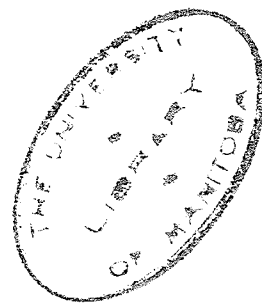


THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN THE NOVELS OF GRAHAM GREENE

by

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Initially, two connotations of the problem of evil are noted in this thesis. The most common meaning is the theological problem: the problem of reconciling the evil in the world with a just and all-powerful God. The other meaning has been called, in this thesis, the literary problem of evil; this is the problem which confronts each individual, to varying degrees: shall I choose the good or the evil? The literary problem is of the greatest importance to the novelist. It provides dramatic conflict within the individual. Both the theological and the literary problems of evil are considered and utilized by Greene, but his emphasis, as is the emphasis in this thesis, is on the latter problem.

I have pointed out in the first chapter that a novelist's importance in the twentieth century depends, technical abilities being equal, upon the attitude he takes to the problem of evil. Three principal attitudes to evil are considered. Somerset Maugham is used to illustrate the first, and least significant, type of writer: the one who is aware of but is indifferent to evil. Aldous Huxley represents the second group: this type of writer is aware of evil and critical of it, but is unable to offer a solution to the problem. The third group has Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene as its central figures: they write from the standpoint of christian morality and offer a solution and a hope to man.

Greene shows a slight development in his four main novels. The first is Brighton Rock, where evil is the keynote all the

way through, and damnation seems the ultimate end for the protagonist. Greene progresses from this black picture to the grey ones of The Power and the Glory, The Heart of the Matter, and The End of the Affair. In these novels, Greene shows that man is a complex of good and evil tendencies and that though he cannot win, usually, in the struggle with evil, he can attain a spiritual awareness and eventually salvation because of the very struggle which seems to drag him down.

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# THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN THE NOVELS OF GRAHAM GREENE

## CHAPTER I

### The Problem of Evil

I suppose it would be generally acceptable to say that a great many people lose their faith in the Christian religion because of the problem of evil. It is important to note this fact, because it indicates, if nothing else, that for a great number of people there is a difficulty involved in accounting for the evil in the world. The problem simply stated is this: "Why does God permit suffering, mental and physical, and the moral evil of sin, in this world which He has created and governs?"<sup>1</sup> In other words, many people are bewildered as to how a merciful and just God can permit sin and suffering in a world over which He has absolute control. This problem is the stumbling block which prevents so many from retaining an ordered picture of the universe.

I shall attempt, in the body of this thesis, to show Graham Greene's vivid awareness of evil and the problem that this evil presents. The solution that Greene indicates to this problem I shall also attempt to reveal. Before doing this, however, some preliminary definitions and distinctions must be made, in order that my terms may be understood. In this first chapter the predominance of evil in the modern world and its impingement on some twentieth century novelists will also be shown. An examination of their reaction to evil will lead us to Greene's particular handling of the theme and

his significance as a novelist.

St. Thomas Aquinas once said: "One opposite is known through the other, as darkness is known through light. Hence, also what evil is must be known from the nature of good."<sup>2</sup> Following this analogy, darkness is an absence of light; therefore, evil must be an absence of good. More specifically, evil is not something positive, nor is it absolutely nothing; it is a lack of good, the absence of a perfection which should be had by a particular nature. St. Thomas calls evil a 'privation'. Of course, to be evil the privation must be of something that is due to the particular nature involved: a man without a tail is not suffering an evil because of this limitation, but a man without an eye certainly is.

A distinction must be made between physical and moral evil. Physical evil is the privation of a physical perfection which the subject should have: a man should have an eye, trees should have leaves. Moral evil deprives a rational creature of the proper order to the end. Moral evil is, therefore also a privation; not, however, a privation in the physical order, but in the moral, the order of the end. Moral evil and physical evil can both refer to the privation or to what causes the privation.

A morally evil act is one which tends to lead a man away from his final end. However, man can never choose this moral evil as such. He always chooses the apparent good in the evil; it is the aspect of good in the thing, that he

chooses, not the evil aspect. For example, if I choose to steal some money, I do not steal it because it is a contravention of God's commandment, but because the money can bring me physical pleasure.

