisely happy, at least complacent or successful. In It's a Battlefield no one succeeds. Even when selfish desires are gratified, the satisfaction turns out to be bitter or inadequate. The picture is a desolate one of irreversible and collective misery.

The novel's epigraph and title are taken from Kinglake:

"In so far as the battlefield presented itself to the bare eyesight of men, it had no length, no breadth, no depth, no size, no shape, and was made up of nothing except small numberless circlets commensurate with such ranges of vision as the mist might allow at each spot ... In such conditions, each separate gathering of English soldiery went on fighting its own little battle in happy and advantageous ignorance of the general state of the action; nay, even very often in ignorance of the fact that any conflict was raging."

An image of life as a succession of little struggles being fought out in ignorance of a general battle recurs at key-points of the action and crystallises its implications.

The action is made up of a series of little, separate actions radiating out from a central situation. Jim Drover, a Communist bus-driver, has stabbed a policeman during a political riot. The policeman had raised his truncheon at Drover's wife, and Drover's action had simply been an instinctive movement in her defence. The policeman dies and Drover is sentenced to death for murder. The book is concerned with the responses of various people to this sentence; and with the attempts of some of them to get it commuted to life imprisonment. Very few of the people involved in Drover's fate are disinterested; and all the attempts to save his life are abandoned or at least temporarily forgotten in the characters' desperate and unavailing struggles to make their own lives worth living.

Even the Home Secretary, with whom the final decision rests, is not disinterested. For him the problem is a matter of political expediency and, ultimately, of his own advancement. His concern is not with the justice of the sentence, but with the effect that the reprieve or hanging of a Communist will have on the strikers who are disrupting the country's economy. It is not about the good of the country that he is worried, but about jeopardising the Government's chances in the next election and, therefore, his own career. The Home Secretary's secretary explains the situation to the Assistant Commissioner of Police, whom he approaches for a report on public feeling about the Drover trial:

"The cotton workers are out, and the railwaymen may be out next week. Drover is a Communist. Will it be taken as a confession of weakness if we reprieve him?

"... And if we hang him, will that be regarded too as a confession of weakness? Will they imagine that we are afraid to be magnanimous?

"... If resentment kept them out a week longer, if over-confidence kept them out a week longer, it would cost the country fifty million.' He tapped the Commissioner's knee. 'More taxes and we lose the next election. What happens then?'

"The Assistant Commissioner did not answer ... The private secretary laughed and said ... with a frankness that gave the impression of deep guile: 'No peerage for the Minister anyway. And no under-secretaryship for me.'"(1)

Among the other characters implicated in Drover's fate are his wife, Milly, his brother, Milly's sister, Kay, Jules, the man who loves her and the Communist, Mr. Surrogate. Each of them, to a different extent, loses sight of Drover's predicament in the shadow of his or her own.

To Mr. Surrogate, who has to make a speech about Drover at a Party meeting, the tragedy is not

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(1) IB pp.7-8

very real in the first place. He has tried to escape from real life, in which he cuts a very poor figure, into a comfortable, abstract world of political theory. A widower, haunted by the knowledge that he had failed to satisfy his wife either spiritually or physically, he has turned to philosophising as an escape from self-knowledge. Harsh realities can be formalised into abstractions. Genuine humility can be replaced by a more comfortable, artificial humility. He can pretend to feel on the same level as the working-class man, and be gratified by his own modesty. "There were occasions of brutal insight when he recognised the cause of his philosophy and his politics ... he needed to form a philosophy of humiliation ... 'Be humble that you may be exalted', and from the depth of humility he would spring refreshed to the height of pride."<sup>(1)</sup> Communism also provides him with a more obvious reason for pride: he is good at political theorising. He has published several books and become a successful intellectual, which helps at times to disguise from himself his failure as a human being.

When we first see Mr. Surrogate he is rehearsing his speech, posturing before a mirror, practising the right expression. The speech is full of noble revolutionary sentiment for which Drover's case merely provides the inspiration: "Sacrifice ... Comrades, one man must die for the people. We accept Comrade Drover's sacrifice, knowing, knowing ...". He is interrupted by his manservant. "'Thank you, Davis, I am quite aware of the time.' Comrades, Mr. Surrogate began again. Comrades, we must not be

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(1) Ibid. p.33

daunted; no sacrifice is too great ...!"(1)

At the meeting he is carried away by the glories of his speech:

"'There is no one here,' Mr. Surrogate said, 'who would not gladly now change places with Comrade Drover, no one so vile who would not with a joyful heart have struck the same blow against capitalist oppression.' At the sound of his own voice realities receded like tides; he had no picture on his mind of the condemned cell, the mask, the walk to the shed, he saw Caesar fall and heard Brutus speak. He called out with a breaking voice across the tip-up seats and the green faces, over the disused cinema to Antony standing against the furthest wall: 'Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him I have offended.'"(2)

Somewhere in the audience a woman is weeping. He thinks she has been affected by his rhetoric. But it is Kay Rimmer, Drover's sister-in-law, overcome by hopelessness at his blithe assumption that Jim is going to die.

To Surrogate, whose private world of political abstraction provides immunity to painful fact, Jim's

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(1) Ibid. p.32

(2) Ibid. pp.41-2

fate is of no real interest. Jim's other 'Comrades' share, for various reasons, Surrogate's indifference. A journalist who has attended the meeting talks to a policeman who is trying to find out for the Assistant Commissioner's report the Communists' response to Drover's sentence:

"Well, I'll tell you.

Surrogate spoke and Bennett spoke and someone from the garage tried to speak. That's all. Nothing's going to be done about Drover. Everyone'll sign the petition, of course. But you can take it from me, Drover's forgotten. He's as good as taken the drop already. What they are interested in is this fellow from Aldershot who's been given two months for distributing papers. They'll make a hell of a noise about him."<sup>(1)</sup>

Indifference to Jim's fate extends to his own family. His sister-in-law, Kay Rimmer, is only slightly more involved than Mr. Surrogate. Like him, she is too absorbed in her own private struggle with life to have attention to spare for someone else's sufferings. Greene treats her sympathetically, however. Her days are spent in the deadening routine of work at a match-box factory. And Greene makes it clear that the eternal dreariness of this sort of life is no less unbearable than Jim's more spectacular tragedy. A carefully contrived parallel is drawn

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(1) Ibid. p.57

between the prison and the factory. The Assistant Commissioner and the Home Secretary's secretary are shown around the prison by a complacent warder:

"That's Block A. The new prisoners all go there. If they behave themselves, they get shifted to that one there, that's Block B. Block C, the one we passed, that's the highest grade. Of course if there's any complaint against them, they get shifted down ..."

"And what happens to them in Block C?" the secretary asked.

"They have certain privileges. Have as many library books as they want to. And they have more butter on their bread."<sup>(1)</sup>

At the same time a distinguished visitor is being given a conducted tour of the match-box factory:

"In the courtyard the manager pointed. 'That's Block A. The new employees go there for the simplest processes. Then if they work well they move to Block B, and so to Block C. Everyone in Block C is a skilled employee. Any serious mistake and they are moved back to Block B.'

"I suppose they have more pay," the visitor said.

"And other privileges. A

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(1) Ibid. p.15

quarter of an hour longer at lunch time. The use of the concert room."(1)

Towards the end of the visit to the prison, the Assistant Commissioner thinks of Drover's wife, of her loneliness and her life made meaningless without her husband, and thinks that Jim's suffering is not the worst kind. A dim memory of Dante stirs at the back of his mind, "Someone had once mapped hell in circles"(2), and, looking at Drover, he thinks, "this is only the outer circle."(3) This image, also, is expanded to take in the match-factory. As the Assistant Commissioner leaves the prison, we are presented with a depressing vision of London at evening: prostitutes moving west, the match-box factory working overtime, the evening papers going to press for the last edition, football news sandwiched between rape and the failure of a disarmament conference. The description ends: "At each station on the Outer Circle a train stopped every two minutes."(4) With a million others, Kay in her match-box factory is as much an inhabitant of the Outer Circle as Drover in his prison.

Kay has a vividness and an air of vitality that survive the soul-destroying routine of her life. She combats the drab uniformity of the days by nights spent in search of sex and excitement. She attends

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(1) Ibid. pp.25-26

(2) Ibid. p.19

(3) Ibid. p.19

(4) Ibid. p.20

Communist meetings, not out of the faintest interest in politics, but because for every woman there, there will be fifty men. She thinks complacently that she is better off than Greta spending the evening "with one boy at the cinema; Norma at a church meeting with a few pale men from a choir; art, politics, the church, Kay Rimmer had tried them all."<sup>(1)</sup>

To Kay, Jim's tragedy is a threat to her own happiness. She doesn't care much about Jim, but she does care about her sister. She knows what agonies Milly must be going through; and knows that she ought to rush back to the dreary house after work to comfort her. But this means giving up the only part of her day that is worth living, and she can't bring herself to do it. She tries to convince herself that Jim can't possibly be hanged ("He isn't a murderer"<sup>(2)</sup>) and that Milly would prefer the company of Jim's brother to her own.

Jules, the man who loves Kay, gets involved with Drover's case for reasons which are essentially selfish. Light, volatile and incorrigibly forgetful, he has a bright, amiable air which hides a desperate insecurity and loneliness. He decides to give his life purpose by taking up Drover's cause. The idea has an added appeal because Drover is Kay's brother-in-law and he feels he will be doing something for her at the same time.

He draws up a petition, puts it in his pocket and forgets about it. He hears that he has been left a small inheritance - £150. Suddenly life seems

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(1) Ibid. p.27

(2) Ibid. p.29

exciting and full of promise. He doesn't need a cause any longer. He feels rich and happy and able to do anything. He decides he is going to marry Kay and never be lonely again.

He orders the wedding breakfast, and whirls Kay out into the country, hugging to himself his secret plan to marry her. It never occurs to him that she might refuse. They spend a precariously happy day together, neither giving Drover a thought, although the petition is still in Jules's pocket. Kay is overwhelmed by her feeling for him, and secretly also starts to dream of marriage.

Although both of them seem to want the same thing, their dreams are actually out of alignment. Jules wants permanence and security out of marriage; Kay a couple of years of excitement and a divorce when passion dies. Their day together has already started to go wrong, though neither realises it. In the evening, they take a room at an inn and make love. Their love-making is brief and, to Kay, unsatisfactory, and from this point the rift between them widens to a complete break. Jules is happy and satisfied; Kay frustrated and annoyed by his cheerfulness. Jules thinks about marriage; Kay thinks she prefers the old, dissatisfied Jules to this cheerful, complacent one. With deadly accuracy, she destroys the thing that has been buoying him up all day: the sense of confidence that possessing £150 has given him:

"'You talk such a hell of a lot,' she said, 'about that legacy. £150 isn't much. I'd show you how to get through it inside a week. Why, I've known men who've earned that every week,' she said, lying

desperately ... 'God's truth I have.'

"He blinked at her. 'Spend it in a week?'

"'Any girl would show you.' She could not have pricked the bubble of his conceit more effectually."<sup>(1)</sup>

Now that Jules is deflated and uncertain, Ray is happy again:

" ... this was the Jules of the café, the Jules between the tea urn and the till, the Jules she loved. Never mind now that he had not satisfied her, she lay back and sighed with happiness, dreaming of the night and other nights ... she might ... if he asked her, marry him. For a year or two they would be perfectly happy; she would not go to the factory; and then when they were no longer crazy about each other, thank God you could give each other up; a friend of hers had got a divorce for five pounds. But he was a Catholic. 'Do Catholics divorce each other?' She had not meant to speak aloud.

"'No,' he said furiously, 'no.' It seemed to him that he had grossly

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(1) Ibid. pp.175-6

exaggerated the value of his legacy. She was right; a girl could run through it in a week."<sup>(1)</sup>

Jules leaves the room and then goes into the cold, empty dining room of the inn, feeling as lonely as he has ever felt before. He lights a fire, using as a spill a piece of paper that he finds in his pocket. It is Drover's petition.

Kay is absorbed in her need for excitement, Jules in his need for security. Both neglect their obligations to Jim (Jules's self-imposed) in an attempt to find what they want in each other. But their very self-absorption prevents them from doing this: neither looks beyond their own need to the other's. Greene's description of their day together is of two people tantalizingly close to real happiness, but not making contact, each absorbed in a private dream. Their pleasure in each other is superficial, precarious and doomed to destruction as soon as the dreams are given expression. "For a year or two they would be perfectly happy ... and then when they were no longer crazy about each other, thank God you could give each other up' ... 'Do Catholics divorce each other?' ... 'No,' he said furiously, 'no.'"

In the early parts of It's a Battlefield, the reader is allowed to assume that justice will be served if Drover is reprieved. His killing of the policeman was not murder and everyone recognises this.<sup>(1)</sup> Even

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(1) It is, in fact, extremely difficult to see how he could have been sentenced for murder at all. The police certainly didn't go all out for a conviction: nobody is more aware than the Assistant Commissioner that the sentence is a complete miscarriage of justice.

the Home Secretary is aware that the sentence is unjust (though he is not going to allow this knowledge to affect his final decision when his own career is at stake). His secretary says to the Assistant Commissioner,

"' ... the minister, you know, doesn't want the poor devil's blood. Nobody does. It was a political meeting. Everybody was excited. Drover thought the bobby was going to hit his wife. He had the knife in his pocket. That, of course, is the snag. Why did he carry the knife?'

"'They all do,' the Assistant Commissioner said. 'Helps to scrape away oil, mud. Cut up bread and - er - cheese.'"(1)

When Greene comes to deal with the plight of Drover's wife and his brother, Conrad, who is hopelessly in love with her, a new horror is produced: if Drover's sentence is commuted to 'life', which, in fact, means eighteen years imprisonment, what will this be like for the wife who loves him and who has been happily married to him for five years? Conrad finds himself thinking,

"If Jim died they would be marked for a long time with horror; but they would live nevertheless.

There would be consolations in time; they would be able to talk naturally together; some sort of

life would be painfully constructed. But if Jim lived, they would be condemned to a kind of death themselves. The end of eighteen years would always be in sight, chilling any chance merriment, the flat end to every story."<sup>(1)</sup>

Conrad tries, as gently as possible, to break his awful knowledge to Milly who has been too absorbed in trying to save her husband's life to think of it.

"'We've got to remember that if he gets his reprieve he may be in prison for eighteen years. He's thirty-eight now. He'd be fifty-six when he came out, and you would be forty-five.'

"... The idea came to her suddenly and plainly of what she might lose; she felt it like the withering of the skin, the death of her sex. When he came out of prison, she would be without passion or enjoyment."<sup>(2)</sup>

Milly tries bravely to pretend that this doesn't matter. She goes on doing everything in her power to get Jim's reprieve: taking round a petition, getting a signature from the policeman's widow, collaring a journalist with a demand for publicity;

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(1) Ibid. p.129

(2) Ibid. p.72

but all the time haunted by the thought, 'I shall be forty-five.' She knows that she won't be able to hold out for eighteen years. With a desperate feeling that "one's got to begin sometime"<sup>(1)</sup> she clumsily tries to seduce Conrad, who sleeps with her out of pity. The fruits of their adultery are guilt and despair. Conrad wakes in the night to the sound of Milly crying, "and nothing he could do would stop her tears."<sup>(2)</sup> He thinks of Kay, happily asleep in the next room, having successfully seduced Mr. Surrogate (of all people, but she isn't discriminating), and he thinks, "lust ... they call that lust and this is love. He meant ... the pain and the sense of guilt and the sound of crying in the greying room and sleeplessness and the walls shaking as the early morning lorries drove out of London."<sup>(3)</sup>

Milly and Conrad are seen as "driven" (the word is Greene's) to the unwilling betrayal of the man they both love. Neither wants to sleep with the other, but we are intended to see that their situation makes adultery inevitable. Throughout the long and cheerless seduction scene, Greene insists on their "innocence", which, despite the distance he has travelled since writing The Man Within, he still equates with complete absence of physical desire.

This scene, which is designed to convey a rising sexual tension without attributing sexual feeling to either of the principals, is handled with a technical skill which does not completely disguise its lack of

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(1) Ibid. p.143

(2) Ibid. p.144

(3) Ibid. p.144

candour. It is presented from Conrad's viewpoint so that what Milly is thinking and feeling can be left vague and undefined. The element of sexual suggestiveness in her behaviour is counteracted by Conrad's sense of her innocence and childlike pathos:

"Her legs were crossed; their thinness, her bony knee, the tangle of her moving fingers [she is crocheting, very inefficiently, with a child's clumsiness and impatience] the red slippers trodden down at the heels which dangled from her toes, her bent head, the high cheekbones filled him with a sadness he did not try to explain ... her legs reminded him of the limbs of starving native children photographed by missionaries. The children stared back at him from white screens in the country school, wide-eyed, uncomprehending with no idea of the pathos they were intended to convey."<sup>(1)</sup>

Conrad's own total absence of desire is frequently stressed, but in such increasingly sexual terms that, if there were not overwhelming evidence of Greene's idealising proclivities at work, one would assume that he were deceiving himself. "He watched her and tried to think of her savagely without her clothes as one thought of an expensive prostitute in a restaurant, but

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(1) Ibid. pp.135-6

the thin legs, the hopeless immaturity of her breasts failed to excite him."<sup>(1)</sup>

The precipitating factor in the adultery is Kay, who comes home purring and complacent after her evening with Mr. Surrogate. With cheerful insensitivity, she says; "'It's rotten for you, Milly ... you haven't had a man for months. It's not healthy.'"<sup>(2)</sup> When Kay leaves the room, Milly tries to seduce Conrad. Greene makes it clear that Milly's surrender is to despair and not to desire, and that Conrad's response is pity, not lust.

"'Shut the door.' She whispered the words. She was full of shame and fear and unhappiness. Her skin was as dry as a child's with fever. She was a child who had been aged suddenly by sickness. He remembered a boy at school who had died from influenza, how ... he had watched all that went on in the sickroom with a fallacious, an elderly wisdom; he was not really wise, not really old; he was only feverish and very weak.

"'Did you hear what she said?' Milly asked ... 'Did you hear what she'd been doing?' If he had felt the slightest lust he would have

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(1) Ibid. p.142

(2) Ibid. p.141

fled; it was the unexcitement in his love, the element of pity that kept him there. It seemed unbearable to him that she should suffer.

"'You ought to turn her out of the house.'

"'Conrad,' she said, ' ... She's right. Eighteen years. Do you think I could stand it? One's got to begin sometime.' He wanted to tell her that this was a sickroom wisdom, but there was no time to argue. She was speaking to him and he wanted to stop her. Otherwise she would suffer later at having been the one to ask, and she already enough suffering to bear; he wanted to spare her anything he could ...

"'Listen,' he said quietly, 'You know I love you. Let me stay. That was why I came upstairs. I couldn't sleep.' He felt no guilt at all; this did not harm his brother, this hopeless attempt to shield her, for she had not even been deceived; she was glad, she was grateful, she was his friend, but she didn't believe a word he said."<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. pp.142-3

Conrad takes Milly in his arms and immediately begins to desire her. Almost simultaneously he feels the first stirrings of guilt.

There are several points to make about this scene. The first is that distaste for sex is still strongly present: in Greene's insistent emphasis on the lack of a sexual motive for the adultery; in Conrad's prompt and automatic self-disgust at the awakening of desire; and also in the quality of the imagery in which sexual feeling is conveyed and denied. There is an obvious similarity between Andrews trying to arouse his lust for Lucy by imagining her "naked and in disgusting attitudes" and Conrad trying (and, of course, failing) to think of Milly "savagely, without her clothes, as one thought of an expensive prostitute in a restaurant."

Secondly, there is Greene's handling of the moral issues involved in the adultery. It is important to clarify these, because later in the novel, Greene shows, with an air of tortured moral paradox, how despair and the sense of having betrayed his brother drive Conrad to madness and death. Here Greene makes it quite clear that neither Milly nor Conrad bears the slightest degree of responsibility for what happens; and Conrad's action, particularly, is seen in an ideally innocent light. Whatever positive sexual feeling might be expected to underlie Milly's despair at the "death of her sex" and her air of frightened prurience ("Did you hear what she'd been doing?"), is obscured by the imagery. She is "a dying child", "only very feverish and very weak". And the purity and generosity of Conrad's motives are stressed throughout the scene: "If he had felt the slightest lust he would have fled; it was the

unexcitement in his love that kept him there," etc. He doesn't want to sleep with Milly. He only does so in a useless attempt to alleviate at least part of her suffering. Greene also makes it quite clear that Conrad has nothing to reproach himself for as far as his brother is concerned. "He felt no guilt; this did not harm his brother, this hopeless attempt to shield her." Guilt only comes after his desire for Milly has been aroused, and this, in turn, only happens after he has decided to sleep with her. His decision, his 'moral choice', has been made in absolute innocence.

The third interesting feature of this scene is the sense that, despite his insistence that he is writing about innocence, Greene is really describing (very vividly) frustrated and unacknowledged sexual desire. The unlikely promptitude of Conrad's response to Milly's touch in view of the uninspiring preliminaries combines with the frequent and increasingly frenzied repudiation of sexual feeling to make this conclusion irresistible.

At the beginning of the scene Conrad tries to work while Milly crochets, but her presence "confuses"<sup>(1)</sup> him. He looks at her legs. The reader's attention is focussed on sex, but Conrad's, apparently, isn't. He compares her legs to the limbs of starving native children and is exclusively concerned with their pathos. But a little later he stares at Milly "with a sadness and a hunger which was hardly sensual at all; it was a hunger to release her."<sup>(2)</sup> A desire to release

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(1) Ibid. p.135

(2) Ibid. p.136

someone from suffering is quite simply not sensual; and Greene's use of the phrase "a hunger which was hardly sensual at all", smacks of protesting too much. It suggests that at the back of his mind there is a sense of sexual disturbance which he is refusing to attribute consciously to the character he is creating.

It may seem impertinent, this suggestion that Greene isn't fully aware of what he is doing in his creation of Conrad. But it is obvious that the degree of conscious control which any particular writer exercises over his material varies considerably. And Greene has often acknowledged the extent to which his subconscious 'takes over' in his writing. In a television interview with Christopher Burstall he says, "When I am writing ... I'm not consciously working out a distress I feel. It's like a tapeworm inside one unreeling."<sup>(1)</sup> And a little later in the same interview he talks of the character of Pinkie in Brighton Rock "taking hold" and turning what was intended to be an entertainment into a religious novel. "I suddenly realised I wasn't [writing] a detective story at all."<sup>(2)</sup>

Conrad appears to be another character who has "taken hold". He seems to be the product of unresolved tensions and conflicts in Greene himself which have failed to reach a level of conscious recognition. And this seduction scene, particularly, with its overt insistence on Conrad's innocence and its increasingly obvious evidence of sexual disturbance, suggests a "distress" which is not being "consciously worked out."

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(1) Christopher Burstall: 'Graham Greene takes the Orient Express', in The Listener. 21.11.1968. p.674.

(2) Ibid. p.676

When Kay comes home with her air of satisfied sensuality, Conrad's furious disgust ("One might as well have a tart in the house."<sup>(1)</sup>) suggests the sort of high-pitched pseudo-morality that is the result of frustration. Kay goes upstairs to talk to Milly who has started to go to bed. Conrad thinks, "She'll be half-undressed."<sup>(2)</sup> But he is apparently only worried about her catching cold. He thinks again of the "starving native children", an image, which after several repetitions (each designed to smother a sexual thought) is beginning to assume the nature of a talisman. He then goes upstairs to Milly's room. Presumably to see that she isn't catching cold. No other explanation is given; and later he is to lie to her gently that he came upstairs because he wanted her. His subsequent actions and furtive behaviour, however, do not suggest that what is uppermost in his mind is the thought of Milly catching cold. He stands outside Milly's door and listens while Kay talks unconcernedly about sex. "How simple she seems to make it,"<sup>(3)</sup> he thinks. When Kay leaves the room Conrad retreats down a few steps. He then returns to Milly's room, stands in the doorway and stares at her, trying to think of her "savagely, as one thought of an expensive prostitute in a restaurant, but her thin legs, the hopeless immaturity of her breasts failed to excite him." Hopelessly unconvincing as a testimony to Conrad's lack of sexual interest in Milly, this sentence vividly suggests a guilty desire ("savagely", "prostitute")

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(1) IB p. 140. This is extracted from two pages of uniformly vicious disapproval.

(2) Ibid. p.140

(3) ibid. p.142

which is becoming increasingly painful and difficult to suppress. The language in which Conrad's 'innocence' is being emphasised has become progressively more violent since the beginning of the scene. Greene continues:

"He told himself that he would be satisfied to hold her all night in his arms and talk, do nothing but talk, talk of what they could do to help the man they both loved. He was without jealousy or passion, but when he heard her say, 'Conrad, come in,' and saw that she had seen him all the while in the glass, he felt ashamed as if she were a girl he had got into trouble."<sup>(1)</sup>

Conrad's shame is meaningless in terms of what is being expressed overtly in the scene; but inevitable in the light of what is really suggested.

The novel's main theme of isolation is most vividly and painfully presented in the figure of Conrad. Conrad's isolation is caused by his intelligence. It has brought him success in examinations and a more responsible and better-paid position than his brother's; but he pays for these with his lack of companionship and a desperate sense of insecurity. Conscious of being the butt of other people's envy or hatred or contempt, he goes through life with a permanent air of waiting for disaster. "Pale, shabby, tightly strung, he had advanced from post to post in his insurance

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(1) Ibid. p.142

office with the bearing of a man waiting to be discharged."<sup>(1)</sup> As a chief clerk, he has achieved a measure of security and success, but he can't believe in them. He lives in the constant expectation of dismissal. Nervously aware of the hostility of his subordinates, he hates them in return as "schemers ... intriguers for his place."<sup>(2)</sup> At any time, he thinks, the manager "might begin to mistrust ... his discipline ... might decide that it was time to try the director's nephew"<sup>(3)</sup>, a suave, self-confident young man whom Conrad dislikes intensely. A tiny incident near the beginning of the novel, which is to have repercussions later on, emphasises for the reader the cocoon of fear and hatred that Conrad lives in. Milly looks at his tense, quivering hands and laughingly tells him that he would be no good with a gun. The idea of a gun takes root in his mind and obsesses him. Much later, he finds himself thinking, "What on earth had made her say that? ... The remark worried him ... he raised his hand a little way and held it stiffly. For about two seconds it was still; long enough for a shot. But what on earth would he want to shoot at? A succession of faces flickered before him: the manager, the director's nephew, a succession of clerks, a plump man laughing outside the Berkeley ..."<sup>(4)</sup> Later still he buys a gun, though without the faintest idea of what he is going to do with it.

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(1) Ibid. p.29

(2) Ibid. p.120

(3) Ibid. p.120

(4) Ibid. p.123

Despite Conrad's exceptional capacity for feeling and inspiring hatred, he is offered as one of the few people who is genuinely capable of love. Most of the characters in the novel are isolated, not only because of other people's indifference, but also because of their own. In their various ways, Mr. Surrogate, Kay and Jules contribute to their own misery by not being able to recognise the misery of others. Conrad differs from these characters in that he is sensitive to the sufferings of other people. He is one of the few people who genuinely cares what becomes of his brother. And he feels Milly's anguish as intensely as most people feel their own. In one of the frequent repetitions of the "starving native children" image, Greene makes it clear that Conrad's tortured awareness of Milly's suffering is part of a very rare ability to recognise and respond to humanity's pain:

"A missionary tapped the screen in the stove-heated schoolroom with a long pointer, begged with passion: 'Look at these', and the children stared back with uncomprehending eyes, expressions of bored and stubborn stupidity; impossible to convey to them that these flat figures flashed one after the other upon the white sheet, naked, thin, bony kneed, were children themselves; only Conrad knew, only Conrad felt the unbearable responsibility for their starvation."<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. pp.197-8

The sufferings of one of the minor characters in the novel, whose desolate existence contributes to the total picture of loneliness and despair are at one point described as "an indictment, an indictment drawn with care to allow no loophole for acquittal, against life."<sup>(1)</sup> Conrad's sufferings are another "indictment drawn with care". Condemned from childhood to isolation ("He could still hear the chorus of malicious voices telling him he was a favourite of the masters."<sup>(2)</sup>), and then to hopeless love of his brother's wife, Conrad is driven by his desire to protect her, to the betrayal of his brother, and then, as part of a process which is shown to be inevitable, to guilt, madness and death.

The day after Conrad has slept with Milly, he buys a gun, though with no clear idea of its use. He wants to shoot someone, but he doesn't know whom. "The resolution," we are told, "was formed in the night."<sup>(3)</sup> For two days he trails around London, brooding obsessively on his guilt and his hatred. His original attitude of suspicion and hostility towards other people is aggravated to a condition of complete paranoia. He thinks that everybody is staring at him, that they know about his hatred and the gun in his pocket. "... they are frightened of me, they are trying to drive me mad. It was a devilish clever method to stare and stare, and encourage others to stare ..."<sup>(4)</sup> He becomes obsessed with the idea of

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(1) Ibid. p.57

(2) Ibid. p.31

(3) Ibid. p.177

(4) Ibid. p.199

shooting someone, and, with a madman's logic, chooses the Assistant Commissioner for his victim. In his tortured mind the Assistant Commissioner becomes a symbol of the 'Justice' which has sentenced his brother to death and himself and Milly to hopeless anguish:

"He came, yellow-lined face;  
He came, thin bureaucratic body;  
he came slowly, justice with a file  
of papers ... he came ... safe in the  
heart of civilisation ('I see no  
reason to reverse the judge's  
decision'; the raised truncheon;  
the forbidden meeting ... reduced  
staffs, unemployment; the constant  
struggle with your fellow man to  
keep alone upon the raft, to let  
the other drown; desire; adultery;  
passion without tenderness or  
permanence); down the street the  
upholder of civilisation, eyes on  
the pavement, neat file under his  
arm." (1)

When Conrad finally runs his quarry to earth and tries to shoot him, he is taking aim at the whole world: at the policeman who testified against his brother; at the manager; the director's nephew; and the children who sneered at him when he was at school. His hatred of life narrows "to a stud in a man's shirt." (2) While he is taking aim, he is knocked

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(1) Ibid. p.185

(2) Ibid. p.224

down by a car. He dies a little later in hospital, screaming despite a broken jaw.

Greene's handling of the guilt that destroys Conrad resembles in its disingenuousness his handling of the same theme in his earlier work. The first three entirely unrealistic novels have the transparently dishonest, indulgent air of self-consoling day-dreams. In Stamboul Train the perfunctory treatment of Czinner's guilt and its dissolution into a self-pitying sense that life, not he, is to blame, while not belonging to quite the same fantasy world, suggests the kind of 'self-analysis' that consoles by its careful evasions. It's a Battlefield, a much more deeply felt novel than any of the others, seems to point to the existence of psychological wounds which make these evasions and consolations necessary.

Conrad's guilt, like Czinner's, dissolves easily into self-pity. It is shot through with the feeling that not he but his situation, life itself, is to blame for his betrayal of his brother. The sense of Conrad's essential innocence, his lack of real responsibility for what he has done is clearly present in most of his essays at self-reproach.

As Conrad lies in bed, sleepless and ashamed, after having made love to Milly, he is filled with "a dull sense of irrevocable injury which one of them had done the other ... One of them had injured the other but it was not their fault. They had been driven to it, and holding her close to him with painful tenderness, it was hate he chiefly felt, hate of Jim, of a director's nephew, of two men laughing in Piccadilly."(1)

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(1) Ibid. p.144

The passage begins with obscure feelings of guilt ("an irrevocable injury which one of them had done the other"). There is a vague suggestion that blame should be levelled at one or the other or both; although Greene's handling of the adultery itself was clearly intended to convey that neither was in any way responsible for it. The feeble claim for moral responsibility is no sooner made than withdrawn: "but it was not their fault. They had been driven to it ..." Then Conrad's original attempt at self-reproach gives way to hatred of the world around him. The juxtaposition of this hatred with his sense of having been "driven" to an act which he sees as despicable seems intended to shift the blame for the act from himself to the people who, directly or indirectly, have made it unavoidable. "... it was not their fault. They had been driven to it, and holding her close to him with painful tenderness, it was hate he chiefly felt, hate of Jim, of a director's nephew, of two men laughing in Piccadilly."

The effect of this is not entirely coherent. The "two men laughing in Piccadilly" are the Home Secretary's secretary and the Assistant Commissioner, who can in a sense be seen as responsible for the Drover family's predicament. They are the purveyors of the justice which has condemned Jim for murder and which may or may not condemn his brother and wife to eighteen years of a living death. The Assistant Commissioner, who, ironically, is one of the most sensitive and sympathetic characters in the book, is painfully aware of the anomalies of the system which he upholds and recognises the Drovers as its victims. It is also possible to see how Conrad could come to feel a sort of twisted hatred for his brother for

inadvertently setting in motion a chain of events which makes the betrayal unavoidable. But there is no possible reason for including the director's nephew in this catalogue of people responsible for the adultery. He plays his part in Conrad's general miseries but has nothing to do with this particular misery; not, that is, as it has been presented: the product of an intolerable situation, Milly's despair and Conrad's pity for her.

Conrad's indiscriminate hatred of life, his sense that everybody but himself is responsible for his sleeping with Milly, seems to be endorsed by Greene, who in the adultery scene went out of his way to emphasise that his action was not of his own seeking.

In Conrad's next access of guilt, self-pity is even more marked. The next day, as he is wondering what on earth to do with the gun he has bought, he thinks,

"... there were people he hated, his fellow clerks, the director's nephew, the manager, the police commissioner, the man who pushed him on the pavement but he did not want to kill these people any more than he wanted to kill himself; less, because he had more reason to hate himself; he loved his brother and he had done his brother what people seemed to consider the bitterest of wrongs. It had been difficult to believe in the wrong during the commission, it had been so easy, so short, so lovely, so unsatisfying, but afterwards, awake and silent in the bed he had pasted the

proper labels on his memory of it.  
'A mortal sin'. 'The bitterest  
wrong.' 'A broken commandment.'  
But the labels were not his; he  
had taken them from others; others  
had made the rules by which he  
suffered; it was unfair that they  
should leave him so alone and yet  
make the rules which governed him.  
It was as if a man marooned must  
still order his life according to  
the regulations of the ship.<sup>(1)</sup>

As a piece of self-analysis this is unpleasantly dishonest. Conrad is claiming to hate himself for what he has done to his brother; but the entire passage is noticeably free from genuine shame. What Conrad is doing under the cover of self-reproach is protesting his injured innocence. His guilt consists simply in pasting other people's "labels" of "mortal sin" and so on onto an action which is seen as quite blameless. The "label"-image emphasises (and is clearly meant to) how meaningless and irrelevant phrases like "mortal sin" and the "bitterest wrong" are when applied to an act which was "so lovely, so short, so unsatisfying". To complete the white-washing effect, even the guilt which Conrad felt at his desire for Milly is being omitted from consideration. The real emotion here is not guilt at all but self-pity: "But the labels were not his; he had taken them from others; others had made the rules by which he had suffered. It was unfair that they should leave him so alone and yet make

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(1) Ibid. p.182

the rules which governed him." etc. Conrad, it is clear, is sinned against, not sinning.

The moral pattern is familiar. An apparent 'sin' is presented condoningly and followed by 'guilt' which is shown to be undeserved. But what makes this novel more interesting than any of its predecessors is Greene's failure here to apply the pattern consistently. In the earlier novels one was left with the feeling that Greene was simply inventing material, at times quite perfunctorily (Chase's betrayal of Crane, Czinner's first-class ticket) to fill in his pre-established moral outline. In It's a Battlefield Greene's material has a quality of authenticity and refuses to accommodate itself to the pattern that he tries to impose on it. This was evident in the seduction scene where one had the impression that Greene was unsuccessfully trying to censor the material that his imagination provided. It is also apparent in the general impression of incoherence which pervades the attempts to analyse Conrad's motives and sufferings. How, for example, can the director's nephew be responsible for an adultery for which Conrad's only motive was pity? There is a suggestion here, later to be confirmed, that Conrad's motives are far more complex, less disinterested than this.

A sub-stratum of genuine guilt, which in the earlier stages of the novel has been imperfectly evaded, makes an unmistakable appearance as Conrad's mental disintegration proceeds and his sufferings and self-hatred become more acute. The climax of Conrad's torment comes with a renewal of desire for Milly, a desire which he tries desperately and unsuccessfully to resist. His mind reels away from thoughts of Milly naked to images of her scuffed slippers and of starving

native children (the innocent symbols of her pathos which sustained him during the seduction scene). But even these images have "the power to repel him and to draw him to them."<sup>(1)</sup> He finally returns to Milly like "a dog ... to its vomit"<sup>(2)</sup>. The Conrad whom Greene has been trying to create, the innocent victim of life driven by his own generosity to an act which destroys him, gives way to another Conrad, a far more complex figure and a genuinely guilty one.

Ironically enough, one of the clearest indications that there is more to Conrad than Greene would care to meet the eye comes in one of the frequent attempts to present him as unjustly accused:

"Conrad convicted himself of ingratitude. The act which was to have been his armour against life, the secret inner pride, 'Even I am loved,' had betrayed him, had driven him along streets too many to count, had trailed him like a dusty coat behind the Assistant Commissioner. Milly, too, had betrayed him; she had given him the only thing he had ever wanted, a thing he had never had the least hope of attaining, and it had proved: something lovely over too quickly, weeping in the night, sleeplessness, condemnation, despair. He clenched his hands

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(1) Ibid. p.201

(2) Ibid. p.203

in a fury of useless hatred."<sup>(1)</sup>

Essentially, this is another piece of deep grievance disguised as self-reproach. Conrad convicts himself of ingratitude. Yet he obviously has less than nothing to be grateful for, and the passage is clearly designed to emphasise this. Its most interesting feature, however, is the new light it throws on Conrad's motives for the adultery. Obviously, if it can be described as "the act which was to have been his armour against life" and "the only thing he had ever wanted", Greene's earlier presentation of the adultery as the result of a purely selfless concern for Milly has been less than frank. This passage inadvertently endorses the impression that we had in the adultery scene: that Conrad did, in fact, desire Milly ("she had given him the only thing that he had ever wanted"); an impression that is again confirmed in Conrad's furious battle against the renewal of his lust. And it also supplies an additional motive: the adultery was to have been a cure for loneliness and also for the desperate feelings of insecurity and inferiority which have haunted Conrad since childhood. Given this fuller and more complex picture of Conrad's motives than Greene in the adultery scene was prepared to give, Conrad's hatred of the director's nephew as one of the people who has driven him to betray his brother at last makes sense. Painful and neurotic sense, but nevertheless sense.

It's a Battlefield offers evidence for something that could, perhaps, be deduced from Greene's

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(1) Ibid. p.197

obsession with his heroes' disguised innocence in the earlier novels: that the obvious falsity of the guilt which he attributes to them is a cover for the guilt feelings which are painfully real; and that the self-pity and hatred of the surrounding world which are such persistent features of these characters' self-accusations is also a kind of protection.

Towards the end of the novel, the Assistant commissioner compiles the report on public feeling about the Drover case for the Home Secretary. From the conflicting information brought to him by his subordinates he concludes that public feeling is non-existent.

"The truth is that nobody cares about anything but his own troubles. Everybody's too busy fighting his own little battle to think of ... the next man."<sup>(1)</sup> The Home Secretary makes his decision without waiting for the Assistant Commissioner's report. Mysteriously, for no apparent reason, Jim Drover is granted his reprieve - the worst possible sentence. He tries to commit suicide in order to release Milly, but fails. The prison chaplain resigns. He tells the Assistant Commissioner, "'I can't stand human justice any longer. Its arbitrariness. Its incomprehensibility.'" The Assistant Commissioner replies,

"'I don't mean, of course, to be blasphemous, but isn't that very like, that is to say, isn't divine justice much the same?'

"'Perhaps, but one can't hand in a resignation to God.'<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.217

(2) Ibid. pp. 230-1

A little later, with the effect of an afterthought, the chaplain adds, "'And I have no complaint against his mercy.'"<sup>(1)</sup> This anticipates a theme which is to be important in the Catholic novels. But, whatever conviction it may carry in the later books, it has no place here. Greene uses the Drover family's predicament to focus sharply and frequently on social injustice; but this in itself is seen as the outcome of a larger and deeper injustice which ordains that everyone must suffer and contribute to the total sum of suffering by not being able to recognise any but his own. Social injustice is simply individual selfishness and incomprehension 'writ large'. We see this in the figure of the Home Secretary whose decision on Drover's sentence is based not on considerations of justice, but on what he considers to be his own interests. Early in the novel Conrad, looking at Milly's "white hopeless face, her shoulders a little bent with the weight of five happy years", recognises that "injustice did not belong only to an old tired judge, to a policeman joking in Piccadilly; it was as much part of the body as age and inevitable disease. There was no such thing as justice in the air we breathed ..."<sup>(2)</sup>

Even those who do recognise the universal suffering can do nothing to avert it. There are only a handful in the novel: Conrad, whose attempt to alleviate Milly's sufferings increases them, involves the betrayal of his brother, and leads to his own death; a minor character called Caroline Bury who wishes to help the Drovers but can do nothing; and the Assistant

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(1) Ibid. pp.230-1

(2) Ibid. p.66

Commissioner who knows that life is a battlefield, and is appalled by a sense of great waste, of people suffering helplessly and dying. "It was impossible to believe in a great directing purpose, for these were not spare parts that could be matched again."<sup>(1)</sup>

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The main focus of interest in England Made Me (1935) is the relationship between a twin brother and sister, Anthony and Kate Farrant. It is a curious, intense affair in which telepathic rapport, the idea of two separate personalities forming a completed whole and a frustrated, half-acknowledged incestuous passion are oddly compounded. Their thirty years of uniquely shared experience ("knowing what the other thought, feeling what the other felt"<sup>(2)</sup>) is on several occasions compared to a marriage tie. Anthony is jealous of Kate's lover, sees his own periodic surrenders to "the itch" as a betrayal of her and sees his feelings for her as disloyalty to the girl he is half in love with. To Kate, Anthony is "the only damned man in the world I love."<sup>(3)</sup> And the single occasion on which she has felt desire for her lover has been after an evening spent flirting with a man who closely resembled her brother. "That night I wanted Erik, I wanted

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(1) Ibid. p.220

(2) EMM p.74

(3) Ibid. p.246

anyone." (1)

Anthony is an ambiguous character. Shady, faintly unscrupulous, he has drifted around the world (or the English parts of it) losing jobs and being excluded from clubs for dishonesty, cadging and boasting. His only asset is a dubious, untrustworthy charm. "'Congratulate me,' he seemed to be saying, and his humorous, friendly, shifty eyes raked her like the headlamps of a second-hand car which has been painted and polished to deceive." (2) At the same time, disreputable though he is, he is firmly attached to the decencies and prejudices (sometimes ridiculous) of English society:

"'You do put it down, Kate,' ... He disapproved, he didn't believe in girls drinking ... Of course one drank oneself, one fornicated, but one didn't lie with a friend's sister, and 'decent' girls were never squiffy ... She could see his lips tingling with the moral maxims of all the majors whom he had known lay down the moral law before smoking room fires." (3)

Anthony is seen, although somewhat obscurely, as the product (this is the point of the title) of a typical English education, of which the chief perpetrators were his father and school. Large sections

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(1) Ibid. p.80

(2) Ibid. p.4

(3) Ibid. p.26

of the book are devoted to reveries and recollections of a childhood which has painfully foreshadowed and shaped his adult experience.