One more distinction should be made in order that my terms may be understood. It is the distinction between the literary and the theological problems of evil. The problem of evil, in the ordinary acceptance of the term, is primarily a theological one. There is, nonetheless, a literary problem of evil, which supplies the subject matter for some of the greatest novels. We have seen at the beginning of this chapter a statement of the theological problem, which involved the reconciling of evil in the world with a just God. The problem of evil in the literary sense is not a search for a teleological explanation of the presence of evil in the world. The literary world assumes the existence of evil and deals with the struggle in the human heart, between good and evil. The literary problem of evil is that which every individual has in varying degrees: shall I choose this (the real good) or that (the apparent good, i.e. evil)? In other words, the literary problem is really the moral or psychological problem, where the individual is confronted with two alternatives, one good and one evil. This problem of the individual, which involves the most profound drama and conflict, is utilized by the novelist. He shows how a certain man copes with the problem. This man's success or failure, his happiness or misery depend, to a great extent, on his solution of the problem. But, in any event, it is the struggle

that is usually important to the novelist.

That evil abounds in the world today, few will be so foolish as to deny. Evil, as it presented itself to the twentieth century novelist, assumed a particularly blatant form. In our era there has been violence in many forms: violent peace, violent wars and violent change, and all this violence has impinged on the twentieth century writer. The violence of war and the evils implied by violence are immediately realized when we think of such things as the prison camps of Dachau and Buchenwald, where the gas chambers put thousands to death. If one feels inclined to toss this off as an isolated incident, the work of the evil rabble-rouser Hitler, these words of Arnold Toynbee should be heeded:

It is no more possible for the West to disclaim responsibility for Hitler, or, indeed, responsibility for Marx, than it is for it to claim, as its perquisite, the merits of christianity. ...If an Englishman, Frenchman, or American thanks God that he has not committed atrocities like those Germans, he is not exculpating himself, but is convicting himself of being a Pharisee. For us non-German Westerners, the true moral of Hitlerism is: This is what any of the rest of us might have done and may still do, but for the grace of God. This is what the children of our Western Civilization are capable of, when they abandon the worship of the God who is love.<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious from this passage that there is something wrong with man, and something particularly wrong with the world of the twentieth century; something that affects everyone and for which we are all in part responsible. The turning point in recent history for our twentieth century society seems to have been the First World War.

Writers, especially English writers, were particularly

sensitive to the unpleasant features of this period because of the era of facile optimism and prosperity that had preceded it. The pre-war era from the turn of the century to 1912 was an era of the greatest hope: there was economic prosperity, expanding opportunity and an increased faith in humanity and its capacity for progress. There had been a hundred years since the last major European conflict (the Napoleonic wars), and prospects were bright for an era of unprecedented peace and progress. The seeds of reaction to this attitude are present in its very nature. The main flaw is obvious: a faith in man instead of a faith in God.

Christian humanists would do well to remember that Christ's chosen leader on earth, his chief disciple, Peter, even he denied Christ three times before the crucifixion. The moral of this incident has been repeated endlessly throughout history: put your faith in man with his fallen nature and he will let you down every time. In the same essay from which I quoted above, Toynbee says: "I have declared my belief that man-worship...is a bad religion in itself and is also one that will never satisfy Mankind's spiritual needs."<sup>4</sup>

Suffice it to say that after the war there was a reaction against the humanistic liberalism of the preceding era. This reaction entered into every phase of life. People were disappointed that the promised opportunities did not materialize, the war austerity seemed to linger on in the economic field, and there was a spiritual decadence caused in large part because an ideal had been temporarily abandoned and no sub-

stitute appeared to fill the vacancy. Here is H. V. Routh on this subject:

As the problems of the first war had not been solved, a second war seemed inevitable, and this prospect favored a continuance of war morality. The burden of the age was insecurity. If public men made hay while the sun shone, the pleasure-seekers, like soldiers on leave from the front, followed their example. Why take thought for the morrow? It was not an agreeable subject for meditation. It was quicker and more spectacular to possess a motor-car (then first becoming fashionable) than to possess oneself. So the Smart Set, like Galsworthy's white monkey, sucked the orange dry and flung it away, mocking and jazzing.<sup>5</sup>

I have tried to indicate in the last few paragraphs the moral climate which prevailed in England during the post-war period, and to point out a few of its causes. It is true, although a little facile, to say that this was a period of depression and disillusionment. This is the environment in which 'the twentieth century writers' lived and wrote. Let us turn, then, to the literature of the period where we shall see the conditions and the conduct of this society clearly portrayed. And the literature of this period shows that moral and physical evil, whether recognized as such by the writers or not, were present in abundance, as they are still today.

The great test of a writer during this period, technical abilities being equal, is largely to what degree of penetration and understanding he can attain in presenting contemporary violence and evil and their effect on the people of the time. All the great writers of this period, Huxley, Forster, James, Joyce, Eliot and Lawrence have shown an awareness of this violent change and eruption, and their subsequent evils.

It will be part of my purpose, later in this thesis, to show that Greene, through his keen awareness of evil and his handling of it, has added something significant to the literature of our time. Perhaps the lesser writers have failed to achieve a place in the literary tradition of the language because of a failure to recognize a veritable 'wasteland' in regard to the world of the spirit. In the last analysis, this is the age of unsurpassed material progress and spiritual regress, and by not realizing this, a writer is doomed to oblivion.

This disillusionment, abandonment, and lack of principle was reflected, and often reacted against, in the literature of the time. Many important writers had something to say about the deplorable state of man; few of them, however, had anything significant to offer in the way of relief. Two volumes of the time exemplify this mood of antipathy. One was The Wasteland of T. S. Eliot, which pointed out, among other things, the spiritual desert through which civilization was travelling. This poem was followed - seven or eight years later, in the late twenties - by the other volume, the novel Point Counterpoint. In this work, Aldous Huxley showed the futility and pointlessness of various existences in particular, and the 'cul de sac' for which society in general was headed.

In the remainder of this opening chapter I propose to look into, very briefly, some work of the following writers: Huxley, Maugham, and Waugh. From looking into these authors I hope to establish the fact that there are three predominant

attitudes to evil taken by leading literary figures of our day. I also hope to establish, although this point will be more fully treated later, that the quality of work of the individual author depends, technical ability being equal, on the attitude to evil that he takes.

Of the three attitudes to evil that I mentioned, the first, to begin at the lowest level, is that of Somerset Maugham. Maugham's writing indicates a negative attitude to evil; or worse, an indifferent acceptance of it. Maugham has professed on many occasions to be interested primarily in telling a 'rattling good tale', and surely his ability to do so is his main claim to fame. He often draws vivid and accurate pictures of our times and our society; such as he does, for example, in Of Human Bondage and The Moon and Sixpence. The central character in each of these novels is striving for some unknown quantity; usually it is a search for a norm or meaning for life. However, this norm, if found, is a materialistic one; life is either just a mystical attempt on the part of the individual to achieve a vague Oneness, or it is a futile pattern, which can be beautiful, but is always meaningless. Thus, Maugham, speaking in The Moon and Sixpence about the artist laying himself bare before his audience, says: "To pursue his secret has something of the fascination of a detective story. It is a riddle which shares with the universe the merit of having no answer."<sup>6</sup> Moral evil, as such, is not recognized; it is merely portrayed as an integrant part of the twentieth century whirl, and, therefore, fair game for the



novelist. To Maugham's characters, such as Philip Carey and George Strickland, existence is often painful, but it is a mysterious painfulness that is not explored by Maugham. Further, the immorality that is rampant throughout his novels is not presented as a blot on human lives or an impediment to the individual's fulfilment, but rather as a means of sensationalism and cheap sentiment in the novel. H. V. Routh says of Maugham:

His protagonists are not sordid or subhuman, but apparently insensible to any motive but their own inclinations and otherwise as good as you and I. Nor does he conceal that his adventurers, sensualists, and law-breakers are playing with fire. One feels that the ghost of tragedy is lurking somewhere behind the scenes, waiting for the cue, which does not come, because there is no eternal law to vindicate. There is only the artist's ability to manoeuvre events and sustain interest through craftsmanship.<sup>7</sup>

This, I suspect, is the last word on Maugham as a novelist: a fine craftsman, a good story-teller, but a man lacking the ability to see the underlying reality of things and their significance, and therefore losing the sense of the real tragedy of human life. We shall see what Maugham has missed when we look at the third type of writer. Maugham, then, is an example of the first, and as I suggested, lowest, type of twentieth century novelist. (I am of course speaking only of those novelists who are considered literary artists.) Writers of this type are faithful chroniclers of the manners, life and perhaps the morals of the age, but they are not interpreters of the age. Nor do they perceive the implications of people's actions; usually, they are content to exploit a loose and wild-

living character for the sensationalism and narrative effectiveness. Maugham, in no sense original, is a noted writer because a superb craftsman; he falls short of greatness in spite, or perhaps because of, this fact.