"This was victory: somehow to have existed; happiness was an incidental enjoyment: the unexpected glass or the unexpected girl. It was perhaps the only lesson he had thoroughly learned at school, the lesson taught by thirteen weeks of overcrowding, tedium and fear. Somehow time passed and the worst came to an end; there were breaks, there were moments of happiness: sickness, tea in the matron's room, punishments which carried with them a momentary popularity. One even after a while adapted oneself to circumstances, learned the secret of being tolerated, wore with conviction the common uniform."<sup>(1)</sup>

School, it is clear, provides an early initiation into the horrors of life and its meagre alleviations. What is less clear, however, is the part played by the initiation process in the formation of Anthony's present character and misfortunes. That it does play a part is insisted on. One of the most frequently recurring memories in the book is of the occasion when Anthony had run away from school, met his sister in a barn and been persuaded by her to return. This episode is presented as the crucially significant step in Anthony's

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(1) Ibid. p.62

career. . . Kate now sees herself as bound to undo "the damage I did when I sent him back to conform, to pick up the conventions, the manners of all the rest."<sup>(1)</sup>

The nature of this "damage" is ill-defined. In a long sequence early in the novel Anthony's memories of his schooldays mingle and combine with memories of his more recent past in a way that implies a continuity between them. Memories of childhood peccadilloes, punishments, 'honour of the school' merge into memories of shady adult enterprises and 'honour of the firm' - the words that herald dismissal from job after job. For this section Greene adopts a stream-of-consciousness technique<sup>(2)</sup>, the main effect of which is to suggest a deeper significance than is actually being presented.

"Voices whispering in the dormitory: 'someone has left a vest in the changing-room. 'Honour of the House', running the gauntlet of the knotted towels ... spoilt tea, shooting in the streets, 'honour of the firm.'"<sup>(3)</sup>

The last part of this paragraph refers to three hundred sacks of tea, spoilt in a revolution,

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(1) Ibid. p.186

(2) This is the only novel in which Greene has made extensive use of stream-of-consciousness techniques. There was a brief, embarrassing example of it in The Man Within, in which preoccupations with harlots and Hansel and Gretel were whimsically combined to suggest Andrews's essential dilemma. An equally brief, but far more successful section in It's a Battleground conveyed the worst stages of Conrad's mental disintegration.

(3) EMM p.18

which Anthony has bought from his own firm for a song and sold again at the full rate. "... they looked at me askance after that. They never trusted me again ... And so on to Aden."<sup>(1)</sup> The connection between the childhood experience and the adult dishonesty is emphasised, but remains obscure. Not only is the latter out of all proportion to the former, but there is no evidence here (or in similar instances) of the causative link which Greene insists on generally in his treatment of Anthony's upbringing and present plight.

Anthony's school-days are seen as completing the process painfully initiated by his father:

"Anthony learning (the beating in the nursery, the tears before boarding school) to keep a stiff upper lip, Anthony learning (the beating in the study when he brought home the smutty book with the pretty pictures) that you must honour other men's sisters. Anthony learning to love with moderation. Anthony in Aden. Anthony in Shanghai."<sup>(2)</sup>

Anthony's surrender to enforced conformity is presented as the first stage of a route leading directly to a life of shabby and hopeless drifting around the world (Aden and Shanghai). Kate thinks that their father "loved Anthony and ... ruined Anthony"<sup>(3)</sup> and that she herself has "damaged" Anthony by "sending him

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(1) Ibid. p.18

(2) Ibid. p.79

(3) Ibid. p.79

back to conform". But the trouble with Greene's account of Anthony's conditioning is that it only clearly explains one side of his character, the conventional, faintly pompous side. The shady, disreputable part of his nature, which is the real cause of his misfortunes, although it is ascribed to the same conditioning, is not really explained by it at all. One has something of the same sense with Anthony as one had with Conrad: of a character to whom is being attributed a greater degree of innocence than he actually possesses. Again the blame for moral failings is being laid, obscurely and somewhat illogically, on life: this time on school life, against which the book reveals a pervasive resentment.

Anthony is the product and the reject of English society. Its firms dismiss him and its clubs exclude him. His upbringing has made him unfit for the life to which in one sense he belongs. It has also made him unfit for the world that his sister has chosen: the impersonal, unscrupulous world of high finance. Kate, by the exercise of a stronger will than Anthony's, has cut herself off from the past they share to become the secretary and (in the same business-like way) the mistress of the international financier, Erik Krogh. Too shady for his own world, Anthony isn't shady enough for Kate's. The sense of decency, of certain things being 'not done' instilled into him by his education is his downfall in a world where the only values are monetary. Early in the novel Kate thinks of him in "his depraved innocence, hopelessly unprepared in his old school tie".<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.12

The two worlds are represented in the novel by London, Anthony's spiritual home, and cosmopolitan Stockholm where the headquarters of Krogh's international offices are housed. London is presented affectionately by Greene as a place of dusty offices, seedy pubs and cheap one-night hotels. Anthony, desolately exiled in Stockholm, thinks nostalgically of "the familiar faces of whores in Wardour Street, the kind paid companionship in hired rooms."<sup>(1)</sup> Krogh's world is symbolised by the cold steel and glass construction of his offices and the piece of modernistic sculpture in the courtyard, which he neither likes nor understands; but which is the best that money can buy.

These two worlds are the only alternatives. Between them Greene has tried to suggest the state of contemporary society: a changing world in which a faintly ridiculous, but nevertheless warm and honest nationalistic past is giving way to a selfish, unscrupulous, international present, "a new frontierless world, with Krogh's on every exchange."<sup>(2)</sup>

Something that weakens the force of Greene's symbolism is the fact that what is generous and decent in the old world is present only in Anthony's character and in Kate's vague nostalgia for "the old honesties"<sup>(3)</sup> she has lost in allying herself with Krogh. The positive qualities are notably absent from that resentfully portrayed segment of the past blamed for the formation (or deformation) of Anthony's character. His school life is presented as uniformly painful and unpleasant;

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(1) Ibid. p.244

(2) Ibid. p.186

(3) Ibid. p.186

and his father ("a little bit of England") as a dull, conventional man, and a cold one:

"... these were the maxims he lived by ... Do not show your feelings. Do not love immoderately. Be chaste, prudent, pay your debts ... He ... did acrostics all the days of his life. A little bit of England. He was disliked by his servants. He was an honourable man ... He may have loved Anthony ... in his own way."<sup>(1)</sup>

The intense bond between Kate and Anthony has been partially destroyed by the divergent paths they have followed in adult life. When they meet again after a separation of many years, Anthony finds himself chilled and faintly repelled by a ruthless streak in Kate: "He ... had come back to find her marked by Krogh's"<sup>(2)</sup>. Kate, in her turn, is "daunted"<sup>(3)</sup> by what life has done to Anthony. They still love each other, but the old sense of intimacy and completeness ("knowing what the other thought ...") has disappeared, leaving in its wake a painful sense of loss. Kate thinks of their estrangement in terms of an abortion: "... in those days it was as if one were bearing a monstrous child who could scream or laugh or weep audibly in the womb. I would have welcomed an

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(1) Ibid. p.78

(2) Ibid. p.243

(3) Ibid. p.12

abortion in those days; but is this how one feels when an abortion has been successful? No more pain, no more movement, nothing to fear and nothing to hope for, a stillness indistinguishable from despair."<sup>(1)</sup> Anthony thinks of "the ravaged country between them"<sup>(2)</sup>, and thinks "This is the curse, the ceasing to know."<sup>(3)</sup>

The novel is largely about Kate's attempts to restore the old intimacy and make reparation for "the damage I did when I sent him back to conform" by taking Anthony to Stockholm and finding him a job in Krogh's employment. Both Kate's projects fail. Anthony's yearning for "home" constitutes a barrier between him and Kate, and also prevents him from accepting "the way out" she has chosen for him. He tries to settle down to the new life; but underneath his apparent success at adapting himself, he has a desolate sense of being exiled. He finds brief consolation in an affair with an English girl, Loo, who is on holiday in Stockholm with her parents. Loo, with her pathetically unsuccessful attempts at sophistication, represents "home" for Anthony, and competes in his affections with Kate.

The book moves to an intricate climax. Krogh's elaborate financial empire is on the brink of a crisis. To cope with it, he has to 'frame' and dismiss a socialist employee who is threatening a strike; and to resort to illegal manipulation of the shares of one of his subsidiary companies. Krogh is completely amoral: these things have to be done to avert a crash; and he does them without a qualm. As a precautionary

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(1) Ibid. p.181

(2) Ibid. p.75

(3) Ibid. p.74

measure he asks Kate to marry him and, if necessary, to go with him to England where a wife needn't give evidence against her husband.

Kate sees the marriage as an opportunity for getting a settlement for Anthony and accepts. The arrangement is entirely unemotional; all Kate's feelings are for her brother. "... she might have been marrying Anthony and not Erik at all ..."<sup>(1)</sup> Her immediate thought is to tell Anthony of the marriage. She finds him at her desk reading her correspondence from which he has learnt of Krogh's shady manoeuvres on the stock exchange.

Anthony's response to Kate's impending marriage is entirely that of the conventional Englishman:

"'You can't ... You don't love him'  
... He was worried; he was muddled;  
he said something under his breath  
about 'children' and blushed with  
self-consciousness ... he stared...  
at her, flushed, childish, in-  
articulate. She was prepared for  
him to say something about a good  
man's love ..."<sup>(2)</sup>

His response to the discovery of Krogh's stock-exchange activities, however, is characteristically ambiguous. Part of him, the decent English part, is shocked: He said with a school-boy gravity, 'You know, Kate, there are limits to what you can do. Believe me, I've discovered them. He can't pass the buck like this.'<sup>(3)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.186

(2) Ibid. pp.188-90

(3) Ibid. p.188

The other side of Anthony, however, the shady adventurer, sees in this newly acquired knowledge a unique opportunity for blackmail. Kate is horrified, not at the idea of blackmail, but at Anthony's innocence, "he was hopelessly innocent, the idea of blackmail lay as lightly on his spirit as a theft of plums. She was frightened by his superficiality; he didn't know where he was; he needed protection ... It almost seemed as though there was nothing he wouldn't do, but she knew that ... somewhere he would stop, waver, make a hash of things. He wasn't unscrupulous enough to be successful. He was in a different class to Krogh ... 'Dear Anthony, you're newly hatched compared to him. You don't really think you could hold up Krogh's. He'd break you before you could open your mouth. He'd have you in prison, he wouldn't stop at anything. You wouldn't be safe ...'"(1)

Anthony gracefully allows himself to be dissuaded from blackmail; but eventually, on another issue, he does take a stand against Krogh.

Kate's and Krogh's engagement party (a dismal affair) is interrupted by the arrival of young Andersen, the son of the socialist factory worker whom Krogh has dismissed. A long section of the book describes Andersen's journey to Salsjöbaden where the party is being held; his earnestness; his innocent belief that there is justice in the world; and his simpleminded conviction that a mistake has been made and that he has only to speak to Krogh for everything to be put right.

Krogh refuses to see him and orders Anthony to throw him out. Anthony, who could swallow his disapproval of a million pound business swindle, is

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(1) Ibid. pp.189-92

revolted by this piece of callous injustice and refuses. One of Krogh's other employees puts Andersen out of commission with a pair of knuckle-dusters.

This incident crystallises the conflict between Krogh's world and Anthony's. Krogh has been so dehumanised by a life lived purely for financial gain that he doesn't even realise that there is anything to disapprove of in his treatment of Andersen's father. For him the man is not a person but a financial risk. "We put something on him at the works. The union couldn't object. I couldn't risk a strike." (1)

Anthony decides that even for Kate, he can't stay in Stockholm. He makes plans to return "home" to England and Loo.

For Krogh, however, Anthony is another financial risk. Knowing what he knows, and untrustworthy as he is, Anthony can't be allowed to return to England where he might betray him. He is killed by a man who is fanatically devoted to Krogh. Krogh doesn't precisely order his death; but he allows it to happen. He is upset, because he has grown fond of Anthony. But business is business.

Kate knows that Krogh is responsible for Anthony's death, and leaves for a job in Copenhagen. Not to any sort of a future: she is simply "moving on. Like Anthony." (2)

The novel's atmosphere is dense with feelings of exile, loneliness and despair. There is an unbridgeable gap between Kate and Anthony. Anthony is an exile from "home" caught up in a world which has no

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(1) Ibid. p.229

(2) Ibid. p.274

place for him. Kate, who is more at home in this world, is nostalgic for a happier past which she is trying, impossibly, to recreate. Even Krogh, who, in a sense, is this world, is dimly conscious of a warmer, companionable past which he has lost somewhere in the process of becoming Krogh's. One of the book's ironies is that it is Anthony, with his easy, friendly air, who makes this past real to him again: but Anthony gets in the way of the present and has to be destroyed. Krogh is too conditioned by the pressures of his financial empire to let his affection for Anthony outweigh its demands.

The world of England Made Me is essentially the same as the world of It's a Battlefield: painful, desolate and destructive. Where Greene tries to introduce a new element into his definition, in the idea of a warmer, happier past giving way to a callous and brutal present, he fails. Only in theory does the past have a rosy glow. Whenever, through the memories of his characters, he tries to reconstruct this past, it emerges as brutal, cold and destructive - like the present. Anthony is deformed by the old world as Krogh is by the new. The fact that Greene can't give an intellectually coherent account of the destructive process doesn't in any way weaken the impact of his imaginative portrayal of it. It simply suggests, as similar failures of coherence did in It's a Battlefield, how deep-rooted is his hatred of life.

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A Gun for Sale (1936) is a thriller. Like England Made Me it is set against a background of corrupt international capitalism. Sir Marcus Stein, owner of Midlands Steel, and enormous armaments manufacturing concern, hires a paid killer to murder a Czechoslovakian socialist minister and plant evidence of political assassination. This brings Europe to the brink of war (the fantasy is based on the very real situation of international tension in the thirties) and creates a booming market for armaments.

The actual hiring and paying of the killer is done by an underling called Davis. Davis is a fool and (for no other good reason than this) pays the killer with stolen bank notes. As soon as the man tries to spend them the police are on his trail. Desperately keeping out of their clutches, and seldom more than one step ahead of them, he sets out to track down and kill the employer of Mr. Davis.

The action moves swiftly, and with some appearance of logic, but is held together, propelled by and sometimes simply embellished with an unbelievable series of coincidences and improbable ironies. Mather, the inspector in charge of the bank robbery case, wishes he was chasing the political killer (which, of course, is what he is doing). The train on which he sees his girl-friend off is also the train on which the killer, Raven, is following Davis. The girl whom Raven forces at gun point to help him past the ticket barrier, and who thereafter gets involved in his search for Stein, is Mather's girl-friend, Ann. Ann has been travelling in the same compartment as Davis whom she later recognises in Raven's description of his quarry. As a result of this coincidence she has no difficulty getting on Davis's track, especially as by yet another wildly

improbable coincidence he is one of the financial backers of the show she is working in and is looking for a little female companionship. Mather who loses Raven's trail gets back on to it after catching sight of him at a jumble sale to which they have both gone for different, and in Raven's case, entirely accidental, reasons. And so on.

One serious implausibility is the basic one on which the entire action hinges. We are asked to believe that a large organisation handling an operation with millions of pounds of profit at stake is going to endanger its success by economising on £200 worth of expenses. Greene tries to explain this away:

"And yet Sir Marcus was not quite happy. Davis had bungled things. When he had told Davis that a murderer ought not to be allowed to benefit from his crime he had never expected all the silly business of the stolen notes."<sup>(1)</sup>

Clearly the grotesque irony of this is meant to divert our attention from the feebleness of the explanation we are being given: that a man who is prepared to organise a murder and set the countries of Europe at each other's throats should moralise about the mere hireling who does his dirty work for him. Davis, however, as he appears in the novel, does not give the impression of being a fool - certainly not of being foolish enough to attract the attention of the police to a man whom he has hired to do a murder. Moreover, we are never given any explanation of how the proceeds of a bank robbery could have come into his possession in the first place.

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(1) GS p.119

For the rest, Greene handles his unlikely action with the dexterity of a conjuror, and with something of the same sleight of hand techniques. On the whole, the reader's attention is diverted from the illogic of the situations by the speed and ingenuity with which they are handled; and by a very skillfully maintained suspense which is usually only relaxed to be whipped up again immediately.

What gives this novel its special quality, however, is Greene's handling of his central figure, Raven. Raven is, in a sense, a preliminary sketch for Pinkie in Brighton Rock: the criminal who is a criminal because life has never given him a chance to be anything else. A theme which has been emerging with increasing clarity and strength since It's a Battlefield is that of the permanent spiritual damage caused by certain types of childhood experience. This idea actually appears, although somewhat perfunctorily, in The Man Within, where Andrews' cowardice is attributed to his father's brutal treatment of him as a child. It is dropped in the next three novels, but re-emerges in It's a Battlefield, where Conrad's neurotic isolation is traced back to childhood experiences of rejection by other children who resented and envied his intelligence. And it is a prominent theme in England Made Me, where Anthony is seen as morally and spiritually disfigured by his education and upbringing.

In A Gun for Sale Raven's criminality (like Pinkie's) is the expression of a total alienation from the rest of humanity. The partial cause of this alienation is a hare-lip which repulsively differentiates him from other people. But even more crucial in forming his character is the sense of betrayal and abandonment that he suffered as a small child at his

mother's suicide:

"... the first thing very nearly he could remember was his mother bleeding across the table. She hadn't even bothered to lock the door: that was all she cared about him. He'd done some ugly things in his time, he told himself, but he'd never been able to equal that in ugliness. Some day he would."<sup>(1)</sup>

After his mother's death, a childhood spent in an orphanage in an atmosphere of stern discipline and total lack of affection had completed the spiritual crippling process. He has grown up, like Pinkie, cut off from other people, unable to sympathise with them, or to see them as real and capable of suffering like himself:

"Raven could never realise other people; they didn't seem to him to live in the same way as he lived; and though he bore a grudge against Mr. Cholmondely [the alias of Davis, who paid him in marked bank-notes], hated him enough to kill him, he couldn't imagine Mr. Cholmondely's own fears and motives. He was the greyhound and Mr. Cholmondely only the mechanical hare."<sup>(2)</sup>

Morality and, with it, religion, his chilly institution experience has taught him, are simply the

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(1) Ibid. pp.103-4

(2) Ibid. p.34

cant that people talk but don't put into practice in their lives:

"... he remembered how they'd sat in rows on benches waiting for Christmas dinner, while the thin precise voice read on about Caesar Augustus and how everyone went up to his own city to be taxed. Nobody was beaten on Christmas Day: all punishments were saved for Boxing Day. Love, Charity, Patience, Humility: he was educated. He knew all about those virtues, he'd seen what they were worth."<sup>(1)</sup>

Despite the detail in which Raven's character and motives are analysed and despite the vivid compressiveness of some of the writing ("nobody was beaten on Christmas Day: all punishments were saved for Boxing Day"), Raven is a sketch rather than a fully rounded character. This tends to happen (quite legitimately) in Greene's thrillers, where the emphasis is on tense and swift-moving action which pushes the characters into traps and whisks them out in hairsbreadth escapes, only to set them again on the brink of some further disaster. The result is that the characters move too fast and in too uniform a set of situations to really act out their personalities, though they are described in sufficient detail to make their necessarily restricted actions comprehensible and convincing. For example, Raven's intense hatred of life and his

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(1) Ibid. p.91

obsession with betrayal dating back to his mother's suicide explain the insane risks that he takes in order to avenge himself on the employers who have let him down. It is notable that when Greene uses thriller-type construction in serious novels like Brighton Rock and The Power and the Glory, the tense pattern of pursuit and escape is relaxed for long stretches in which the characters are allowed to develop fully.

Ann plays a similar role in Raven's life to that played by Rose in Pinkie's. She gets through the hard shell of hatred and indifference with which he protects himself from other people and teaches him the rudiments of trust and affection. Like Rose's, her influence is undeliberate. It begins with her simply not reacting to his ugliness at all - she is (rather implausibly) the only person he has ever met who is indifferent to his repulsive deformity. And it continues when she doesn't betray him to the police, although she has the opportunity to do so. For the first time in his life Raven has met somebody he can trust, and he finds himself beginning to thaw. They spend a night in a shed, surrounded by police, and Raven feels a compulsive urge to confess his crimes to her. He wants to trust her with everything. But when she learns that he has shot the socialist minister she is horrified. This time she does betray him to the police, because she wants to stop the war. The police surround Midlands Steel which she tells them is Raven's destination.

Raven manages to get past the police and kill Sir Marcus and Davis; but he realises from their presence that Ann must have betrayed him. All his hatred and bitterness come flooding back. When he shoots Davis, he is - like Conrad - "shooting the whole

world".<sup>(1)</sup> He doesn't even bother to try to escape. One of the policemen shoots him in the back. "Death came to him in the form of an unbearable pain. It was as if he had to deliver this pain as a woman delivers a child, and he sobbed and moaned in the effort. At last it came out of him and he followed his only child into a vast desolation."<sup>(2)</sup>

After this Greene gives the novel a happy ending. War is prevented. And Mather and Ann look forward to marriage. But the novel is Raven's, and his bitterness and pain overshadow this concession to the thriller convention.

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(1) Ibid. p.173

(2) Ibid. p.174

#### CHAPTER IV: THE NOVELS: 1938-1951

Greene's vision of life as it emerges in the novels from Stamboul Train to A Gun for Sale is clearly not a Catholic one. Catholicism, vaguely and romantically conceived, was offered in the first three books as a means of escape from a world of sex and sin. But in the succeeding novels, where the world is more convincingly and more variously unpleasant and painful, there is no escape and no hope. Catholicism, when it appears in these works, is peripheral and usually irrelevant. In Stamboul Train when Czinner's Catholic upbringing reasserts itself before his death, prompting what purports to be an examination of his conscience, it simply triggers off the self-pitying, non-Catholic, non-Christian conclusion that life is a force which thwarts and torments the innocent. This insight is a key one and constitutes the central theme of the book. In It's a Battlefield life is again a hostile force and all the characters are its victims. Its chief and most innocent victim, Conrad, is turned into an adulterer and a murderer, driven mad and destroyed. A brief reference to God's mercy at the end of the book is outweighed by an overwhelming sense of desolation at a universal injustice, "as much a part of the body as age and inevitable disease".<sup>(1)</sup> In England Made Me and A Gun for Sale the central characters are again seen in a light that is incompatible with a Christian outlook. Anthony and Raven are spiritually maimed by what life has done to them in childhood. No blame is attached to them for their

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(1) IB p.66

misdemeanors or crimes. They are simply the helpless victims of the past. The fact is that Greene's vision is both too pessimistic generally and, as far as his central characters are concerned, too condoning morally to really coincide with a Christian view.

In the Catholic novels, Greene's twin obsessions with the innocence of his heroes and the malevolence of the life that traps and perverts them and drives them to their doom persist, but are partly disguised with an overlay of Christian theology. Ostensibly in these books Catholicism provides an alleviation (God's Mercy) and an explanation (purgatorial suffering) for pain. But what it in fact provides is an exacerbation of pain and a glamorisation of the sufferers.

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On the face of it, Pinkie, the vicious adolescent gangster-hero of Brighton Rock (1938), is an unlikely candidate for the role of "innocent victim of life", which Greene's characters generally play. He has two murders and one attempted murder to his credit and a short life-time of cruelty symbolised in his progress in weapons from dividers (at school) through razors to the bottle of vitriol which he keeps in his pocket and caresses with "a faint secret sensual pleasure".<sup>(1)</sup>

Greene offers two explanations of Pinkie's character, the one psychological, the other supernatural. The supernatural explanation is that Pinkie

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(1) BR p.47

is Satanic. "Perhaps when they christened me the holy water didn't take. I never howled the devil out,"<sup>(1)</sup> He is filled with an "infernal pride"<sup>(2)</sup> and parodies the Creed: "'Credo in unum Satanam'".<sup>(3)</sup> When he dies - leaping over a cliff, his face burning from his own vitriol - the vividly horrifying effect is of a physical descent into hell:

"He looked half his size, doubled up in appalling agony; it was as if the flames had literally got him and he shrank - shrank into a school-boy flying in panic and pain ... 'Stop him,' Dallow cried; it wasn't any good; he was at the edge, he was over; they couldn't even hear a splash. It was as if he'd been withdrawn suddenly by a hand out of any existence - past or present, whipped away into zero - nothing."<sup>(4)</sup>

A reference to Faust has been introduced earlier on with an unexpected Mephistopheles, the corrupt and tormented lawyer, Mr. Drewitt<sup>(5)</sup> quoting Marlowe: "'This is Hell, nor are we out of it.'"<sup>(6)</sup>

The other explanation of Pinkie's character

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(1) Ibid. p.128

(2) Ibid. p.187

(3) Ibid. p.168

(4) Ibid. p.245

(5) In some editions, including the latest (Heinemann, 1970) he appears as Mr. Prewitt.

(6) Ibid. p.213

is that he is sick, psychologically twisted and stunted by an upbringing in the Brighton slums and underworld. The details of Pinkie's past are conveyed through nightmares and painful, fragmented recurring memories. The most crucial and crippling feature of this past has been the experience, enforced by poverty, of having to watch in the shared bedroom the mysterious and revolting 'Saturday night exercise' of his parents:

"It was Saturday night. His father panted like a man at the end of a race and his mother made a horrifying sound of pleasurable pain. He was filled with hatred, disgust, loneliness; He was completely abandoned: he had no share in their thoughts - for the space of a few minutes he was dead, he was like a soul in purgatory watching the shameless act of a beloved person."<sup>(1)</sup>

The effects of this experience on Pinkie's character ramify: into a terror and loathing of sex; a frightened resistance to the idea of any emotional involvement; a re-routing of the sexual impulse into sadistic channels ("his cruel virginity ... demanded some satisfaction different from theirs"<sup>(2)</sup>); and a humiliating sense of sexual inadequacy, which is the real root of his twisted ambitions and pride. "... the frightening weekly exercise ... That was what they

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(1) Ibid. p.189

(2) Ibid. p.110

expected of you, every polony you met had her eyes on the bed ... That was how they judged you; not by whether you had the guts to kill a man, to run a mob, to conquer Colleoni."<sup>(1)</sup>

Additional childhood experiences of abandonment, isolation and fear complete the foundations of Pinkie's spiritual outlook: "He was in an asphalt playground ... a cracked bell<sup>(2)</sup> clanged and the children came out to him. He was new; he knew no one; he was sick with fear - they came towards him with a purpose ..."<sup>(3)</sup> He has had to learn to defend himself violently: with the dividers and the razors. "... they only needed to be taught once that he would stop at nothing, that there were no rules."<sup>(4)</sup> There is also a suggestion - in a memory of being picked up on the Brighton Pier by Kite, the leader of a race-track gang and included in his mob - that Pinkie at an early age has been completely abandoned by his parents.

At the age of seventeen, Pinkie, like Raven, is completely cut off from other people. He doesn't know the meaning of what he has never experienced: sympathy, affection or love. "The imagination hadn't

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(1) Ibid. p.91. Colleoni is a successful big time gangster who has 'taken over' the Brighton underworld, and whom Pinkie absurdly and bravely tries to challenge.

(2) The "cracked bell" and "the asphalt playground" / recur in Greene's novels as symbols of unhappy childhood. They have already appeared in Anthony's recollections of school and Raven's of the orphanage.

(3) Ibid. p.188

(4) Ibid. p.188

wakened ... He couldn't see through other people's eyes, or feel with their nerves."<sup>(1)</sup> Near the end of the novel, Mr. Drewitt frightens him by "coming alive before his eyes"<sup>(2)</sup> in a revelation of a pain and horror of life as real as his own. Usually, it is only through music that the boy is made uneasily conscious of other people's emotions and, with them, of a whole world of experience from which his bitter constricted upbringing has excluded him:

"Only the music made him uneasy, the cat-gut vibrating in the heart; it was like nerves losing their freshness ... other people's experience battering on the brain."<sup>(3)</sup>

"'Why, I was in a choir once,' the Boy confided, and suddenly he began to sing softly in his spoilt boy's voice: 'Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.' In his voice a whole lost world moved ... Music, it didn't matter what music - 'Agnus Dei', 'lovely to look at ...' - any music moved him, speaking to him of things he didn't understand."<sup>(4)</sup>

Greene makes some attempt to correlate the

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(1) Ibid. p.46

(2) Ibid. p.212

(3) Ibid. p.46

(4) Ibid. p.53

two explanations of Pinkie's character, the natural and supernatural, through the equation, Brighton formed Pinkie's character: Brighton equals Hell.

"Heaven was a word; Hell was something he could trust. A brain was capable only of what it could conceive, and ... his cells were formed of the cement school playground, the dead fire and the dying man in [the station] waiting-room, his bed at Billy's and his parents' bed."<sup>(1)</sup>

Basically, however, the two explanations are incompatible. On the one hand we have a Pinkie whose exceptional capacity for corruption derives from the fact that he is a Catholic, which means (for Catholics, at any rate) that he has a special knowledge of the significance of his actions, and therefore a special responsibility for them. At the end of the novel, Rose, the girl (also a Catholic) whom Pinkie despite his revulsion has been forced by circumstances to marry and who defiantly ranges herself on his side against God, says to the priest who is trying to comfort her: "He's damned. He knew what he was about. He was a Catholic too."<sup>(2)</sup> On the other hand we have a Pinkie who is 'sick', a claim that is made, never explicitly, but with increasing emphasis as the novel progresses. What this, of course, means is that Pinkie doesn't, in fact, 'know what he is about', and

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(1) Ibid. p.230

(2) Ibid. p.249

that ultimately he isn't responsible for what he is doing. Greene's whole handling of Pinkie's character and actions (under the rather glamorous demonic exterior) is substantially devoted to proving that Pinkie - by virtue of what has been done to him - isn't in a position to understand what he is doing; and that the responsibility for his actions rests not with him but with the past that has made him.

Whenever Pinkie does something particularly nasty - like murder - which might qualify him for the demonic role he is supposedly playing, a sense of the moral extenuation which his conditioning implies is cunningly worked into the narrative. When he performs his first murder, the murder of Hale with which the book opens, we are told, "The word 'murder' conveyed no more to him than the words 'box' or 'collar',"<sup>(1)</sup> and "The imagination hadn't awakened. That was his strength. He couldn't see through other people's eyes, or feel with their nerves."<sup>(2)</sup> Pinkie, in other words, doesn't even know what murder means. And when he plans to kill a member of the gang, which since Kite's death he has taken over, a sense of his crippled incomprehension of any path other than the one he is bound to, is ingeniously suggested:

"Why, it was even possible that old Spicer was not set for the flames, he'd been a loyal old geezer, he hadn't done as much harm as the next man, he might slip through the gates into - but the Boy couldn't

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(1) Ibid. p.46

(2) Ibid. p.46

picture any eternity except in terms of pain. He frowned a little in the effort: a glassy sea, a golden crown, old Spicer."<sup>(1)</sup>

And later when Pinkie is engaged in driving Rose to her death, exploiting her unselfish devotion to him by urging on her a suicide pact which he doesn't intend to fulfil, the idea that the responsibility for his action rests with the life that had deformed him is made completely explicit.

In his association with Rose who is good and who loves him, Pinkie for the first time is brought into contact with something other than the violence and ugliness and coldness which up to now are the only life he has known. Rose's devotion strikes a faint answering chord in Pinkie's brain, so that for the first time there is something in him to resist the impulse to kill. As he drives Rose out into the remote countryside where he intends her to die, he is conscious, in a mounting tension, of a conflict between the newly stirring emotions of tenderness and pity and the habits of hatred which are pressing him on.

In the end hatred of what Rose stands for - a lifetime of sexual and emotional demands which he is psychologically unfitted to fulfil - is too strong:

"A brain ... couldn't conceive what it had never experienced ... An awful resentment stirred in him - why shouldn't he have had his chance like all the rest, seen his glimpse of Heaven if it was only a crack between the Brighton walls? ...

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(1) Ibid. p.98

He ... took a long look at [Rose] as if she might be it - but the brain couldn't conceive - he saw a mouth which wanted the sexual contact, the shape of breasts demanding a child."<sup>(1)</sup>

The inclination to spare Rose is resisted: not by Pinkie as a moral agent, but by Pinkie acting compulsively as the helpless victim of his past:

" ... he didn't hate her ... An enormous emotion beat on him; it was like something trying to get in, the pressure of gigantic wings against the glass. Dona nobis pacem. He withstood it, with all the bitter force of the school bench, the cement playground, the St. Pancras waiting-room, Dallow's and Judy's secret lust, and the cold, unhappy moment on the pier. If the glass broke, if the beast - whatever it was - got in, God knows what it would do. He had a sense of huge havoc - the confession, the penance, and the sacrament - an awful distraction, and he drove blind into the rain."<sup>(2)</sup>

It is noteworthy that Greene brings his elaborate Catholic moral equipment most fully to bear not

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(1) Ibid. p.230

(2) Ibid. p.242

on Pinkie, the murderer, but on Pinkie, the "adulterer". Forced by circumstances to marry, Pinkie doesn't want a "real" marriage, one, that is, which is sacramentally binding; he wants one that he can get out of later on. He marries Rose in a registry office. This, in the eyes of the church, simply doesn't count: in consummating this marriage Pinkie and Rose are committing adultery, a 'mortal sin'. None of Pinkie's murders is described as a mortal sin - possibly because in those instances the reader might be too inclined to accept the definition. But in the marriage scenes, with accompanying visions of hellfire and damnation, the concept is superimposed on what is essentially a picture of two reluctant and inexperienced children, thoroughly frightened by what is expected of them.

Rose is late for the ceremony because she has tried to go to confession.

"'I got confused ... I wanted to be in a state of grace when I married you.' She took no notice at all of Dallow. The theological term lay oddly and pedantically on her tongue ... 'But then I remembered. It wasn't any good confessing. I went away.' She said with a mixture of fear and pride: 'We're going to do a mortal sin.' The Boy said, with bitter and unhappy relish: 'It'll be no good going to confession ever again - as long as we're both alive.'" (1)

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(1) Ibid. p.169

Pinkie puts off making love to Rose for as long as possible, and when it can no longer be avoided, both children are awkward and scared.

"'Well,' he said, 'we can't stand here all night. We better get to bed.' He felt an appalling emptiness as if he hadn't fed for days. He tried to pretend, taking off his jacket and hanging it over a chair-back, that everything was as usual. When he turned she hadn't moved; a thin and half-grown child, she trembled between the washstand and the bed. 'Why,' he mocked her with a dry mouth, 'you're scared.' It was as if he had gone back four years and was taunting a school-fellow into some offence.

'Aren't you scared?' Rose said.

'Me?' He laughed at her unconvincingly ..."(1)

The consummation is "a sad brutal now-or-never embrace: a cry of pain"(2) accomplished between one jangling of the door bell and another. When it is over Pinkie has

"an odd sense of triumph: he had graduated in the last human shame - it wasn't so difficult after all ... An enormous weight seemed to have

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(1) Ibid. p.183

(2) Ibid. p.184

lifted. He could face anyone now ... he had a sense that he would never be scared again ... he had been afraid, afraid of pain and more afraid of damnation ... Now it was as if he were damned already, and there was nothing more to fear ever again. The ugly bell clattered, the long wire humming in the hall, and the bare globe burnt above the bed - the girl - the washstand, the sooty window, the blank shape of a chimney, a voice whispered: 'I love you, Pinkie.' This was hell then; it wasn't anything to worry about: it was just his own familiar room"<sup>(1)</sup>.

It is difficult here to resist the conclusion (which is quite irresistible in The Power and the Glory and The Heart of the Matter) that Greene's writing, far from being genuinely Catholic in feeling, actually exploits Catholic dogma dishonestly with the evasiveness that characterises his handling of moral issues in his earlier work. In the secular novels burdens of guilt were imposed on the characters for actions which were not treated as in any way genuinely reprehensible, and which were in some cases positively virtuous (Conrad sleeping with Milly out of pity, for example). In the Catholic novels the guilt is accompanied by - in Brighton Rock replaced by - a sense of sin. But the actions to which the concept of sin is attached

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(1) Ibid. p.184

are presented either as virtuous, like Rose's forfeit of her salvation for Pinkie's sake <sup>(1)</sup> or else as perfectly innocuous. Nothing in Greene's handling of Rose's and Pinkie's 'adultery' co-operates with the superficial claim that it is a mortal sin. The doctrine of mortal sin seems essentially to provide Greene with a set of artificial rules which his characters can break with impunity as far as the reader's sympathy and his own deep-rooted conviction of their innocence are concerned. At the same time they apparently endanger their immortal souls, thus producing a macabre and intense but superficial, spiritual drama.

In Brighton Rock the Catholicism is all on the surface, simply adding a kind of perverse satanic glamour to a character who is not being presented as evil at all. Pinkie's least ugly action - his sleeping with Rose is presented as his most damnable: "He had graduated in pain: first the school dividers had been left behind, next the razor. He had a sense now that the murders of Hale and Spicer were trivial acts, a boy's game ... Murder had only led to this - this corruption."<sup>(2)</sup> And what is genuinely ugly in his character and in his actions is only ambiguously related to the book's demonic theme. "Brighton/Hell formed Pinkie's character", for all its macabre overtones, is essentially a plea for diminished responsibility.

At the same time as the concept of evil is being undermined by Greene's handling of Pinkie's actions and character, Pinkie is elevated to a position of spiritual significance precisely because of his

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(1) "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his soul for his friend," (p.249) the priest tells her at the end of the novel.

(2) Ibid. p.169

alleged capacity for it. The 'religious vision' of Pinkie and Rose is contrasted with the secular outlook of Ida Arnold, the woman who is the instrument of retribution.

To avenge the murder of Hale whom she had befriended on the day of his death, Ida pursues Pinkie with a ruthlessness that is sustained by her unthinking acceptance of the ordinary moral standards of society. These standards, Greene insists, are heartless and superficial. 'Fair play', 'right and wrong', 'law and order': Ida is "barnacled with pieces of popular wisdom"<sup>(1)</sup>. Her mind works "with the simplicity and regularity of a sky sign."<sup>(2)</sup> "'I'm like everybody else. I want Justice,'" she says, "as if she were ordering a pound of tea."<sup>(3)</sup>

Ida, with her cheerful friendly air and her casual promiscuity ("God didn't mind a bit of human nature"<sup>(4)</sup>), is an inversion of a popular cliché: a tart-with-a-heart-of-steel. Beneath her surface warmth and sympathy lies a deep-rooted incapacity for love or pity:

"One had heard that laugh in a hundred places: dry-eyed, uncaring, looking on the bright side, when boats drew out and other people wept."<sup>(5)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.237

(2) Ibid. p.37

(3) Ibid. p.198

(4) Ibid. p.153

(5) Ibid. p.113

"She was cheery, she was healthy, she could get a bit lit with the best of them. She liked a good time, her big breasts bore their carnality frankly down the Old Steyne, but you had only to look at her to know that you could rely on her. She wouldn't tell tales to your wife, she wouldn't remind you next morning of what you wanted to forget, she was honest, she was kindly, she belonged to the great middle law-abiding class, her amusements were their amusements, her superstitions their superstitions ... she had no more love for anyone than they had."<sup>(1)</sup>

Her vengeful pursuit of Pinkie is prompted as much by pleasure in the hunt as by any feeling for Hale - and as she comes closer to the scent, she loses sight of Hale altogether.

"... her Mission [was] doing good ... seeing that the evil suffered ... She ... felt excitement stirring ... Poor old Fred - the name no longer conveyed any sense of grief or pathos. She couldn't remember anything much about him now ... The hunt was what mattered."<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.81

(2) Ibid. p.153

Faced with Pinkie, Ida feels neither pity nor even comprehension. When Rose, whom Ida is trying to persuade to give evidence against Pinkie, asks, "'You haven't thought, have you, why he did it? You don't kill a man for no reason.'"<sup>(1)</sup> - the question has behind it the whole weight of the book - Ida can only mechanically reassert her formula: "I know the difference between Right and Wrong."<sup>(2)</sup>

Near the end of the novel, one of Ida's own friends is made to say, "'But you're so terribly certain about things, Ida. You go busting in ... Oh, you mean well, but how do we know the reasons he may have had? ... And besides,' he accused her, 'you're only doing it because it's fun. Fred wasn't anyone you cared about.'"<sup>(3)</sup>

Ida's ordinary human standards of decency, which are reducible to the formula of knowing the difference between right and wrong, are repeatedly contrasted with the (supposedly) more profound distinction which Rose and Pinkie make between good and evil.