The second type of novelist is exemplified by Aldous Huxley. This is far and away the largest of the three groups that I intend to mention. Needless to say, many other writers besides Huxley could have been used to exemplify it. Franz Kafka would have served admirably, but I have chosen Huxley as I am a little more familiar with his work, and furthermore, Huxley's work is not allegorical (as Kafka's is) and is more easily understood.

This second group of novelists is far more perceptive than the first. Evil to them is a fact and a fearful blight on man's existence. They are aware of the insidious and destructive nature of evil and of the firmness with which it has gripped our society. They portray evil for what it is: a sure means to the downfall of man and his world. There is, however, a dimension lacking in the characters they portray, and seemingly, therefore, in themselves. Very few, if any, of their characters 'know' or 'realize' in the sense of these words which I shall later point out. B. Ifor Evans hints at what is missing when he says:

If unity is to be discovered in the varied work within the period (that is, the inter-war period) it will be found in an increasing recognition of the degree to which civilization has been disrupted. Few of the genuinely creative minds offer any complete or satisfying solution of the dilemma. They are able to diagnose the disease of their age without the strength to heal it.<sup>8</sup>

This then is what is lacking in these writers: there is an absence of a solid standpoint from which to criticize. They criticize the age, realizing in part what is wrong, but are unable to show the deeper reason for their disgust, and cannot suggest a remedy for the ills they depict.

I think this fact can be illustrated by a cursory look at Huxley's Point Counterpoint. After reading this novel I suppose one would be inclined to say that Huxley thinks of himself as a man with a mission. What else is indicated by the ferocity of his criticism, the disdain with which he portrays his generation? It must be concluded too, from the tone of the novel in general and the character of Mark Rampion in particular, that Huxley has hopes for a better world, possibly partly through his own writing. So often throughout this book there is a pronouncement either from the omniscient author, or in a dialogue of some characters, that has the tone of a message for society. This aspect of the novel is particularly evident in the diatribes of Mark Rampion. Rampion, the only character in the book not frowned upon by the author, presumably speaks for Huxley. In most of the book Rampion is exhorting everyone within earshot 'to be a perfect animal and a perfect human'; he complains about people who "could have been perfectly decent human beings if they'd just gone about behaving naturally, in accordance with their instincts";<sup>9</sup> and another time he says, "Nobody's asking you to be anything but a man. A man, mind you, not an angel or a devil."<sup>10</sup> And this is really all that Rampion says.

Huxley spends the rest of his time (in a very long book) drawing caricatures of a twentieth century amoral society, and Rampion's typical utterings above are all he puts forth in the way of a life preserver for a drowning world.

Now it is my opinion that Huxley is dodging the issue. In all his talk about man, how he should behave as a human and an animal, should not be tame, should believe in life, should live, and so forth, Rampion (or rather Huxley) never once ventures to tell us what man is. And before we know what something is essentially, we can never know what is good for that thing. It seems to me that Huxley could have spent his time better, if he was set on correcting his generation, by setting forth explicitly his ideas of the essence of man; knowing this, the course for man to take to perfect himself would be clear.

This second type of novelist, for which Huxley has served as an example, shows society in its true colors. They do perceive the devastating effect of evil in the world. However, like Stephen Spender in The Trial of a Judge or Franz Kafka in The Trial, they paint the picture as almost hopeless, or else, like Huxley, their solution is vague or unsatisfying.

The third group, for which Evelyn Waugh will serve as an example, write from the standpoint of christians surveying a world of evil. This is, of course, the group to which Graham Greene belongs. A fair sprinkling of other writers have written from this christian standpoint in the twentieth century, but their number is not great. T. S. Eliot and C. S. Lewis are both known to belong to this group to a degree:

Eliot's Ash Wednesday and Lewis' The Screwtape Letters are in the recent christian literary tradition. However, it is the French school of novelists which has the most followers of this tradition: Mauriac, Bernanos and Maurois to name only a few. At any rate, all these writers perceive a more ordered world where the solution to much despair and disillusionment among contemporary writers can be found. Some of the writers in the first two groups realize that western civilization is threatened by its own spiritual weakness. However, their own personal tragedy is that they cannot integrate the christian background into their own lives.

This third type of writer is superior to the other two because he presents a more complete and satisfying picture of life. I think I can illustrate this contention by a brief examination of two novels by Evelyn Waugh, A Handful of Dust and Brideshead Revisited. I wish to show in this comparison of these two novels how the same environment in the two novels, a wealthy family and their family seat, produce similar characters, with this one difference: one novel (A Handful of Dust) leaves the characters either dead or full of the blackest despair, while the other leaves them shaken but with their hope undestroyed. In the former of these novels, Waugh belongs to the second group; in the latter, he belongs to the third group. The difference is the presence of a theological system of reference in Brideshead Revisited.

The theme of A Handful of Dust is the destruction of a simple, dull and honest bore, by his wife, an amoral pleasure-

seeker. Grim events and fatuous lust abound in the novel, but the urbane and witty Waugh is always just around the corner. The final ingeniously devised tragedy of the book occurs when the ill-used hero finds himself trapped in the jungles of South America, doomed to spend the rest of his life in a village of savages, reading the works of Dickens to the white chief. There is a highly developed parallel worked out at the end of the book, showing the similarity of his despair and his jungle trap with the senseless amorality, equal despair and jungle-like atmosphere of his wife's world in London.

In the same year - 1934 - that A Handful of Dust was published, Evelyn Waugh was received into the Roman Catholic Church. This fact, quite naturally, had a great impact on his life and outlook. By this conversion, Waugh seems to have found a philosophical system completely satisfactory to himself, and at the same time an answer to man's despair on earth. With his conversion he seemed to abandon the theme of the deplorable condition of society, as portrayed in A Handful of Dust, and begin to develop the thesis that even that society might be a part of a preparation for man's real fulfillment. In developing this thesis, he tries to show how God is at work, through the medium of actual grace, on the worst sinners, to keep up their hope and draw them to their eternal destiny. This understanding or 'realization' has enabled Waugh to create more rounded personalities, and ones with a deep and abiding conflict in their own breast because of their own 'realization'. Two characters in Brideshead

Revisited illustrate Waugh's new attitude.

First there is the figure of Rex Mottram. Through this character Waugh manages to show the complete poverty of worldly success and riches sought for themselves and as our final end. Rex is a success in the eyes of the world: wealthy, a British M.P., promising, married well, and so forth. However, his sensitivity is nil, his understanding is non-existent, and his appreciation is limited to expensive liquor and flashy women. His complete lack of moral standards is shown when he informs Charles that he (Rex) does not wish a divorce, as it might damage his career, but he says he will not bother Charles and Julia, Rex's own wife, while Charles is living with her. Waugh sums up his opinion of Rex in these words of Julia's:

You know, Fr. Mowbray lit on the truth about Rex at once, that it took me a year of marriage to see. He simply wasn't all there. He wasn't a complete human being at all. He was a tiny bit of one, unnaturally developed; something in a bottle, an organ kept alive in a laboratory. I thought he was a sort of primitive savage, but he was something absolutely modern and up-to-date that only this ghastly age could produce. A tiny bit of a man pretending he was the whole.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, and this seems to be Waugh's point, we have Sebastian Flyte, who gives in throughout life to the sins of the bottle and the flesh, but who is a full grown person, because he has a sense of sin and guilt and a sense of the Divine Order of things. Not only does Sebastian give in to the sins of the flesh, but of sexual perversion. Indeed, we first hear of Sebastian when he has been sick through Charles' window after a drinking bout at Oxford. But at the same time

it is the same Sebastian who opens this dialogue with Charles:

"Oh dear, it's very difficult being a Catholic."  
 "Does it make much difference to you?"  
 "Of course. All the time."  
 "Well, I can't say I've noticed it. Are you struggling against temptation? You don't seem much more virtuous than me."  
 "I'm very, very, much more wicked" said Sebastian indignantly.  
 "Well then?"  
 "Who was it used to pray 'Oh God make me good, but not yet?'"  
 "I don't know. You, I should think."  
 "Why yes I do, every day. But it isn't that."  
 "I suppose they try and make you believe an awful lot of nonsense?"  
 "Is it nonsense? I wish it were. It sometimes sounds terribly sensible to me."<sup>12</sup>

In other words, Sebastian has a sense of guilt and sin and order. When he tells Charles that he (Sebastian) is much more wicked than Charles, he does not necessarily mean that he actually sins more, but rather that he knows how much he is sinning and therefore is more wicked because of his knowledge and faith. In the end, Sebastian seems to gravitate to the only place where he could be even remotely happy. He becomes a porter in a religious community in Africa, where, periodically, he can disappear for a drinking bout and return to his home near the chapel, repentant but unchanged, the quaint and colorful character who is pointed out to visitors.