"'Right and wrong,'" says Rose contemptuously, "'That's what she talks about. As if she knew ... Oh, she won't burn. She couldn't burn if she tried.' She might have been discussing a damp Catherine wheel."<sup>(4)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.200

(2) Ibid. p.201

(3) Ibid. p.225

(4) Ibid. pp.114-115

"It was as if she were in a strange country: the typical Englishwoman abroad. She hadn't even got a phrase-book. She was as far from either of them as she was from Hell - or Heaven. Good and evil lived in the same country, spoke the same language, came together like old friends, feeling the same completion, touching hands beside the iron bedstead. 'You want to do what's Right, Rose?' she implored.

"Rose whispered ... 'You don't know a thing.'" (1)

"'You're a good girl, Rose,' the Boy said, pressing his fingers round the small sharp wrist.

"She shook her head. 'I'm bad.' She implored him: 'I want to be bad if she's good and you -' ...

"'She?' The Boy laughed. 'She's just nothing.'" (2)

"'I know one thing you don't. I know the difference between Right and Wrong. They didn't teach you that at school.'

"Rose didn't answer; the woman was quite right; the two words meant nothing to her. Their taste was extinguished by stronger foods -

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(1) Ibid. p.128

(2) Ibid. pp.128-129

Good and Evil. The woman could tell her nothing she didn't know about these - she knew by tests as clear as mathematics that Pinkie was evil - what did it matter in that case whether he was right or wrong?"(1)

One is reminded of Eliot's essay on Baudelaire:

"... moral Good and Evil are not natural Good and Bad or Puritan Right and Wrong ... The possibility of damnation is so immense a relief in a world of electoral reform, plebiscites, sex reform and dress reform that damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation - of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at last gives some significance to living ... It is better in a paradoxical way to do evil than to do nothing: at least, we exist ... The worst that can be said of most of our male-factors ... is that they are not men enough to be damned."(2)

Pinkie and Rose, because they define their actions in terms of the religious standards of Good and Evil, live out their lives on a lofty spiritual plane to which Ida has no access. Pinkie who is Evil is

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(1) Ibid. p.201

(2) "Baudelaire", in Selected Prose ed. John Hayward. Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1955. pp.193-4.

spiritually real: while Ida who is satisfied with merely human standards of decency is "nothing".

This doctrine (it doesn't matter what you do, as long as you can see your actions as having some sort of supernatural significance: it is better to be evil than right) is pernicious and egocentric, which is perhaps insufficient reason for objecting to its presence in a novel. What one may, quite legitimately, object to, however, is the sleight-of-hand involved in Greene's setting up of religious values above secular values in this book.

Ida's moral judgments are condemned because they are too simple and therefore too superficial to define justly the actions they are applied to. To Ida murder is "Wrong" and therefore murderers must be punished. She cannot see beyond her simple code to the tangled confusion of motives and the mental distortion which have led to the murder and which in some sense are an extenuation of it. Rose, on the other hand, can see that "'You don't commit a murder for no reason'" and consequently appears as a more sensitive and more profound moralist than Ida. What ought to be noticed, however, is that Rose's superior sensitivity has nothing to do with her Catholicism. If Ida's mind works with "the simplicity and regularity of a sky sign", Rose, who knows "by tests as clear as mathematics" that Pinkie is Evil, has standards of judgment which are no more complex. Greene gets his effects by stressing the inadequacy of Ida's moral criteria while ignoring the inadequacy of Rose's. The over-simplified Catholic framework within which most of the book operates differs from the secular code of values to which it is opposed not by being more profound, but simply by being more colourful. 'Good and

Evil' are "stronger foods" than 'Right and Wrong'. They have a more exciting flavour, they are more exotic. But they are no more real in relation to Pinkie's character, as Greene presents it, than Ida's more pallid judgments are.

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The Power and the Glory (1940), set in Communist Mexico at a time of religious persecution, is the story of the last functioning priest in a state where practice of the ministry is punishable by death. The priest is a 'whiskey priest', a coward who needs to be fortified with brandy in order to carry on, and who in a moment of drink-sodden despair has fathered a child. By conventional standards (and in his own eyes) he is a bad priest and yet he doggedly manages to do his duty, evading the law and facing danger, travelling from village to village with a price upon his head to bring the sacraments to the people.

Actively engaged upon the suppression of religion, Mexico is Greene's symbol for a 'fallen world': a world which has tried to abandon God and which in turn appears to have been abandoned by him.<sup>(1)</sup> The story of the priest's ministration, his pursuit by a lieutenant of police, his escape over the border and his voluntary return to death and martyrdom is set against

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(1) The Lawless Roads, the travel book describing Greene's visit to Mexico in 1938 which provided some of the material for The Power and the Glory, has as its epigraph a quotation from Newman's Apologia pro Vita Sua, ending:

"... either there is no Creator, or this living society of men is in a true sense discarded from His presence ... if there be a God, since there is a God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity."

a human backdrop of "Bystanders"<sup>(1)</sup>, people in various stages of dereliction and despair. There is an English dentist, Mr. Tench, exiled, hopeless and drained of all vitality. There is a second priest, the pitiable Padre José who has capitulated to the law that all priests must marry and knows that his abjection makes a mockery of his church. There is an ordinary Mexican family who feel they have been abandoned by God, but who carry on as best they can. There is an English owner of a banana plantation, Mr. Fellowes, who uses his work as a means of evading the family responsibilities he is helpless to cope with. There is his neurotic, death-haunted wife, and their daughter, Coral, facing life and responsibility alone because of the inadequacy of her parents. Finally there are the villagers, living on the edge of subsistence, their struggle for survival given its only significance by the infrequent visits of the whiskey priest. Mexico with its enervating heat, its dust and its dryness, is used atmospherically to project the spiritual desolation of its inhabitants:

"Mr. Tench went out to look for his ether cylinder, into the blazing Mexican sun and the bleaching dust. A few vultures looked down with shabby indifference: he wasn't carrion yet. A faint feeling of rebellion stirred in Mr. Tench's heart, and he wrenched up a piece of the road with splintering finger-nails and tossed it feebly across the town: over the tiny plaza, over

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(1) This is the heading of one of the chapters.

the bust of an ex-president, ex-general, ex-human being, over the two stalls which sold mineral water, towards the river and the sea. It wouldn't find anything there: the sharks looked after the carrion on that side. Mr. Tench went across the plaza."<sup>(1)</sup>

Variations on an image of "huge abandonment" echo insistently throughout the book. Padre José blanketed in the despair that grips nearly all of the characters, looks at the stars and cannot believe "that to a watcher this world would shine with such brilliance: it would roll heavily in space under its fog like a burning and abandoned ship."<sup>(2)</sup>

At one level The Power and the Glory is an allegorical statement of Divine Providence working through weak and imperfect human agency. The priest is God's obedient servant keeping the Faith alive in a country which has officially abandoned it. The lieutenant who hunts him down in the name of 'progressive' materialism, is really pitting himself against God. The priest tells him this at the end of the novel: "'It's God you're against ... I'm not worth fighting, am I?'"<sup>(3)</sup>

Greene has tried to be fair to the lieutenant (though not to his socialism), giving him qualities of idealism and integrity which, he says, he did not

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(1) PG p.1

(2) Ibid. p.31

(3) Ibid. p.251

find in Mexico.<sup>(1)</sup> The lieutenant is filled with an intense but misguided love for his people, seeing himself as having a mission to free them from the Church's yoke:

"He would eliminate ... everything that was poor, superstitious and corrupt. They deserved nothing less than the truth - a vacant universe and a cooling world, the right to be happy in any way they chose. He was quite prepared to make a massacre for their sakes - first the church and then the foreigner and then the politician - even his own chief would one day have to go. He wanted to begin the world again with them in the desert."<sup>(2)</sup>

The lieutenant wants to give his people everything, but he can give them nothing; all his twisted love can do is destroy. The banning of the church after ten years has brought the Mexicans no closer to material prosperity. The appalling conditions of poverty and squalor in which they live mock the lieutenant's ambitions for them. And his 'truth' is a sterile mysticism far from the rationalism he believes it to be.

"There are mystics who are

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(1) Introduction to Three Novels, p.15

(2) PG pp.70-71

said to have experienced God directly. He was a mystic, too, and what he had experienced was vacancy - a complete certainty in the existence of a dying, cooling world, of human beings who had evolved from animals for no purpose at all. He knew ... Heat stood in the room like an enemy. But he believed against the evidence of his senses in the cold empty ether spaces."<sup>(1)</sup>

The lieutenant is powerless against God. Everything he does is turned against him. He can take hostages from the villages and shoot them but he cannot force the villagers to betray their priest. He can only "make martyrs" for God and alienate himself from the people he loves.

"The villagers ... stared at the ground: everyone was afraid to catch his eye. He broke out suddenly: 'Why won't you trust me? I don't want any of you to die. In my eyes - can't you understand - you are worth far more than he is. I want to give you' - he made a gesture with his hands which was valueless because no one saw him - 'everything'. He said in a dull voice, 'you, you there. I'll take you.'"<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.25

(2) Ibid. pp.96-7

The lieutenant cannot capture the priest until God wishes him to. Twice he comes face to face with him but does not recognise him: and on the second occasion the priest sees his escape as literally miraculous. ("His escape was so improbable that, if it happened, it couldn't be anything else but a sign ..."<sup>(1)</sup>). The priest finally escapes over the border into safety. The lieutenant traps him into returning; but it is not his superior cunning that brings the priest back. The priest sees through the trap, but it has been baited with a dying gangster in need of absolution and he knows that it is his duty to God to return.

The execution of the priest - though it looks like a victory for the lieutenant - is really a victory for God. The priest dies voluntarily, a martyr. And his death inspires a fresh wave of religious enthusiasm among the Mexican people. Greene conveys this in his handling of the situation of the Mexican family who are part of the backdrop of "bystanders" against which the priest's story is played out. They are an ordinary Catholic family who at the beginning of the novel, with the church's reduction to one renegade and one whiskey priest, feel deserted by God. The mother tries to bring up her children in the old way, reading them fortifying tales of Saints' lives. The pious simplicities of one of these, read in instalments which punctuate the novel's action, provide an ironic counterpoint to the life of its ambiguous saint-sinner hero. The little girls, "their eyes large and

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(1) Ibid. p.171

brown and pious"<sup>(1)</sup>, respond dutifully to their mother's attempts to instruct them, but the son, Luis, is bored and rebellious. "I don't believe a word of it,"<sup>(2)</sup> he says sullenly, and is sent to his father to be punished. But his father refuses to be angry. "What's the good?" he says, "It's not your fault. We have been deserted."<sup>(3)</sup>

With the execution of the priest all this is changed. God has given the Mexicans a martyr and they no longer feel abandoned. The priest's death coincides with the rousing Christian climax of the martyr's tale which the mother is reading to her children. And Luis who has been bored by the pious platitudes of the earlier chapters, responds excitedly to the heroic ending, identifying the whiskey priest with the noble San Juan of the story. Religion suddenly comes alive for him, and a dialogue between the boy and his mother indicates that it has in fact done so for everyone.

"And that one," the boy said,  
'They shot today. Was he a hero  
too?'

"Yes.'

"The one who stayed with us  
that time?'

"Yes. He was one of the  
martyrs of the church' ...

"Shall we pray for him then?'  
The mother hesitated.

"It could do no harm. Of

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(1) Ibid. p.61

(2) Ibid. p.60

(3) Ibid. p.62

course before we know he is a saint there will have to be miracles ...'

"'Did he call "Viva el Christo Rey"?' the boy asked.

"'Yes. He was one of the heroes of the faith.'

"'And a handkerchief soaked in blood?' the boy went on. 'Did anyone do that?'

"The mother said ponderously, 'I have reason to believe ... Senora Jiminez told me ... I think if your father will give me a little money, I shall be able to get a relic ...'

"He squatted beside the window, staring out ... It brought it home to one - to have had a hero in the house ..."(1)

Luis's 'conversion' is given additional force by the fact that previously the lieutenant of police had been the object of his adulation. Now the lieutenant is no longer a hero to Luis, but a destroyer of heroes. The lieutenant and everything he stands for have suffered total defeat.

The significance and effectiveness of the priest's martyrdom are underlined by the crucifixion symbols which Greene works into the account of his death. There is a Judas, a dying thief, a darkness over the land. There is also a resurrection: on the night following the priest's execution a new priest

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(1) Ibid. pp. 285-6.

arrives to take over his mission. The sense of symbolical continuity implied by his arrival is emphasised by the fact that like the whiskey priest, he is deliberately left unnamed. He comes to the house of Luis's parents to hide, and it is the boy, Luis, who lets him in. The book ends:

"'If you would let me come in'  
the man said with an odd frightened  
smile, and suddely lowering his voice  
he said to the boy, 'I am a priest'.

"'You?' the boy exclaimed.

"'Yes,' he said gently. 'My  
name is Father - ' But the boy had  
already swung the door open and put  
his lips to his hand before the  
other could give himself a name."<sup>(1)</sup>

The world in The Power and the Glory is the desolate and painful world of Greene's earlier work. But in this novel suffering, though no less intense or ubiquitous, is optimistically reinterpreted in the light of Christian theology. It is seen as part of an essential spiritual purifying process. In Brighton Rock the world is Hell: in The Power and the Glory it is Purgatory.

This point is made explicit twice, the first time in a sermon, when the priest is celebrating a hurried mass in a village where the police are expected at any minute. The mass is being held in a bare hut with the people squatting uncomfortably on the earth floor. They have had to get up before dawn for

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(1) Ibid. p.288

the service because of the rumours of the police. It is dark, the door is shut and the place is hot and airless. The smell of melting wax from candles on a packing case mingles overpoweringly with the smell of unwashed human beings. And the priest cries out, "stubbornly in a voice of authority,

'... I tell you that heaven is here ... Pray that you will suffer more and more and more. Never get tired of suffering. The police watching you, the soldiers gathering taxes, the beating you get from the jefe because you are too poor to pay, smallpox and fever ... that is all part of heaven - the preparation.'"(1)

The point is made again in the long confrontation scene between priest and lieutenant at the end of the book. It is on the question of suffering that the lieutenant really takes issue with the priest. The lieutenant hates the church because he sees it increasing the miseries of the people, taking money from the poor and abusing them for "their small comforting sins"(2), extracting further sacrifices from people whose lives are already one long sacrifice.

"He remembered the smell of incense in the churches of his boyhood ... The old peasants knelt there before the holy

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(1) Ibid. p.86

(2) Ibid. p.23

images with their arms held out  
in the attitude of the cross:  
tired out by the long day's  
labour in the plantations they  
squeezed out a further mortifi-  
cation."(1)

He says to the priest,

"I hate your reasons ...  
I don't want reasons. If you  
see somebody in pain people like  
you reason and reason. You say -  
perhaps pain's a good thing, per-  
haps he'll be better for it one  
day. I want to let my heart  
speak."(2)

"The heart's an untrustworthy beast," the  
priest replies and starts to talk to him about the love  
of God. "We wouldn't even recognise that love. It  
might even look like hate. It would be enough to scare  
us - God's love. It set fire to a bush in the desert,  
didn't it, and smashed open graves and set the dead  
walking in the dark."(3)

These scenes, the mass scene and the confron-  
tation, contain what is intended to be the key to the  
main action, the priest's flight through the abandoned  
land. The priest is pursued by the lieutenant, but  
he is also being pursued by God. He cannot leave the  
State until God allows him to, and when it is God's will

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(1) Ibid. p.22

(2) Ibid. p.258

(3) Ibid. p.259

that he goes back, he goes back. At the opening of the book we see him at the end of his tether, making one of his periodic attempts at escape. But a child calls him back to minister to his mother who is dying and he misses his boat. "'I am meant to miss it,'" he says, and is "shaken by a tiny rage".<sup>(1)</sup> Later when he leaves the State it is because he feels that he has been given a "sign", and when he returns to certain death, it is because his duty to God calls him back.

The priest is bound to the abandoned land by God, partly, it is clear, for the spiritual welfare of the people, but also because he himself requires the suffering that he endures in their service. As a result of his sufferings he comes to achieve the Christian virtues of fortitude, humility and love that he hadn't been capable of when his life was secure and comfortable. What he is forced to endure is "all part of heaven - the preparation." He is being driven by God through sin and pain to his own salvation - "We wouldn't even recognise that love. It might even look like hate". His journey is really a spiritual one, a devious pilgrimage through sin to self-knowledge and sanctity.

This point is made explicitly in the contrast (which is frequently emphasised) between the priest as he was in the old days, a complacent, ambitious and unspiritual man, and the priest as he is now after ten years of hardship and terror. This contrast is pointed to in the priest's recollections of his past and also in the out-of-date "wanted" photograph of him

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(1) Ibid. p.14

which hangs in the lieutenant's office. He is completely unrecognisable, both physically and spiritually, as the plump, self-satisfied man of the picture. On both the occasions that the lieutenant lets him slip through his fingers he has the photograph with him. And on the second occasion the priest, while he is waiting in the lieutenant's office to be discharged from jail (he has spent the night in a communal cell for being in possession of brandy - it is a prohibition state), looks at the picture and thinks:

"It is not very like me now. What an unbearable creature he must have been in those days - and yet in those days he had been comparatively innocent. That was another mystery: it sometimes seemed to him that venial sins - impatience, an unimportant lie, pride, a neglected opportunity - cut you off from grace more completely than the worst sins of all. Then in his innocence, he had felt no love for anyone: now in his corruption he had learnt ..."(1)

The point that the priest's sufferings are necessary for his salvation is again made when he escapes over the border into the comparative ease and safety of the neighbouring state. He finds himself reverting to his former complacency and hears the note of patronising priestly authority creeping back into his voice as he bargains over the price of a baptism.

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(1) Ibid. p.179

"He could feel the old life hardening round him like a habit, a stony case which held his head high and dictated the way he walked, and even formed his words."<sup>(1)</sup>

The novel's action is intended to be seen as the last stages in the priest's unorthodox journey towards salvation. The various high-points of this action are designed to be either tests of endurance and courage or else confrontations, in which the priest is brought to recognise some failing in himself, and through remorse, to learn humility, and through humility to learn compassion, wisdom and love. The pilgrim's progress effect of the journey is emphasised by the symbolic shedding, at various stages, of the last relics of his secure and complacent past. At one point he is forced to leave on a rubbish dump a brief-case that had been given to him by his parishioners on the fifth anniversary of his ordination, and we are told, "a whole important and respected youth dropped among the cans."<sup>(2)</sup> Eventually he is forced to relinquish his last 'souvenir', a scrap of paper on which he had jotted down notes for an after-dinner speech: "it was like the final surrender of a whole past."<sup>(3)</sup>

The moral pattern of The Power and the Glory, though more elaborate than any in the preceding novels, is not unfamiliar. The priest's route to salvation is essentially the same as Crane's in Rumour at Nightfall, in which sin led to guilt, and guilt (without intervening steps) to "the world of the spirit". Rose in Brighton Rock, like the priest, found sanctity through

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(1) Ibid. p.216

(2) Ibid. p.101

(3) Ibid. p.152

sin. And in the secular novels Andrews, Czinner and Conrad were surrounded with an aura of moral paradox which gives them some resemblance to the whiskey priest.

If the moral pattern is not new, neither, unfortunately, is Greene's handling of it. The critical presentation of the priest's faults is confined to his own remorseful brooding over past actions which are condoned, or to present failings which are surreptitiously denied at the same time that they are claimed. Against his own conviction of his utter worthlessness as a priest, his pride, his cowardice, his lust, his inability to love the world perfectly as Christ loved it, is set Greene's picture of a man who never fails to act heroically, however frightened he might be, who is permanently humble, whose lust "[isn't] even real lust",<sup>(1)</sup> but despair, whose despair is the product of a desperate situation, and who so loves the world that he is able, like God, to die for "the half-hearted and the corrupt."<sup>(2)</sup>

The brooding sense of guilt which is the most persistent feature of the priest's consciousness is clearly intended to be evidence of his extraordinary scrupulousness rather than any sort of index to his behaviour. His self-reproaches are always carefully designed either to repudiate the faults they ostensibly chastise or else to direct the reader's attention not to his faults at all, but to his virtues. (One remembers how Andrews had 'confessed' to Elizabeth, with spurious shame, that he had appeared as a witness at the smugglers' trial.) The following example is typical:

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(1) Ibid. p.126

(2) Ibid. p.124

"He was being driven by the presence of soldiers to the very place where he most wanted to be [the village where his daughter lives]. He had avoided it for six years, but now it wasn't his fault - it was his duty to go there - it couldn't count as sin ...

"In any case, even if he could have gone South and avoided the village, it was only one more surrender - feast days and fast days and days of abstinence had been the first to go: then he had ceased to trouble more than occasionally about his <sup>e</sup>br<sub>A</sub>viary - and finally he had left it behind altogether at the post in one of his periodic attempts at escape. Then the altar stone went - too dangerous to carry with him. He had no business to say Mass without it: he was probably liable to suspension, but penalties of the ecclesiastical kind began to seem unreal where the only penalty was the civil one of death. The routine of his life like a dam was cracked and forgetfulness came dribbling in wiping out this and that. Five years ago he had given way to despair - the unforgivable sin - and he was going back now to the scene of his despair with a curious lightening of heart. For

he had got over despair too. He was a bad priest, he knew it: they had a word for his kind - a whiskey priest, but every failure dropped out of sight and mind: somewhere they accumulated in secret - the rubble of his failures. One day they would choke up, he supposed, altogether the source of grace. Until then he carried on, with spells of fear, weariness, with a shamefaced lightness of heart."<sup>(1)</sup>

In this passage we see the priest brooding gently and remorsefully over his spiritual deterioration. His sense of guilt is less agonised than usual because he is 'happy', going "for the first time in many years, like any ordinary man, to his home."<sup>(2)</sup> Happiness drugs him a little "like the taste of brandy promising temporary relief from fear, loneliness, a lot of things".<sup>(3)</sup> The passage builds up through an enumeration of instances of the priest's slackness in pastoral activities to a generalised sense of spiritual disintegration: "The routine of his life like a dam was cracked and forgetfulness came dribbling in wiping out this and that." "Forgetfulness" has led to despair and then to getting over despair. "He was a bad priest, he knew it."

It is obvious that the reader does not - and

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(1) Ibid. pp.73-74

(2) Ibid. p.73

(3) Ibid. p.73

is not intended to - share the priest's conclusion about himself. This is partly a matter of context: we measure his confessed failure against what the book shows to be his positive achievement - which includes his unfailing devotion to duty even when pitched near to breaking-point by fear and exhaustion. But it is also a result of the subtly dishonest way in which the accusation itself is organised to negate the very failure that is being claimed. The priest reproaches himself for laxity in spiritual matters, but the reproach is disingenuously precluded with a proof of stern self-discipline: for six years he has avoided the one place where he wants to be, the village where his daughter lives, "but now ... it was his duty to go there - it couldn't count as a sin". The scrupulousness of this is so fine that it is quite hard to see where the sin - if the priest had dreamt of committing it - would lie: but presumably he sees his love for his daughter as an impermissible self-indulgence. (The grosser self-indulgence of his having fathered a child is ignored at this point, but is disposed of later in the sequence of scenes that take place in the daughter's village.) At any rate, whatever the sin is, it is clear that the priest has assiduously avoided it; and Greene takes some pains to emphasise the extent of his self-denial: "a small gaunt man in torn peasant's clothes going for the first time in many years, like any ordinary man, to his home".

Having firmly established the soundness of the priest's moral fibre, Greene deftly works his way towards a little moral probing: "... it couldn't count as a sin ... In any case, even if he could have gone south and avoided the village it was only one more surrender: the years behind were littered with similar

surrenders." With the word "surrender", suitably diminished in force, Greene goes on to give examples of the priest's failings. It emerges that they are merely transgressions of formal ecclesiastical rules which obviously only apply in a very different kind of life. It is possible to take these rules seriously, but clearly Greene doesn't. By the end of his catalogue of the priest's offences he is surreptitiously withdrawing the charge that has already been made with the utmost equivocation: "Then the altar stone went - too dangerous to carry about with him. He had no business to say mass without it: he was probably liable to suspension, but penalties of the ecclesiastical kind began to seem unreal in a State where the only penalty was the civil one of death". Obviously if the altar stone is too dangerous to carry around, then to abandon it cannot count as a moral surrender at all. Moreover, it is his duty to abandon it, because it is his duty not to be caught. Ecclesiastical rules are as "unreal" as ecclesiastical "penalties" in the spiritual jungle that the priest is working in. The other charges are equally absurd in this situation. He is living the kind of life in which he doesn't even know for certain which month it is, let alone which saint's day. And so on.

The remaining accusations ("despair", "a bad priest") having no concreteness in themselves and given no concreteness by the context, simply add to the effect, which the rhythm tends to enhance, of a vaguely self-condemnatory reverie which is being obscurely enjoyed.

An even more dishonest self-accusation comes a little later when the priest is holding a mass for the villagers. Having fathered a child seven years

ago, the priest - as there are no opportunities for absolution - is in a state of mortal sin. His celebration of the mass is therefore sacrilegious:

"There was a time when he had approached the Canon of the Mass with actual physical dread - the first time he had consumed the body and blood of God in a state of mortal sin; but then life bred its excuses - it hadn't after a while seemed to matter very much whether he was damned or not, so long as these others ..."(1)

The dots are Greene's, and are obviously meant to be read, "so long as these others were saved". Sacrilegious celebration of the mass, while it is ostensibly being offered as a horrifying sin ("actual physical dread") is really being presented as the priest's supreme sacrifice of his own salvation for the sake of others. Only in the most technical sense is the priest's behaviour sacrilegious, and its truly noble import is conveyed to us under the cover of a blatantly spurious self-denigration: "Life bred its excuses - it hadn't ... seemed to matter very much whether he was damned or not, so long as these others ...". Presumably we are meant to admire the priest's humility as well as his sacrifice - we are clearly not meant to accept the imputation of spiritual laxity which the word "excuses" implies.

The priest's remorseful brooding and self-

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(1) Ibid. p.82

analysis provide a running accompaniment to most of the important action. Guilt plays a crucial part in the confrontation scenes where the 'self-knowledge' which it implies is both a virtue in itself and a bridge to further virtues. There are three major confrontations designed to bring the priest to a state of spiritual perfection and a fourth, with the lieutenant, which is part debate, part resumé of all the moral probing that has gone before. Whatever the priest says to the lieutenant that is not in defence of his church is a confession of his own failure as its representative. It is worth noting, however, that the lieutenant responds to the priest's long self-castigation by recognising not that he is worthless, as he appears to claim, but that he is a saint.

The priest's first confrontation is with his daughter, who is his sexual sin translated into flesh. Brigitta is a vivid symbol of corruption - though hardly recognisable as a seven-year-old child, whatever the circumstances of its conception.

"The world was in her heart already like a small spot of decay in a fruit."<sup>(1)</sup>

"The seven-year-old body was like a dwarf's: it disguised an ugly maturity".<sup>(2)</sup>

"He caught the look in the child's eyes which frightened him - it was as if a grown woman was there before her time, making

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(1) Ibid. p.102

(2) Ibid. p.84

plans, aware of far too much.

It was like seeing his own mortal sin look back at him, without contrition. He tried to find some contact with the child and not the woman; he said, 'My dear, tell me what games you play ...' The child sniggered. He turned his face quickly away and stared up at the roof where a spider moved."<sup>(1)</sup>

When the priest fails at first to recognise his daughter, it is "like making light of his mortal sin: you couldn't do a thing like that and not even recognise ..."<sup>(2)</sup>

This externalisation of the priest's sin enables Greene to make a superficial fuss about his sexual disgrace ("it was like seeing his own mortal sin look back at him without contrition"), while at the same time condoning and surreptitiously making light of the act itself. The sequence of scenes at Brigitta's village is filled both with the priest's anguish when faced with the image of his own corruption and with numerous references to his lapse which are clearly designed to indicate that corruption has not entered into it:

"... just fear and despair and half a bottle of brandy and the sense of loneliness had driven

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(1) Ibid. p.82

(2) Ibid. p.80

him to an act which horrified  
him."(1)

"He was aware of an immense load  
of responsibility: it was indis-  
tinguishable from love. This,  
he thought, must be what all  
parents feel ... This is what we  
escape at no cost at all, sac-  
rificing an unimportant motion of  
the body."(2)

"Once for five minutes seven years  
ago they had been lovers."(3)

It might be remembered that Greene used a  
similar externalisation device in Rumour at Nightfall  
where Chase felt the full horror of his 'sin' (which  
had been very sympathetically presented) by looking at  
a photograph which had no moral connection with it.  
And Brigitta's corruption is clearly not the priest's.

The confrontation with his daughter leads the  
priest to drive a curious, rather Faust-like bargain  
with God:

"He prayed silently, 'O God, give  
me any kind of death - without  
contrition, in a state of mortal  
sin, only save this child.'"(4)

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(1) Ibid. p.81

(2) Ibid. p.81

(3) Ibid. p.85

(4) Ibid. p.103

This sacrifice, which is clearly of the highest kind ("I would give my life, that's nothing, my soul ...")<sup>(1)</sup> provides the priest with a further opportunity for remorse:

"One mustn't have human affections - or rather one must love every soul as if it were one's own child.

This passion to protect must extend itself over a world - but he felt it tethered and aching like a hobbled animal to the tree trunk."<sup>(2)</sup>

It has been repeatedly emphasised in this sequence of scenes that the priest, by continuing, despite the risk of death, to minister to the Mexicans while in a state of mortal sin, is in fact prepared to make the same sacrifice for "the world" as for his child. "... it hadn't seemed to matter very much if he were damned so long as these others ..." and "He thought: if I go, I shall meet other priests: I shall go to confession. I shall feel contrition and be forgiven: eternal life will begin for me all over again."<sup>(3)</sup> After all this for the priest to reproach himself for his imperfect love of humanity is simply to draw attention, disingenuously, to its perfection.

The next stage of the priest's pilgrimage is his meeting with the mestizo, the man who is to betray him. This confrontation is also ostensibly designed to be a lesson in Perfect Love. It is a more elaborate

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(1) Ibid. p.103

(2) Ibid. p.104

(3) Ibid. p.80

and difficult lesson than the last: the priest has to learn to love his betrayer. We see him passing from a remorseful contemplation of his own sins and failings to a recognition that the half-caste is more worthy of God's love than he himself is:

"He prayed silently: 'God forgive me'. Christ had died for this man too: how could he pretend with his pride and his lust and his cowardice to be any more worthy of that death than this half-caste. This man had intended to betray him for the money which he needed, and he had betrayed God for what? Not even for real lust."<sup>(1)</sup>

He reminds himself that all men are created in the image of God - "God was the parent, but he was also the policeman, the criminal, the priest, the maniac and the judge."<sup>(2)</sup> And at the end of the scene he presses his hand "with a kind of driven tenderness upon the shoulders of God's image."<sup>(3)</sup>

The apparent object of this scene is clear: we see the priest moving from remorse to humility, from humility to a recognition of his common humanity with his betrayer, and from this to generosity and love. He even wonders with exquisite charity, whether the reward for handing him over to the authorities mightn't lead indirectly to the half-caste's salvation:

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(1) Ibid. p.126

(2) Ibid. p.129

(3) Ibid. p.129

"... seven hundred pesos wasn't so much, but he could probably live on it for a whole year ... and it was just possible, he thought, that a year without anxiety might save this man's soul."<sup>(1)</sup> The actual object of this scene, however, is rather different. Instead of a spiritual progress, what we are really being given is simply a display of a succession of virtues. The priest's guilt, which, according to the scene's (and, indeed, the book's) design, ought to be functional is, in fact, part of the decoration. The priest's recognition that his spiritual abjection is deeper than the half-caste's has no objective value at all. The claim is actually framed to contain its implicit denial. "How could he pretend ... to be any more worthy of that death than this half-caste? This man had intended to betray him for the money which he needed, and he had betrayed God for what? Not even for real lust." The last phrase, while it is ostensibly designed to emphasise the priest's sin, actually does precisely the opposite: it reminds us of the extenuating circumstances, the loneliness and despair which were insisted on in the previous scenes.

A similar equivocation informs the orgy of self-abasement which leads to this 'recognition'. Very little is required to spark it off. "'You don't trust me,'" says the half-caste, who is clearly untrustworthy. At this the priest's conscience

"began automatically to work: it was like a slot-machine into which any coin could be fitted, even a cheater's blank disk. The words

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(1) Ibid. p.128

proud, lustful, envious, cowardly, ungrateful - they all worked the right springs - he was all these things ... perhaps he was unjust too ..."(1)

Eventually, long after the half-caste has made his motives clear to the meanest intelligence, the priest stops reproaching himself for his mistrust: "even his conscience ceased to accuse him of uncharity."(2) Evidently, when the priest reproaches himself for his non-existent failings, we are intended to admire the sensitivity of his conscience.

Once his "uncharity" has ceased to preoccupy him, the priest finds another "blank disk" to pop into his slot-machine conscience. He thinks how different life is now from the old days -

"no church anywhere: no brother priest, except Padre José, the out-cast in the capital. He lay listening to the heavy breathing of the half-caste and wondered why he had not gone the same road as Padre José and conformed to the laws. I was too ambitious he thought, that was it. Perhaps Padre José was the better man - he was so humble that he was ready to accept any amount of mockery - at the best of times he had never considered himself

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(1) Ibid. pp. 112-113

(2) Ibid. p. 115

worthy of the priesthood."<sup>(1)</sup>

Padre José is offered throughout the book as a foil to the whiskey priest. Both men are in the same situation, but while the whiskey priest grimly endures and transcends it, Padre José has collapsed and given in. He is sympathetically treated however: the situation is shown to be well beyond the ordinary man's pain threshold. The contrast between the two men is clearly intended to heighten our sense of the whiskey priest's heroism. Green's introduction of José at this point, therefore, simply directs our attention to the priest's virtues at a time when it is ostensibly being concentrated on one of his faults.

The whiskey priest goes on to a rapt contemplation of José's humility, during which the reader is presumably raptly contemplating his. At the end of it, his own ambitions come back to him "as something faintly comic ... he gave a gulp of astonished laughter".<sup>(2)</sup> One has the familiar sense of a charge being furtively withdrawn. Clearly the priest's ambitions (if they now appear to him as "faintly comic") have no place in his present state of mind, and yet he continues with his mission; ergo pride is not, and probably never has been his motive for sacrificing himself.

The priest's self-examination moves inexorably and inaccurately on:

"No, if he had been humble like Padre José, he might be living in the

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(1) Ibid. p.120

(2) Ibid. pp.120-121

capital now with Maria on a pension. This was pride, devilish pride lying here offering his shirt to the man who wanted to betray him. Even his attempts at escape had been half-hearted because of his pride - the sin by which the angels fell. When he had been the only priest left in the state, his pride had been all the greater; he thought himself the devil of a fellow carrying God round at the risk of his life; one day there would be a reward ... he prayed in the half-light: 'O God, forgive me - I am a proud, lustful, greedy man. I have loved authority too much. These people are martyrs - protecting me with their lives. They deserve a martyr to care for them - not a fool like me who loves all the wrong things. Perhaps I had better escape - if I tell people how it is over here, perhaps they will send a good man with a fire of love ...'

"How little his pride had to feed on - he had celebrated only four Masses this year, and he had heard perhaps a hundred confessions. It seemed to him that the dunce of any seminary could have done as well or better."<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. pp.121-122

In this flood of self-reproach the faint outline of a moral structure is discernible. Sin leads to recognition ("This was pride, devilish pride ..."): recognition to remorse ("O God, forgive me"): and remorse to self improvement, for "a fool like me" and "the dunce of any seminary" are unmistakable evidence of humility.

Yet the moral structure, although it is there, does not easily catch our attention: it is almost completely submerged in the overwhelming impression of humility which this scene as a whole is really intended to convey. The priest's pride is not sharply realised - in fact it is not realised at all. There has been nothing in the earlier parts of the book to indicate that the priest is a proud man. Not one of his actions has appeared to be prompted by pride. This scene is the first in which we hear of it. And at the opening of the scene we have, in effect, been warned not to take the priest's self-accusations too seriously. His conscience works "automatically" like a "slot-machine". Even "a cheater's blank disk" will "work the right springs". This curious condition of spiritual hypochondria (which actually emphasises the spirit's real health) is clearly being offered for our admiration and approval: "even his conscience ceased to accuse him ...". The priest, we are meant to see, possesses something rather special in the way of conscience.

After this introduction, we find the priest comparing himself to José, to his own disadvantage. But, as throughout the book the comparison between the two men is always made in the priest's favour, the reader takes the priest's evaluation of himself here as evidence of his humility - although this is

ostensibly the first stage in his recognition of the part that pride has played in his noble actions.

The result of all this is that by the time the priest comes to the climax of his soul-searching, the reader is pretty well convinced that he is totally lacking in the pride that he reproaches himself with. And the climax is disingenuously designed to increase this conviction.

It is precluded by an action which is ostensibly intended to dramatise the priest's failing for us. He offers his shirt to the half-caste who has a fever: "Would you like this shirt? It isn't much, but it might help."<sup>(1)</sup> This isn't very effective evidence of the priest's pride. In fact, if he hadn't gone on to reproach himself, "This was pride, devilish pride, lying here offering his shirt to the man who wanted to betray him", the reader would simply have taken his action as charitable. Greene's failure to dramatise the priest's weakness convincingly is very suggestive, for he has shown no comparable lack in providing us with evidence of his virtues. We continually see the priest acting heroically, loving his enemies, being humble and self-sacrificing and so on. Moreover, Greene is normally very good at creating the sort of action or gesture which is an outward sign of an inward state. For example, there is a scene in which the lieutenant is shown playing with some children which tells us all we need to know about his twisted, destructive love for his people: "The lieutenant put out his hand in a gesture of affection - a touch, he didn't know what to do with it. He pinched the boy's

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(1) Ibid. p.121

ear and saw him flinch away with the pain: they scattered from him like birds and he went on alone across the plaza to the police station."<sup>(1)</sup> So if now we don't feel very convinced of the priest's pride, it is at least a probability that Greene doesn't wish us to be.

This impression is confirmed in the next accusation which the priest levels against himself: "Even his attempts at escape had been half-hearted because of his pride - the sin by which the angels fell." Now, we have been presented with one of the priest's attempts at escape: at the opening of the book. And in that scene Greene didn't make the least effort to suggest that the priest was making an attempt to escape which was half-hearted through pride. He showed us the priest exhausted almost beyond endurance, letting his chance of escape go by because a dying woman needed him. We saw him overcoming his exhaustion and reluctance in a dogged devotion to duty. At the end of the scene he rode back into the hot, damp, swampy interior from which he had so nearly escaped, praying, "Let me be caught soon ... Let me be caught."<sup>(2)</sup> Clearly this doesn't begin to support the accusations that the priest is making against himself now.

The priest's first accusation of pride points to an act of charity, his second points to an act of endurance. His third and last accusation doesn't point to any act that we have seen, but its final phrase is clearly inaccurate, "When he was the only priest left in the state his pride had been all the greater, he

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(1) Ibid. p.71.

(2) Ibid. p.18

thought himself the devil of a fellow carrying God around at the risk of his life; one day there would be a reward." If there is one thing we do know about this priest it is that the thought of a heavenly reward plays no part as a motive for his actions. We have, on the contrary, been told repeatedly of his conviction that he is damned because he is in a state of mortal sin and that by staying in the abandoned land for the sake of others he is sacrificing his chances of salvation. This is in fact the greatest of his much-sung virtues. As to what the priest was like in the early days of being "the only priest left in the state" we have no direct evidence. But the general, one might almost say hypocritical, tenor of the scene disinclines us to accept the self-reproach as having any substance. When the priest accuses himself of some failing we are being invited, not to accept what he says as part of the complex truth about himself, but simply to shake our heads tenderly and exclaim, "No! No! He's not like that at all - but how modest, how admirably humble of him to think so!"

The priest's next confrontation is with 'humanity', or with Greene's idea of a typical cross-section of it, which the priest finds among the thieves, adulterers and murderers whom he meets in jail:

"This place [the prison] was very like the world: overcrowded with lust and crime and unhappy love: it stank to heaven."<sup>(1)</sup>

The scene is essentially a continuation of the

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(1) Ibid. p.161

half-caste scene. The priest, having come to love one corrupt specimen of humanity, can now identify himself with and love all miserable sinners:

"He was moved by an enormous and irrational affection for the inhabitants of this prison. A phrase came to him: 'God so loved the world ...'"<sup>(1)</sup>

"Again he was touched by an extraordinary affection. He was just one criminal among a herd of criminals ... he had a sense of companionship which he had never experienced in the old days when pious people came kissing his black cotton glove."<sup>(2)</sup>

Two new details are added to the picture of the priest's spiritual progress.

One of the main points of this scene is to show the priest painstakingly forcing himself to feel Christian charity for a complacently pious woman. Having taken all erring humanity easily in his stride, the priest encounters some difficulty with the virtuous prude, who is in jail, as she proudly confesses, for having holy pictures in her house. The difficulty of loving this woman - whom Greene presents as singularly unlovable and incapable of love herself - is the occasion of some characteristically unmerited self-reproach on the priest's part. He persists heroically

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(1) Ibid. pp.163-4

(2) Ibid. p.166

in his endeavour, and by the next day when he watches her leaving the prison, wrapped in her black shawl, like something "bought at the market ... hard and dry and secondhand"<sup>(1)</sup>, he has come to feel sympathy and understanding even for her.