I think the key word in pointing out the merit of this second novel over the first is 'realization'. There is this 'realization' on the part of the writer of the presence of God and evil in the world, and the reconciliation of the two. There is also 'realization' on the part of the principal



characters, and it is this that supplies the material for the drama and the tragedy.

Graham Greene along with Waugh, is a member of this third group of writers. I have chosen Waugh to illustrate the unique qualities of this group for two reasons; first, the two novels I have quoted from present a fairly simple illustration of the increased conflict and the more satisfying philosophy in the example of the novel belonging to the third group, that is, Brideshead Revisited; second, because I shall be referring back to Waugh and these novels in the subsequent arguments, I wanted to introduce him to the reader at an early point. Although I have spoken, and will continue to do so, of Greene's peculiar handling of the contemporary scene, I think that Greene's work is unique enough to justify the use of this phrase. Waugh has produced only the one work where this realization is present to any degree. Greene, on the other hand, has produced few works that do not show traces of this 'realization'.

This 'realization' involves the Christian premises from which Greene writes. The most fundamental of these premises is the fact of a fallen world. Adam fell from a high estate, and fell as head of the race. Human nature in its entirety was represented in him, and in his fall we all fell. By the fall, man lost principally, the capacity to attain the Beatific Vision, and also his impassibility and freedom from the usurpation of the passions. Prior to the fall, the intellect governed; after the fall, the passions could govern. Before

the fall, man could only sin intellectually; Adam's sin was one of pride. But after the fall, the passions were able to hold sway over the will, and evil entered the world. As Aristotle has it in his Ethics, the reason has a politic not a despotic influence over the passions; that is, the passions can rebel. Greene writes of the passions. But he also realizes that there is a merciful and just God, governing all. This, of course, presents us with the original problem. As Friday put the naive question to Robinson Crusoe, "Why does not God kill the devil?" The only logical solution possible, is that God tolerates evil and utilizes it in the divine plan. Assuredly, in some way, goodness is begotten of wickedness. It is precisely in the fact that out of moral evil comes greater good that we are to look for the basic reason of the divine tolerance of sin. These are the Christian premises that Greene writes from, and it is the realization of them that gives a third dimension, as it were, to his characters and his novels.

In this opening chapter I have attempted to break some ground for future planting and, I hope, harvesting. I have tried to point out some of the distinctions and definitions necessary for an understanding of the nature of the problem of evil. I then made an effort to fit this problem into our twentieth century background. The literary world was then examined and three distinct and important attitudes to evil in this world were shown and how the success of the authors involved, as novelists, depended to a great extent on their particular attitudes. And finally, I placed Graham Greene

in the third of the categories that I established. In the body of the thesis I shall try to illustrate Greene's handling of evil and its implications, by examining his four principal novels, Brighton Rock, The Power and the Glory, The Heart of the Matter, and The End of the Affair.

## NOTES

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9. A. Huxley, Point Counterpoint (New York: Random House, 1928), p. 480.
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12. Ibid., p. 86.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HARDNESS OF BRIGHTON ROCK

Brighton Rock is Greene's first book that may in the long run become a part of the literary tradition of the novel. It was first published in 1938 when Greene was thirty-four. In this book he has combined all the important themes which he had developed before in his lesser, but by no means insignificant works. He had served his literary apprenticeship, so to speak, on such novels as The Man Within, Stamboul Train, It's a Battlefield, England Made Me and A Gun for Sale. All these novels (two of them, Stamboul Train and A Gun for Sale, are distinguished as 'entertainments' rather than novels, but the distinction is not very real) display a technical competence unexcelled in the writings of the thirties. In various ways and in varying degrees these books all exploit the following themes: the hunted man, the effect of evil impressions on the innocence of youth, contemporary violence (with the exception of The Man Within which takes place in the nineteenth century), and the theme of betrayal. These themes together with some important new ones are found in Brighton Rock. It is these new themes that give to Brighton Rock the distinction of being Greene's first really important novel; it is his literary coming of age.

I shall briefly examine A Gun for Sale to illustrate the presence of these various early themes and Greene's attitude to them. In this novel (I abandon here the term 'entertainment') Greene is at his best in the particular field of the

'thriller'. All the necessary elements for a successful 'thriller' are present: international intrigue, the mysterious 'big' man who pulls the strings in the background and is not introduced until late in the book, the 'cops and robbers' chase, and finally there is the 'kill'. But at the same time there is something more to the novel than this conventional picture. There is a highly individual and well developed character in the person of Raven; there is an attempt to get beneath the surface, in a psychological sense, in the creation of some other characters; and finally there is a technical competence which is able to surmount some very difficult problems.