A second incident, which points to, rather than extends, the priest's spiritual education, involves a frail, pathetic, old man who, like the priest, has an illegitimate daughter. He falters out his story, aided by the pious woman who apparently knows him. In the old days the priests had taken his daughter away from him because she was a bastard, and taught her to hate him for his sin. The whiskey priest, who is filled with "miserable happiness" at the word 'bastard' ("It brought his own child nearer"), says, "They had no business ... They were bad priests to do a thing like that. The sin was over. It was their duty to teach - well, love."<sup>(2)</sup>

One of the functions of the exchange between the whiskey priest, the pious woman and the old man is to contrast the whiskey priest with the narrow-minded conventional clergy who have taken the child away from its father: and to show how the priest, through his own sin, has learnt generosity and charity towards other sinners. These qualities are shown to be far more important and real than the priggish and pious rule-following which conventionally passes for virtue. It is at the end of the night spent in jail that the priest looks at the old photograph of himself in the lieutenant's office and thinks, "It isn't very like me

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(1) Ibid. p.179

(2) Ibid. pp.165-166

now ... in those days he had been comparatively innocent ... he had felt no love for anybody: now in his corruption he had learnt ..."(1)

The second function of this exchange is to crystallise the attitude which the reader is expected to take to the priest's own sin which is the same as the old man's. The pious woman who approves of the action of the "bad priests" says to the whiskey priest,

"'They were doing what was right of course. It was a mortal sin.'

"'[They had] no right to make her hate him'

"'They knew what's right.'

"He said, 'They were bad priests to do a thing like that. The sin was over. It was their duty to teach - well, love'."(2)

The woman argues with a single-minded assurance, which despite her Catholicism, markedly resembles Ida Arnold's. It is clear that her dogmatic assertion "'It was a mortal sin'", is meant to be outweighed by the priest's more sensitive and generous, "'The sin was over. It was their duty to teach - well, love'". And it is also clear that the priest's words are intended to hint at a general principle - the sin doesn't matter very much: it is love that is important - which applies to his own action as well as to the old man's. What the priest says is, in fact, a very precise explication of the principles which had governed Greene's

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(1) See above p.196

(2) Ibid. p.166

handling of his sin in the scenes at Brigitta's village. The priest's lapse was shown to be far less important than the noble self-sacrificing love which resulted from it. And certainly the priest's sin - in so far as it was a sin at all - is "over": "once for five minutes seven years ago," we were told, "they had been lovers."<sup>(1)</sup>

Once Greene has firmly established that the priest's sin is insignificant, he shows us the priest reproaching himself for finding it insignificant. Just four pages after the dispute with the pious woman, we get this:

"'I don't know how to repent.'

That was true: he had lost the faculty. He couldn't say to himself that he wished his sin had never existed, because the sin seemed to him now so unimportant - and he loved the fruit of it'."<sup>(2)</sup>

From this point onwards the priest's inability to repent his sin plays an increasingly prominent part in his consciousness. On the night before his execution he tries to reproach himself into a state of perfect contrition, but his love for his daughter gets in his way. He dies with his mortal sin unabsolved and unrepented; but at the same time he is a saint and a martyr. The intended effect is of paradox, but the paradox is very superficial, for Greene's handling of the action has really made nonsense of the concept of

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(1) See above p.206

(2) Ibid. p.165

mortal sin.

One of the interesting features of the exchange between the priest and the pious woman is the ease with which her judgement, "'It was a mortal sin.'" is dismissed. Greene has frequently said in interviews <sup>(1)</sup> that he doesn't believe in mortal sin, and his Catholic novels, despite the emotional and spiritual colour that they derive from the exploitation of the concept, bear this out. In Brighton Rock, Greene called Pinkie's and Rose's unsacramental marriage "Adultery", "A Mortal Sin", but he didn't present it as such. He simply used their "Awareness of Sin" to add to their torments and glamorise them. In The Power and the Glory a similar duplicity obtains. The priest is agonisingly aware that he has committed a Mortal Sin: but when Greene describes his action in a scene in which the priest is ostensibly confronted with the image of his own corruption, we find that the corruption is not his at all, but his daughter's: his lust is not "real lust": and his sin is "an unimportant motion of the body" impelled by fear and despair and loneliness. Far from making any attempt to show the priest's action as genuinely ugly or sinful, Greene goes out of his way to extenuate it.

There is a complete disparity between the priest's evaluations of his character and Greene's actual presentation of it. The priest sees himself as totally debased: Greene sees him as perfect. His confessed failings - when they are allowed to exist at all - are shown to be insignificant and are outweighed by his extraordinary virtues, his ability to love the

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(1) e.g. "I don't believe in this phrase 'mortal sin', so often used by old-fashioned priests."  
Christopher Burstall: "Graham Greene Takes the Orient Express", in The Listener, 21.11.68. p.673

corrupt and unlovable, his readiness to sacrifice his hopes of eternity for the spiritual well-being of others - and so on. He has a child: it wasn't even real lust. He drinks: most understandable, something is needed to blur the horrors of his life. Most of his self-recriminations, however, are without any substance at all: his pride and spiritual laxity are non-existent; so to all practical intent is his cowardice, for, though he occasionally feels fear, it never incapacitates him. He never acts other than heroically. His so-called 'sacrilege' is really self-sacrifice. When he crosses the border into safety, and supposedly lapses into his former complacency, we are presented with nothing more solid than his hearing a note of complacency creeping back into his voice. And the immediate issue of this is a lengthy self-recrimination, entirely uncomplacent in its effect.

The priest is no more a complex figure than the irritating Juan of the story that the faithful mother reads to her children. The aura of moral ambiguity which surrounds him is simply skilfully faked. He is decked out with a corrupt daughter and a brandy bottle, and both symbols are dramatically deployed for paradoxical effect. But the paradox is all on the surface.

I do not think that Greene's dishonesty in the handling of the priest is likely to be apparent on a first or even a second reading. It is only occasionally blatant ("life bred its excuses - it hadn't ... seemed to matter very much whether he was damned or not so long as these others ..."). Usually the proofs of the priest's perfection are more devious and subtle than this, and it is easy to accept the overt meaning: "Despite his many weaknesses, etc." With successive

rereadings, however, it becomes evident that his weaknesses aren't being seriously offered as weaknesses at all, and that Greene's real concern is with the innocence and perfection that underlie his constantly reiterated self-reproaches.

The Power and the Glory, despite the part that Catholicism plays in the action, is not really a Catholic novel any more than Brighton Rock was. Catholicism provides certain rules which the priest can reproach himself for breaking, but Greene himself doesn't treat the rules seriously. The priest's adultery is condoned, his sacrilege is self-sacrifice in disguise, and his departure from the formal routines of his church is necessitated by the conditions of life in the abandoned land. The elaborate Christian-pilgrimage structure of the novel is also essentially meaningless. We don't, in fact, feel that God's incomprehensible love is burning away the priest's imperfections because Greene is never prepared to admit that he has any. The idea of purgatorial suffering, despite the explicitness with which it is offered, is not really an issue at all. Greene uses it less to provide an explanation for suffering than an excuse to wallow in it.

What makes Greene's dishonest treatment of his priest so frustrating is the fact that he so clearly is capable of writing the novel he is pretending to write. All the material is there for a profound and complex novel, and Greene obviously has the imaginative and technical ability to cope with it. The background allegory is tactfully and persuasively handled: carefully realistic details (like Luis' 'conversion's' being based on adolescent hero-worship) de-romanticise it where it is in danger of getting sentimental. The statement of the central theme in the priest's sermon on

pain is perfectly placed and dramatically handled. The discomforts and danger for the villagers attending the mass are effectively emphasised to provide a backdrop against which the priest cries out "stubbornly, in a voice of authority, 'I tell you that heaven is here ...'" The embodiment of this theme in the priest's spiritual journeying is brilliantly imagined. All the book lacks is a genuine sense of the sin it is supposedly about. But because the priest's guilt plays such a crucial part in the novel, and occupies such a vast proportion of it, the lack is crippling.

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Scobie, the hero of Greene's next novel, The Heart of the Matter (1948), is another Perfect Saint disguised as a complex saint-sinner-martyr. The theme of the novel is pity, and Greene's ostensible concern is with the ambiguities inherent in this emotion. The action rehearses Scobie's decline - gradual at first and then accelerating - through a series of professional indiscretions and moral misdemeanours of increasing gravity to "the worst crime a Catholic could commit"<sup>(1)</sup>: suicide. Each of Scobie's actions, including the suicide, is inspired by pity, kindness and a hatred of inflicting pain on others. Part of the novel's apparent intention is to show, through a demonstration that "pity corrupts", the complicated mixture of good and bad which goes to make up human character. At the close, Scobie's wife, Louise, who has found out that his death which he had tried to camouflage as heart

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(1) HM p.249

failure, is in fact suicide, talks to Father Rank, their priest: "He must have known he was damning himself - It's no good even praying." And Father Rank bursts out, "furiously,

'For goodness sake, Mrs Scobie, don't imagine that you - or I - know a thing about God's mercy ... The Church knows all the rules but it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart!'"(1)

Most of Greene's critics would agree that this last scene is intended to emphasise the undeviating purity of motive which has prompted each stage of Scobie's fall.

In Introduction to Three Novels, however, Greene has asserted that his aim was more complex than this: that he had meant to show not simply how Scobie had been led astray by virtuous intentions, but that his virtue was itself suspect. The subject of The Heart of the Matter, Greene writes, is "pity as distinct from compassion ... the character of Scobie was intended to illustrate how pity can be an expression of an almost monstrous pride."(2)

This point he elaborates in an interview with Christopher Burstall:

"[Pride and pity] are very closely allied. When you pity, you treat the person pitied as an inferior, whilst with compassion you're treating the person as an equal ...

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(1) Ibid. pp.263-264

(2) Introduction to Three Novels, Stockholm, Norstedts, 1962. p.25

[Scobie] is doomed by pride: not a satanic pride, but the kind of pride that lots of us have, which makes him feel he can manage lives."<sup>(1)</sup>

In other words, Greene had intended to show, not only that "pity corrupts", but that it is in itself a kind of corruption. There are only very faint traces of the latter purpose apparent in the novel, and on the whole they have been overlooked by its readers (or those, at least, who get into print). In Introduction to Three Novels, Greene, after stating what his aim had been, goes on:

"But I found the effect on the reader quite different. Scobie was exonerated. Scobie was a 'good man', he was haunted to his doom by the harshness of his wife."<sup>(2)</sup>

Greene explains his failure to get his point across as a technical one:

"In the original draft of the novel a scene was played between Mrs Scobie and Wilson on their evening walk which occurred between the end of Part II, Chapter 1 and the beginning of Part II, Chapter 2. This put Mrs Scobie's character in a more favourable light but the drive of the

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(1) "Graham Greene Takes the Orient Express", in The Listener, 21.11.68. p.674

(2) Op.cit. p.25

narrative appeared to slacken.

By eliminating it I gained intensity and impetus, but I sacrificed tone."<sup>(1)</sup>

To my mind the single scene<sup>(2)</sup> is not enough to change the entire character of the novel. Although it does show Mrs Scobie's character in a less unfavourable (rather than "more favourable") light than certain other parts of the book, it is still a long way from making her a really sympathetic figure: usually she is intolerable: here she is more or less neutral. Moreover, she is only one of Scobie's tormentors. As the narrative progresses, the list of his persecutors grows to include, among others, his mistress, Helen (whom he has acquired out of pity), and the Arch-Tormentor, God.

Greene's real failure in The Heart of the Matter is not so much a technical failure, as the same failure in self-awareness and honesty that has conditioned his handling of the surreptitiously idealised heroes of his earlier work. Under the cover of presenting Scobie as a complex figure who, despite his good intentions, is initially corrupt and progresses in corruption, Greene's real concern is to show that beneath the burden of guilt which is inflicted upon him, Scobie is the Persecuted Innocent who has become familiar to us in the long line of heroes from Francis Andrews to the Whiskey Priest. When Scobie reproaches himself for the imperfections of his attitude to those

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(1) Ibid. pp.26-27

(2) Greene printed the rejected scene in Introduction to Three Novels (pp.27-37) and I have included it in this thesis as an appendix as the book is not readily available.

whom he pities, there is a subtle pressure on the reader not to agree. So successfully has this pressure been applied, that the pride implicit in Scobie's feelings of pity and responsibility has gone largely unnoticed. For the rest, Scobie's 'corruption' consists of mere rule-breaking. And Greene presents the rules that Scobie breaks as inimical to what he surreptitiously offers as 'real' virtue: a totally self-sacrificing concern for the material and spiritual welfare of others. Scobie's tortured progress towards 'damnation' is essentially a record of extraordinary saintliness. Like the whiskey priest, he is prepared to sacrifice, not merely his life ("that's nothing") but his soul.

The year is 1942. Scobie is Deputy Commissioner of Police in a colonial port on the West African coast, where life is stripped to its ugly essentials. Vultures, rats, cockroaches, malarial mosquitoes - these are the forms of life that flourish. Men are worn down to what is weakest and worst in their natures. The climate is one which nurtures "meanness, malice, snobbery".<sup>(1)</sup> Stronger or nobler emotions in this heat would drive men mad. Age is computed, not according to years, but to the length of time a man has spent in the colony. "The Commissioner was an old man of fifty-three ... just as the Governor was a stripling of sixty-five compared with any district officer who had five years' experience behind him",<sup>(2)</sup> There is a rapid turnover in government officials. Scobie thinks of the Secretariat as a hospital. "For fifteen

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(1) HM p.31

(2) Ibid. p.16

years he had watched the arrival of a succession of patients: periodically at the end of eighteen months certain patients were sent home, yellow and nervy and others took their place - Colonial Secretaries, Secretaries of Agriculture, Treasurers and Directors of Public Works. He watched their temperature charts every one - the first outbreak of unreasonable temper, the drink too many, the sudden stand for principle after a year of acquiescence."<sup>(1)</sup>

Although the novel is ostensibly about the corruption of Scobie, it is noteworthy that he is presented as the one man strong enough to look life in its ugly face and not break down.

"Why, he wondered, swerving the car to avoid a dead pye-dog, do I love this place so much? Is it because here human nature hasn't had time to disguise itself? Nobody here could ever talk about a heaven on earth. Heaven remained rigidly in its proper place on the other side of death, and on this side flourished the injustices, the cruelties, the meanness that elsewhere people cleverly hushed up. Here you could love human beings nearly as God loved them, knowing the worst: you didn't love a pose, a pretty dress, a sentiment artfully assumed."<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.14

(2) Ibid. p.35

The principle in operation here is one that showed itself more crudely in Rumour at Nightfall where Chant became disillusioned with everybody's human nature but his own. Scobie alone is immune to the debilitating conditions of life on the West African coast. Other people break down to reveal what is worst, i.e. truest in their natures. Anything other than their worst is dismissed as facade: "a pose, a pretty dress, a sentiment artfully assumed.". Scobie alone has a hard core of integrity which remains intact, and is able like God and the whiskey priest to love poor, ravaged humanity without illusion. Throughout the novel, even when Scobie is supposedly well advanced in corruption, a series of more or less explicit comparisons designed to flatter him is made between him and the rest of the characters in whom the climate and other hardships conspire to bring out the worst. We get Scobie posed against the other officials who are sent home "yellow and nervy", unable to cope. We get Scobie posed against Louise with her selfish, helpless, clinging dependence and her irritating, futile attempts to make life 'gracious' instead of accepting its horrors as Scobie does. It is the West Coast which has made her what she is. "She wasn't always like this,"<sup>(1)</sup> thinks Scobie who blames himself: "the experience that had come to her was the experience selected by himself."<sup>(2)</sup> We get Scobie posed against Wilson, the contemptible creature who is in love with Louise and who expresses his love in bad romantic poetry. The last comparison is an extended one and covers a number

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(1) Ibid. p.31

(2) Ibid. p.16

of points. Wilson by profession is a spy and deceit is part of his nature. At one stage he is made to cry out to Scobie angrily, "'Oh you are unbearable. You are too damned honest to live.'" His face was aflame, even his knees seemed to blush with rage, shame, self-depreciation."<sup>(1)</sup> At another point, when Scobie's 'corruption' has reached the adultery stage, Wilson sees him leave Helen's house in the early hours of the morning. Scobie, unused to deception, lies clumsily and unconvincingly, and Wilson feels "an odd elderly envy for Scobie, much as an old lag might envy the young crook his first sentence, to whom all this was new."<sup>(2)</sup> As pointed is the sexual contrast which is drawn between the two men. Of Scobie we are told: "his body in this climate had lost the sense of lust"<sup>(3)</sup> (and we are more or less expected to believe that he commits adultery without it). In Wilson, on the other hand, the climate serves to expose the degrading physical appetites that lurk beneath the poetic sentiment in his love for Louise. When the book opens, Wilson is newly arrived at the coast, and his newness shows, among other ways, in his indifference to the charms of the negro schoolgirls. Half-way through the book, Wilson at the sight of a young native girl, is afflicted with "melancholy lust".<sup>(4)</sup> He remembers there was a time when he hadn't noticed a black skin, and feels "as though he had passed years and not months

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(1) Ibid. p.126

(2) Ibid. p.160

(3) Ibid. p.151

(4) Ibid. p.161

on this coast, all the years between puberty and manhood".<sup>(1)</sup> He sets off for a brothel, Greene nastily making him think: "When this is over I shall be able to write another poem to Louise".<sup>(2)</sup> By entering the brothel he sheds "every racial, social and individual trait, he had reduced himself to human nature."<sup>(3)</sup> "Human nature" in its essential sexual sordidness (the brothel scene is executed in imagery of the most depressing squalor) is something which Scobie in his pity-inspired adultery somehow manages to by-pass. And Wilson's visit to the brothel has no other function in the book than to emphasise this.

When the novel opens, Scobie has been passed over for promotion - his failure is a mark of his integrity. Just as Czinner was too noble to succeed in the world of politics, and Anthony too decent to succeed in the world of Big Business, so Scobie is too good for the African coast.

"'It's damned unfair,' the Commissioner said. 'I can do nothing more than I have done, Scobie. You are a wonderful man for picking up enemies. Like Aristides the Just.'"<sup>(4)</sup>

Scobie now has to break the news to his wife.

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(1) Ibid. p.164

(2) Ibid. p.165

(3) Ibid. p.166

(4) Ibid. p.17

The first thing we learn about Louise is that she is generally disliked; and the second is her resemblance to the pair of rusty handcuffs which hangs in Scobie's office.

"She had joined him in the first year of the phony war and now she couldn't get away: the danger of submarines made her as much of a fixture as the handcuffs on the nail."<sup>(1)</sup>

The ugly image fixes the reader's bias against Louise, and very precisely defines the nature of her relationship with her husband, which the ensuing pages are going to reveal. Scobie is gripped and imprisoned by the demands which her unattractiveness and inability to cope with life make on his sense of pity and responsibility. He has long ago ceased to love her, but the less he needs or wants her the more bound he feels by a "terrible private vow" made fourteen years ago:

"No man could guarantee love forever, but he had sworn fourteen years ago, at Ealing, silently during the horrible little elegant ceremony among the lace and candles that he would at least always see to it that she was happy."<sup>(2)</sup>

As Scobie goes home to break the news to Louise, the assault on her begun in the opening pages

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(1) Ibid. p.15

(2) Ibid. p.57

of the book continues. Scobie reflects:

"Women depended so much on pride, pride in themselves, their husbands, their surroundings. They were seldom proud, it seemed to him, of the invisible."<sup>(1)</sup>

When he gets back Louise is in the bedroom asleep. Her dressing-table is cluttered with pots and photographs which include:

"innumerable photographs of Louise herself, in groups with nursing sisters, with the Admiral's party at Medley beach ... It was as if she were accumulating evidence that she had friends like other people."<sup>(2)</sup>

Scobie watches her through the mosquito-net:

"Her face had the yellow ivory tinge of atabrine, her hair which had once been the colour of bottled honey, was dark and stringy with sweat. These were times of ugliness when he loved her, when pity and responsibility reached the intensity of a passion."<sup>(3)</sup>

Scobie tiptoes from the room: "he wouldn't have woken his worst enemy from sleep, leave alone Louise."<sup>(4)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.21

(2) Ibid. p.21

(3) Ibid. p.21

(4) Ibid. p.22

A little later a voice "wails"<sup>(1)</sup> 'Ticki' (Louise's nickname for him which he detests) and he returns to the bedroom:

"His wife was sitting up under the mosquito-net and for a moment he had the impression of a joint under a meat-cover. But pity trod on the heels of the cruel image and hustled it away."<sup>(2)</sup>

Louise has learned that Scobie has been passed over for promotion. Her concern is all for herself and her own humiliation:

"I'll never be able to show my face at the club again ... I was so upset I came out of Mass before the end. It's so mean of them Ticki. You can't take it lying down. You've got to think of me."<sup>(3)</sup>

She nags at him disconsolately on unrelated matters before returning to her central theme:

"How different the whole day would have been," she said staring out of the net, 'if you'd come home and said, "Darling I'm going to be the Commissioner."<sup>(4)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.22

(2) Ibid. p.23

(3) Ibid. p.23

(4) Ibid. p.24

Scobie is gentle and patient and eventually manages to pacify her with a soothing lie,

"'You know, dear, in a place like this in war-time - an important harbour - the Vichy French just across the border - all this diamond smuggling from the Protectorate, they need a younger man.' He didn't believe a word he was saying."<sup>(1)</sup>

Temporarily consoled, Louise allows herself to be persuaded to eat a little lunch:

"A vulture flapped heavily upwards from the iron roof and down again in the yard next door. Scobie drew a deep breath: he felt exhausted and victorious: he had persuaded Louise to pick at a little meat."<sup>(2)</sup>

The general impression of this exchange, clinched by the final juxtaposition of vulture and Louise at her meat, has been aptly described by Conor Cruise O'Brien: "Prometheus stroking his vulture's raw, red neck."<sup>(3)</sup>

In the Burstall interview, just before making a distinction between pity and compassion ("when you pity you treat the person pitied as an inferior ..."), Greene says: "The scene between Scobie and his wife

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(1) Ibid. p.24

(2) Ibid. p.25

(3) Op.cit. p.60

in their bedroom is the first sign of Scobie's obsession and pride."<sup>(1)</sup> But this statement of intention doesn't square at all with the actual impact of the scene. There is something unhealthy and perverse and ultimately self-flattering in Scobie's attitude to his wife. He seems almost to feed on her ugliness and humiliation: "Her face had the yellow ivory tinge of atabrine ... There were times of ugliness when he loved her, when pity and responsibility reached the intensity of a passion." But Greene in the novel (as opposed to Greene in the interview) seems oblivious to the limitations of this sort of attitude. In the bedroom scene, far from presenting Scobie's pity critically, Greene seems to be emphasising its perfections, to be drawing attention to the generosity, patience and selflessness that are required to show pity to a creature like Louise. He seems intent on showing not that Scobie treats Louise as his inferior, but that she is his inferior. In a very short space of time in this scene and in the references to her that precede it, an enormous amount of evidence has accumulated against her. She is friendless, neurotic, nagging, status-seeking, egocentric, has no spiritual resources. She is compared in turn to rusty handcuffs, a joint of meat and a vulture. It is true that the scene is presented from Scobie's viewpoint, so that most of the images are his, but they seem to be offered to the reader without irony. When Scobie has "the impression of a joint of meat under a cover" pity "treads on the heels of the cruel image and hustles it away" - the reader is left with the impression that Louise is like a joint of meat but that Scobie is too kind to think so. And it is

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(1) Ibid. p.674

Greene, after all, and not Scobie, who shifts the vulture symbolically from the roof as Louise descends to pick at a little meat. Moreover, in the dialogue between Louise and Scobie, Louise's selfishness and her nagging petulance come through to the reader direct. And the gentle patience with which Scobie soothes and consoles his unhappy tormentor is clearly being offered for our admiration.

In the subsequent scenes in which the relationship between Scobie and Louise is developed, the original impression is confirmed: Scobie is a loving, patient martyr to a nagging impossible wife. If this relationship, compounded of neurotic demanding helplessness on the one side and unselfish care and concern on the other is flattering to Scobie and degrading to Louise, it is not because Scobie's pity for Louise diminishes her as a person, but because Greene, the emotionally involved creator of both, is idealising Scobie at Louise's expense.

In the evening the two of them go to the Club. At the entrance Louise flinches. "Do you think they all know by this time?" Scobie replies,

"My dear, I thought we'd finished with all that. Look at all the generals who've been passed over ever since 1940. They won't bother about a deputy-commissioner."

"She said, 'But they don't like me.'"

"Poor Louise, he thought, it is terrible not to be liked ... 'My dear, how absurd you are. I've never known anyone with so many friends.' He ran unconvincingly on.

'Mrs Halifax, Mrs Castle ...' and then decided it was better after all not to list them.

"'They'll all be waiting there,' she said, 'just waiting for me to walk in. I never wanted to come to the Club tonight. Let's go home.'

"'We can't. Here's Mrs Castle's car arriving' ... He saw the fist open and close, the damp inefficient powder lying like snow in the ridges of the knuckles. 'Oh, Ticki, Ticki,' she said, 'you won't leave me ever will you? I haven't got any friends - not since the Tom Barlows went away.' He lifted the moist hand and kissed the palm: he was bound by the pathos of her unattractiveness."<sup>(1)</sup>

Inside the Club more of Louise's failings are exposed. Scobie takes pity on Wilson, a newcomer to the coast, who is being cold-shouldered by the snobby colonial set for "gate-crashing" the Club. He has an invitation, but there is an unwritten rule that the Club is for officers only. Scobie leads the lost-looking Wilson over to Louise. After the non-committal introductory noises have been made, Louise turns to Wilson and asks: "'Do you like reading?'" Scobie breathes a sigh of relief:

"... she was going to be kind to

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(1) Ibid. p.27

the poor devil. It was always a bit of a toss-up with Louise. Sometimes she could be the worst snob in the station, and it occurred to him with pity that perhaps now she believed she couldn't afford to be snobbish. Any new face that didn't 'know' was welcome."<sup>(1)</sup>

Scobie wanders off, leaving Louise and Wilson talking about poetry which is presented as one of Louise's affectations and Wilson's secret vice ("a drug ... taken at night in small doses ... For public exhibition he had his Wallace."<sup>(2)</sup>). As Scobie reaches the bar, he overhears a group of men sneering at 'Literary Louise'. He walks away shaking with anger.

"Beside the bookshelves Louise was talking happily to Wilson, but [Scobie] could feel the malice and snobbery of the world padding up like wolves around her. They wouldn't even let her enjoy her books, he thought, and his hand began to shake again. Approaching he heard her say in her kindly Lady Bountiful manner, 'You must come and have dinner with us one day. I've got a lot of books that

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(1) Ibid. p.30

(2) Ibid. p.12

might interest you.'...

"Scobie thought: What are those others worth that they have the nerve to sneer at any other human being? He knew every one of her faults. How often had he winced at her patronage of strangers. He knew each phrase, each intonation that alienated others. Sometimes he longed to warn her - don't wear that dress, don't say that again, as a mother might teach a daughter, but he had to remain silent aching with the foreknowledge of her loss of friends. The worst was when he detected in his colleagues an extra warmth of friendliness towards himself, as though they pitied him. What right have you, he longed to exclaim, to criticise her?"<sup>(1)</sup>

The scene ends with Scobie, who has to leave early for a tour of inspection, publicly and defiantly kissing his wife's hand: "it was a challenge. He proclaimed to the whole Club that he was not to be pitied, that he loved his wife."<sup>(2)</sup>

If the reader should find himself reflecting that Louise is hardly better off as the object of Scobie's pity than as the object of other people's contempt, it is not because he is being invited to do

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(1) Ibid. p.31

(2) Ibid. p.32

so. It is remarkable how often Scobie's kindness serves to emphasise Louise's faults and unattractiveness or to expose them to the reader further than they have been exposed already. Scobie tries to console Louise by reciting a long list of the people who like her (he should know better): and dries up on the second name. To comfort her, he kisses her hand: and finds it clammy. We see Louise apparently being kind to poor Wilson: and Scobie disillusion us by reflecting, "with pity", "perhaps now she thought she couldn't afford to be snobbish." Scobie hears somebody sneering at Louise's literary affectations: and is prompted by this, though his tone is protective, to produce a list of her faults that malice itself could hardly improve on. There is something peculiarly double-edged about Scobie's pity, but Greene seems not to point to this ambiguity (in fact, he doesn't seem aware of it), but to emphasise the generosity of the affection which is being shown to such an undeserving object.

At one level the book seems to carry on a curious submerged vendetta against Louise, a vendetta which, significantly, is continued even after Scobie's death. Louise tells Father Rank that Scobie has committed suicide, and with typical selfishness asks, "'Father, haven't you any comfort to give me?'" And he reproves her irritatedly,

"'You've been given an awful lot of comfort in your life Mrs Scobie. If what Wilson thinks is true, it's he who needs our comfort.'"(1)

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(1) Ibid. p.263

There is a sense in which Father Rank is fighting Scobie's battle, which Scobie all his life has been too generous to fight himself.

On the same night as the visit to the Club, Scobie wakes up to find Louise crying. He braces himself to comfort her. "He blamed himself for being heartless because the idea occurred to him that it was two o'clock in the morning: this might go on for hours and at six o'clock the day's work began."<sup>(1)</sup> Just as earlier Scobie was too kind to think that Louise looked like a joint of meat, he is now too kind to think that she is selfish. He nobly banishes the thought from his mind - and in the process of doing so registers the accusation with the reader.

Louise can't bear her humiliation and demands to be sent to South Africa. Scobie can't afford the fare, but she insists: "'Ticki I can't bear it any longer here.'" He says, "gently,

'I'll try and work something out. You know if it's possible I'd do anything for you - anything ... I'll manage somehow.' He was surprised how quickly she fell asleep: she was like a tired carrier who had slipped his load. She was asleep before he had finished his sentence, clutching one of his fingers like a child, breathing as easily. The load lay beside him now, and he prepared to lift it."<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.41

(2) Ibid. pp.42-43

Subsequent scenes show Scobie trying and failing to raise the money, and having to face Louise's neurotically uncontrolled despair. He is forced to repeat his promise, not knowing how he is going to keep it, but prepared to make any self-sacrifice to do so.

"He would still have made the promise even if he could have foreseen all that would come of it. He had always been prepared to accept responsibility for his actions, and he had always been half aware too, from the time he made his terrible private vow, that she should be happy, how far this action might carry him."<sup>(1)</sup>

Isolated attempts to criticise Scobie's attitude towards Louise are handled equivocally to increase our sense of its rightness. They seem, in fact, intended to forestall criticism rather than to implement it. There is one point, for example, where Louise sees through Scobie's attempt to postpone (out of pity) telling her that he hasn't been able to borrow the money for her fare and accuses him,

"Ticki, why are you such a coward? Why don't you tell me it's all off? ... I'm not a child, Ticki. Why don't you say straight out "You can't go"?"<sup>(2)</sup>

But when he admits that the bank has refused his request

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(1) Ibid. p.58

(2) Ibid. p.55

for a loan, she is like a child refusing to accept what he says. She breaks down and hysterically and illogically reiterates her impossible demand:

"'Ticki, I can't bear this place any longer. I know I have said it before, but I mean it this time. I shall go mad. Ticki, I'm so lonely. I haven't a friend, Ticki ... Ticki ... Please, please do something.'"<sup>(1)</sup>

On another occasion Scobie compares his own behaviour towards Louise with hers towards him, and reproaches himself for his lack of honesty: but disingenuously so that he is exonerated and the odium attaches to her. He has a habit of calling out her name whenever he comes home, a habit formed in the days when he loved her, and which he persists in to disguise his present lack of love. Louise doesn't answer when he calls:

"In the old days she had replied, but she was not such a creature of habit as he was - nor so false he sometimes told himself. Kindness and pity had no power with her: she would never pretend an emotion she didn't feel ..."<sup>2)</sup>

There is only one occasion on which Scobie's self-criticism clearly points to the condescension

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(1) Ibid. p.56

(2) Ibid. p.21, italics mine

implicit in his attitude to Louise - or perhaps I should say the condescension that would be implicit if she were being presented as a responsible human being - and it doesn't seem to be given much weight. Scobie comes home after several days spent at a remote and isolated outstation. He is still rather weak from a bout of fever, and he is exhausted by the long journey. It is half-past one in the morning and he has to start work at eight. Tiredly, he tries to evade the question of Louise's passage money: he can hear from her voice that she is about to broach it. But Louise launches her attack:

"She said, 'Ticki, have you done anything at all?'

"'How do you mean, dear?'

"'About the passage.'

"'Don't worry I'll find a way.'

"'You haven't found one yet?'

"'No. I've got several ideas I'm working on. It's just a question of borrowing.'"<sup>(1)</sup>

Suddenly Louise relents: "'Poor dear,' she said, 'don't worry,' and put her hand against his cheek. 'You're tired. You've had fever. I'm not going to bait you now.'"

Scobie is moved by her unaccustomed gentleness.

"It occurred to him, as it hadn't occurred to him for years,

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(1) Ibid. p.91

that she loved him: poor dear, she loved him: she was someone of human stature with her own sense of responsibility, not simply the object of his care and kindness."<sup>(1)</sup>

This ought to be pointed, but isn't. The fact is that Louise doesn't normally behave like "someone of human stature with her own sense of responsibility". And her irrational outburst at the beginning of the scene - Scobie could scarcely be expected to borrow £200 when he is in the jungle, miles from anywhere - serves to emphasise this.

Scobie drifts away from the recognition, through a dejected sense of failure, to an even deeper feeling of responsibility towards Louise. There is no hint of irony in Greene's presentation of this. And the fleeting criticism of Scobie is simply lost in the general picture of long-suffering virtue and perfection.

In the meantime Scobie's pity-inspired disintegration has begun. In the course of his duties as a police-officer, Scobie has to search a Portuguese ship for contraband diamonds and infringements of the navicert regulations. In the Captain's cabin, concealed under the lid of the lavatory cistern, he finds a letter addressed to Frau Groener in Leipzig (enemy territory), which it is his duty to send unopened to the proper authorities for inspection. The Captain explains that Frau Groener is his married daughter and pleads with Scobie not to pass the letter on. Discovering Scobie is a Catholic, he even tries to offer him money: "He would never have attempted to bribe an

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(1) Ibid. p.90

Englishman: it was the most sincere compliment he could pay to their common religion."<sup>(1)</sup>

The Captain, in his own way, is as unattractive as Louise, and inevitably arouses Scobie's pity. "He kept wiping his eyes with the back of his hand like a child - an unattractive child, the fat boy of the school. Against the beautiful, the clever and the successful one can wage a pitiless war, but not against the unattractive: then the millstone weighs on the breast."<sup>(2)</sup>

Throughout the scene Greene is at pains to emphasise the innocent triviality of the Captain's misdemeanour ("These men were not criminals: they were merely breaking regulations enforced on the shipping companies by the navicert system."<sup>(3)</sup>) and the completely disproportionate punishment that he will receive for it. "Your authorities," the Captain pleads, "will blacklist me. You know what this means. The consul will not give a navicert to any ship with me as a captain. I shall starve on shore."<sup>(4)</sup> Scobie knows this is true. "Perhaps nothing will happen ... There are so many slips in these matters ... Files get mislaid,"<sup>(5)</sup> is the only comfort he can offer.

Scobie leaves the ship, without having visibly relented, but with "the millstone weighing on his

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(1) Ibid. p.50

(2) Ibid. p.49

(3) Ibid. p.47

(4) Ibid. p.49

(5) Ibid. p.49

breast."<sup>(1)</sup> "The last time he saw the captain as he looked back from the door of the cabin, he was beating his head against the cistern, the tears catching in the folds of his cheeks."<sup>(2)</sup>

When Scobie gets back to his office, he hesitates, opens the letter, assures himself of its innocence (it is heartrendingly pathetic and sincere) and destroys it. We are told, "Scobie against the strictest orders was exercising his own imperfect judgment."<sup>(3)</sup> This sentence, in the context, is heavily ironic: for "perfect judgment", the judgment of the 'proper authorities', it has been implied, would automatically result in the ruin of an innocent man.

Having burnt the letter - which Greene has made clear is the humane and decent thing to do - Scobie feels,

"he had joined the ranks of the corrupt police officers - Bailey who had kept a safe deposit in another city, Crayshaw who had been found with diamonds, Boyston against whom nothing had definitely been proved and who had been invalidated out. They had been corrupted by money, and he had been corrupted by sentiment."<sup>(4)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.50

(2) Ibid. p.50

(3) Ibid. p.52

(4) Ibid. p.53

This is dishonest. For Scobie to see his contravention of the navicert regulations as the moral equivalent of being corrupted for financial gain is unbalanced on any view. But the judgment at least demands that the regulations are seen as having an absolute moral value: that the fate of nations depends on their being rigidly upheld in all circumstances, or something of the sort. But they haven't been treated with this sort of seriousness at all. On the contrary, Greene's main emphasis throughout the scene has been on the cruel injustice that would result from the rules being kept in this particular instance. Moreover, the scene is presented from Scobie's point of view. It is Scobie who thinks, "These men weren't criminals ...!" etc. and feels uncomfortable at having to undertake the search at all. In this context, his self-reproaches are absurd and contradictory.

The next stage in Scobie's 'decline' also provides him with opportunities for self-reproach, without in any way genuinely diminishing his moral status. To fulfil his promise to Louise he borrows her passage money (at the normal rate of interest) from the only man who is prepared to lend it to him, Yusef, a shady Syrian trader who is suspected of being involved in the diamond smuggling racket. This is a highly imprudent action for a police officer, but not a dishonest or immoral one. Scobie, however, thinks of "the enormous breach pity had blasted through his integrity".<sup>(1)</sup> And some time afterwards when he visits Yusef, he walks into

"the little room where nearly  
two months ago now he had lost

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(1) Ibid. p.109

his integrity ... he had returned to the scene of a crime. Useless to tell himself that he had committed no offence. Like a woman who has made a loveless marriage he recognised in the room as anonymous as a hotel bedroom the memory of an adultery ... Scobie stared again around the room, but he had examined it already when he came here to arrange his loan: there was no change - the same hideous mauve silk cushions, the thread showing through where the damp was rotting the covers: the tangerine curtains: even the blue syphon of soda was in the same place: they had an eternal air like the furnishings of hell."<sup>(1)</sup>

Phase three is adultery. Some careful juggling is required to present this also as an act at once innocent and guilt-provoking. But Greene has had nearly twenty years of novel-writing in which to master this sort of equivocation, and his handling of Scobie's adultery is a very smooth performance. Just how smooth can be appreciated by comparing Scobie's adultery with Conrad's in It's a Battlefield, which in many ways it resembles. Scobie's adultery, like Conrad's, is inspired by pity. But the sexual motive

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(1) Ibid. pp.141-142

which in Conrad's case was conspicuous despite Greene's efforts to disguise it is in Scobie's case kept well out of sight.

Helen, a nineteen year-old widow, is "carried into [Scobie's] life"<sup>(1)</sup>, unconscious, on a stretcher, clutching a stamp album. The stamp album indicates her helpless, childish innocence, as the "starving native children" did Milly's. She is one of a group of survivors of a torpedoing brought into Pende after forty days at sea in an open boat. When, some weeks later, a relationship forms between Helen and Scobie, it is founded upon her childish dependance and upon his tormented emotions of pity and responsibility towards suffering humanity, which the scenes at the temporary hospital in Pende are designed to reveal in the most flattering possible light.

Scobie, who, with the departure of Louise, has had his first taste of peace for years, is jolted out of his brief contentment by the sight of the survivors of the harrowing Atlantic ordeal. He feels he has shed his responsibility for Louise, only to take on responsibility for the world:

"This was the responsibility he shared with all human beings ... What an absurd thing it was to expect happiness in a world full of misery. He had cut down his own needs to a minimum ... but one still has one's eyes, he thought, one's ears. Point me out the happy man and I will point

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(1) Ibid. p.115

you out either egotism, evil -  
or else an absolute ignorance." (1)

Among the survivors are three children - Helen is seen as one of them, and it is in her childishness that her only appeal for Scobie lies. "It was the stamp-album and not the face that haunted his memory ... and the wedding-ring loose on the finger, as though a child had dressed up." (2) The children (Helen no more than the other two) arouse Scobie's pity in its acutest, most self-lacerating form. He has to watch one of them die, a little girl of six. What sears him is not the fact that she is dying, but the suffering that she has to endure while she is still alive. (His attitude to death is the same as the whiskey priest's: "Why, after all, should we expect God to punish the innocent with more life". (3))

"He could hear the heavy uneven breathing of the child. It was as if she was carrying a weight with great effort up a long hill. It was an inhuman situation not to be able to carry it for her ... He prayed ... 'Father, look after her. Give her peace.' The breathing broke, choked, began again with terrible effort. Looking between his fingers he could see the six-year-old-face convulsed like a

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(1) Ibid. pp.116-117

(2) Ibid. p.117

(3) PG p.201

navvy's with labour. 'Father,' he prayed, 'give her peace. Take away my peace forever, but give her peace.' The sweat broke out on his hands. 'Father ...'"(1)

Scobie, like the whiskey priest, has bargained away his soul. As if in answer to the first part of his prayer, the child's struggles cease in death. By implication, his 'corruption', adultery and all, which from this point onwards is to tumble him with increasing alacrity towards 'damnation', is God's Mephistophelean answer to the second part of the prayer. Greene has been quite explicit about this point in a letter to Marcel Moré:

"Obviously one did have in mind that when he offered up his peace for the child it was genuine prayer and had the results that followed. I always believe that such prayers, though obviously a God would not answer them to the limit of robbing him of a peace forever, are answered up to a point as a kind of test of a man's sincerity and to see whether in fact the offer was merely based on emotion."(2)

Against this idealised background of pity and supreme self-sacrifice the relationship between Scobie

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(1) HM p.118

(2) Quoted in R.W.B. Lewis, "The 'Trilogy' of Graham Greene" in Modern Fiction Studies, Autumn 1957 p.214

and Helen is developed. The note struck in the hospital scenes is maintained: Scobie's feelings towards Helen are pitying, fatherly and protective. Helen is thirty years younger than he is, "a stupid and bewildered child"<sup>(1)</sup>, "ugly with the temporary ugliness of a child."<sup>(2)</sup>

"The ugliness was like handcuffs on his wrists ... He had no sense of responsibility towards the beautiful and the graceful and the intelligent. They could find their own way. It was the face for which nobody would go out of his way, the face that would never catch the covert look, the face which would soon be used to rebuffs and indifference that demanded his allegiance. The word 'pity' is used as loosely as the word 'love': the terrible promiscuous passion which so few experience."<sup>(3)</sup>

As Scobie thinks of what life has done to Helen, of what it might still hold in store for her, he feels a painful sense of responsibility. "Sadly like an evening tide he felt responsibility bearing him up the shore."<sup>(4)</sup>

One evening while Scobie is visiting Helen -

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(1) Ibid. p.150

(2) Ibid. p.152

(3) Ibid. p.152

(4) Ibid. p.149

he has brought her some stamps for her collection - a minor official called Bagster knocks at her door with lascivious intent. "Be a sport Helen. Only Freddie Bagster,"<sup>(1)</sup> he wheedles drunkenly. Helen stands close to Scobie, frozen and terrified, and in saving her from a fate worse than death Scobie sleeps with her himself. "What they had both thought was safety proved to have been the camouflage of the enemy who works in terms of friendship, trust and pity."<sup>(2)</sup>

In the next scene Scobie has just reached home. The time is 4.25 a.m. "... somewhere between the Nissen hut and home he had mislaid his joy."<sup>(3)</sup> Gloomily he thinks of the lies they are going to tell, and reproaches himself for what he has done:

"The responsibility as well as the guilt was his - he was not a Bagster: he knew what he was about. He had sworn to preserve Louise's happiness, and now he had accepted another and contradictory responsibility. He felt tired by all the lies he would some time have to tell: he felt the wounds of all those victims who had not yet bled. Lying back on the pillow he stared sleeplessly out towards the grey early morning tide. Somewhere on the face of those obscure waters moved the sense of yet another wrong and another victim,

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(1) Ibid. p.153

(2) Ibid. p.153

(3) Ibid. p.153

not Louise, not Helen. Away in the town the cocks began to crow for the false dawn."<sup>(1)</sup>

Despite the fact that Scobie has committed adultery, which, according to the religious morality that the book pretends to endorse, is a mortal sin, and despite Scobie's remorse at having simultaneously offended against Louise, Helen and God, the reader is left with the impression that at stage three of his descent into darkness Scobie still hasn't done anything genuinely wrong. His adultery has been delicately, even evasively handled. In the background there is the supernatural motive, the bargain with God. The selflessness and purity of his feelings for Helen have been repeatedly stressed. We have been told that "his body in this climate had lost the sense of lust"<sup>(2)</sup>, and finally given to understand that he has somehow been betrayed by his pity into sleeping with Helen. ("One presumes," says O'Brien, "that his constitution had recovered from the climate ..."<sup>(3)</sup>) Scobie's subsequent self-accusations do nothing to bring his 'sin' more clearly into focus: they have a vague, romantic, elegiac quality, which puts him in an attractively penitential light without emphasising the alleged blackness of the deed that has occasioned the penitence: "Somewhere on the face of those obscure waters moved the sense of yet another wrong and another victim, not Louise nor Helen. Away in the town the

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(1) Ibid. p.154

(2) Ibid. p.151

(3) Op.cit. p.69

cocks began to crow ..."

Notably absent both from the adultery scene and from the remorse is the sense of ugly degradation that accompanies the sexual endeavours of the other characters in the book: Wilson reducing himself to "human nature" in his visit to the brothel; Wilson (in the rejected scene) kissing Louise against a background of crude graffiti, their mouths clinging "like bi-valves", Louise's humiliating laughter, Wilson's shorts flapping, "'in a body like a grave'"<sup>(1)</sup>; Bagster "howling", animal-like, outside Helen's door.

The omission is even more striking in a later scene, where Scobie, supposedly remorseful at his sin, finds himself unable to repent it. He thinks that Father Rank would tell him, "speaking in those terrible abstract terms", to avoid the 'woman' and the 'occasion':

"Helen - the woman, the occasion,  
no longer the bewildered child  
clutching the stamp album, listening  
to Bagster howling outside the  
door: that moment of peace and  
darkness and tenderness and pity  
'adultery'."<sup>(2)</sup>

It is clear that in this version of the adultery (which is a reasonably accurate summary of all that was allowed to emerge in the adultery scene itself) Scobie's action is being presented as (a) not degrading, (b) not sinful and (c) not even sexual. A child clutching a stamp album and a moment of pity and peace do not by themselves add up to adultery: something is being left

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(1) See Appendix below: passim

(2) Ibid. p.211

out, in a sentimental attempt to present Scobie's action in a surreptitiously ideal light.

Scobie persists in his adultery - but purely for Helen's sake. He presumably continues to sleep with her, as he presumably slept with her in the first place. But sex is obviously the least important element in their relationship. Helen's main, in fact, sole function in Scobie's 'sinful' life is to provide him with a "contradictory responsibility". Scobie has sworn to keep Louise happy. Now he is answerable for Helen, and the two obligations are mutually exclusive.

Helen starts to nag him unreasonably for the discretion with which he conducts their affair. (His caution is on Louise's account, and hers, not his own.) From being childlike, Helen becomes Louise-like. "He thought wearily, if I shut my eyes it might almost be Louise speaking."<sup>(1)</sup> He feels guilty and responsible for Helen's unhappiness. Having pitied Helen the child, he now pities Helen the neurotic. "Pity smouldered like decay in his heart. He would never rid himself of it. He knew from experience how passion died away and how love went, but pity always stayed. Nothing ever diminished pity. The conditions of life nurtured it. There was only one person in the world who was unpitiable - himself."<sup>(2)</sup>

There is no pleasure or happiness for Scobie in this affair. When at the end of a hysterical tirade, Helen screams at him, "'Go to hell ... and don't come back!'"<sup>(3)</sup> Scobie longs to take her at her

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(1) Ibid. p.170

(2) Ibid. p.170

(3) Ibid. p.178

word.

"He thought, I'd write to Louise and in the evening go to Confession: the day after that God would return to me in a priest's hands: life would be simple again. He would be at peace ... Virtue, the good life tempted him like sin."<sup>(1)</sup>

But Scobie can't leave Helen because her need of him is desperate. She admits this when he reluctantly returns to her the day after the row:

"'If you hadn't come back ...' she said, and became lost in thought ... He could see her searching for herself, frowning in the effort to see where she would have been ... 'I don't know. Perhaps I'd have slugged with Bagster, or killed myself, or both.'<sup>(2)</sup>

Scobie is forced to swear, "'I'll always be here if you need me, as long as I'm alive.'<sup>(3)</sup> "... that constituted an oath as ineffaceable as the vow by the Ealing altar."<sup>(4)</sup>

Out of pity for Helen's unhappiness, Scobie writes her a deliberately indiscreet letter:

"He wrote: My darling - he

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(1) Ibid. p.178

(2) Ibid. p.179

(3) Ibid. p.179

(4) Ibid. p.181

wanted to put himself entirely in her hands but to leave her anonymous ... I love you more than myself, more than my wife, more than God I think ..."(1)

As he takes the letter to deposit under Helen's door, he carries "a sense of corruption up the hill ... The sky wept endlessly around him: he had the sense of wounds that never healed. He said softly aloud, 'O God, I have deserted you. Do not you desert me.'"(2) The action which has prompted Scobie's self-disgust has, characteristically, been presented as entirely noble and self-sacrificing: "he wanted to put himself entirely in her hands but to leave her anonymous."

Helen never gets the letter: it is stolen. Heroically, Scobie tries to hide from her the extent of the damage. "'Don't worry ... it said nothing really - nothing a stranger would understand.'"(3)

The plot thickens. Scobie feels "life ... closing in on him."(4) A telegram arrives from Louise to say that she is coming home. Helen nags. Wilson spies. And Yusef blackmails. It is he who has stolen Scobie's letter, and he now threatens to hand it to Louise as soon as she lands unless Scobie helps him smuggle some diamonds out of the colony. Scobie submits - not out of moral cowardice, but for Louise's

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(1) Ibid. p.173

(2) Ibid. pp.173-174

(3) Ibid. p.180

(4) Ibid. p.188

sake. "It would be a cold welcome, he thought."<sup>(1)</sup>  
"Oh, Major Scobie," says the villain, Yusef, who  
genuinely likes and admires him, "what made you write  
such a letter. It was asking for trouble ... it put  
you in my hands." And Scobie, ever indifferent to  
his own welfare, replies, "I wouldn't mind that so  
much. But to put three people in your hands ..."<sup>(2)</sup>  
A smuggler he may be, but conspicuously pure in heart.

Scobie's 'disintegration' proceeds. Louise,  
when she returns, insists on his accompanying her to  
communion, which since he is in a state of mortal sin  
would involve him in sacrilege. Louise, though Scobie  
doesn't know it, is deliberately putting him to a test.  
A 'friend' in the colony has written to her about his  
affair with Helen and this is the reason for her return.  
If Scobie evades communion she will know that he is  
still carrying on his adulterous affair. Scobie knows  
none of this, but he does know that to avoid communion  
will arouse Louise's suspicions. He feels trapped.  
For Louise's sake he must take communion: for God's  
sake he mustn't do so in a state of mortal sin ("It's  
like striking God when he's down,"<sup>(3)</sup> he explains to  
Helen): and for Helen's sake he must persist in the  
sin.

Scobie feels literally nauseated by his pre-  
dicament:

"He drove unsteadily down the  
road, his eyes blurred with nausea.  
O God, he thought, the decisions

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(1) Ibid. p.192

(2) Ibid. p.191

(3) Ibid. p.203

you force on people ... I am too tired to think: this ought to be worked out on paper like a problem in mathematics, and the answer arrived at without pain. But the pain made him physically sick, so that he retched over the wheel. The trouble is, he thought, we know the answers - we Catholics are damned by our knowledge. There is no need for me to work anything out - there is only one answer, to bend down in the confessional and say, 'Since my last confession I have committed adultery so many times, etcetera and etcetera'; to hear Father Rank telling me to avoid the occasion: never see the woman alone (speaking in those terrible abstract terms: Helen - the woman, the occasion, no longer the bewildered child clutching the stamp album, listening to Bagster Howling outside the door: that moment of peace and darkness and tenderness and pity 'adultery'). And I to make my act of contrition, the promise 'never more to offend thee', and then tomorrow the Communion: taking God in my mouth in what they call a State of Grace. That's the right answer - there is no other answer: to save my own soul and abandon her to Bagster

and despair."(1)

He goes into a church and prays for "a miracle":

"O God convince me, help me.  
Make me feel I am more important than  
that child.' It was not Helen's  
face he saw as he prayed but the  
dying child who had called him  
father: a face in a photograph  
staring from the dressing-table  
[his own dead daughter]: the face  
of a black girl of twelve a sailor  
had raped and killed glaring up  
blindly at him in a yellow paraffin  
light. 'Make me put my soul first.  
Give me trust in your mercy to the  
one I abandon' ... nausea twisted  
him again on his knees. 'O God,'  
he said, 'if instead I should  
abandon you, punish me but let the  
others get some happiness.'"(2)

It is in these passages, I think, that we  
come to the dishonest core of the novel. Scobie, as  
a Catholic, "knows" what he ought to do: break with  
Helen, repent his sin, and take communion in a State  
of Grace. But the whole point of these passages is  
to undermine surreptitiously the Catholic code which  
they pretend to offer as a moral imperative. At the  
same time as Greene insists that the Catholic rules are  
binding, he is covertly presenting them as abstract,

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(1) Ibid. p.211

(2) Ibid. p.212

cruel and irrelevant. In Catholic terms, the innocent vulnerable, childish Helen becomes 'the woman' and Scobie's pure, noble act of pity and tenderness (for this is how we are to see it) becomes 'adultery'. There is a heavy, sentimental, emotional pressure on the reader to reject the Catholic definitions. In the same way the Catholic solution to Scobie's predicament, ostensibly being offered as the virtuous, the 'right' course to take, is surreptitiously being presented as the wrong, selfish, callous thing to do. "O God," Scobie prays, "Convince me, help me, convince me. Make me feel that I am more important than that child." And as he prays he sees not Helen's face but all the suffering children he has known. To do the 'right thing' is to make helpless innocence suffer. By abandoning Helen to "Bagster and despair" Scobie would achieve "what they call a State of Grace". There is a marked similarity between these passages and the less skilfully dishonest passage in It's a Battlefield, where Conrad pretended to apply "other people's labels" - "mortal sin" and "the bitterest wrong" - to an act which had been "so short, so lovely, so unsatisfactory".

Throughout the book, but most detectably here, Greene juggles dishonestly with what are essentially two entirely different kinds of morality. The one morality consists of blindly following conventional rules whatever the consequences: 'Thou shalt not commit adultery': 'Thou shalt not commit a sacrilege': 'Thou shalt not contravene the navicert regulations nor smuggle diamonds out of the colony.' The second morality is more profoundly based on generosity, concern for others and self-sacrifice. Its only rule is 'Love your neighbour more than yourself.' The two moralities are brought into conflict. Scobie breaks

all the conventional rules in obedience to the one rule that really counts for him: Love your neighbour... The conflict, however, is neither serious nor honestly handled. The conventional rules, despite the fuss that is made at their contravention, are nugatory, do not provide a genuine claim against the morality of love which they are made to oppose. Scobie's repeated infringements of conventional moral and religious rules leave his virtue and real integrity conspicuously unimpaired.

Scobie, of course, takes the sacrilegious communion. He cannot desert Helen - "push innocence back ... under the Atlantic surge."<sup>(1)</sup> Nor can he hurt Louise. "Once and for all now at whatever eternal cost, he was determined that he would clear himself in her eyes and give her the reassurance she needed."<sup>(2)</sup> Nobly he forfeits salvation for the peace of mind of two undeserving women. The ungrateful Helen doesn't even realise what he has done for her. "'It's all hoey to me,'"<sup>(3)</sup> she says: she is an invincibly ignorant protestant.

Characteristically, Scobie sees his heroic sacrifice as an act of the utmost degradation: also characteristically, he manages to emphasise his nobility in the course of his self-castigations:

"Those ruined priests who presided at a Black Mass, consecrating the host over the naked body of a woman, consuming God

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(1) Ibid. p.216

(2) Ibid. p.214

(3) Ibid. p.203

in an absurd and horrifying ritual, were at least performing the act of damnation with an emotion larger than human love: they were doing it from hate of God or some odd perverse devotion to God's enemy. But he had no love of evil or hate of God ... He was desecrating God because he loved a woman - was it even love or was it just a feeling of responsibility? He tried again to excuse himself: 'You can look after yourself. You survive the Cross every day. You can only suffer. You can never be lost. Admit you must come second to these others.' And myself, he thought, watching ... his own damnation being prepared like a meal at the altar, I must come last: I am the Deputy Commissioner of Police ... I am the responsible man. It is my job to look after these others. I am conditioned to serve."<sup>(1)</sup>

As he takes the host in his mouth, Scobie repeats the sacrifice he made for the dying child at Pende; but now he makes it for Helen and Louise.

"O God, I offer up my damnation to you. Take it. Use it for

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(1) Ibid. p.215

them,' and [he] was aware of the pale papery taste of his eternal sentence on the tongue."<sup>(1)</sup>

Scobie feels that he carries corruption around inside him. "It's the coating of my stomach."<sup>(2)</sup> His 'disintegration' proceeds rapidly. Greene implicates him - but only ambiguously - in the murder of his faithful servant Ali. He leaves Scobie implicated just long enough for him to feel the utmost self-revulsion and then smartly extricates him again.

Scobie starts to feel that Ali, whom he has trusted for fifteen years, is spying on him. As a result of his own corruption, Scobie has lost "the trick of trust."<sup>(3)</sup> "If I can lie and betray," he thinks, "so can others. Wouldn't many people gamble on my honesty and lose their stake? Why should I lose my stake on Ali?"<sup>(4)</sup>

Scobie goes to visit Yusef. His reasons for doing so are shrouded in obscurity. He feels an "odd yearning"<sup>(5)</sup> towards his blackmailer, a companion in corruption. "In this new world of lies his blackmailer was at home: he knew the paths: he could advise: even help ..."<sup>(6)</sup> Greene tails off before any significant

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(1) Ibid. p.217

(2) Ibid. p.224

(3) Ibid. p.225

(4) Ibid. p.221

(5) Ibid. p.229

(6) Ibid. p.230

revelations can be made.

Yusef is delighted to see Scobie. "This is the first time you have ever honoured my office, Major Scobie," he says. And Scobie replies "I don't know why I am here now Yusef." The two of them talk, and eventually Scobie tells Yusef of his worry that Ali could ruin him. "But you trust Ali?" Yusef asks. And Scobie replies, "I think I trust him." Then he says: "But he knows about you too!"<sup>(1)</sup>, which rather looks as though he is gently nudging Yusef into action. He has the "odd sense of having for the first time in his life shifted his burden elsewhere."<sup>(2)</sup> Yusef makes vague but sinister-sounding promises about "looking after" Scobie and "making Ali trustworthy". "You mustn't ask me questions, Major Scobie," he says. "You must leave everything to me just this once. I understand the way."<sup>(3)</sup> Scobie is "touched by uneasiness, as though he has accidentally set in motion a powerful machine that he couldn't control."<sup>(4)</sup> Then, at the unaccustomed sensation of being 'looked after', "a kind of nursery peace descended."<sup>(5)</sup> Still uneasy, he hands over a token which will make Ali follow Yusef's messenger to the office. "It seemed to him that he had rotted so far that it was useless to make any effort. God was lodged in his body - and his body was corrupting outwards from that seed ... It seemed to

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(1) Ibid. p.233

(2) Ibid. p.233

(3) Ibid. p.233

(4) Ibid. p.233

(5) Ibid. p.233

Scobie that now or never he must ask what was Yusef's plan, but the weariness of his corruption halted his tongue."<sup>(1)</sup> Scobie waits uneasily for Ali's arrival, and is finally aroused from his obscure lethargy by the sound of a cry outside on the wharf. He rushes out and finds the body of Ali with its throat cut. "He swore aloud, hysterically. 'By God, I'll get the man who did this,' but under that anonymous stare insincerity withered. He thought: I am the man. Didn't I know all the time in Yusef's room that something was planned? Couldn't I have pressed for an answer?"<sup>(2)</sup>

For once the answer to Scobie's self-accusing questions appears to be 'yes'. The scene between him and Yusef is blurred in its effects: but the only possible explanation of it seems to be a sinister, unspoken and unacknowledged collusion, with Scobie not really admitting to himself what he is doing, reluctant to do it, but too paralysed by self-disgust to prevent himself from sliding deeper into corruption than he is already. His final accusation against himself seems to put the matter beyond doubt: "'I am the man ... Didn't I know all the time ... that something was planned?'" Greene, however, allows Scobie just one more bitter flood of self-reproach before exonerating him completely.

The next day Helen, who has just heard about the murder, asks Scobie (rather oddly), "'Did you do it?'"

"'I didn't cut his throat myself,' he said. 'But he died

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(1) Ibid. p.235

(2) Ibid. p.238

because I existed.'

"'Do you know who did it?'

"'I don't know who held the knife. A wharf rat, I suppose. Yusef's boy who was with him has disappeared. Perhaps he did it or perhaps he's dead too. We will never prove anything. I doubt if Yusef intended it.'"(1)

Now this just doesn't make sense, for there is no suggestion here that Scobie is being untruthful. First we see him apparently acquiescing in Yusef's plan. Then we see him blaming himself for this acquiescence. And finally we learn that there was no plan - or at least that Scobie doesn't think there was, which means there was no acquiescence.

The explanation of this contradiction is that Greene is again being evasive about Scobie's guilt - but much more clumsily than usual. The incident fits into the general pattern of the book: Scobie sinks deeper and deeper into corruption without being guilty of any wrong-doing. The typical way in which Greene handles this paradox is by being shifty about what constitutes wrong-doing, but here he has blundered into a factual contradiction.

At any rate, by whatever dubious means, Scobie's innocence in connection with Ali's death has been established. And, his innocence established, Scobie continues to reproach himself in tones which remain hysterical though the charge is reduced to "'he died because I existed'".

Scobie, virtue intact, has reached the utmost

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(1) Ibid. p.241

depths of self-disgust. He sees himself as an infection injuring those whom he loves, Louise and Helen and God, simply by continuing to exist. He decides to kill himself to rid his 'victims' of himself. His motive for suicide - "the worst crime a Catholic could commit" - is the noble self-sacrificing pity which has prompted all his other actions: pity for Louise and Helen; pity for God whom he sees as reeling "punch-drunk"<sup>(1)</sup> from the shower of blows inflicted by his repeated acts of sacrilege.

"I can't desert either of them while I am alive but I can die and remove myself from their bloodstream. They are ill with me and I can cure them. And you too God - you are ill with me. I can't go on month after month, insulting you. I can't face coming up to the altar at Christmas - your birthday feast - and taking your body and blood for the sake of a lie. You'll be better off if you lose me once and for all. I know what I am doing. I am not pleading for mercy. I am going to damn myself, whatever that means. I've longed for peace - and now I am never going to know peace again. But you'll be at peace when I am out of your reach ... you'll be able to forget

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(1) Ibid. p.228

me God, for eternity."(1)

Scobie takes an overdose of sleeping tablets, having first faked the symptoms of angina to avoid hurting Louise and Helen. As he dies, he tries to make an act of contrition but can't "remember what it was that he had to be sorry for."(2) He has the sense that someone is calling him in pain, someone outside, "seeking to get in, someone appealing for help, someone in need of him. And automatically at the call of need, at the cry of a victim, Scobie strung himself up to act. He dredged his consciousness up from an infinite distance in order to make some reply. He said aloud, 'Dear God, I love ...!'"(3), and he dies. As he falls a medal of an obscure saint drops out of his pocket - "the saint whose name nobody could remember."(4) At the end of the novel Father Rank tells Louise "'It may seem an odd thing to say - when a man's as wrong as he was - but I think from what I saw of him that he really loved God.'"(5)

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During his 'Catholic' period Greene wrote two entertainments, The Confidential Agent (1939) and The Ministry of Fear (1943). Neither of these has a Catholic theme, but the heroes might be said to be

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(1) Ibid. pp.243-250

(2) Ibid. p.256

(3) Ibid. p.257

(4) Ibid. p.257

(5) Ibid. p.264

secular versions of the whiskey priest and Scobie - as Raven was a secular version of Pinkie. Several critics have commented on the way that Greene's entertainments seem to act as curtain raisers to his serious novels. Stamboul Train had also been closely related in its structure and theme to It's a Battlefield.

The Ministry of Fear, like The Heart of the Matter, is about pity, which is again ostensibly being treated as an ambiguous emotion. "We are trapped and betrayed by our virtues," the hero thinks. "Courage smashes a cathedral, endurance lets a city starve, pity kills."<sup>(1)</sup>

The hero is Arthur Rowe, who, out of pity, has killed his wife, rather than watch her die of a slow and painful disease. "The papers called it a mercy killing," he says. "Mercy to her or mercy to me. They didn't say. And I don't know even now."<sup>(2)</sup> "He always bit on the word murder as you bite on a sore spot on the tongue; he never used the word without self-accusation. The law had taken the merciful view: he himself took the merciless one."<sup>(3)</sup>

Rowe accidentally stumbles on the activities of a blackmailing Nazi spy ring. The Nazis try to kill him but fail. He sees them as murderers like himself: only less efficient. A young girl, an Austrian refugee, one of Greene's pathetic child-heroines, who falls in love with him, explains that there is a difference between him and the Nazis.

"She said, 'Where I come from I have seen a lot of killings, but

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(1) MF p.79

(2) Ibid. pp.38-39

(3) Ibid. pp.76-7

they were none of them mercy killings. Don't think so much. Give yourself a chance ... You think you are so bad ... but it was only because you couldn't bear the pain. But they can bear pain - other people's pain - endlessly. They are the people who don't care."<sup>(1)</sup>

Rowe doesn't pay any attention to what Anna tells him, but hers is clearly to be taken as the authoritative view.

The Nazis perform one murder, stage another and implicate Rowe in both, so that he will avoid the police. It would have been simpler to kill him, but this is the most preposterous and least satisfactory of Greene's entertainments. An inadequate explanation of the haphazard action is perfunctorily inserted at the end. Greene's real interest is in Rowe.

When Rowe refuses to be intimidated by the threat of a murder charge the Nazis try to kill him again, this time with a bomb in a suitcase. Rowe is hurt and loses consciousness in the explosion. The Nazis, instead of finishing him off, pop him into a very select nursing home run by a mad doctor, one of their blackmail victims. When he recovers consciousness he has lost his adult memories.

Without his memory and without knowledge of the world, Rowe is innocent, carefree and happy. He has, in fact, become a child again. "'You've changed so much,'" says Anna. "'This is how you should have

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(1) Ibid. pp.107-8

been.'"<sup>(1)</sup> He is only occasionally disturbed by a faint, troubling emotion to which he cannot give a name: it is pity, an emotion that a child is not properly capable of.

The last section of the novel is devoted to the rounding up of the Nazi spy ring, and Rowe's re-awakening to the nature of life and the knowledge of his own guilt. He is 'growing up'. He learns again the nature of pain, and to feel sorry for the villains who are being defeated. The pity which floods back into his consciousness is now unambiguously offered as a virtue: it is a mark of maturity, perceptiveness and imagination.

The hero of The Confidential Agent, D., is the Socialists' representative of a country torn by civil war, who comes to England to buy coal which his side desperately needs for victory. He is the confidential agent in whom no one has any confidence - not because he is untrustworthy, but because of the general atmosphere of suspicion, double-dealing and treachery of the war-riven world to which he belongs.

D. has the same integrity and the same frightened yet courageous fidelity to his mission that the whiskey priest has. In his recollections of his academic past, which are a side issue to the action but not to the theme, Greene develops very fully and explicitly his idea of what courage consists of. This idea underlies a number of his novels, including The Man Within, The Power and the Glory and The Quiet American. Courage, for Greene, is not fearlessness, but a triumph over cowardice, which implies an

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(1) Ibid. p.125

imaginative apprehension of what danger and pain really mean. Physical bravery (Pyle has this) is not a virtue, but simply a kind of obtuseness. D. in peace time had been a lecturer in medieval French, and the triumph of his academic career had been the discovery of an unromantic version of The Song of Roland, the Berne MS. The Berne version of the story, it is insisted, is more historical and truer to the nature of life than the romantic versions. In the Berne MS it is the cautious and sensible Oliver, who wants to call back Charlemagne's army when he sees the Saracens arrive, who is the real hero. Roland, who wants to hold the infidel off by himself and whose 'heroism' leads to a lot of unnecessary deaths apart from his own, is a "big boasting courageous fool who was more concerned with his own glory than the victory of his faith."<sup>(1)</sup>

D., with his unassuming heroism and his self-effacing dedication to his socialist faith ("I've chosen certain people who've had the lean portion for some centuries now."<sup>(2)</sup>), is, of course, another Oliver. "'Oh, I'm not an Oliver,'"<sup>(3)</sup> he says as the whiskey priest says, "'Martyrs are not like me.'"<sup>(4)</sup>

Greene wrote this novel on benzedrine in a matter of weeks on the eve of the war in order to provide financial security for his family. His tension has gone into the book, which in the sense of being hunted that it conveys, is paranoid even for him. D.

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(1) CA p.62

(2) Ibid. p.60

(3) Ibid. p.63

(4) PG p.253, for example. The priest actually says this on several occasions.

is pursued and thwarted by the enemy side whose agents loom up unexpectedly wherever he goes, by the members of his own side who one after another turn traitor, and finally, by the dumb English police, when he is made to look responsible for a murder he hasn't committed. The style of the book is more rapid and clipped than anything else that Greene has written, unusually short, breathless, disjointed sentences contributing to its tension and pace. There is a startling preference displayed for the violence and treachery and brutality of the world which D. comes from to the secure, but cheap and meaningless civilisation which he finds in England.

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The End of the Affair (1951) is, like The Power and the Glory, about sanctity achieved through suffering. (Scobie didn't achieve sanctity: he was a saint all along and his sufferings were less the cause than the consequence of his saintliness.) The saint in this novel is Sarah Miles, who, with anguished reluctance gives up an adulterous affair in obedience to a vow made to God. Near the end of the book in a letter to her ex-lover, in which she refuses to run away with him, Sarah writes, in phrases which echo the priest's "we wouldn't even recognise that love. It might even look like hate":

"I came out of the church and saw the crucifix they have there, and I thought, of course he's got mercy, only it's such an odd sort of mercy, it sometimes looks like

punishment."(1)

The evidence of God's intervention in human affairs is more striking in this novel than it was in The Power and the Glory. Miracles replace the more tactfully presented allegory of the earlier book. God brings Sarah's lover, Bendrix, back to life when he has been killed in an air-raid; and after Sarah's death, and through her intercession, He miraculously cures a small boy of a fatal illness, and one of the men who loved her of a hideous facial disfigurement. But if the evidence is more striking, it is also less credible than in The Power and the Glory, where the series of signs and portents, ironies and odd coincidences admitted of a natural as well as supernatural interpretation. Most of the critics of The End of the Affair have found it difficult to accept God advertising His presence in this unmistakable way. Greene himself came to feel that he had been "cheating": "I realise now too late that I was cheating. The incident of the strawberry mark had no place in this book; every so-called miracle should have had a natural explanation ..."(2)

Greene's account of the process by which Sarah achieves sanctity is in a sense more arbitrary than his account of the similar process in the whiskey priest. In The Power and the Glory, had Greene done what he ostensibly set out to do, we would have had a very fully and persuasively dramatised account of a man coming through sin and self-recognition to virtues of

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(1) EA p.143

(2) Introduction to Three Novels. Stockholm, Norstedts, 1962.

humility and love that his earlier 'innocent', self-satisfied existence had precluded. In The End of the Affair it is assumed, but not substantiated in terms of Sarah's character, that suffering is good for the soul.

Sarah, in abandoning Bendrix for God, does not, morally speaking, become a 'better' person. Her adultery is not seen in Christian terms at all. Greene never suggests that her relationship with Bendrix is sinful, or that her marriage vows are sacred or even that she is acting badly towards her husband by being unfaithful. In fact, near the end of the book, poor, decent, utterly inadequate Henry is made to say, "It was a great injury I did to Sarah when I married her. I know that now."<sup>(1)</sup> Sarah, in turning her back on adultery, is turning her back not on sin or wrong-doing, but on happiness. And for the reader who does not share Greene's Christian and/or neurotic belief in the desirability of mortification as an end in itself, the whole rationale of Sarah's sanctification can be hard to accept.

To a great degree the style, passionate, desperate and intense, that Greene has created for Sarah does make her miraculous, supra-rational abandonment to God and unhappiness compelling. In the letter to Bendrix, quoted earlier, she writes:

"But what's the good, Maurice?  
I believe there's a God - I  
believe the whole bag of tricks,  
there's nothing I don't believe,  
they could subdivide the Trinity

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(1) EA p.167

into a dozen parts and I'd believe. They could dig up records that proved Christ had been invented by Pilate to get himself promoted and I'd believe just the same. I've caught belief like a disease. I've fallen into belief like I fell in love. I've never loved before as I love you, and I've never believed in anything before as I believe now. I'm sure. I've never been sure before about anything. When you came in at the door with the blood on your face, I became sure. Once and for all. Even though I didn't know it at the time. I fought belief for longer than I fought love, but I haven't any fight left."<sup>(1)</sup>

There are times, however, in Sarah's diary, her own tortured and genuinely moving account of her conversion and its consequences, where the tone seems to get out of control. There is, for example, the fervid, rapturous welcoming of pain as Sarah forces herself to kiss Smythe's hideously deforming strawberry mark, just after she has rejected his offer of marriage:

"He turned his crinkled scarlet

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(1) Ibid. pp.143-144

cheek towards me. 'You believe in God,' he said. That's easy. You are beautiful. You have no complaint, but why should I love a God who gives a child this?'

"'Dear Richard,' I said, 'there's nothing so very bad ...' I shut my eyes and put my mouth against the mark. I felt sick for a moment because I fear deformity, and he sat quiet and let me kiss him, and I thought I am kissing pain and pain belongs to You as happiness never does. I love You in Your pain. I could almost taste metal and salt in the skin, and I thought, How good You are. You might have killed us with happiness, but You let us be with You in pain."<sup>(1)</sup>

I am not sure how orthodox the religious feeling of this passage is. It probably does belong to one of Christianity's border regions - but only just. The radiant enjoyment of pain as an end in itself - "pain belongs to You as happiness never does" - seems to imply an oddly unbalanced, truncated sort of Christianity, for happiness is surely a part of religion as much as pain is. This seems to take the Christian story as though it ended with the Crucifixion and the Resurrection never happened. In psychological terms it is hard not to see Sarah here as a sort of fervid

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(1) Ibid. p.120

masochist - though I admit it may be the limitations of my own attitude that makes me feel this.

But even if one does accept Sarah's rapt abandonment to a difficult and disgusting action as fulfilling a high Christian ideal, there is surely something wrong and unpleasant about her attitude to Smythe. Sarah doesn't like Smythe very much, although she loves his strawberry mark - or the crucifix which it symbolises for her. Though she refuses his offer of marriage kindly, her thoughts about him are contemptuous. She is irritated by him and by his obtuseness in proposing to her. "I thought angrily, if I haven't left [Henry] for Maurice, why the hell should I be expected to leave him for you?"<sup>(1)</sup> She kisses his deformity not out of any sort of personal affection, but out of a larger, more abstract emotion of pity for suffering. While she is kissing him, she thinks not of him, but of herself and of Christ. She sees his pain not as something which he personally has to endure but as an image for Christ's sufferings and an opportunity for herself to emulate them. "I thought I am kissing pain and pain belongs to You as happiness never does. I love You in Your pain. I could almost taste metal and salt in the skin, and I thought, how good You are." It is clear that Greene would like us to take Sarah's action as a heroic mortification inspired by a profound Christian charity. But it is impossible to accept as charitable an action as insensitive to the feelings of its recipient as Sarah's is. It is, after all, humiliating, if not positively insulting, to be loved for one's strawberry

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(1) Ibid. p.119

mark alone. Smythe asks Sarah not to see him again. "I can't bear your pity," he says. One can hardly blame him. It is not easy to be the object of someone else's charity and a far greater measure of fortitude is required to allow one's own strawberry mark to be kissed than to kiss someone else's. Sarah writes:

"I went away. It wasn't any good staying. I couldn't tell him I envied him, carrying the mark of pain around with him like that, seeing You in the glass every day instead of this dull human thing we call beauty."<sup>(1)</sup>

Greene would obviously like us to see Sarah as superhuman, but it is hard not to see her at this point simply as inhuman. She takes Richard's suffering and welcomes it as symbolising the ideal condition to which in emulation of Christ she aspires. (A little earlier in the diary is a prayer, "Dear God, if only you could come down from your cross and let me get up there instead."<sup>(2)</sup>) But in doing so she is completely oblivious to Richard's actual pain and humiliation and to the fact that she is increasing them. There is an unpleasant sense that in so radiantly seeking to identify with Christ's sufferings, she is crucifying herself not on a block of wood but on another human being.

Sarah's diary interrupts a narrative given

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(1) Ibid. p.120

(2) Ibid. p.118

to Maurice Bendrix, her ex-lover. This is Greene's first use in a novel of the first person technique and his handling of it is masterly. The obvious drawback of the limitations of the narrator's viewpoint he turns into a virtue, deliberately making Bendrix's understanding of events partial, and supplementing his narrative with the diary and the rambling reports of an inefficient private detective to give additional and alternative interpretations of the experiences Bendrix describes.

Bendrix takes up his story at a point two years after Sarah has abruptly and inexplicably left him. This point is a chance meeting with her husband, who not knowing that Bendrix has been her lover, miserably confides his suspicions of her present infidelity. Bendrix's barely dormant hurt, hatred and jealousy are fanned to life by Henry's disclosures. He sets a private detective called Parkis on Sarah's tracks, obsessed with the idea of finding out who his successor is, and whether her current lover is the man she abandoned him for, or the last in a line of casual infidelities. Bendrix has clearly never stopped loving Sarah, although he insists that his story is "a record of hate"<sup>(1)</sup>: hatred of Sarah, of Henry, of the man or men who have supplanted him; hatred also of "that other, in whom in those days we were lucky enough not to believe."<sup>(2)</sup>

Bendrix's narrative dips backwards and forwards in time interweaving the discoveries of the zealous but maladroit Parkis with flashbacks and

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(1) Ibid. p.7

(2) Ibid. p.7

recollections of the past. Some critics <sup>(1)</sup> have found the time sequences unnecessarily hard to follow, but they are, in fact, very skilfully designed to build up piece by piece an intricate picture of two complex characters and a love which is obviously still alive although the affair is over. Bendrix, insisting all the time that he hates Sarah, lovingly recreates his memories of her, gets caught in the longing which they revive and viciously suppresses his feelings in a hatred which is his only defence against pain.

This "record of hate" is actually the first of Greene's novels to deal genuinely and convincingly with love. The nearest he has come to it in the past is in Rose's inexplicable passion for Pinkie and in Anthony's and Kate's half-acknowledged feelings for each other. Greene's other characters have only been capable of the feeble and self-flattering love-surrogate which he calls pity. There is a genuine warmth and rapport between Bendrix and Sarah (which there isn't between the couples who pity and depend), a need and a passion and an absorption in each other which makes this book remarkably unlike anything else that Greene has written. The first of Greene's heroines to have evidently passed the age of consent, Sarah, after a long and dreary line of skinny innocents, starving native children and immature schoolgirls, is also the first to appeal through her beauty, vitality and warmth rather than the pathos of a drained unattractiveness. Desire in this novel is for the first time called desire instead of being apologetically and unconvincingly disguised as pity or despair.

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(1) Atkins and Wyndham

The Sarah whom Bendrix's apparently haphazard recollections are skilfully designed to reveal is brilliantly and consistently the Sarah of the diary. The same qualities of generosity and trust and emotional wholeheartedness with which she gives herself to Bendrix are the basis of her later abandonment to God. Her second 'affair' is in a sense a continuation of the first. It was Maurice, she says, on several occasions, who taught her how to love.

In the figure of Bendrix, Greene's talents for indirection serve him better than they have done in other novels. Bendrix is a more genuinely complex character than any of the earlier heroes, and the fluctuations of his obsessive love-hatred for Sarah are convincingly portrayed under his nearly unremitting insistence that he hates her.

The unflattering self-portrait, with its emphasis on vindictiveness, malice, jealousy and hatred, which Bendrix draws, is not an entirely honest one. Surreptitiously he gives a rather better impression of himself than he pretends to. All his meanness is to some extent condoned by being the product of insecurity or pain. And on a number of occasions his emphasised unkindness - to Parkis or Smythe, for example - is clearly accidental. Sarah's diary continues the covert white-washing of Bendrix's character which his own account of himself begins:

"... Maurice who thinks he hates,  
and loves, loves all the time.  
Even his enemies."<sup>(1)</sup>

"I thought of a new scar

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(1) Ibid. p.99

on his shoulder that wouldn't have been there if once he hadn't tried to protect another man's body from a falling wall. He didn't tell me why he was in hospital those three days: Henry told me. That scar was part of his character as much as his jealousy."<sup>(1)</sup>

Subtly, Sarah's diary directs us to look for the good in Bendrix's character which he will call bad and warns us that he has virtues which he is too modest ever to mention.

If Bendrix's self-portrait is not entirely honest, it is, for once, not entirely dishonest either. Bendrix is the first of Greene's characters (this book is remarkable for its number of 'firsts') to actually do some of the ugly things he accuses himself of doing, and to do them knowingly. There is, for example, his monstrous confrontation of Henry with the evidence (he thinks) of Sarah's infidelity and the unforgivably vicious attack with which he follows it through:

"'You pimped with your ignorance.

You pimped by never learning how to make love with her, so she had to look elsewhere. You pimped by giving opportunities ... You pimped by being a bore and a fool, so now somebody who isn't a bore and a fool is playing about with her in Cedar Road."<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.108

(2) Ibid. p.65

It is clear that Bendrix here is acting compulsively out of jealousy and pain. His vindictiveness has been prompted by a particularly violent convulsion of longing for Sarah. But for once there is no attempt at the total extenuation of his actions that one finds in the other books. He is the first of Greene's heroes to act badly enough to justify his self-disgust, and whose self-reproaches are not simply inverted proofs of innocence.

In the course of his investigations Parkis, despite his incompetence, manages to unearth and purloin Sarah's diary, which he gives to Bendrix. Reading it, Bendrix discovers the truth about Sarah: that she loves still, and that she has left him not for another man but for God. Ironically, he is elated, for he is confident that this shadowy rival is one that he can contend with. His hatred drops from him like the cloak it is. He forces Sarah to see him. She is ill with what he takes to be a bad cold. He tells her to stay in bed for a few days and ring him when she is better. In the week that follows this meeting, he is triumphant and happy, full of optimistic plans for their future together. On the eighth day he gets a telephone call - not from Sarah, but from Henry to tell him she is dead. Bendrix's unscrupulous, all-powerful rival has carried her off, out of his reach.