The story very briefly is this: an English millionaire steel magnate, in an effort to secure prospects for his vast business, has one of his colleagues hire Raven, a ~~have~~-lipped criminal with a grudge against life, to kill an eastern European Minister of War, in order to stir up a war scare. Sir Marcus, the magnate, is not introduced until late in the novel, but Davis, his colleague and underling, is met with quite early. In order to get rid of the witness to their intrigue, Davis is ordered to pay off Raven in stolen bank notes, the numbers of which are known by the police. Raven soon finds out about this double cross and the rest of the book involves his pursuit of revenge. Mather, the detective on Raven's trail, and his fiancée, Anne, are neatly worked into the story as a sub-plot.

The themes of the hunted man, betrayal, and the effect

of evil in early life are all encountered in the treatment of Raven. We do not see him when he is not fleeing and furtive. Greene has taken great pains in portraying Raven and, as with all of Greene's main characters, the reader comes to feel the same pity for the character as does Greene himself. Raven's early life seems to have been an almost unrelieved hell. His father is a criminal and a drunkard; his mother commits suicide by stabbing herself with a saw-edged knife; Raven is subsequently sent to an 'institution' where life is possibly worse than at his so-called home. This is the evil environment in which Raven grows up. At the first opportunity he flees the institution and takes up with a gang of race-course hoodlums - the same gang, incidentally, which kills Kite, the former leader of Pinkie's gang in Brighton Rock. But besides all these early surroundings and incidents, there is something else which affects Raven's whole life and leads to his misanthropic attitude. He carries his own evil environment around with him in the form of a physical evil, his hare-lip. This is another reason for his seeking revenge on society as a whole.

As well as his early evil environment and his present position as the hunted man, Raven also has to contend with being alone in the world, and this is perhaps what makes him a really tragic figure and therefore worthy of our pity. This feeling of loneliness and isolation is not something caused solely by his past life, particularly his childhood; it is accentuated and put in bold relief by four specific instances of betrayal. First, he is betrayed by Davis when the stolen

bank notes are given as payment; then he is betrayed by the man and woman who run the 'pub' over which he lives (they phone the police); then by the doctor with the shady reputation (he will not operate on Raven's lip and he too phones the police); finally he is betrayed by Anne when she tells the police how and where to catch him. The second and third betrayals are particularly hard because they are enacted by people of his own type, and there is supposed to be honor among thieves: "He was touched by something he had never felt before..... These people were of his own kind...for the second time in one day he had been betrayed by the lawless. He had always been alone but never so alone as this."<sup>1</sup> The last instance, his betrayal by Anne, means a betrayal by the one person he had ever trusted and perhaps loved, for whom he had performed his few charitable acts. Because of this almost overwhelming accumulation of misfortunes, Raven finally is killed. He dies experiencing the deepest despair and excruciating pain.

In A Gun for Sale, we see exemplified the three themes that are common to nearly all of Greene's work, early and late: the hunted man, betrayal, and the effect of evil on innocence. But as I mentioned, with the publication of Brighton Rock, these themes take on an added significance, and several new themes are developed. I do not want to give the impression that Greene develops in a clearly definable way, because he does not. Traces of the 'added significance and new themes' mentioned, can be found in work prior to 1938. Also, after Brighton Rock had been published there



appeared two more 'entertainments', The Ministry of Fear and The Third Man, both of which revert to the more superficial level of the pre-1938 work, and, incidentally, to the use of the happy ending. Suffice it to say that there is no hard and fast rule to distinguish periods in Greene's work. I have used 1938 as an approximate date when Greene's work seems to become more significant.

Greene takes an unusual interest in the effect of little incidents of early life. In one of his autobiographical essays Greene says, "It is in those early years that I would look for the crisis, the moment when life took a new slant in its journey towards death."<sup>2</sup> Later in this same essay, Greene gives some valuable information on one such incident in his own childhood. It is an incident that not only started him on his career as a writer, but set for him the very themes which he was subsequently to develop with such care, and to which he has added so much. The passage is important enough to warrant quotation:

But when - perhaps I was fourteen by that time - I took Miss Marjorie Bowen's The Viper of Milan from the library shelf, the future for better or worse really struck. From that moment I began to write. All the other possible futures slid away: the potential civil servant, the don, the clerk had to look for other incarnations. Imitation after imitation of Miss Bowen's magnificent novel went into exercise books - stories of sixteenth-century Italy or twelfth-century England marked with enormous brutality and a despairing romanticism. It was as if I had been supplied once and for all with a subject.<sup>3</sup>