"There follows," says Francis Wyndham, with evident distaste, "what can only be described as a series of miracles."<sup>(1)</sup> The miracles force the agnostic Bendrix into belief. Fighting frantically, he comes at last to acknowledge God as his enemy and an

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(1) Francis Wyndham: Graham Greene. London, Longmans 1958. p.22

object of hatred. The novel ends there, but with the suggestion that Bendrix's story is not over. Sarah had hated God before she came to love Him, and to accept that what looked like punishment was "such an odd sort of mercy". Bendrix himself has thought he hated Sarah; and he has thought he hated Henry, but since Sarah's death has become very fond of him. Bendrix "thinks he hates, and loves, loves all the time. Even his enemies." The book ends with the broken Bendrix, forced now to admit that God exists, praying at least to be left with his hatred:

"O God, You've done enough,  
You've robbed me of enough, I'm  
too tired and old to learn to  
love, leave me alone for ever."<sup>(1)</sup>

But the prayer sounds the exhausted note of defeat. And it is obvious that God, having brought Bendrix this far, isn't going to let him go.

From The End of the Affair onwards an element of comedy, noticeable but not very marked in the earlier novels, plays an increasingly prominent part in Greene's writing. In the earlier work comedy, usually of a rather black and sardonic kind, goes into the creation of certain minor characters, Drewitt in Brighton Rock and Yusef in The Heart of the Matter, for example, but seldom approaches the novel's central areas. In The End of the Affair Greene has given his own dry, keen wit to Bendrix. Little frequent flashes of pungent irony punctuate a narrative characterised, despite bursts of powerful emotion, by a prevailing dryness of tone. There is also in this

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(1) Ibid. p.187

novel, in the lugubrious and appealing figure of Parkis, a new kind of comedy for Greene: genial, droll and delicately understated. Parkis's reports and several of the scenes in which he makes an appearance are quiet triumphs of comic skill. One of the most successful is the scene in which, his investigations concluded, he presents Bendrix, as a souvenir of their association, with a cheap ashtray, a memento of his most spectacular case:

"I have something here, sir, that might be of interest and use.' He took out of his pocket an object wrapped in tissue paper and slid it shyly across the desk towards me. I unwrapped it. It was a cheap ash-tray marked Hotel Metropole, Brightlingsea. 'There's quite a history, sir, with that. You remember the Bolton case.'

"I can't say I do.'

"It made a great stir, sir, at the time. Lady Bolton, her maid, and the man, sir. All discovered together. That ash-tray stood beside the bed. On the lady's side.'

"You must have collected quite a little museum.'

"I should have given it to Mr. Savage - he took a particular interest - but I am glad now, sir, I didn't. I think you will find the inscription will evoke comment when your friends put out

their cigarettes and there's your answer pat - the Bolton Case. They'll all want to hear more of that.'

"'It sounds sensational.'

"'It's all human nature, sir, isn't it, and human love. Though I was surprised.. Not having expected the third. And the room not large or fashionable. Mrs. Parkis was alive then, but I didn't like to tell her the details. She got disturbed by things.'

"'I'll certainly treasure the memento,' I said.

"'If ash-trays could speak, sir.'

"'Indeed, yes.'"(1)

This is a new note in Greene's fiction, and a very attractive one. One finds it again in subsequent novels - the Smiths in The Comedians are a product of the same gently comic region of the imagination - and in some of the later short stories.

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(1) Ibid. p.85

## CHAPTER V: THE NOVELS: 1955-1969

Greene's last six novels are written at a much lower emotional temperature than those of his 'Catholic' and earlier periods. Hatred of life wanes, though without ever disappearing entirely. Life is still on the whole ugly and unpleasant, but the heroes are more resigned to it, and they suffer less than the earlier characters. The element of comedy - usually, but not always, sardonic - becomes increasingly marked. And Greene's latest novel, Travels With My Aunt, is, up to a point at least, a comic novel.

The guilt inflicted on the Catholic and earlier heroes is in the later novels subdued to a nagging self-distaste - against which the characteristic defences are erected. But the subject of innocence or sanctity in disguise no longer engages Greene so profoundly; and the recent novels, taken as a series, show a steady falling away from this theme. Even The Quiet American which follows a moral pattern very similar to that of The Heart of the Matter, derives nothing like the same degree of overt anguish and concealed satisfaction from its ambiguities. In Travels With My Aunt the guilt-theme disappears altogether; and there appears to be a kind of valedictory reference to it. "Regret your own actions, if you like that kind of wallowing in self-pity,"<sup>(1)</sup> says Henry Pulling's aunt, who is the mouthpiece for the book's mixture of bizarre and shrewd wisdom. There is a strong probability that Greene's gradual abandonment of his ambiguous guilt-theme has something to do with a growth

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(1) TMA p.131

of self-knowledge. The distaste for The Heart of the Matter, which he had originally found the most successful of his novels, evinced in Introduction to Three Novels<sup>(1)</sup>, seems further indication of this.

With the diminishing of Greene's central neurosis (for his dishonest and evasive handling of moral issues is clearly neurotic in origin) a new theme emerges. Broadly, this is boredom and a search for meaning in life. The recent heroes are sardonic and sceptical, their lives are empty (an image which occurs in several books is of life as a "desert"), their personal relationships shallow or non-existent. They stand outside the human condition: Fowler has opted out; Querry is burnt-out; Browne and Pulling have never been in. The essential concern of the novels is with the rehabilitation or reformation of these characters, with their growth in sympathy and understanding, and their learning to involve themselves with other human beings. Commitment, whether of a personal or a public sort, is offered in these novels as an ethical ideal, but it is also offered, with a degree of explicitness which varies from book to book, as an antidote to boredom (sometimes one of several) and a way of giving significance to the heroes' meaningless lives.

Religion, which in the Catholic books had played such an important rôle as an instrument of self-torture, does not disappear altogether, from the subsequent novels, although it no longer serves this function. Faith is in effect another antidote to boredom, though not always an attainable one.

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(1) e.g. on p.37: "Perhaps Scobie should have been the subject for cruel comedy rather than for tragedy..."

During what one might call his post-Catholic period, Greene wrote two entertainments. These are not closely related to the adjacent novels as the earlier entertainments were, but they do reflect a lightening of Greene's mood also apparent in the novels.

The hero of the first of these entertainments, Loser Takes All (1955), does bear a kind of general family resemblance to the sardonic heroes of the period. He is a tender-hearted cynic who nearly loses his wife as a result of his cynicism. At the end of the novel tenderheartedness triumphs and conjugal bliss is restored. The plot which centres on the vagaries of fortune at the gaming tables in Monte Carlo is adroitly handled. And a slick, intelligent, witty surface covers up and to some extent counteracts the sentimentality lurking beneath.

The second entertainment, Our Man in Havana (1958), is a charming and funny spoof spy comedy which pokes sardonic fun at the MI5. It is set in Batista's Cuba, the terrors of which, for all their Greenland potential, are underplayed. This apparently was deliberate: "I had not wanted too black a background for a light-hearted comedy," Greene writes in the preface to the latest edition.<sup>(1)</sup> Those who believe Greenland to be a region of the mind will find it interesting to compare Greene's Cuba with his earlier version of Brighton.

The hero of this novel, Wormold, is closer to Scobie than to any of the later heroes. He has the same sense of overwhelmed responsibility that Scobie had, without his self-pity and his covert resentment

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(1) London, Heineman, 1970. p.xviii

towards those he feels responsible for. Wormold's main concern is his sixteen-year-old daughter, Milly, whose demands on her father's pocket are as exorbitant as Louise's had been on Scobie's soul.

Wormold allows himself to be co-opted into the MI5 in order to be able to provide Milly with a pony she has set her heart on and a year at a finishing school in Switzerland which he has set his heart on for her. He supplies the gullible Secret Service with invented information and sketches of a new 'secret weapon' - careful, magnified drawings of dismantled vacuum cleaners, which in 'real life' it is his business to sell.

Wormold's employers are very impressed: "'Do you know what Savage said to me?'" says the Chief of the Service. "'I can tell you it gave me a very nasty nightmare. He said one of the drawings reminded him of a giant vacuum cleaner ... Fiendish, isn't it? ... The ingenuity, the simplicity, the devilish imagination of the thing.'"<sup>(1)</sup>

Life eventually catches up with Wormold as it usually does with Greene's heroes; and his fantasy reports lead to real destruction when the enemy starts taking him seriously.

In the end the confusion is partially sorted out and the novel ends fairly happily, more because Greene thinks entertainments should than because it has been moving in this direction.

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(1) DMH pp.78-9

The narrator-hero of The Quiet American (1955) is Fowler, a British foreign correspondent in Vietnam. The French are giving up the struggle, the Americans are about to take over in the name of Democracy. The Communists are the only ones who have anything to offer the Vietnamese. Atrocities are equal on both sides. America, for all her high-minded talk, will keep things atrocious. Fowler is disengaged.

"The human condition being what it was, let them fight, let them love, let them murder, I would not be involved. My fellow journalists called themselves correspondents; I preferred the title of reporter. I wrote what I saw: I took no action - even an opinion is a kind of action."<sup>(1)</sup>

Fowler's own broken marriage - he has opted out of that too - belongs to the same region of conflict. He has hurt his wife. She is still intent on hurting him when the opportunity arises. "The other kind of war is more innocent than this," thinks Fowler reading a letter from her, reading her pain between the malicious lines. "One does less damage with a mortar."<sup>(2)</sup>

Into the international situation and into what remains of Fowler's emotional life blunders the 'Quiet American', Pyle, devastatingly armed with a set of boy-scout morals and some well-meaning books on democracy. "I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused,"<sup>(3)</sup> Fowler comments

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(1) QA . p.27

(2) Ibid. p.118

(3) Ibid. p.57

sourly. Pyle takes away Fowler's Annamite mistress whom Fowler would like to marry but can't because his wife, out of a combination of Anglo-Catholicism and spite, refuses to divorce him. Pyle's conscience is clear: "... you do believe me, don't you, that if you'd been married - why, I wouldn't ever come between a man and his wife." (1) In an attempt to establish a democratic Third Force - a notion derived from his reading - Pyle supplies money and bombs to a self-aggrandising bandit called General Thá. The result is a brutal and senseless massacre of fifty civilians. Pyle's conscience is clear about this too: "In a way you could say they died for Democracy," he said." (2) Fowler becomes engaged at last, and, before the unrepentant Pyle can do any more harm, co-operates in a Communist plot to eliminate him.

With Pyle dead, Fowler's private circumstances improve enormously. His ex-mistress, Phuong, returns. And his wife relents and agrees to divorce him. The novel ends with the agnostic Fowler ("I am a reporter. God exists only for leader-writers." (3)) wishing there existed a God to absolve his guilt:

"Everything had gone right with me since he died, but how I wished there existed someone to whom I could say I was sorry." (4)

The reader is left wondering whether the God

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(1) Ibid. p.57

(2) Ibid. p.117

(3) Ibid. p.60

(4) Ibid. p.187

of Greene's Catholic novels is quite the One to turn to for this sort of solace, and also what it is precisely that Fowler has to feel guilty for.

Greene's ostensible concern in this novel is with the inevitably ambiguous nature of moral action. For Pyle morality is a simple matter of a few straightforward rules based on a few grand abstractions like Honour and Democracy. This is precisely why he does so much damage. He measures his actions in terms of a simple, ideal, abstract code, without ever giving a thought to their consequences. He is only concerned with 'playing straight' or 'fighting for Democracy', and it never occurs to him to think of the pain that he causes. "... good intentions, a clear conscience, and to hell with everybody,"<sup>(1)</sup> is Fowler's caustic summary of his ethical outlook. Pyle doesn't even see the war in terms of human suffering. He sees it as a kind of abstract struggle between Good=Democracy and Evil=Communism. Its victims for him are 'enemy dead' or 'sacrifices for democracy.'

Against Pyle's obtuse idealism is set Fowler's sensitive realism. Fowler has a caustic and cynical manner, which to some extent disguises his sensitivity. But he is only caustic and cynical (and often very funny) about things which Greene thinks need deflating: American hypocrisy, American materialism, American education, American journalists, the American way of life. When Fowler is not cutting America down to size he is showing the same horrified concern for humanity's pain that Scobie showed. One can feel it in the restrained anger of his war-reporting:

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(1) Ibid. p.62

"The canal was full of bodies:  
I am reminded now of an Irish Stew  
containing too much meat. The  
bodies overlapped: one head, seal-  
grey, and anonymous as a convict  
with a shaven scalp, stuck up out of  
the water like a buoy. There was no  
blood. I suppose it had flowed away  
a long time ago."<sup>(1)</sup>

Shortly after this we get a description of two dead  
civilians, a mother and child, caught in a cross-fire.

"Twenty yards beyond the farm  
buildings, in a narrow ditch, we  
came on what we sought: a woman  
and a small boy. They were very  
clearly dead: a small neat clot  
of blood on the woman's forehead,  
and the child might have been  
sleeping. He was about six years  
old and he lay like an embryo in  
the womb with his little bony  
knees drawn up. 'Malchance,' the  
lieutenant said. He bent down  
and turned the child over. He  
was wearing a holy medal round  
his neck, and I said to myself, 'The  
juju doesn't work.' There was a  
gnawed piece of loaf under his body.  
I thought, 'I hate war.'"<sup>(2)</sup>

Fowler's sensitivity shows also in his sympathy for the

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(1) Ibid. pp.50-51

(2) Ibid. pp.52-53

French, although he hates what they are doing, for his wife when he receives her hurt, malicious letter, and for the Vietnamese people whom he sees as the innocent victims of an ugly power-struggle between East and West. "You and your like," he tells Pyle, "are trying to make a war with the help of people who just aren't interested."

"They don't want Communism."

"They want enough rice," I said.  
"They don't want to be shot at.  
They want one day to be much the same as another. They don't want our white skins around telling them what they want." (1)

It is Fowler's sensitivity to suffering which makes him with apparent selfishness, stand aside. He refrains from action, not because he doesn't care, but because he cares too much. Unlike Pyle, he knows that actions do have consequences, and he feels one cannot act or become involved without causing pain. (It is clear that Greene endorses this.) "If only it were possible to love without injury," (2) he thinks when he gets the letter from his wife. When a French pilot talks to him about napalm bombing and then goes on to describe the equal barbarities of the Vietminh, Fowler says: "That's why I won't be involved." (3) Life is ugly, pain is inevitable, there is no choice

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(1) Ibid. p.93

(2) Ibid. p.118

(3) Ibid. p.150

between a simple good and a simple bad (as Pyle thinks) only between one kind of evil and another. Better, thinks Fowler, not to choose at all.

When Pyle's naive attempt to turn General Thé and his private army into a national democratic front results in the bombing of innocent civilians in Saigon, Fowler is forced at last to take the kind of action he has always tried to avoid. "'Sooner or later,'" says Heng, the leader of the Communist underground movement, "'one has to take sides. If one is to remain human,'"<sup>(1)</sup> Pyle, still starry-eyed about winning the East for Democracy, is incapable of seeing beyond his idealistic dream to the reality of the pointless suffering he has caused. It doesn't even occur to him to wonder if Thé (whose only motive for the bombing of the civilians was to get himself into the limelight) is quite the material that democrats are made of. "'In the long run he's the only hope we have,'"<sup>(2)</sup> he says, explaining that he intends to continue his association with the General.

Fowler is faced with a choice of remaining uninvolved and allowing Pyle to blunder - 'innocently', because he has no conception of what he is doing - into causing further catastrophes or of helping the Communists to murder him. The image of a mangled baby in the Saigon Square takes its place in his mind with the image of the dead child with its mother in the ditch. Fowler, who has never in any real sense been disengaged, sides with humanity against Pyle. In doing so he condemns himself to a lifetime of

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(1) Ibid. p.172

(2) Ibid. p.174

guilt for having betrayed and murdered a friend.

"Am I the only one who really cared for Pyle?"<sup>(1)</sup> he thinks bitterly after his death. Like Scobie, Fowler is prepared to accept responsibility for wrong-doing for the sake of diminishing other people's suffering.

The novel is elaborately constructed to focus on Fowler's guilt. It opens at the end of the story, with Fowler's growing conviction that Pyle is dead; and the story is narrated in consecutive flash-backs covering their association from the first meeting to the last. The frame for these flash-backs is the remorse-stained present, and a series of interrogations to which Fowler is subjected by a French Police officer. Fowler's defensive parrying of Vigot's questions makes it quite clear that he is implicated in Pyle's death (although it is only near the end of the novel that we learn precisely how and why), and that his conscience is troubling him.

"'Not guilty,' I said. I told myself that it was true ...."<sup>(2)</sup>

"I told myself again that I was innocent ...."<sup>(3)</sup>

"I said, 'You would have made a good priest, Vigot. What is it about you that would make it so easy to confess - if there were anything to confess?'"<sup>(4)</sup>

On the face of it, the novel is a sad,

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(1) Ibid. p.21

(2) Ibid. p.17

(3) Ibid. p.18

(4) Ibid. p.166

sophisticated demonstration of the insurmountable complexities of moral action. The 'human condition', being what it is, man is never faced with a choice between a simple good and evil, only between contrasted forms of evil. Pyle's inability to perceive this is directly related to his extraordinary capacity for harming others. Fowler, who does know this, tries to avoid the problem by standing aside, but is eventually forced into a position where even standing aside is a kind of action. He is faced with the choice between murdering a friend or, in effect, conniving at the murders resulting from his friend's political activities. Holley Martins in the film, The Third Man, is confronted with a similar choice - for Greene's entertainments are no less 'serious' than his novels - although there the connivance would be at a particularly nasty form of black marketeering which leads to the death or deformity of children treated with watered-down penicillin. Like Holley Martins, Fowler chooses the lesser evil, the murder of his friend.

Beneath the surface complexity of his novel, however, Greene's concern (as it has been in his earlier books) is with the unsullied innocence of a hero who through no fault of his own is forced to bear a painful burden of guilt. The problem which confronts Fowler in the case of humanity v. Pyle, although it is made to look difficult, is actually very simple, and admits of an ideal solution. This is the solution which Fowler chooses, the death of Pyle. No real odium can attach to Fowler for choosing to sacrifice one human being for the sake of countless others. Pyle is not, in fact, a human being: he is a semi-comic monster. No more moral outrage is attached to his

death than is attached to the death of a flatly, simply characterised villain in the sort of thriller or spy-story where the moral issues are naively straightforward, where the good characters are good and the bad characters are bad and virtue triumphs in the end. One couldn't paint a blacker picture of 'innocence' than Greene has done in this novel. In the main body of the book, where Pyle is not simply comic - a caricature American - he is extraordinarily imperceptive and obtuse. And in the crucial scene near the end of the novel, where Fowler reluctantly makes his decision, Pyle's complete indifference to the suffering he has caused is callous to the point of implausibility. He has actually been present at the horrifying aftermath of the explosion, has seen the mutilated dead, the mother with what remains of her baby, a trishaw-driver twitching legless at the end of the square. He has literally been pushed into a pool of blood by Fowler:

"'You see what a drum of Dio-lacton can do,' I said, 'in the wrong hands.' I forced him, with my hand on his shoulder, to look around. I said, 'This is the hour when the place is always full of women and children - it's the shopping hour. Why choose that of all hours?'

"He said weakly, 'There was to have been a parade.'

"'And you hoped to catch a few colonels. But the parade was cancelled yesterday, Pyle.'

"'I didn't know.'

"'Didn't know!' I pushed him

into a patch of blood where a stretcher had lain. 'You ought to be better informed.'

"'I was out of town,' he said, looking down at his shoes. 'They should have called it off.'

"'And missed the fun?' I asked him. 'Do you expect General Thé to lose his demonstration? This is better than a parade. Women and children are news, and soldiers aren't in a war. This will hit the world's Press. You've put General Thé on the map all right, Pyle. You've got the Third Force and National Democracy all over your right shoe.'"<sup>(1)</sup>

Six hours afterwards Pyle is unmoved by what he has witnessed:

"'I saw Thé this afternoon ... I dealt with him very severely.' He spoke like the captain of a school-team who has found one of his boys breaking his training. All the same I asked him with a certain hope, 'Have you thrown him over?'

"'I told him that if he made another uncontrolled demonstration we would have no more to do with him.'

"'But haven't you finished

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(1) Ibid. pp.161-162

with him already, Pyle?'....

"'I can't ... In the long run he's the only hope we have. If he came to power with our help, we could rely on him ...'"(1)

A little later in the same scene, Pyle says,

"'And I'm not likely to change either - except with death,' he added merrily.

"'Not even with this morning? Mightn't that change a man's views?'

"'They were only war casualties,' he said. 'It was a pity, but you can't always hit your target. Anyway they died in the right cause ... In a way you could say they died for Democracy..'"(2)

There are occasional traces in the novel of a theoretical intention to strike a kind of balance between Fowler and Pyle, to present both critically yet sympathetically. Pyle is shown heroically risking his own life to save Fowler's - this is the sort of obvious virtue that his simple moral code does promote. And on one or two occasions his sexual innocence is presented as touching. (He believes in the Purity of Woman; and, at the age of thirty-two, is himself a virgin.) But the sporadic attempts to treat Pyle sympathetically are lost in the generally malicious caricature-portrait. On the whole he is

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(1) Ibid. p.174

(2) Ibid. p.177

treated with the contempt displayed towards everything American in this book. "The Minister had a great respect for Pyle - Pyle had taken a good degree in - well, one of those subjects Americans can take degrees in: perhaps public relations or theatrecraft, perhaps even Far Eastern studies (he had read a lot of books)."(1) He goes about his conspiracies eating funny American sandwiches made with "A new sandwich-spread called Vit-Health. My mother sent it from the States ... It tastes rather like Russian salad - only sort of drier.' ... He took a large mouthful and it crunched and crackled." He is wary of the local food: "'I like to know what I'm eating,'" (2) he says, crunching up another bits of sandwich. Even the virtues which Pyle is occasionally allowed are vitiated in the overall picture. His courage is simply physical bravery based on a lack of imagination: "he was incapable of imagining pain or danger to himself as he was incapable of conceiving the pain he might cause others." (3) (It is Fowler, who has the imagination to be afraid but keeps a stiff upper lip in danger, who is the real hero.) As for Pyle's sexual purity, this is so sneeringly introduced in the second chapter of the novel that the later half-hearted attempts to present it as 'touching' have no effect whatsoever. Fowler, after Pyle's death, goes to his flat to collect Phuong's clothes, and looks over his bookshelves. Surreptitiously tucked away behind books on democracy and "a mysterious anthology" called The Triumph of Life,

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(1) Ibid. p.20

(2) Ibid. pp.84-85

(3) Ibid. p.61

ERRATUM: There is no page 309. The discussion  
on page 308 continues on page 310.

is "a paper-backed book called The Physiology of Marriage. Perhaps he was studying sex, as he had studied the East, on paper. And the keyword was marriage. Pyle believed in being involved."<sup>(1)</sup> In this sort of context, Fowler's sporadic claims to have been fond of Pyle (for the purpose of feeling guilty, one presumes) can hardly be seen as other than hypocritical.

To match the half-hearted attempt to present Pyle as more than a simple comic villain, there is an equally half-hearted attempt to present Fowler as less than an ideal hero. "'I am selfish,'" he says, in a context designed to show how unselfish he is. "'I am not involved,'" he says in situations designed to show how perceptively and sensitively involved he is. In the contest over Phuong where Pyle 'plays straight', Fowler plays to win. He does, in fact, act badly and selfishly, but his actions are condoned, and we are clearly intended to feel that his attitude to Phuong is preferable and in the long run less hurtful than Pyle's is:

"We used to speak of sterling qualities. Have we got to talk now about a dollar love? A dollar love, of course, would include marriage and Junior and Mother's Day, even though later it might include Reno or the Virgin Islands or wherever they go nowadays for their divorces. A dollar love had good intentions, a clear conscience, and to hell with

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(1) Ibid. p.28

everybody. But my love had no intentions: it knew the future. All one could do was try to make the future less hard, to break the future gently when it came."<sup>(1)</sup>

Near the end of the novel Fowler compares himself unfavourably with Pyle who by now has taken Phuong from him, because he can offer her the security of marriage. Fowler's initial hurt fury has evaporated:

"All the time that his innocence had angered me, some judge within myself had summed up in his favour, had compared his idealism, his half-baked ideas founded on the works of York Harding, with my cynicism. Oh, I was right about the facts, but wasn't he right too to be young and mistaken, and wasn't he perhaps a better man for a girl to spend her life with?"<sup>(2)</sup>

This passage is intended to convince the reader not of its truth but of Fowler's sweetness and generosity. The whole book is devoted to a contrast between Fowler and Pyle, which shows Fowler not only as 'right' about the facts where Pyle is 'wrong', but also as wise where Pyle is stupid, sensitive where Pyle is obtuse, and sympathetic where Pyle can't even see that sympathy is required. Moreover, earlier in the same scene Fowler has had deep misgivings about what life will be like for Phuong in America. Pyle tells Fowler that he and

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(1) Ibid. p.62

(2) Ibid. pp.155-156

Phuong will be getting married in America:

"'My father and mother would be there - she'd kind of enter the family. It's important in view of the past.'

"'The past?'

"'You know what I mean. I wouldn't want to leave her behind there with any stigma....'

"'Would you leave her behind?'

"'I guess so. My mother's a wonderful woman - she'd take her around, introduce her, you know, kind of fit her in. She'd help to get a home ready for me.'

"I didn't know whether to feel sorry for Phuong or not - she had looked forward so to the skyscrapers and the Statue of Liberty, but she had little idea of all they would involve, Professor and Mrs. Pyle, the women's lunch clubs; would they teach her Canasta?... Strangely I found myself saying... 'Go easy with her, Pyle. Don't force things. She can be hurt like you or me.'"(1)

Trailed over the early parts of the novel like a whiff of red herring, is the half-suggestion that Fowler's motives for eliminating Pyle might have included a wish to get Phuong back. Vigot has his

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(1) Ibid. pp.154-155

suspicious; Fowler is haunted by an obscure guilt; the American Economic Attaché is surprised to see Fowler and Phuong together on the day after Pyle's death. Several critics and reviewers, taken in by the novel's air of sad complexity, have assumed that Fowler's action was genuinely ambiguous: "his motives are suspect to himself, for Pyle has taken his mistress from him," writes Francis Wyndham<sup>(1)</sup>. In the last scenes of the book, however, Greene carefully and repeatedly emphasises that the horror of the catastrophe has driven all thought of Phuong from Fowler's mind. After the explosion Fowler describes the mourners flocking into the Cathedral to pray for their dead and thinks,

"Unlike them, I had reason for thankfulness for wasn't Phuong alive? Hadn't Phuong been 'warned'? But what I remembered was the torso in the square, the baby on its mother's lap. They had not been warned: They had not been sufficiently important..."<sup>(2)</sup>

In the last scene where Fowler reluctantly comes to his decision the point is made again: Pyle says,

"'I know you disagree with me, but we can disagree, can't we, and be friends?'

"'I don't know. I don't think

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(1) Graham Greene. London, Longmans, 1958. p.24

(2) QA p.162

so.'

"'After all, Phuong was much more important than this.'

"'Do you really believe that, Pyle?'

"'Why, she's the most important thing there is. To me. And to you, Thomas.'

"'Not to me any longer.'"(1)

And finally we are told that while the conviction that Pyle is dead is growing on him, Fowler thinks "for the first time since I had known she was safe, of Phuong."(2)

In a genuinely complex novel, the novel that Greene is pretending to write, Fowler could never have been as certain of the purity of his motives as he is made out to be. But under its air of sophistication, this book is a simple one. The hero is very good. The villain is very bad. And virtue triumphs in the end. The Quiet American like The Power and the Glory is a novel which ought to have been very much better than it is, for its intelligence and sophistication are real qualities - but defeated by Greene's inability to stand clear of his hero.

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(1) Ibid. p.175

(2) Ibid. p.181

Query, the hero of A Burnt-Out Case (1961), is a famous Catholic architect, noted also for his numerous love affairs, who has come to the end of religion, vocation and sex. In flight from a life which has grown meaningless, he comes to halt in a leproserie in the heart of the Congo, because, as he explains, "The boat goes no further."<sup>(1)</sup>

Query sees his spiritual condition as analogous to the 'burnt-out' state of a cured and mutilated leper in whom the disease has run its course. Religionless, vocationless and sexless, he is the spiritual equivalent of a leper who has lost his fingers and toes.

The nature of the disease which has led to Query's mutilations is somewhat mysterious, for he identifies it with several different things which appear to have little to do with each other. But his most frequent diagnosis, and the one which seems most directly related to the action, is that his sickness is egotism.

Towards the end of the novel Query tells the story of his life, done up as a fable about a master jeweller, to Marie Rycker, a young married woman who has fallen in love with him. He tells her how the jeweller had once believed that in following his profession he was honouring God, and that in loving many women he was at least "imitating in a faulty way the King's love for his people".<sup>(2)</sup> But when the jeweller lost his faith, Query explains, he realised that everything he had ever done must have been out of love

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(1) BOC p.13

(2) Ibid. p.155

for himself. "How could there be any point any longer in making jewels or making love for his own solitary pleasure?"(1)

The same points are made more directly in a number of long self-explanatory conversations in which he admits that he has never built anything except for his own pleasure, and never made love to a woman except for the same reason. "It was only a question of time before I realised that I didn't love at all. I've never really loved. I'd only accepted love. And then the worst boredom settled in. Because if I had deceived myself with women I had deceived myself with work too."(2) And on another occasion: "Self-expression is a hard and selfish thing. It eats everything, even the self. At the end you find you haven't even got a self to express. I have no interest in anything any more ... I don't want to sleep with a woman nor design a building."(3)

At the opening of the novel Querry, bored and vacant, emotionally 'mutilated', is apparently in the last stages of the 'leprosy' of self-love. Having lost interest in everything, he has lost interest even in himself. He feels nothing, wants nothing, does nothing. But even this state, paradoxically, is a kind of negative egotism. He is totally absorbed in his boredom, in "thinking of [his] own case. It's often the way with the mutilated ..."(4) When the doctor at the leproserie, Doctor Colin, tries to persuade him to design and

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(1) Ibid. p.156

(2) Ibid. p.109

(3) Ibid. p.41

(4) Ibid. p.42

supervise the building of a hospital that is badly needed, Query refuses. "I've come to the end of ... a vocation ... Don't try ... to make me imitate what I used to perform with passion ..."(1) "Just scruples," says Doctor Colin impatiently - "Who cares?"(2) The question, 'Who cares?' goes echoing on obsessively in Query's brain, and it haunts him until, the next day, he agrees to help with the hospital.

The work which he does on the hospital - he is working for others now, not himself - and a gradually growing curiosity about other people effect Query's cure. He becomes modestly involved in the human condition. He makes himself useful, he becomes mildly sympathetic, he learns to feel pity, and he comes to feel remorse for past callousness. In a quiet way he learns to be happy. Doctor Colin, who, with some modifications, accepts Query's diagnosis of his condition, compares his recovery with the process by which the burnt-out leper learns, despite mutilations, to make himself a useful member of the community.

Against Query's own analysis of his condition is set another more flattering one. Three people, an unpleasantly pious margarine manufacturer called Rycker, a morbid priest, Father Thomas, and a corrupt journalist, are determined to see him as a saint, or very nearly. The journalist, Parkinson, simply wants copy: "Though Query spoke to me," he writes untruthfully, "as perhaps he had never spoken to another human soul, with a burning remorse for a past as colourful and cavalier

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(1) Ibid. p.46

(2) Ibid. p.46

as that Saint Francis once led ...'"<sup>(1)</sup> The other two are unctuously sincere. "'You want to know what makes him tick? ... I am sure it is love, a completely selfless love without the barrier of colour or class,'"<sup>(2)</sup> says Rycker. Father Thomas is more precise. He sees Querry's boredom and lack of faith as Aridity and his modest rehabilitation as a State of Heroic Virtue, a condition not far removed from sanctity. "'Don't you see,'" he tells Querry, "'that perhaps you've been given the grace of aridity? Perhaps even now you are walking in the footsteps of St. John of the Cross, the noche oscura.'"<sup>(3)</sup> When Querry tries to insist that he is just burnt-out, Father Thomas says, "'You have a truly wonderful quality of humility.'"<sup>(4)</sup>

Most of the book is devoted to a running debate between the exponents of the Burnt-Out theory and the exponents of the Aridity and allied theories. Everything Querry does is open to conflicting interpretations. On the one view (his own) he is a dead husk of man, destroyed by a self-consuming egotism, who gradually comes alive again through learning to sympathise with other people. On the other view - which is held by the most obnoxious people in the book - he is a near-saint, atoning for a colourful sexual past by giving up worldly glory and pleasure to devote himself to the service of others. On this view Querry's boredom is a kind of disgust at himself and the world carefully engendered by God to turn him to a life of self-abnegation and sacrifice.

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(1) Ibid. pp.130-131

(2) Ibid. p.131

(3) Ibid. p.89

(4) Ibid. p.132

Both interpretations of Querry's character are suggested in the ambiguous autobiographical fable which he tells Marie Rycker. He speaks to her of a jeweller who had been brought up to believe in "a great King", a benevolent and powerful ruler, who watched over everything his subjects did, meting out punishment and reward in accordance with the strictest principles of justice. To be sure the King's rewards sometimes looked uncommonly like punishments and vice versa, but one "had to take both on trust."<sup>(1)</sup> The jeweller himself, as long as he was virtuous, was rewarded by professional failure and the death of his child. Then he quarrelled with his wife, and worked his way through a succession of mistresses. He "broke all the rules he could think of."<sup>(2)</sup> The King punished him by making him rich and famous and allowing him a great deal of pleasure with women. The jeweller had a wonderful life, but the problem was that he grew bored. Then he made a series of discoveries. The first was that, although he had always prided himself on his exceptional capacity for love (his experiences with women had seemed proof of this), he wasn't really capable of love at all. Then he discovered that he wasn't a great artist, but only a clever technician. His art consisted of making elaborate jewelled eggs with gold crosses set on top in honour of the King. Everyone praised him for his masterly technique and the profundity of his subject matter (the gold crosses), but he knew that his work was merely ingenious and trivial. "He knew what the damned fools could do with their

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(1) Ibid. p.150

(2) Ibid. p.151

praise."<sup>(1)</sup> He eventually grew less popular with the masses, but only to be taken up by the serious critics, "the connoisseurs who distrust popular success."<sup>(2)</sup> They called him "the Jeweller of Original Sin"<sup>(3)</sup> and wrote books in which they examined the religious implications of his art. The jeweller's final and most devastating discovery was that he no longer believed in the existence of the King. His heart, "calloused with pride and success", had no room left in it for love of the King: "it had learned to beat only with pride when a jewel was completed or when a woman cried under him, "donne, donne, donne."<sup>(4)</sup> The fable ends:

"He had believed quite sincerely that when he loved his work he was loving the King and that when he made love to a woman he was at least imitating in a faulty way the King's love for his people ... But when he discovered there was no such King as the one he had believed in, he realised too that anything that he had ever done must have been done for love of himself. How could there be any point any longer in making jewels or making love for his own solitary pleasure. Perhaps he had reached the end of his sex and the end of his vocation

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(1) Ibid. p.153

(2) Ibid. p.155

(3) Ibid. p.155

(4) Ibid. p.155

before he made his discovery about the King, or perhaps that discovery brought about the end of everything? I wouldn't know, but I'm told that there were moments when he wondered if his unbelief were not after all a final and conclusive proof of the King's existence. This total vacancy might be his punishment for the rules he had wilfully broken. It was even possible that this was what people meant by pain. The problem was complicated to the point of absurdity ..."(1)

The parable can, of course, be read in two ways. On the one reading the jeweller is an egotist whose artistic and sexual activities have been inspired by self-love, and whose successes in both spheres have so corrupted his heart that there is no room in it left for God. On the other reading the jeweller's story is evidence for God's existence; for the total vacancy which follows his loss of faith can be seen as punishment for his flouting of God's rules. The peculiar feature of these two interpretations is that although they could easily be combined they are not. It would be perfectly reasonable to suppose that God was punishing the jeweller for his egotism, but the second theory loses sight of the egotism theme altogether. The jeweller is being punished not for selfishness and pride, but for the number of mistresses he has had, for "the rules he had wilfully broken". In fact what is happening in the telling of this tale is what has

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(1) Ibid. pp. 155-156

happened so often before in Greene's novels: the hero is surreptitiously edging away from the criticism he appears to be levelling at himself. For Querry's autobiography, while it appears to be consistent with the self-accusations that he has continually been making, indirectly offers evidence for the Aridity/Heroic Virtue version of his character, which up till now he has repudiated.

Querry's fable, for all its specific references to egotism, does not focus on this failing very clearly. The story moves from an opening cynicism about the likelihood of God having much to do with the arrangement of human affairs to the not too tentative conclusion that He might after all be moving in a rather mysterious way. So the structure, the basic design of the fable, gives more emphasis to the paradoxical operations of Divine Providence than to the problem of the jeweller's egotism. Then, although we are told that the jeweller's heart is "'callused with pride and success'", the picture which the fable gives us is not of a proud man at all, but, on the contrary, of one who recognises the hollowness of his success and despises the acclaim that it brings him. Lastly, there is the disingenuousness with which the jeweller's final self-revelation is presented. We are told that he "'had believed quite sincerely that when he loved his work he was loving the King and that when he made love to a woman he was at least imitating in a faulty way the King's love for his people'"; but that when he discovered there was no King, "'he realised that anything he had ever done must have been out of love for himself.'" The most salient feature of this self-analysis is its lack of conviction. The reasoning for a start is specious: for if the jeweller "'sincerely believed'" that his sexual

and artistic activities were ways of expressing his love of God, loss of faith might well bring these activities to a halt, but it could scarcely affect the integrity of the motives that had inspired him while his belief was still alive. The faultiness of Greene's logic is presumably not intentional; but it does seem to spring from a covert desire to make the jeweller's conclusion that he must be an egotist unconvincing. For certainly the jeweller's self-analysis is artificial and evasive in a way that recalls Chase appearing to find evidence of his own corruption in a photograph of Caveda or the priest appearing to find evidence of his in his daughter's sexual precocity. Like Chase and the priest, the jeweller 'recognises' his failing, not by looking at it, but by appearing to find it in something else: in this case he deduces its existence from his present lack of faith. And, as with Chase and the priest, the import of the self-revelation is undermined by the context. For in the final review of his character which accompanies the revelation, the jeweller is describing not an egotist at all, but a man who had "'sincerely believed'" that his actions were inspired by love of God, and who with the loss of his faith feels that there is no significance left in life. "'How could there be any point any longer in making jewels or in making love for his own solitary pleasure?'" He argues, shakily, that if God does not exist, he must be an egotist - and then goes on to offer "'a final and conclusive proof'" of God's existence.

Querry's fable is full of confusions and inconsistencies. It appears to end on a questioning note: was it the jeweller's egotism or his loss of faith that brought his life to its present empty state? At the same time it surreptitiously answers the question by

implying that the jeweller was a man to whom belief in God had been everything. And in giving this answer it ignores the evidence offered earlier of the jeweller's callousness and pride; evidence however, which had been both offered and withdrawn in a most equivocal way.

The question which the fable poses (or pretends to) about the jeweller is, of course, the question which the book raises about Query: is his burnt-out state the result of egotism, or is it the paradoxical grace of Aridity which God is said occasionally to visit on those of profound faith, a stepping-stone to a faith yet more profound?

In the sections of the book which precede the telling of the fable the question is left more or less open. The novel, as I have suggested, is essentially given over to a debate. The characters take up one of three positions. There are those - most of the monks at the leproserie - who are chary about uncanonised saints and refuse to commit themselves. Then there is Query himself who insists that he is suffering the consequences of egotism. Doctor Colin accepts his analysis of his condition up to a point. That is, he agrees that there are natural reasons for it and like Query firmly rejects the supernatural explanations offered by Father Thomas et al. However, it is noticeable that Doctor Colin's estimate of Query's character is a good deal more charitable than Query's own. It is hard to tell exactly what Doctor Colin thinks about Query, for the debate is largely conducted on the level of sustained analogy between Query's spiritual condition and the various stages of leprosy: so that when Doctor Colin calls Query 'burnt-out' one doesn't necessarily know what he means by it. Certainly he never calls Query an egotist (significantly,

nobody but Query ever does), and at one point he appears to offer a modified version of what Query's disease consists of: "It needs a very strong man to survive an introspective and solitary vocation. I don't think you were strong enough. I know I couldn't have stood your life."<sup>(1)</sup> Finally there are those who insist that Query is a saint. These are either fools like Rycker and Father Thomas or knaves like Parkinson; and on the face of it their views would appear to be discounted. Undoubtedly, they always get their facts wrong: Parkinson deliberately, because he writes what people will pay to read, the other two out of an excess of pious enthusiasm. Unexpected support for their views, however, is to be found in the quality of the opposition, an opposition which rests largely with Query himself.

Query categorically repudiates all the pieties attributed to him, but Greene often enough suggests that he doesn't really understand his own motives. There is at least one sequence of scenes in which this is made unmistakably clear. Query has a long row with Parkinson who insists on writing him up for the Sunday papers as a saint atoning for a lurid past. Query argues furiously that he is not expiating anything, that he is a heartless egotist incapable of remorse. Parkinson is convinced: "What a cold-blooded bastard you are,"<sup>(2)</sup> he says - admiringly, because he is a bastard too. The scene over, and Parkinson for the moment disposed of, Query flings himself onto his bed and, in an access of what

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(1) Ibid. p.119

(2) Ibid. p.111

is only too evidently remorse, addresses himself to the wronged ghosts of his past, promising "never again from boredom or vanity to involve another human being in my lack of love. I shall do no more harm, he thought ... 'I am sorry. I really believed that I meant you no harm. I really thought in those days that I acted from love.'"(1)

This scene does crudely what the rest of the book, with its ironic weighing and balancing of different views, on the whole does subtly and skilfully. Querry's every action and motive is looked at first from one angle, then from another; and up to the point of the telling of the fable, Greene (except for his lapse in the remorse-scene) doesn't push Querry too hard in the direction of saintly penitence and self-sacrifice.

From the telling of the fable onwards it becomes increasingly clear that the reader is expected to see Querry as a saint. Not that Greene is ever explicit about this: it is a matter of ingeniously, but not very honestly, shifting emphasis away from the egotism theme.

Querry, in telling the story of the jeweller, changes his position without particularly appearing to do so. Thereafter he continues to insist that he is an egotist but more perfunctorily and sporadically than in the earlier parts of the book.

The last section of the novel shows a general softening of the picture of Querry. Querry dies, in a manner faintly suggestive of martyrdom. He dies from his own virtue for the folly of others. The sympathy which he has acquired (or re-acquired) during his

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(1) Ibid. p.114

stay at the leprosie leads him to involve himself in the problems of the unhappily married Marie Rycker. A childish egotist, she repays his kindness by pretending he is the father of her unborn child in order to make her husband divorce her; and Rycker, before doing this, shoots Query in revenge for the adultery he has not committed.

Query dies with his public reputation for sanctity shattered. ("The Saint who Failed" is the title of Parkinson's last article about him.) But while those who had believed in his piety are disappointed, all those who had refused earlier to see him as a saint appear to change their minds.

The most disconcerting change of face comes from Parkinson, who without for a moment believing in Query's sanctity, has cynically written it up to suit the vulgar spiritual tastes of his reading public. Suddenly he steps out of his role of corrupt distorter of the truth to say to Query, with thoroughly uncharacteristic sincerity:

"'You have buried yourself here, haven't you? You are working for the lepers. You did pursue that man into the forest ... It all adds up, you know, to what people like to call goodness.'"

"'I know my own motives.'"

"'Do you? And did the saints?'"(1)

Shortly after this Doctor Colin shifts over to the 'Aridity' camp, although without appearing to notice

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(1) Ibid. p.164

the implications of what he is saying. Still using the inevitable leprosy analogy, he tells Querry that he is cured of everything, except for his faith: "'Only one sore seems to remain, and you rub it all the time.'"(1) This is true enough, for throughout the book Querry is shown as nostalgic for the faith he has lost and, in a curious way, jealous of those who do believe. He is restless about his lack of faith, not content to live without it, as he is without sex or vocation. This, it is suggested, implies that he has not lost it permanently, but that his boredom is after all the noche oscura that Father Thomas talks about. And if Doctor Colin doesn't fully recognise the implications of what he is saying, Querry does and on the face of it rejects them: "'You are wrong, doctor,'" he says. "'Sometimes you talk like Father Thomas.'"(2) Yet in the same conversation he says enough to confirm Doctor Colin's new diagnosis. "'You must have had a lot of belief once to miss it the way you do,'" says Doctor Colin, and Querry replies:

"'I swallowed their myth whole, if you call that a belief. This is my body and this is my blood. Now when I read that passage it seems so obviously symbolic ... Only in moments of superstition I remember that I gave up the sacrament before I gave up the belief, and the priests would say there was a connection.'"(3)

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(1) Ibid. p.190

(2) Ibid. p.190

(3) Ibid. p.189

At the same time as he offers evidence for the Aridity theory, Query offers yet another explanation for his burnt-out state. This is that his disease is success, "It needs a very strong vocation to withstand success," he says.

"The popular priest and the popular architect - their talents can be killed easily by disgust ... Disgust of praise. How it nauseates, doctor, by its stupidity. The very people who ruined my churches were loudest afterwards in their praise of what I'd built. The books they have written about my work, the pious motives they've attributed to me - they were enough to sicken me of the drawing-board. It needed more faith than I possessed to withstand all that. The praise of priests and pious people - the Ryckers of the world."<sup>(1)</sup>

The interesting feature of this conversation - it is Query's last, interrupted forever by the dramatic eruption of Rycker from the dark and stormy night - is that it shifts the focus away from the egotism theme altogether. Two explanations of Query's burnt-out condition are offered, not entirely consistent, but both quite flattering. The one is that Query, having missed mass, has forfeited grace, therefore lost his faith, and, being a profoundly religious man, can find no savour in life without it. Missing Mass, it should

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(1) Ibid. pp.189-190

be noted, is not morally reprehensible in the way that egotism is: at any rate not in this book, which gives noticeably short shrift to what Greene clearly considers are the formalities and externals of religion. The other explanation for Querry's boredom is that its source is disgust at the nauseating praise he receives for his work. The blame for his burnt-out state is no longer levelled at Querry himself, but at the incomprehension and vulgarity of other people. Far from being the consequence of his own egotism, his boredom is the consequence of virtues like sensitivity, honesty and humility about his achievements: "Most men put up with success comfortably enough," says the doctor. "But you came here." (1)

The book ends with one last conversation, this time between Doctor Colin and the wise and generous Father Superior of the leproserie. Doctor Colin takes up the success theme briefly ("Success is ... a mutilation of the natural man." (2)); and the Superior takes up the Aridity theme. He does this tactfully and tentatively, quoting Pascal, "a man who starts looking for God has already found him." (3) The Father Superior's tentativeness in an odd way lends credence to his views, which are all the more persuasive for his earlier refusal to commit himself on the matter of Querry's spiritual status.

In the course of this conversation, Doctor Colin adds yet another diagnosis of Querry's condition. He now apparently sees Querry as the victim of frigidity:

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(1) Ibid. p.190

(2) Ibid. p.193

(3) Ibid. p.195

"He told me once that all his life he had only made use of women, but I think he saw himself always in the hardest possible light. I even wondered sometimes whether he suffered from a kind of frigidity. Like a woman who changes partners constantly in the hope that one day she will experience the true orgasm. He said that he always went through the motions of love efficiently, even towards God in the days when he believed, but then he found that the love wasn't really there for anything except his work, so in the end he gave up the motions. And afterwards, when he couldn't even pretend that what he felt was love, the motives for work failed him. That was like the crisis of a sickness - when the patient has no more interest in life at all. It is then that people sometimes kill themselves, but he was tough, very tough."<sup>(1)</sup>

What precisely 'frigidity' means in this context is not clear. The doctor's final diagnosis seems less a diagnosis than a simple resumé of the symptoms. Two things, however, do emerge clearly from his speech. The one is that if Querry is not a saint he is at least a hero. And the other is that Querry "'saw himself always in the hardest possible light'" and frigidity,

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(1) Ibid. pp.194-5

whatever it is, is not egotism. Somewhere in drawing his novel to a close Greene has abandoned his original theme.

A Burnt-Out Case is constructed on the same pattern of equivocation and evasion as Greene's other work, but in this book the dishonesty is more perfunctory than usual, and the occasion of less emotional satisfaction to Greene. The novel's conclusion leaves a lot of loose ends, for Querry's egotism is ignored rather than disposed of; whereas in earlier books the central characters are carefully and minutely defended from the criticisms which they fling at themselves. Even more significant in this novel than the comparative perfunctoriness of Querry's defence is the almost purely discursive level at which it takes place. Typically, Greene's heroes are protected from their self-accusations by their own good actions or the conspicuous nobility of their motives; but Querry's defence is conducted largely in the conversations about him. He is an oddly shadowy figure in the middle of the debate he occasions, and does little to justify the pious adulation he receives. And if at the end of the novel the reader is persuaded of his sanctity (as Greene intends him to be) this is less because Querry's own character provides the evidence for it than because of the way Greene has manipulated the debate. Querry, the saint, is an insubstantial figure next to Scobie or Fowler or the whiskey priest.

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Commitment is the most evident theme of The Comedians (1966). The setting for the novel is Haiti under Papa Doc. The corruption and above all the brutality of his régime are of a piece, Greene insists, with the rest of the world. In the course of the book there are several allusions to Cuba and many to Nazi Germany - the heroine's father was hanged as a war criminal, which occasions some of these - which Greene uses to extend his frame of reference. Haiti, like the prison in The Power and the Glory, is "very like the world"<sup>(1)</sup>:

"Haiti was not an exception in a sane world: it was a small slice of everyday taken at random. Baron Samedi walked in all our graveyards."<sup>(2)</sup>

Against the background of violence, political brutality and human suffering, various kinds of commitment and non-involvement are displayed and examined. The "comedians" of the title are those who stand aside. The image, which incorporates both the English word, "comedians", and the French, "comédiens", is applied to anyone whose life is based on pretence, or playing a rôle. This covers a multitude of life-styles from roguery, chronic boastfulness and dilettantish dabbling in the arts to a heroic cultivation of a mask of gaiety in defiance of despair. What the various comedians have in common is the self-centredness of their lives. They act out rôles chosen for reasons of personal gain, or pleasure, or the preservation of their own dignity;

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(1) See above p.216

(2) C p.141

and in doing so they ignore the world's need for involvement and constructive action. In an important scene in which a number of "comedians" identify themselves, and some of the implications of non-involvement are examined, a character who has spent his youth producing stylish imitations of Baudelaire, and who is now leader of an inexperienced and ineffectual guerilla band, bitterly regrets his own particular comedy:

"In my generation we have learnt to paint ... Our novelists are published in Paris - and now they live there too... [And my poems] were quite melodious, weren't they, but they sang the Doctor into power. All our negatives made that one great black positive." (1)

At the end of the book, in a moving sermon preached at the funeral of four men who have died in a guerilla operation, a priest says,

"... our hearts go out in sympathy to all who are moved to violence by the sufferings of others. The church condemns violence, but it condemns indifference more harshly. Violence can be the expression of love, indifference never. One is an imperfection of charity, the other the perfection of egoism." (2)

The novel opens with a longish chapter, a kind

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(1) Ibid. p.144

(2) Ibid. p.309

of prologue, which introduces four characters, two committed and two not, travelling towards Haiti on a boat. What happens to them when they get to Haiti - a testing of their particular type of commitment or comedy, as the case may be - is what gives shape to the novel, which, for Greene, has comparatively little in the way of consecutive, plotted action.

The two committed characters are a devoted elderly American couple called Smith. They are gentle and idealistic, and at the same time both heroic and absurd. They are vegetarian pacifists and preach a vegetarian gospel: eating meat causes acidity, acidity leads to inflamed passions, and inflamed passions to violence; if men stopped eating meat all war would cease. "Eliminate acidity," Mr. Smith says seriously, "and you give a kind of elbow room to the conscience. And the conscience, well it wants to grow and grow and grow. So one day you refuse to have an innocent animal butchered for your pleasure, and the next - it takes you by surprise perhaps, but you turn away in horror from killing a fellow man."<sup>(1)</sup> The Smiths are going to Haiti to found a vegetarian centre, the first stage of a long-term project to eliminate acidity from the Haitian character. They have no idea how much acidity there is to eliminate.

The two uncommitted characters are Jones and Brown. "Major" Jones, as he calls himself (he later promotes himself to "Colonel"), is a shifty, engaging rogue whom everyone likes. He brags cheerfully and implausibly about his daring war exploits and isn't unduly perturbed when people are sceptical. He is bound

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(1) Ibid. p.31

for Haiti to transact some shady and profitable deal with the government.

Brown is the hero and narrator of the novel. Rootless, unhappy and self-centred, he is returning to Haiti to the only home he knows, a hotel, once prosperous, but empty now that the tourists have been frightened away; and to a love affair which his own jealous possessiveness has made as empty as the hotel.

These four characters are profoundly influenced by Haiti. The other characters in the book are relatively static, remain fixed in their committed or "comic" positions; but these four learn something about life and about themselves, and they change.

The Smiths are disillusioned - both about the total efficacy of vegetarianism as a panacea for the world's ills, and about the Haitian government. Their disillusionment is a slow and painful process, for in their gentle way they obstinately refuse to understand what they see. They have been freedom riders in the South - "We have a great love for coloured people,"<sup>(1)</sup> Mr. Smith explains - and they can't bear to admit that negroes can be aggressors as well as victims.

The gradual breakdown of the Smiths' mulish incomprehension gives shape to a series of episodes which cumulatively reveal the violence and greed and lawlessness (the sinister Tontons Macoute are the only law) of Duvalier's régime. At the same time their innocent idealism provides a highlighting of the political corruption, and an indirect commentary on it. This happens, for example, in a scene where Smith and Brown attempt to get Jones extricated from prison,

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(1) Ibid. p.20

into which he has been thrown without explanation on his arrival in Haiti. To the Secretary of State whom he and Brown have approached on Jones's behalf, and who is being evasive and unhelpful, Mr. Smith says, "with a roughness I [Brown] had not known him to possess,

"'You can find out what the charge is, can't you?'

"'Charge?'

"'Charge.'

"'Oh - charge.'

"'Exactly,' Mr. Smith said.

'Charge.'

"'There will not necessarily be a charge. You are anticipating the worst.'

"'Then why keep him in prison?'

"'I know nothing about the case. I suppose there is something to be investigated.'

"'Then he ought to be brought before a magistrate and put on bail. I will stand bail for any reasonable amount.'

"'Bail?' the Minister said, 'bail?' He turned to me with a gesture of appeal from his cigar. 'What is bail?'" (1)

"'A kind of gift to the state if a prisoner should not return for trial,'" is Brown's careful definition. "'It can be quite a substantial amount,'" (2) he adds.

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(1) Ibid. pp.117-8

(2) Ibid. p.118

A day or two later, writing an article about his experiences in Haiti for a provincial hometown journal, Mr. Smith (having persuaded himself) manages to describe Jones's arrest - and brutal beating up by the police - as "some bureaucratic mistake liable to happen in much older countries than Haiti".<sup>(1)</sup>

The incident of Jones's imprisonment is followed by a series of episodes which eventually convince even the Smiths that Haiti is a place of nightmarish cruelty and violence, to which no amount of nut-cutlets could bring peace. There is a scene in which the Tontons Macoute viciously break up a funeral, forcing the widow to give up the corpse of her husband ("What use to anyone was the body ...? A corpse couldn't even suffer. But unreason can be more terrifying than reason."<sup>(2)</sup>); there are several instances of police bullying; several more of corruption and bribery in high places; a visit to Duvalierville, the site of a showplace capital (hundreds of slum-dwellers had to be cleared away, the Secretary for Social Welfare explains, proud of Haitian efficiency), a project profitable to its projectors, which will never be completed; and finally there is a public execution, a reprisal for a guerilla attempt on a police station, which all the children in Port-au-Prince are ordered to attend, so that they will grow up in the knowledge of Duvalier's might.

The Smiths leave Haiti, sadly, acknowledging the foolishness of their dream. (They are resilient enough, however, to try again in San Domingo. There

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(1) Ibid. p.127

(2) Ibid. p.137

are brief references at the end of the book to a second doomed attempt at establishing a vegetarian centre.) But if the Smiths' confrontation with Haiti leads to the frequent exposure of their absurdity, it also reveals their virtues and their strength. They have a real concern and sympathy for suffering; and show great courage in pursuing their ideals. They have no regard for their personal safety when justice is at stake. There is one brilliant scene, in which Mrs. Smith, without being any less comic than usual, wins a genuinely heroic victory over the Tontons Macoute. She intervenes in an early-morning "interrogation" of Brown (who is being interrogated with fists and boots). Still in her nightgown and her hair in curlers,

"she stood there firmly in the dawn-light and let them have it in sharp fragmented phrases torn out of Hugo's Self-Taught. She told them of the bruit horrible which had roused her and her husband ... She accused them of lâcheté in striking an unarmed man; she demanded their warrant to be here at all - warrant and again warrant: but here Hugo's vocabulary failed her - 'montrez moi votre warrant', 'votre warrant où est-il?' ... She said in her atrocious accent, 'You have searched. You have not found. You can go.' Except for the absence of certain nouns the sentences would have been suitable for the second lesson. Captain Concasseur hesitated. Too ambitiously she attempted both the

subjunctive and the future tense and got them wrong, but he recognised very well what she intended to say, 'If you don't go, I will fetch my husband.' He capitulated. He led his men out and soon they were going down the drive more noisily than they had come, laughing hollowly in an attempt to heal their wounded pride."<sup>(1)</sup>

When the Smiths dejectedly prepare to leave Haiti, Brown says to them gently,

"'I'm sorry about the centre. But you know, Mr. Smith, it would never have done.'

"'I realise that now.' Perhaps we seem rather comic figures to you, Mr. Brown.'

"'Not comic,' I said with sincerity, 'heroic.'"<sup>(2)</sup>

Jones's transformation - an involuntary one - is from comedy to commitment. His shady deal with the Haitian government falls through when the Tontons Macoute discover prematurely - before he has had a chance to abscond with the profits, that is - that the arms he is negotiating the sale of are non-existent. With Brown's help he finds asylum in a South American embassy. The wife of the ambassador is Brown's mistress, and Jones gets on very well with her. Chronically

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(1) Ibid. pp.202-4

(2) Ibid. p.209

jealous and insecure, Brown takes this as evidence that they are sleeping together. In order to get Jones out of the way, he traps him through his boasts of valour and military experience into agreeing to lead the Haitian resistance movement. Jones walks blithely and unsuspectingly into the trap; but when he realises what he has let himself in for, he accepts his new rôle bravely and even welcomes it. It is as though, in a misspent life, this is what he has been waiting for. Despite the fact that he hasn't had any military experience (his stories were completely untrue), he wins the trust and affection of his men; and he proves his sincerity in an abortive guerilla operation by dying a hero's death.

What happens to Brown is harder to define, partly because Greene is tentative about this, partly because he hasn't been entirely honest about him, and perhaps partly because he isn't fully in control of his theme.

Brown is - or says he is - uncommitted in every possible way. Born in Monte Carlo, "a city of transients"<sup>(1)</sup>, he is without a country or a home; to all intents and purposes fatherless (he isn't sure whether his mother was married or not), and abandoned by his mother in childhood, he has never known love, and consequently is incapable of it; having lost his faith and vocation (he was brought up by Jesuits) more or less simultaneously with his virginity at the age of sixteen, he has found nothing to put in their place. This much of his self-portrait is accurate (in the sense that the book substantiates it, we are meant to believe all this

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(1) Ibid. pp.242-3

about him); the rest of it - that he is unsympathetic towards other people and indifferent to their sufferings - is false.

The early stages of the novel, particularly, are peppered with indirect hints and half-accusations of indifference, callousness and sometimes even of malice which are quite evidently not meant to be believed. At one point, when he has shown himself to be genuinely touched by the number of affectionate tributes paid to his mother after her death, Brown goes on to say, "Perhaps I had in mind the hope that her likeability might have been passed on to me - a great advantage in [the hotel] business."<sup>(1)</sup> At another point he asks himself whether he has been trying to humiliate her ex-lover, and goes on to speak of the man so sympathetically that it is clear he has not. And on another occasion, when he is attempting to secure Jones's release from prison, he emphasises his evident concern for him by appearing to disparage it. His first step in trying to extricate Jones is to approach the British chargé d'affaires. The chargé is one of the "comedians", although in his case Greene varies the image: "He was the perfect spectator ... intelligent, watchful, amused and critical in just the right way."<sup>(2)</sup> The chargé is unhelpful - there isn't in any case much he can do - and not particularly sympathetic; his detached, ironical air ("I have a feeling this is not the first police-cell that Major Jones has known."<sup>(3)</sup>) makes Brown feel like "the player-king rebuked by Hamlet

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(1) Ibid. p.91

(2) Ibid. p.112

(3) Ibid. p.113

for exaggerating his part".<sup>(1)</sup>

"I suppose I was playing a part -"  
Brown says, "the part of an  
Englishman concerned over the fate  
of a fellow-countryman, of a  
responsible businessman who saw  
his duty clearly and who came to  
consult the representative of his  
sovereign."<sup>(2)</sup>

But it is clear that he supposes nothing of the sort.  
The point of the scene - its only point - is to con-  
trast his own sympathy for Jones and desire to help him  
with the chargé's indifference. It is the charge,  
amusedly playing his part of "ideal spectator", who is  
the "comedian", not Brown.

As far as the less intimate side of his life is  
concerned Brown shows sympathy, understanding and hu-  
manity, although he is always denying that he possesses  
these qualities. At the end of the novel, one of the  
characters, Dr. Magiot, committed and a communist, tells  
him in a letter, "'We are humanists, you and I. You  
won't admit it perhaps ...'"<sup>(3)</sup> Brown is helpful to-  
wards Jones (before his jealousy is aroused, that is)  
and extricates him from difficulties several times, on  
one occasion at great risk to himself; he is protective  
towards the Smiths; and he shows sympathy and com-  
passion for the suffering Haitians. (His account of  
what Haiti is like for those who live in it has the  
same quality of restrained anger as Fowler's war

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(1) Ibid. p.113

(2) Ibid. p.112

(3) Ibid. p.311

reporting.)

In his personal life, however, which Greene presents with unusual honesty, Brown is the failure he claims to be. His possessiveness and insecurity spoil his relationship with Martha, who loves him better than he knows how to love her. Unhappy himself, he goes out of his way to hurt her too, and their meetings are marred by the endless quarrels he picks - about her husband, her son (whom he recognises as his real rival, and hates), the mythical lovers that he insists she must have had while he was away, and finally about Jones. In the end his jealousy wrecks the relationship altogether.

In the course of the book, Brown is confronted with and measured against a number of characters, some of whom genuinely are, some of whom it is pretended are his moral superiors. These characters are committed in a variety of ways, not necessarily political.

Of these, Martha genuinely is a better person than Brown is. She is not committed in a political sense, but she is committed to people. She has the gift for intimacy which Brown himself lacks. She is devoted to her child, loyal, if not faithful, to her husband and affectionate; and shows honesty, understanding and compassion in her relationship with Brown. From her Brown learns something about love. This is quite tentatively suggested, but here and there in the novel there are hints that he has changed since the time that the events he is narrating took place. One of these hints is to be found in his description of how he tore up on receiving it a letter Martha had written him when he was in America.

"... she wrote ... 'Perhaps the sexual life is the great test. If we can

survive it with charity to those we love and with affection to those we have betrayed, we needn't worry so much about the good and bad in us. But jealousy, distrust, cruelty, revenge, recrimination ... then we fail. The wrong is in that failure even if we are the victims not the executioners ...'

"At that moment I found in what she wrote a pretentiousness, a lack of sincerity. I was angry with myself, and so I was angry with her. I tore the letter up in spite of its tenderness, in spite of the fact that it was the only one I had. I thought she was preaching at me because I had spent two hours that afternoon in [a call-girl's] apartment on East 56th Street, though how could she possibly have known? That is the reason why of all my jackdaw relics ... I have no scrap of her writing with me now. And yet I can remember her writing very clearly, round and childish, though I can't remember the tone of her voice."<sup>(1)</sup>

The other people with whom Brown is confronted and compared are his mother (and the memory of her -

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(1) Ibid. pp.151-2

his meeting with her, the first in many years, is brief) who became involved to the extent of taking a negro lover; the lover Marcel, who kills himself after her death, thus proving he is no "comedian" - "Death is a proof of sincerity"<sup>(1)</sup>; Jones, who has commitment thrust upon him, and who also proves his sincerity by dying; Dr. Magiot, the communist, wise and humane, a man of great presence and courage; the vegetarian Smiths; and the little band of rebels, who, knowing that they stand no chance against Duvalier, make a desperate and heroic effort to resist him.

The point of this series of confrontations needs some considering. Superficially, a contrast is drawn between the commitment of these characters and the indifference of Brown who persistently disparages himself on this count. Yet Brown is clearly far from indifferent and in fact possesses all the virtues that go to make up commitment: compassion, hatred of brutality and injustice, even bravery - though he calls himself a coward. He is openly defiant of the régime, and in encounters with Tontons Macoute displays the kind of satirical courage that he admires in someone else. He is helpful to anyone who falls foul of Papa Doc and his henchmen, and at one point risks his life to keep Jones out of their clutches. He is not politically active; but when one looks at the choice of political activity which the novel offers one begins to wonder if the theme of commitment, for all the explicitness with which it is handled, is, after all, Greene's real concern.

One kind of political action is the foundation

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(1) Ibid. p.276

of a vegetarian centre to eliminate acidity from the Haitian character - which is ludicrous. And however sympathetic and brave anyone committed to this project might be, he is clearly not going to be of much help to the Haitians. Another kind of action is to join the rebel group hiding in the mountains, which is foolhardy and heroic and of no more use to Haiti than founding a vegetarian centre would be. And finally there is Dr. Magiot's communism. This also can achieve nothing; for although communism offers the best solution to Haiti's economic problems, there is no possibility of the communists ever getting into power: "... if we ever tried to take over," says Dr. Magiot, "you can be certain the marines would land and Papa Doc would remain in power."<sup>(1)</sup> All Dr. Magiot can do is hope for "a palace revolution ... And then, before Fat Gracia settles in [Papa Doc's] place, a purge by the people."<sup>(2)</sup>; and in the meantime he can read books on communism, be sympathetic and helpful to Papa Doc's victims when the opportunity arises (as Brown is), act as emissary to the rebels with a hopeless cause ("Poor souls, they don't know how to fight ... They may be heroes but they have to learn to live and not to die."<sup>(3)</sup>), and meet his death with dignity when Papa Doc, in an overture of friendship to America, embarks on a communist purge.

What then is the point of political activity if it achieves nothing for those it is intended to help? Why should all these characters be compared to

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(1) Ibid. p.253

(2) Ibid. p.254

(3) Ibid. p.254

Brown if they can only, like he is, be helpful in a small way, or, alternatively, helpless in a big way? What have the Smiths got that Brown hasn't got? What did his mother have that he lacks? "If your mother had lived to see these days," Dr. Magiot says, "she would not have been so indifferent; she might well be up in the mountains now." "Uselessly?" asks Brown. "Oh yes, uselessly, of course."<sup>(1)</sup> What for that matter does Dr. Magiot have?

The answer is that all these characters have either a faith or some sort of shape or point to their lives. They know what they want and Brown doesn't. All he has is a love affair which he doesn't know how to handle, and a hotel, which, even in the days when conditions in Haiti allowed him to run it successfully, was a poor substitute for the vocation he lost as a boy. "You have to have two [dreams] don't you?" says Jones near the end of the book. "In case the first goes wrong." "Yes I suppose so," Brown replies; "Making money had been my dream also. Had there been another? I had no wish to search so far back."<sup>(2)</sup> But it is this search that is the real point of the novel.

Throughout the book Brown is confronted less with varieties of involvement, than with varieties of faith. "I envy [Dr. Magiot]," he says at one point. "He's lucky to believe. I left all such absolutes behind me in the chapel of the visitation."<sup>(3)</sup> And at another: "I envied [Mr. Smith] his assurance, yes

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(1) Ibid. p.255

(2) Ibid. p.290

(3) Ibid. p.245

and the purity of his intention too."<sup>(1)</sup> And his most shattering experience in the course of the novel is his attendance at a voodoo initiation ceremony, where he watches his crippled servant Joseph possessed by the war-god, Ogoun Ferraille. Brown leaves before the ceremony is over:

"I went out into the hot night and drew a long breath of air, which smelt of wood-fire and rain. I told myself that I hadn't left the Jesuits to be the victim of an African god. The holy banners moved in the tonelle, the interminable repetitions went on, I returned to my car ... After a while the rain came. I closed the window and sat in stifling heat while the rain fell like an extinguisher over the tonelle. The noise of the rain silenced the drums, and I felt as lonely as a man in a strange hotel after a friend's funeral. I kept a flask of whiskey in the car against emergencies and I took a pull from it, and presently I saw the mourners going by, grey shapes in the black rain.

"Nobody stopped at the car: they divided and flowed past on either side. Once I thought I heard an engine start - Philipot must have brought his car, but the rain hid it.

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(1) Ibid. p.275.

I should never have gone to this funeral; I should never have come back to this country, I was a stranger. My mother had taken a black lover, she had been involved, but somewhere years ago I had forgotten how to be involved in anything. . . Somehow somewhere I had lost completely the capacity to be concerned. Once I looked out and thought I saw Philipot beckoning to me through the glass. It was an illusion."<sup>(1)</sup>

Despite the repeated categorisation of characters into "committed" and "comedians", despite the strictures against the indifference that helped to bring Papa Doc into power (and earlier, Hitler - there is a reference to the Germans who "did nothing"<sup>(2)</sup>), despite the use of Haiti as a background which cries out for committed activity, and despite the two stirring calls to commitment with which the book ends, one has the sense that Greene's concern in this novel is less the alleviation of the 'human condition', so horrifyingly portrayed, than with finding some sort of salvation for his hero.

In the last pages of the book there is a letter - one of the 'calls to commitment' - written to Brown by Dr. Magiot shortly before his death, which reveals Greene's emphasis quite clearly:

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(1) Ibid. p.198

(2) Ibid. p.206

"... I have grown to dislike the word "Marxist", the letter runs. "It is used so often to describe only a particular economic plan. I believe of course in that economic plan - in certain cases and in certain times, here in Haiti, in Cuba, in Vietnam, in India. But communism, my friend, is more than Marxism, just as Catholicism - remember I was born a Catholic too - is more than the Roman Curia. There is a mystique as well as a politique. We are humanists, you and I. You won't admit it perhaps, but you are the son of your mother ... Catholics and Communists have committed great crimes, but at least they have not stood aside, like an established society, and been indifferent. I would rather have blood on my hands than water like Pontius Pilate. I know you and love you well, and I am writing this letter with some care because it may be the last chance I have of communicating with you ... I implore you - a knock on the door may not allow me to finish this sentence, so take it as the last request of a dying man - if you have abandoned one faith, do not abandon all faith. There is always an alternative to the faith we lose. Or is it the same faith

under another mask?"(1)

There is a curious note of irresponsibility in this letter ("I would rather have blood on my hands...") which ought not to be there if the suffering of humanity were what Dr. Magiot were concerned with. But it isn't after all humanity and its sufferings that he is thinking of, but Brown and his empty life. A faith for Brown and not help for Haiti is the subject of the letter's appeal. And when one looks at Greene's committed characters, one wonders if they have really achieved anything beyond a faith or a life style for themselves: something to live for, a banner to fight under, a means of preserving their personal dignity (even the Smiths, in their comic way, have moments when they achieve this), a courageous indifference to death. There is little difference, in the end, between them and the South American Ambassador who says,

"We mustn't complain too much of being comedians - it's an honourable profession. If only we could be good ones the world might at least gain a sense of style."(2)

The novel ends tentatively with Brown, his life even emptier than before - he has lost Martha and lost his hotel - pondering the significance of Jones's death, and possibly listening to Dr. Magiot's call.

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(1) Ibid. pp.311-12

(2) Ibid. pp.145-6

In The Quiet American boredom is not explicitly a theme, but it does provide an undercurrent to the book. Fowler's life, while he is disengaged, is on more than one occasion described as a desert. When he becomes involved he incurs guilt (or appears to): suffers: and boredom is no longer a problem. In A Burnt-Out Case, Querry is openly bored; and Greene's simultaneous concerns are to explain his condition, find a cure for it in involvement, and idealise it by suggesting that it is probably a symptom of sanctity. In The Comedians Brown is bored, not as obviously as Querry, but quite as painfully, and beneath its more open concern with a political theme, the novel seems essentially devoted to the search for a cure.

Utterly dissimilar to these novels in tone, Travels With My Aunt nevertheless shares their preoccupation with boredom and its antidotes, which in this case quite straightforwardly provides the central theme.

The hero (and narrator) of Travels With My Aunt is Henry Pulling, a staid, old-maidish bachelor, prematurely retired after thirty years in a bank. His only interests are a weekly game of bridge at the Conservative Club and the cultivation of dahlias. Emotionally under-endowed and having little to do with his time, he welcomes his mother's funeral as an agreeable break in the unexciting routine of his days. Henry Pulling, in his fifties, hasn't yet started to live.

Life begins for him at his mother's funeral, where he meets his Aunt Augusta. A shared taxi-ride back to her flat is the first of a series of "travels" which open up new worlds for him. Some of the travels involve literal journeys; others are anecdotal excursions into his aunt's riotously unconventional past

and into the rest of his family's history, which is a good deal more extraordinary than he has been led to assume. Even his straight-laced, conservative mother turns out to have been less orthodox than he had believed. In fact, as he learns in the taxi, she is not his mother at all, but had married his father to protect his real mother (who for the moment remains anonymous) and had simulated pregnancy with cushions of assorted sizes.

Bewildered and perturbed, but increasingly intrigued, Henry finds himself drawn into his aunt's peripatetic life. He meets her negro lover, Wordsworth, whom he is a little slow in recognising as such. His aunt, after all, is seventy-five; and nothing in his thirty years' experience in the bank has quite prepared him for her. With her he makes a short trip to Brighton, a very much longer one to Istanbul, as the innocent accomplice to her smuggling activities, and another trip to Bologne.

On his travels Henry meets a number of interesting people, including an ex-mistress of his long-dead father. It has been a revelation to Henry that his father had had mistresses; but, if Aunt Augusta is to be believed, he himself is the offspring of one of them. Even more interesting than the flesh-and-blood people he meets are the ghosts which his aunt vividly conjures up out of her past: Mr. Curran who ran (very profitably) a dogs' church; M. Dambreuse who kept two mistresses (one of them Aunt Augusta - most of the ghosts are ex-lovers) in the same hotel; Mr. Pottifer, a tax consultant, who found a way of continuing his war against the department of revenue for several weeks after his death; and the villainous Mr. Visconti, a pimp, swindler and war-criminal, for whom Aunt Augusta retains a special

affection.

The journeys and the anecdotes provide the main substance of this very entertaining novel; and the anecdotes particularly, with their parade of bizarre and curious characters described with wit and elegance and zest, make highly enjoyable reading. On the outside, looking in, or listening, is Henry, and the effects which "travelling" has on his character provide the novel's point.

Henry becomes dissatisfied with his old existence. He comes increasingly to realise how boring and pointless and lonely his life is. He also grows in sympathy - and there are echoes here of the "involvement" theme of the preceding novels. At the opening of the novel Henry is too moral and conventional to really like people. Disapproval comes easily to him. Conditioned by his years at the bank, he is prone to assess people sternly for reliability as if they were clients requiring an overdraft. His moral principles are very clear-cut. Travel with Aunt Augusta, however, has a broadening effect on his mind, and gradually people become more important to him than his principles. Greene traces his development carefully. We see his initial disapproval of the cheerful, scoundrelly Wordsworth give way to liking. We see him gradually becoming more open-minded in his attitude to the characters in his aunt's stories, some of whom he finds extremely shocking at first. His aunt rebukes his primness several times. "Never presume yours is the better morality,"<sup>(1)</sup> she tells him. And we see how his growing affection for his aunt increasingly overcomes his prejudices about

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(1) TMA p.131

correct behaviour, until eventually he loses the prejudices altogether. About two-thirds of the way through the book he has progressed to the point where he can think (still rather primly),

"Loyalty to a person inevitably entails loyalty to all the imperfections of a human being, even to the chicanery and immorality from which my aunt was not entirely free. I wondered whether she had ever forged a cheque or robbed a bank [honesty in financial matters has always been Henry's main test of integrity] and I smiled at the thought with the tenderness I might have shown in the past to a small eccentricity."<sup>(1)</sup>

Near the end of the book he stops thinking in terms of "imperfections", and has come to see his aunt's way of life as better than his own. When somebody calls her a "shady character", he thinks,

"I would certainly have called her career shady myself nine years ago, and yet now there seemed nothing so very wrong in her curriculum vitae, nothing so wrong as thirty years in a bank."<sup>(2)</sup>

For most of the book Henry is a "traveller" in his aunt's world, the world of "the unexpected

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(1) Ibid. p.212

(2) Ibid. p.280

character and the unforeseen event"<sup>(1)</sup>. He makes brief or longish excursions into it, as a tourist and interested onlooker. His own life derives colour and interest from watching the colourful and interesting lives of the people he meets, but nothing really happens to him. After each journey he returns to his home and his dahlias in Southwood, each time more acutely conscious of the bleakness of his existence. In the end he chooses to become permanently domiciled in his aunt's world. He joins her in Paraguay, where she has decided to 'settle down', reunited with her favourite (now octogenarian) lover, the deplorable Mr. Visconti, whose latest venture is a partnership in a profitable smuggling concern. In Paraguay anything can happen, life is uncertain, danger lurks. This, apparently, is the whole point. While Henry is still hesitating about whether to stay in Paraguay, his aunt contrasts his humdrum Southwood existence with the life she offers:

" [In Southwood you ] will think how every day you are getting a little closer to death. It will stand there as close as the bedroom wall. And you'll become more and more afraid of the wall because nothing can prevent you coming nearer and nearer to it every night ... [But] here ... Tomorrow you may be shot in the street because you haven't understood Guarani, or a man may knife you in a cantina because you can't speak Spanish and he thinks

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(1) Ibid. p.244

you are acting in a superior way.  
Next week, when we have our Dakota,  
perhaps it will crash with you over  
Argentina ... My dear Henry, if you  
live with us, you won't be edging  
day by day to any last wall. The  
wall will find you of its own  
accord without your help, and  
every day you live will seem to  
you like a kind of victory."<sup>(1)</sup>

The solution found for Henry is the same one that Greene found for himself at the age of seventeen, when he learnt, through playing Russian Roulette, "that it was possible to enjoy again the visible world by risking its total loss."<sup>(2)</sup>

The Paraguay section of the novel is perfunctorily handled. Henry guesses (long after the reader) that his aunt is really his mother. Wordsworth, whom Aunt Augusta has quite callously abandoned for Mr. Visconti, is mysteriously killed off, so that Henry, who has just opted for Paraguay, with the sense that there will be "a price to pay"<sup>(3)</sup> for his decision, can reflect,

"I thought how his bizarre love for an old woman had taken him from the doors of the Grenada cinema, where he used to stand so proudly in his uniform, to die on wet grass near the Paraguay river, but I knew that

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(1) Ibid. pp.270-1

(2) "The Revolver in the Corner Cupboard" in LC p.204

(3) TMA p.316

if this was the price he had to pay, he would have paid it gladly."<sup>(1)</sup>

Things begin to happen to Henry. For example, he is beaten up and thrown into prison for blowing his nose on a handkerchief which is the colour of the Colorado party's flag. In prison he mentally composes a letter to an acquaintance:

"I have insulted the ruling party of Paraguay and I'm mixed up with a war criminal wanted by Interpol. For the first the maximum penalty is ten years. I am in a small cell ten feet by six, and I have nothing to sleep on but a piece of sacking. I have no idea what is going to happen next, but I confess I am not altogether unhappy, I am too deeply interested."<sup>(2)</sup>

In the last pages of the novel he tells us briefly that he has joined Mr. Visconti in the smuggling business (Mr. Visconti's original partner having been shot by a policeman because he couldn't make himself understood in Guarani) and that he is engaged to marry the daughter of the Chief of Customs as soon as she turns sixteen.

"There is, of course, a considerable difference in our ages, but she is a gentle and obedient child, and often in the warm scented evenings we read Browning together.

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(1) Ibid. p.316

(2) Ibid. p.282

'"God's in his heaven -

All's right with the world." (1)

It may seem pompous to complain about this ending to what is on the whole a very entertaining and funny novel. But it hasn't after all been entirely comic, and at the end of it one is left with the disturbing impression that Henry's problem is a real one, while the solution offered him, a perfunctory courting of danger and a child bride, isn't real at all. Even the sympathy which Henry learns in the course of his travels, and which might have provided the solution required, is rather artificially handled. Greene is careful, in a theoretical way, to trace the development of this sympathy, but it never becomes a convincing part of Henry's attitude to other people. We know that we are to see Henry as growing in sympathy for Greene is quite explicit about this. But when he is not being explicit, one isn't much conscious of a real warmth in Henry's attitude to people. One episode in the middle of Henry's travels, which is intended to emphasise how far he has progressed in his attitude to people - his meeting with an eighteen-year-old drop-out called Tooley, for whom he feels affection and responsibility - is quite embarrassingly false. By far the best antidote to boredom which the book offers is the procession of comic, interesting and implausible characters which parades through it. The humour and delight in the incongruous, which go into their invention, provide, if not a very profound solution to the sense of life's meaninglessness which underlies the book, at least an effective one.

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(1) Ibid. p.319

## CHAPTER VI: THE SHORT STORIES

Greene has published three volumes of short stories, and one story in book form, called The Bear Fell Free. The Bear Fell Free (1935) was privately printed in a limited edition, and is now unavailable. Critics seldom mention it, and the references to it that I have seen have been brief and scathing.

The first collection of stories has been published, in different selections, under three titles. The original volume was called The Basement Room (1935). This was republished with additions in 1947 as Nineteen Stories, and again in 1954 with two omissions<sup>(1)</sup> and four further additions as Twenty-One Stories. The more recent collections are A Sense of Reality (1963) and May We Borrow Your Husband? (1967).

Critics have paid little attention to Greene as a short story writer, probably because most of the substantial books on his work pre-date the later collections. The stories in the first volume, with one or two exceptions, are markedly inferior to the novels in quality. Allott and Farris, in what is the best full-length study of Greene's work, and one of the most

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(1) One of these is a 35 page fragment of a novel that Greene never completed. Called "The Other Side of the Border", it was to have been about corruption in deepest Africa, and bears faint resemblances to Heart of Darkness. The central character, Hands, is very like Anthony Farrant, which was one of Greene's reasons for abandoning the novel. The other reason, he says in an Author's Note, was that "another book, Brighton Rock, was more insistent to be written". The fragment is too inconclusive to make satisfying reading, which might have been why Greene omitted it from Twenty-One Stories. An important feature of his narrative technique in novel writing is the balancing of scenes against each other, and many of the scenes in "The Other Side of the Border" seem indeterminate, as though they lack their complement.

sympathetic treatments of it, make only one comment on Nineteen Stories:

"When this collection of disappointing short stories appeared some people wondered whether Greene had written himself out, for Nineteen Stories looked to them like a book put together to keep a successful author's name before the public."<sup>(1)</sup>

Easily the best story in this collection, and in fact the only good one, is "The Basement Room". (It has been filmed under the title of The Fallen Idol and reprinted under that title together with the story of The Third Man.) It was written in 1935, and its subject is one which has always been a major pre-occupation of Greene's, and which was particularly prominent in his novels in the middle and late thirties. This subject is the disastrous repercussions in the adult life of certain types of childhood experience. In the years 1934 to 1938 Greene created a series of characters - Conrad, Anthony, Raven and Pinkie - who were the morally and spiritually deformed products of their childhood conditioning. In "The Basement Room" Greene deals with the conditioning process from the other end: showing a traumatic experience being inflicted on a child, and looking forward into his destroyed future.

The child is a seven-year-old boy, Philip

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(1) Allott, Kenneth and Miriam Farris: The Art of Graham Greene. London, Hamilton, 1951. p.162.

Lane, on whom a nightmarish and incomprehensible adult world encroaches before he is equipped to cope with its demands. His parents have gone away for a fortnight, leaving him in the charge of the butler, Baines, and his wife. Philip loves Baines who is genial and friendly and tells him stories; and he hates Mrs. Baines who is shrewish and cold. He senses obscurely that there is some kind of friction between the couple, and he is on Baines's side. He would like to help him, but there isn't much he can do, except refuse second helpings of Mrs. Baines's puddings. One day he meets Baines with a girl and again he senses a grown-up tension that he doesn't understand. Baines asks him not to mention the girl to Mrs. Baines, and Philip feels very important: at last there is something he can do to help his friend. "'Of course not,'" he says in his most grown-up voice. "'I understand, Baines ... You can trust me.'"<sup>(1)</sup>

But of course Philip doesn't understand, and he is too small to be trusted. Mrs. Baines easily tricks the secret out of him, and he is miserable and ashamed at having let Baines down. "She had got what she wanted, there was no doubt about that, even when you didn't know what it was she wanted."<sup>(2)</sup> Mrs. Baines tries to extract a promise from him not to tell Baines that she has learnt about the girl. Philip refuses to promise; but in fact he doesn't tell. He has already started to withdraw from the confusing and frightening adult world of responsibility and secrets: where you betray the people you love without even knowing that

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(1) TOS p.11

(2) Ibid. p.13

you are doing it.

Mrs. Baines traps the lovers by pretending to go away for a night. Baines brings the girl, Emmy, home with him; and with Philip they have a celebration supper, Philip uneasy all the time at the thought of Mrs. Baines. At one point he nearly tells Baines that she knows about Emmy, but he is frightened of getting involved again, of making mistakes.

That night he is woken up out of a nightmare by Mrs. Baines, witchlike and terrifying, whispering into his ear: "'Where are they? ... Where are they?'"<sup>(1)</sup> Panic-stricken, he screams to warn Baines, and, as if the nightmare were continuing, there follows a series of violent and incomprehensible events: a grappling on the stairs; a flurry of black skirts over the banisters; and Mrs. Baines lying, unmoving, in the hall. "... he didn't understand what she was doing, lying there ... the things he didn't understand terrified him. The whole house had been turned over to the grown-up world; he wasn't safe."<sup>(2)</sup>

In the end Philip betrays Baines to the police - Baines has tried to make the accident look like a different sort of accident, one that doesn't involve Emmy. But all the details come flooding out of Philip in a torrent, including the fact that Emmy was there. He doesn't quite know what he is doing, though he is conscious all the time of Baines's pleading face. But he shuts himself off from its appeal. "He wasn't going to keep any more secrets: he was going to finish once and for all with everything, with Baines and Mrs.

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(1) Ibid. p.20

(2) Ibid. p.23

Baines and the grown-up life beyond him."<sup>(1)</sup>

For this one story, with its intensity and its brilliant portrayal of the mind of a child in panic-stricken retreat from life, one is prepared to forgive Greene the rest of his book, although parts of it are hard to forgive. The remaining stories were written sporadically over a period of twenty-six years - 1929 to 1954. They are a mixed lot, dealing with a variety of subjects, uniform only in the air of determined pessimism that pervades them and the technical ineptitude with which they are handled. None are better than mediocre; and some are not even that.

Many of the stories show Greene's obsession with the horrors of sex, some of them in passing, some taking 'sex equals corruption' for their theme. One of the latter, "The Innocent", glumly points the moral that sex is beautiful before puberty, but after that is a matter of sordid weekends and cheap tarts.

Several of the tales are concerned, in a pointlessly bizarre way, with life after death. One of these, "A Little Place off Edgware Road", is about a man called Craven who in a cinema sits next to a little man babbling madly about a murder in Cullen Mews. At one point the man touches Craven's hand with sticky fingers, and shortly after that leaves the cinema. When the lights go on, Craven's horrified suspicions are confirmed: there is blood on his hand. He immediately phones the police, who know about the murder. As he begins to tell them that he has been sitting next to the murderer, they interrupt him:

"'Oh no ... we have the murderer -

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(1) Ibid. p.33

no doubt of it at all. It's the  
body that's disappeared.'"(1)

Treated briskly and unpretentiously, the story could have made acceptable reading at a Saturday Evening Post level. But Greene's hand is heavy: the tale is made to bear the burden of disgusted thoughts at the body's resurrection (the dirty, lusty, warty, erupting body - the details are laid on with a trowel); and in consequence is exasperating and absurd. Moreover he muffs what clearly ought to have been his climax, by making Craven go mad afterwards with the horror of it all.

Similarly outlandish and unbalanced is "A Second Death" which is about a man panicking on his death-bed at the thought of hell. He knows what to expect because he has died once before; but just as he was about to be pitched into the flames (on account of his sexual activities and stealing money from his mother's purse) a miracle-worker had brought him back to life. For two years after this chastening experience he had managed to be virtuous, but then the memory of hell began to fade and he lapsed into his former fornicating ways. (Greene does not mention whether he resumed his forays on his mother's purse.) "[No] mortal man could have kept him off a likely woman when his appetite was up," (2) says his friend. Doom clearly awaits him.

Most of the stories on sex and death show Greene at his out and out worst. The others are less hysterical and less bizarre, but show the same

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(1) Ibid. p.168

(2) Ibid. p.149

tendency to gloomy and awkward moralising and the same cavalier treatment of the story as a vehicle for theme. "The Case for the Defence", for example, is an extraordinarily clumsy treatment of the question of moral responsibility. It deals with a man on trial for murder. The case against him appears watertight. There are four witnesses to swear that he was on the scene of the crime. One of them, Mrs. Salmon, is particularly firm in giving her testimony. "'It isn't a face one forgets,'"<sup>(1)</sup> she says, gazing at the brutish features. The council for the defence then pops a rabbit out of his hat: an identical twin brother. No one can say which of the twins it is that he has seen, and the man is acquitted for lack of evidence. After the trial, a crowd mills around the brothers, and one of them gets pushed under a bus. The murderer or the innocent man? No one can say. The remaining brother looks at Mrs. Salmon accusingly, and the story ends: "'If you were Mrs. Salmon, could you sleep at night?'"<sup>(2)</sup> which is so unjust as to be pointless.

A few of the stories have well-handled irony to recommend them. One of these is "Greek Meets Greek", which deftly shows two old crooks being simultaneously outwitted by each other. On the whole very amusing, even this story is spoilt by irrelevant patches of glum sententiousness. Another story which has some virtues is "Across the Bridge". Its central episode, a rich embezzler getting his just deserts, is also the subject of some prosy moral reflections, gloomy and rather confused. But an atmosphere of utter

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(1) Ibid. p.172

(2) Ibid. p.173

pointlessness which blankets the tale is skilfully conveyed. The story is set in two towns, one American, one Mexican, on opposite sides of the border. The Mexicans look at America and think life must begin over there (it must be so much more luxurious, refined and amusing). The Americans look at Mexico, thinking life must begin there (there must be so much more colour and sun and passion). But the two towns are nearly identical. The American one is a bit cleaner and a lot more expensive. That is all.

Twenty-One Stories on the whole makes unpleasant and depressing reading; but the unbalanced pessimism of Greene's outlook is not where the book's main weakness lies. Its chief failure is technical, a slap-dash handling of the subject matter that makes the pessimism irritating, where well-handled it might be horrifying and compelling. In a Prefatory Note to the 1947 collection, Greene wrote:

" I am only too conscious of the defects of these stories ... The short story is an exacting form which I have never properly practised: I present these tales merely as the by-products of a novelist's career."

In confessing to carelessness over the form, Greene puts his finger on the book's weakest spot. Most of the stories give the impression that he has started with a theme, and tacked it roughly onto a story, without bothering too much over the story's appropriateness, and without bothering much about the way that he tells it. This is certainly the case in "A Little Place off Edgeware Road". The theme is the body's ugliness and capacity for decay. Craven has an obsession with this

(and is otherwise featureless - characterisation is another weak point in most of the stories). He walks past a park (sneering at couples) and into Edgeware Road, thinking all the time of his physical defects: his lusts and his indigestion, his thinness, his warts and his boils and the foulness of his breath. He thinks resentfully of the doctrine of the body's resurrection. "Why should he be asked to believe in the resurrection of this body he wanted to forget? Sometimes he prayed at night (a hint of religious belief was lodged in his breast like a worm in a nut) that his body at any rate would never rise again."<sup>(1)</sup> He stops outside an unsuccessful cinema located a mile away from the conventional theatre zone. The story stops too, while Greene reflects sardonically on the cinema's lack of success and on the kind of pseudo-culture that languishes inside it. Craven walks into the cinema and the story picks up again but on a different level: it has now become a horror story. In the course of it a new theme is introduced. The insane-sounding chatter of the little man sitting next to him reminds Craven of his own fear that he might one day go mad. The horror story lurches to its climax, which Greene ignores; and Craven goes mad. There is no sense of shape, no sense of pace, no sense of emphasis. And this story is far from being an exception.

In some of the other tales - these tend to be the better ones, like "Greek Meets Greek" - Greene appears to have started with the story - or at least taken some trouble over the telling of it - and then been unable to resist the temptation to moralise: again

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(1) Ibid. p.162

without any sense of the appropriateness of the tale or consideration of whether it is substantial enough to bear the weight of his reflections.

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After the publication of Twenty-One Stories Greene must have given the requirements of short story writing some careful attention, for his second collection, A Sense of Reality, is, very differently, an interesting and impressive display of technique. It contains only four stories (one a long one), each in a different style, though each handled with a cool ironic control that only in one case is less than impeccable.

Two of the stories deal with the idea that losing one's faith does not necessarily mean one has lost it - a theme so persistent in Greene's later work that one might suspect he finds it consoling. (It is the subject of A Burnt-Out Case, of the play, The Potting Shed, and, in a way, of The Comedians.)

The first of the stories, "Under the Garden", is about an explorer called Wilditch, who, on learning that he has lung cancer, instead of undergoing an operation ("I have to decide, don't I, whether I want my particular kind of life prolonged."<sup>(1)</sup>), returns to the scene of a childhood dream or vision or adventure - he isn't sure which - that has obsessed him all through his life. Wilditch is an unbeliever, but it is suggested obliquely that the experience was of religious significance - his own too frequent protestations that he believes in nothing contributing to the suggestion.

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(1) SR p.14

The main part of the story is devoted to Wilditch's careful and detailed reconstruction of his dream - a weird, surrealistic adventure in which he discovers an ancient, one-legged man and a quacking crone with no roof to her mouth living in a cave at the end of a tunnel under the earth. The old man, who sits on what at first appears to be a throne, but turns out to be a lavatory seat, is apparently God:

"He sat there on his lavatory seat and he said ... 'Everything that comes out of me is alive, I tell you. It's squirming around there, germs and bacilli and the like, and it goes into the ground like a womb, and it comes out somewhere, I dare say, like my daughter did ...'"<sup>(1)</sup>

The balding crone who wears an ancient blue dress is called Maria. She and Javitt - "'You can call me Javitt,' he said, 'but only because it's not my real name.'"<sup>(2)</sup> - have a beautiful daughter, who has gone out into the world. "'It was for that she was born.'"<sup>(3)</sup>

The seven-year-old Wilditch falls passionately in love with a picture of the daughter and swears he will devote the whole of his life to searching for her. (It is suggested that in the course of his long wanderings over the globe, he has been doing precisely that.)

Most of Wilditch's time in the cave (he doesn't know how long he stayed there - there were no days or nights, and Javitt's time is, in any case, "different")<sup>(4)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. pp.44-5

(2) Ibid. p.44

(3) Ibid. p.59

(4) Ibid. p.51

is spent in listening to Javitt's talk, a fascinating, colourful jumble of factual information - on the sex life of monkeys, the age of the universe, the weight of water - of crazy ideas that aren't quite crazy, and of off-beat, anarchical wisdom:

"Only the most beautiful in the hen's eyes survives, so when you admire a peacock you know you have the same taste as a pea-hen." (1)

"Beauty doesn't come from beauty. All that beauty can produce is prettiness ... Beauty diminishes all the time ... and only when you get back to zero, to the real ugly base of things, there's a chance to start again free and independent." (2)

"Be disloyal. It's your duty to the human race. The human race needs to survive and it's the loyal man who dies first from anxiety or a bullet or overwork." (3)

As Wilditch recounts his experience, one is aware of a conflict in his mind. Superficially he is sceptical - for obviously none of this could have happened. But at a deeper level of his consciousness he has retained the matter-of-fact certainty with which as a child he had accepted the implausible as true. This certainty keeps contriving to overthrow his adult

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(1) Ibid. p.54

(2) Ibid. p.52

(3) Ibid. pp.55-56

common sense. He continually has to remind himself that it is - must be - a dream he is describing; and in the end he gives up the attempt. Conviction grows inside him; and it seems to him impossible that at seven he could have acquired the knowledge of life to provide the imagery for such a dream. At the end of the story, following up elusive 'proofs' of the actuality of his strange experience, he finds his scepticism fading, and has "a sense that there was a decision he had to make all over again."<sup>(1)</sup>

"A Visit to Morin", which treats a similar theme in a more prosaic vein, is the story of a French Catholic writer whose loss of belief is a guarantee for him that the Church is true.

The writer was noted in his younger days for novels which took orthodoxy to such extreme limits that they verged on the unorthodox. "... it was as though some of his characters accepted a dogma so wholeheartedly that they drew out its implications to the verge of absurdity."<sup>(2)</sup> His Catholic critics, without being able to point precisely to any heresy in his works, obscurely sensed its presence. They accused him of Jansenism and Augustinianism, and, in tones perceptibly aggrieved, of being "paradoxical".

The climax of the story is a meeting between its narrator, an admirer of these novels since his schooldays, and the author, M. Morin. With this meeting comes the revelation of how far Morin's sense of paradox has taken him in his personal life. The revelation is skilfully teased out in a dialogue in which

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(1) Ibid. p.75

(2) Ibid. p.82

the narrator's straightforward assumptions and unparadoxical mind throw into relief the tortuousness of Morin's position. "Because you've lost your faith ..." the narrator says in the course of this conversation, and is interrupted ferociously, "I never told you that." "Then what have we been talking about all this time?" he asks in bewilderment.

"... obviously striving to be patient", Morin explains:

"For twenty years ... I excommunicated myself voluntarily. I never went to confession. I loved a woman too much to pretend to myself that I would ever leave her. You know the condition of absolution? A firm purpose of amendment. I had no such purpose. Five years ago my mistress died ... I can tell myself now that my lack of belief is a final proof that the Church is right and the faith is true. I had cut myself off from grace and my belief withered as the priests said it would. I don't believe in God and His Son and His angels and His saints, but I know the reason why I don't believe and the reason is - the Church is true and what she has taught me is true. For twenty years I have been without the sacrament and I can see the effect." (1)

The next tale, "A Dream of a Strange Land", is

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(1) Ibid. pp.94-5

a very different kind of story with more action, and gets a different kind of treatment. The action is divided into three parts, and the balancing and contrasting of the parts combines with the way imagery and symbolism are used to make the story's point. As in the other pieces in the book (and unlike those in Twenty-One Stories) there is no direct author's comment.

In the first section of the story a doctor refuses to break the law for a patient suffering from leprosy. The man pleads not to be sent to hospital, which would brand him as a leper for life - for the world never accepts a cured leper as cured. He could easily be treated privately, and the risk of his infecting anyone is minimal, but the doctor is unsympathetic and adamant: "... you cannot expect a man in my position to break a law,"<sup>(1)</sup> he says.

In the second part of the story the doctor does break a law - for entirely trivial reasons. He allows himself to be persuaded by the military authorities to turn his house temporarily into a gambling salon for a birthday party in honour of a general who has a passion for roulette.

"The Herr Professor said, 'I have never before violated the law,' and then smiled a quick false smile to cover his failure of nerve.

"'You could hardly do so in a better cause,' the Herr Colonel replied."<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Ibid. p.102

(2) Ibid. p.106

In the last section of the tale, when the party is in full swing, the leper returns to the doctor's house to plead his cause again. He finds himself lost in a world changed beyond recognition and shoots himself.

This story is less adroit than the others in the book. Its imagery is often quite crudely over-explicit, and the doctor, in the early stages, an implausibly horrific figure. Used as symbols for his cold legalism are his large, strong, tomb-like teeth and a massive bronze paperweight on his desk representing Prometheus and the eagle. "Sometimes when breaking the news to a patient with cirrhosis, the Professor had referred to his paperweight with dry humour."<sup>(1)</sup> The punishment, presumably, fits the crime. He caresses the paperweight as he pronounces the living-death sentence on the leper who has caught his disease from a prostitute. And when the man miserably leaves his consulting room, the doctor moves over to his sideboard, selects a hard green apple and bites into it. "He sat down at his desk again and his teeth went crunch, crunch, crunch."<sup>(2)</sup>

"A Discovery in the Woods", the last of these stories, is Greene's single excursion into the realm of what is loosely called 'Science Fiction'. It is a lament for a lost world, in its way one of the finest pieces he has written.

The story deals with the adventure of a group of children who live in a very primitive and isolated fishing village. The details of village life are

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(1) Ibid. p.100

(2) Ibid. p.103

deftly sketched in, as if for background. The villagers live a hard life, but not an unhappy one, though it has some strange and faintly disturbing features. They are governed by curious superstitions. There are ruins at the edge of the village, which, it is believed, are haunted by the ghosts of giants, who have some sort of connection with a legendary figure called Noh, involved in an obscure catastrophe, something to do with a thunderbolt from the sky perhaps, or a tidal wave, or possibly a plague. The villagers also have a superstitious dread of clouds and they fish only in clear weather or grey overcast weather: "it was ... when the shape of clouds could be discerned that by general consent the fishing stopped."<sup>(1)</sup> The children play games based on these superstitions - 'Old Noh' and 'Ware that Cloud'. The villagers have apparently intermarried ("everybody in the village was in some way related"<sup>(2)</sup>) and been affected mentally: the mother of one of the children is described as the only person in the village who has the ability to generalise. There is a curious air of timidity about these people: they seldom venture much beyond the boundaries of their village, and view strangers (the inhabitants of the nearest village, 20 miles away, are "strangers") with nervous hostility and suspicion.

The little gang of children - four boys and a girl, Liz, "unwillingly introduced for reasons of utility"<sup>(3)</sup> - are led by an unusually daring boy called Pete, who one day makes the revolutionary proposal that

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(1) Ibid. p.120

(2) Ibid. p.118

(3) Ibid. p.119

they should explore new territory. "'Nobody's ever been there before,'"<sup>(1)</sup> says one of the children reluctantly; "'Perhaps there's giants,'"<sup>(2)</sup> says Liz. By sheer force of personality, Peter overcomes their objections, and with a mixture of fear and excitement, the gang sets off for the woods.

What the children find in the woods - an enormous, oddly shaped house, "broken"<sup>(3)</sup>, with half of it flung upwards at an angle - and what they make of their discovery, fitting it in with the legends and strange superstitions that govern their lives, provides the intricately wrought dénouement of the tale.

"The whole huge house ... seemed ... like a monstrous fish thrown up among the rocks to die, but what a fish and what a wave to carry it so high."<sup>(4)</sup>

"'It's Noh's boat,'" says Pete eventually. "'... It floated here and the waters went down again and left it.'"<sup>(5)</sup>

Gradually, the references to the story of Noah (with its implication of man bringing whole-scale destruction down on himself), the superstitious terror of clouds ("'It may have been the cloud which frightened Noh,'"<sup>(6)</sup> one of the children says) and other

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(1) Ibid. p.121

(2) Ibid. p.125

(3) Ibid. p.130

(4) Ibid. p.133

(5) Ibid. pp.136-7

(6) Ibid. p.137

details of village life are pieced together to suggest the appalling explanation for the strange, impoverished world the children live in. They and their parents are the wrecked remains of humanity after Atomic War. The mental deficiency of the villagers takes on new significance as the story unfolds, and casual, isolated references to individual ugliness, which have been unemphatically touched on in the course of the tale, build up to a horrifying revelation of general physical deformity.

The brilliant, macabre climax of the story comes when the children discover in one of the "rooms" of the "house" (from our sophisticated 20th century viewpoint, we know it is a cabin in a ship), a skeleton, and measure themselves against its straightness and its six-foot length: "'so there were giants,'"<sup>(1)</sup> Liz breathes. The impact of this climax derives in part from the fact that, for the first time, the reader really sees these children, as for the first time they really see themselves:

"They stood around the skeleton with eyes lowered as though they were ashamed of something.

"At last Number Two said suddenly, 'It's late. I'm going home,' and he made his hop-and-skip way to the ladder, and after a moment's hesitation Number One and Number Three limped after him...

"At the top of the ladder Pete turned to see what Liz was up to. She sat squatting on the thigh-bones of the

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(1) Ibid. p.139

skeleton, her naked buttocks rocking to and fro as though in the act of possession. When he went back to her he found that she was weeping.

"'What is it, Liz?' he asked.

"She leant forward towards the gaping mouth. 'He's beautiful,' she said, 'he's so beautiful. And he's a giant. Why aren't there giants now?' She began to kee over him like a little old woman at a funeral. 'He's six feet tall,' she cried, exaggerating a little, 'and he has beautiful straight legs. No one has straight legs in Bottom. Why aren't there giants now? Look at his lovely mouth with all the teeth. Who has teeth like that in Bottom?'

"'You are pretty, Liz,' Pete said, shuffling around in front of her, trying in vain to straighten his own spine like the skeleton's, beseeching her to notice him, feeling jealousy for those straight white bones upon the floor and for the first time a sensation of love for the little bandy-legged creature bucketing to and fro.

"'Why aren't there any giants now?' she repeated for the third time, with her tears falling among the bird-droppings. He went sadly to the window and looked out. Below him, the red rock split the floor, and up the long slope of the roof he could see

the three children scrambling towards the cliff; awkward, with short uneven limbs, they moved like little crabs. He looked down at his own stunted and uneven legs and heard her begin to keen again for a whole world lost.

"He's six feet tall and he has beautiful straight legs." (1)

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Greene's third collection of short stories, May We Borrow Your Husband?, shows him using a new approach. In the earlier collections, he uses the short story as a vehicle for his ideas - in the first book clumsily, and in the second adroitly. But in May We Borrow Your Husband? he is mostly concerned with people, their quirks and their follies, and the vagaries of their behaviour, which he exposes or records deftly, satirically and with an at times malicious accuracy.

The deadliest, and one of the most skilfully handled pieces of satire in the book is "Mortmain", in which a discarded mistress subtly insinuates herself into the newly married life of her ex-lover, and wrecks it. Her weapons are brave and affectionate little letters cunningly designed to just conceal reproach; and apparent helpfulness and generosity skilfully implying a past intimacy, and reminding how love can fade.

The first of her letters reaches the couple

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(1) Ibid. pp.139-40

on their honeymoon:

"Dear Philip, I didn't want to be a death's head at the reception, so I had no chance to say goodbye and wish you both the greatest possible happiness. I thought Julia looked terribly beautiful and so very, very young. You must look after her carefully. I know how well you can do that, Philip dear. When I saw her I couldn't help wondering why you took such a long time to make up your mind to leave me. Silly Philip. It's much less painful to act quickly..."<sup>(1)</sup>

The husband - as he is meant to be - is guilty and irritated. The wife - as she is meant to be - is impressed by the generosity of the letter and its sweetness of tone. This is the cause of the first rift between them; and the story deftly records the gradual deterioration of their apparently idyllic marriage, as the ex-mistress's well-planned little bombs go off at regular intervals.

The ex-mistress's methods, when one comes to think of it, are remarkably like Scobie's; but these methods are now the subject of a "cruel comedy" as in Introduction to Three Novels Greene says Scobie's ought to have been.

The full title of May We Borrow Your Husband? continues: And Other Comedies of the Sexual Life. The

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(1) MBH p.80

explanatory part of the title has to be interpreted rather widely. Some of the stories, like "Mortmain", are grimly funny; others, like the title story, are comedies only in the darkest sense of the word; others again are delicately ironic; and one or two are basically farces, told more for the fun of it than anything else.

One of the last kind is "A Shocking Accident", although the subject of the farce is a bit unexpected. In this story a small boy, Jerome, grows up to the knowledge that to most people the circumstances in which his father met his death are inexpressibly funny. Unfortunately for Jerome, who cherishes the memory of his father, he has an aunt with no sense of humour, so there is nothing to restrain her from telling the story to everyone she meets.

"'A shocking accident,' she would begin, and the stranger would compose his or her features into the correct shape for interest and commiseration. Both reactions, of course, were false, but it was terrible for Jerome to see how suddenly, midway in her rambling discourse, the interest would become genuine. 'I can't think how such things can be allowed in a civilised country,' his aunt would say. 'I suppose one has to regard Italy as civilised. One is prepared for all kinds of things abroad, of course, and my brother was a great traveller. He always carried a water-filter with him. It was far less expensive, you know, than buying all those bottles of mineral water. My brother

always said that his filter paid for his dinner wine. You can see from that what a careful man he was, but who could possibly have expected when he was walking along the Via Dottore Manuele Panucci on his way to the Hydrographic Museum that a pig would fall on him?' That was the moment when the interest became genuine.:"(1)

The rest of the tale is concerned with Jerome's own efforts to tell the story of his father's death in a way that reduces the comic element to a minimum - one of these is "really a masterly attempt to make an intrinsically interesting subject boring"(2) - and with his engagement to an innocent, pleasant-faced girl, who - miraculously - doesn't see the joke.

Another of the more farcical stories (although it has a satirical point, most of its content is farcical), is "The Root of All Evil", which is a highly diverting cautionary tale, told by a narrator as it was told to him by his father, an intensely moral and religious man. The story the father tells, intending to illustrate the theme that secrecy leads to every kind of sin imaginable, consists of a mildly hilarious chain of events arising out of the formation of a secret drinking club. The father is, of course, impervious to the hilarity of his tale, and is only concerned with the sins it exemplifies. These he enumerates with gusto at the end of each episode. Punctuating the narrative are the

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(1) Ibid. pp.129-30

(2) Ibid. p.131

child's eager questions, which show him to be in a state of breathless expectancy about which sin will emerge next; and he is clearly intrigued by the more esoteric ones. "I always found an ambivalence in my father's moral teaching,"<sup>(1)</sup> the narrator says at one point.

Some of the stories are anecdotal glimpses into people's lives, narrated by a detached ironic observer. These tend to be set in restaurants, where the narrator, sitting alone, listens to people's conversation, watches their reactions to their surroundings and with deft selectiveness records the details that reveal this character's egotism, that character's superficiality, someone else's weak-spiritedness. In one of these stories, "Chagrin in Three Parts", he watches a lesbian skilfully seduce and console a recently deserted, attractive young married woman whom he would rather like to console himself.

The title story, "May We Borrow Your Husband?", is of the same sort, though on a larger scale. In this story the narrator watches, over a period of several days, the situation develop between an attractive pair of honeymooners and two queers. The young husband is impotent with his wife, is seduced by the gay couple, and then manages to make love to his wife successfully. The girl, who hasn't the faintest idea of the reason for his success, is radiant, convinced that her marriage from now on will be perfect. The narrator (who has rather glib opinions on homosexuality and hormones) views the situation with forboding. This story, too, is told with a curious detachment, although the narrator is

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(1) Ibid. p.164

superficially sympathetic towards the couple, and is attracted to the girl. Almost without appearing to notice what he is doing, he exposes the banality of the young honeymooners' minds with the same accuracy and skill as he exposes the malice and selfishness of the queers.

Most of the stories in May We Borrow Your Husband? provide very enjoyable entertainment at a dryly funny, sophisticated level. There are occasional touches of real nastiness (as in the weakest story, "Beauty"); there is some malice, but this is usually deft enough to be amusing; the characters are skilfully dissected, and Greene's expert and delicate operations upon them are a pleasure to observe. One story, however, stands out from the rest, and, indeed, from Greene's work as a whole. This is "Cheap in August", where the detachment which characterises his most recent books combines with a sympathy not generally found in them, to touch an emotional and moral depth which is unlike anything else in his work.

The story is about a young married woman, holidaying away from her husband and hoping for an "adventure", who ends up sleeping with a rather grotesque, but appealing old man. The woman, Mary Watson, is nearing forty, and is restless, wanting a new experience before resigning herself to middle age and the not very exciting knowledge that she has retained the affection of one good man. Her holiday is nearly over without having provided a single opportunity for unfaithfulness. There are no attractive men at the resort she is staying in - attractive men, she learns, do not frequent holiday resorts in the cheap season. Most of the holiday-makers are jolly parties of fat and unappealing women. Mary, who is intelligent and

fastidious, holds herself aloof from these, preferring solitude. When this solitude is interrupted by the determined attentions of an ungainly old man, who introduces himself as Henry Hickslaughter (she isn't quite sure if she has got the name right) she is at first disconcerted, and coolly amused. She imagines herself telling her husband about him. She tries to shake him off, because whatever slender chances remain of her finding an adventure will be finally ruined by his presence. No one would dream of approaching her if she were in his company. But Henry Hickslaughter is very hard to budge. She snubs him coldly, and then feels ashamed when he looks hurt. Later she relents and when she encounters him again accepts an invitation for drinks. She feels at ease in his company, grows to like him more and more, and gradually she discovers how lonely he is. Eventually, out of pity and affection (which is a very different thing from Scobie's pity and contempt), she sleeps with him.

This is the first time in Greene's work that what is offered as moral progress really is meant to be moral progress. When Mary feels ashamed of herself, she genuinely is ashamed, and genuinely has reason to be, for she has been selfish - not very selfish, but absorbed enough in her own problems to ignore someone else's appeal. Her guilt is neither exaggerated nor displayed as virtue and detached from her actual behaviour. She feels guilty about her selfishness, and does something about it. For the first time in Greene's writing guilt is functional instead of simply being offered as an admirable state of mind. Mary genuinely is a nicer person at the end of the story than she was at the beginning (she hasn't been secretly cherishing the thought of her perfection all the way through); she

is more generous and more gentle.

Greene's treatment of her generosity marks another revolution in his handling of his central character. Typically and oddly, generosity in Greene's heroes is a way of scoring against its objects. The saintlier the characters, the nastier their generosity is. In the Catholic novels, particularly, the saints are generous from a God-like height "knowing the worst" about the characters they suffer and sacrifice their souls for, and secretly despising them for it. It is clear that Greene, in idealising his earlier characters, felt that the more spiritually and morally repulsive the objects of his saints' generosity were, the more glory was attached to their sacrifices. The trouble is that his saints recognise the moral and spiritual repulsiveness of those they are apparently loving - and when that happens "love" becomes a rather dubious emotion. Sarah "loving" Smythe for his deformity and despite his obtuseness; Scobie "loving" his ugly impossible mistress and his ugly impossible wife - knowing all the time how ugly and impossible they are; the priest painstakingly teaching himself to "love" the avid and pious old maid in the prison, and then being able to see her as something "bought in the market ... hard and dry and second hand."<sup>(1)</sup>: these characters don't love anyone but themselves. The self-flattering, consciously heroic, leper-kissing attitude which these saints extend towards the world has nothing to do with charity or generosity or pity.

It is a much more mature Greene who writes "Cheap in August", realising that generosity and

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(1) PG p.179

compassion are based on liking, not contempt.

It is sad that this maturity has come so late, and at a time when Greene is finding novel writing increasingly difficult. He said that he thought A Burnt-Out Case would be his last full-length novel, and went on with difficulty to produce two more. Travels With My Aunt, which was written two years after May We Borrow Your Husband?, has all the virtues of the lesser stories (it reads rather like a collection of them in fact, for Henry's 'moral development' is a thin link) and is by no means a dishonest novel, but it doesn't reach the depth of "Cheap in August".

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## A P P E N D I X

### Scene rejected from the draft of The Heart of the Matter (1)

Mrs. Scobie led the way, scrambling down towards the bridge over the river that still carried the sleepers of an abandoned railway.

"I'd never have found this path by myself," Wilson said, panting a little with the burden of his plumpness.

Louise Scobie said, "It's my favourite walk."

On the dry dusty slope above the path an old man sat in the doorway of a hut doing nothing: a girl with small crescent breasts climbed down towards them balancing a pail of water on her head: a child naked except for a red bead necklace round the waist played in a little dustpaved yard among the chickens: labourers carrying hatchets came across the bridge at the end of their day. It was the hour of comparative coolness, the hour of peace.

"You wouldn't guess, would you, that the city's just behind us?" Mrs. Scobie said. "And a few hundred yards up there over the hill the boys are bringing in the drinks."

The path wound along the slope of the hills: down below him Wilson could see the huge harbour spread out: a convoy was gathering inside the boom: tiny boats moved like flies between the ships: above them

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(1) Introduction to Three Novels. Stockholm, Norstedts, 1962. pp.27-37

the ashy trees and the burnt scrubs hid the summit of the ridge. Wilson stumbled once or twice as his toes caught in the ledges left by the sleepers.

Louise Scobie said, "This is what I thought it was all going to be like."

"Your husband loves the place, doesn't he?"

"Oh, I think sometimes he's got a kind of selective eyesight. He sees what he likes to see. He doesn't seem to see the snobbery, and he doesn't hear the gossip."

"He sees you," Wilson said.

"Thank God, he doesn't because I've caught the disease."

"You aren't a snob."

"Oh yes, I am."

"You took me up," Wilson said, blushing and contorting his face into a careful careless whistle. But he couldn't whistle. The plump lips blew empty air, like a fish.

"For God's sake," Louise said, "don't be humble."

"I'm not really humble," Wilson said. He stood aside to let a labourer go by. He explained, "I've got inordinate ambitions."

"In two minutes," Louise said, "we get to the best point of all - where you can't see a single house."

"It's good of you," Wilson muttered, stumbling on again along the ridge track: he had no small talk: with a woman he could be romantic, but nothing else.

"There," Louise said, but he had hardly time to take the view in - the harsh green slopes falling down towards the great flat glaring bay, when she

wanted to be off again, back the way they had come.

"Henry will be in soon," she said.

"Who's Henry?"

"My husband."

"I didn't know his name. I'd heard you call him something else - something like Ticki."

"Poor Henry," she said. "How he hates it. I try not to when other people are there, but I forget. Let's go."

"Can't we go just a little further - to the railway station?"

"I'd like to change," Louise said, "before dark. The rats begin to come in after dark."

"Going back will be downhill all the way."

"Let's hurry then," Louise said. He followed her: thin and ungainly, she seemed to him to possess a sort of Undine beauty. She had been kind to him, she bore his company, and automatically at the first kindness love had stirred. He had no capacity for friendship or for equality. In his romantic, humble and ambitious mind he could conceive only Cophetuas (a waitress, a cinema usherette, and a landlady's daughter in Battersea) or a queen - this was a queen. He began to mutter again at her heels - "so good" - between pants, his plump knees knocking together on the stony path. Quite suddenly the light changed: the laterite soil turned a translucent pink sloping down the hill to the wide flat water of the bay. There was something happily accidental in the evening light as though it hadn't been planned.

"This is it," Louise said, and they leant and got their breath again against the wooden wall of the small abandoned station, watching the light fade out as quickly as it came.

Through an open door - had it been the waiting room or the station master's office? - the hens passed in and out. The dust on the windows was like the steam left only a moment ago by a passing train. On the forever closed guichet somebody had chalked a crude phallic figure. Wilson could see it over her left shoulder as she leant back to get her breath. "I used to come here every day," Louise said, "until they spoilt it for me."

"They?"

She said, "Thank God, I shall be out of here soon."

"Why? You are not going away?"

"Henry's sending me to South Africa."

"Oh God," Wilson exclaimed. The news was so unexpected that it was like a twinge of pain: his face twisted with it.

He tried to cover up the absurd exposure: no one knew better than he did that his face was not made to express agony or passion. He said, "What will he do without you?" meaning simply, "What will I do?"

"He'll manage."

"He'll be terribly lonely," Wilson said - he, he, he chiming back in his inner ear like a misleading echo I, I, I.

"He'll be happier without me."

"He couldn't be."

"Henry doesn't love me," she said gently, as though she were teaching a child, using the simplest words to explain a difficult subject, simplifying ... She leant her head back against the guichet and smiled at him as much as to say, it's quite easy really when you get the hang of it. "He'll be happier without me," she repeated. An ant moved from the woodwork on to

her neck and he leant close to flick it away. He had no other motive. When he took his mouth away from hers the ant was still there. He let it run on to his finger. The taste of the lipstick was like something he'd never tasted before and that he would always remember, that and the stream of sweat flowing between them. It seemed to him that an act had been committed which altered the whole world.

"I hate him," she said, carrying on the conversation exactly where it had been left.

"You mustn't go," he implored her. A bead of sweat ran down into his right eye and he brushed it away: on the guichet by her shoulder his eyes took in again the phallic scrawl.

"I'd have gone before this if it hadn't been for the money, poor dear. He has to find it."

"Where?"

"That's man's business," she said like a provocation, and he kissed her again: their mouths clung like bivalves, and then she pulled away and he heard the sad to and fro of Father Rank's laugh coming up along the path. "Good evening, good evening," Father Rank called: his stride lengthened and he caught a foot in his soutane and stumbled as he went by. "A storm's coming up," he said. "Got to hurry," and his "ho, ho, ho" diminished mournfully along the railway track, bringing no comfort to anyone.

"He didn't see who we were," Wilson said.

"Of course he did. What does it matter?"

"He's the biggest gossip in the town."

"Only about things that matter," she said.

"This doesn't matter?"

"Of course it doesn't," she said. "Why should it?"

"I'm in love with you, Louise," Wilson said

sadly.

"This is the second time we've met."

"I don't see that that makes any difference.

Do you like me, Louise?"

"Of course I like you, Wilson."

"I wish you wouldn't call me Wilson."

"Have you got another name?"

"Edward."

"Do you want me to call you Teddy? Or Bear? These things creep on you before you know where you are. Suddenly you are calling someone Bear or Ticki, and the read name seems bald and formal, and the next you know they hate you for it. I'll stick to Wilson."

"Why don't you leave him?"

"I am leaving him. I told you. I'm going to South Africa."

"I love you, Louise," he said again.

"How old are you, Wilson?"

"Thirty-two."

"A very young thirty-two, and I am an old thirty-eight."

"It doesn't matter."

"The poetry you read, Wilson, is too romantic. It does matter. It matters much more than love. Love isn't a fact like age and religion ..."

Across the bay the clouds came up: they massed blackly over Bullom and then tore up the sky, climbing vertically: the wind pressed the two of them back against the station. "Too late," Louise said, "we're caught."

"How long will this last?"

"Half an hour."

A handful of rain was flung in their faces,

and then the water came down. They stood drenched through inside the station and heard the water hurled upon the roof. They were in darkness, and the chickens moved at their feet.

"This is grim," Louise said.

He made a motion towards her hand and touched her shoulder. "Oh, for God's sake, Wilson," she said, "don't let's have a petting party." She had to speak loud for her voice to carry above the thunder on the iron roof.

"I'm sorry ... I didn't mean ..."

He could hear her shifting further away, and he was glad of the darkness which hid his humiliation. "I like you, Wilson," she said, "but I'm not a nursing sister who expects to be taken whenever she finds herself in the dark with a man. You have no responsibilities towards me, Wilson. I don't want you."

"I love you, Louise."

"Yes, yes, Wilson. You've told me. Do you think there are snakes in here - or rats?"

"I've no idea. When are you going to South Africa, Louise?"

"When Ticki can raise the money."

"It will cost a lot. Perhaps you won't be able to go."

"He'll manage somehow. He said he would."

"Life insurance?"

"No, he's tried that."

"I wish I could lend it to you myself. But I'm poor as a church-mouse."

"Don't talk about mice in here. Ticki will manage somehow." He began to see her face through the darkness, thin, grey attenuated - it was like trying to remember the features of someone he had once known who

had gone away. One would build them up in just this way - the nose and then if one concentrated enough the brow: the eyes would escape him.

"He'll do anything for me," Louise boasted with feeble pride.

He said bitterly, "A moment ago you said he didn't love you."

"Oh," she said, "but he has a terrible sense of responsibility."

He made a movement and she cried furiously out, "Keep still. I don't love you. I love Ticki."

"I was only shifting my weight," he said. She began to laugh. "How funny this is," she said. "It's a long time since anything funny happened to me. I'll remember this for months, for months." But it seemed to Wilson that he would remember her laughter all his life if nothing happened to alter it. His shorts flapped in the draught of the storm and he thought, "In a body like a grave."

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