Greene has previously said that he was intrigued by such novels as King Solomon's Mines, but even at that age he saw the futility of trying to see himself in the guise of such great and

good figures as Alan Quartermain and Sir Henry Curtis. He goes on:

It was no good in that real world to dream that one would ever be a Sir Henry Curtis, but della Scala who at last turned from an honesty that never paid and betrayed his friends and died dishonoured and a failure even at treachery - it was easier for a child to escape behind his mask. As for Visconti, with his beauty, his patience and his genius for evil, I had watched him pass by many a time in his black Sunday suit smelling of mothballs. His name was Carter. He exercised terror from a distance like a snowcloud over the young fields. Goodness has only once found a perfect incarnation in a human body and never will again, but evil can always find a home there. Human nature is not black and white but black and grey. I read all that in The Viper of Milan and I looked around and I saw that it was so. ...One had lived for fourteen years in a wild jungle country without a map, but now the paths had been traced and naturally one had to follow them. ...Anyway she had given me my pattern - religion might later explain it to me in other terms, but the pattern was already there - perfect evil walking the world where perfect good can never walk again, and only the pendulum ensures that after all in the end justice is done.<sup>4</sup>

Later, in The Power and the Glory, we see the same theme illustrated in regard to Mr. Tench, the desolate, spiritless dentist:

Mr. Tench's father had been a dentist too - his first memory was finding a discarded cast in a wastepaper basket - the rough toothless gaping mouth of clay, like something dug up in Dorset - Neanderthal or Pithecanthropus. It had been his favorite toy: they tried to tempt him with Meccano: but fate had struck.

There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in. The hot, wet river-port and the vultures lay in the waste-paper basket. We should be thankful we cannot see the horrors and degradations lying around our childhood, in cupboards and bookshelves, everywhere.<sup>5</sup>

In these passages we see Greene's concern with the importance of childhood as an influence on later life. Fate often takes advantage of the susceptibility and defencelessness of children. In spite of this, Greene feels "in the end justice is done".

I think that Greene's outlook on life in general can be derived from these passages. In a sense he is a romantic and expects the best, the idyllic; but he looks in vain for an Alan Quartermain or a Sir Henry Curtis. In view of this, Greene became somewhat pessimistic, seeing everywhere violence, brutality and lust. Even in the triumphant and the peaceful, Greene saw the beginnings of despair and havoc:

One looked around and saw the doomed everywhere - the champion runner who one day would sag over the tape; the head of the school who would atone, poor devil, during forty dreary undistinguished years; the scholar ...and when success began to touch oneself too, however mildly, one could only pray that failure would not be held off for too long.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, with this frustrated romanticism, this extreme awareness of evil in the world and this revulsion from, but also preoccupation with violence, Greene began to write.

And as a good novelist should, he turned to the contemporary scene for his material. The contemporary scene of the thirties provided abundant material in Greene's case. The violent, immoral unprincipled inter-war period was at its height. Arthur Calder-Marshall describes the scene in these words:

The disenchantment of the Twenties - a matter of the mind and the emotions - became in the Thirties, even more a matter of economics, politics and war, a matter of life and death. For D. H. Lawrence in the Twenties, there was still the mysticism of the dark pulse of the blood. For Greene and others in the Thirties, there was the gathering of evil and violence, from Manchuria, Abyssinia, Spain, the shadows cast by war came closer home and closer; and every year, the mounting frustration, indignity and disgust.<sup>7</sup>

And it was because of this atmosphere that Greene was able to lift his material almost directly from the newspapers of the

time. Mr. Marshall indicates Greene's contemporary source material when he says: "The financial juggling of Ivan Krogh in England Made Me was suggested by the suicide of Kreuger, the Swedish Match King: Brighton Rock sprang from the Brighton Race Gang Murders: Confidential Agent derived from the Spanish Civil War: The Power and the Glory from Garrido's anti-clerical governorship of Tabasco in Mexico."<sup>8</sup>

In keeping with this general idea of contemporary violence and newspaper headlines, Greene's style in presenting this material is often very similar to news reporting style. The novels are charged with fast, factual narrative with a concentration on objective detail. This passage describing Mr. Prewitt the lawyer is a typical example:

Mr. Prewitt knew. You were certain of that at the first sight of him. He was a stranger to no wangle, twist, contradictory clause, ambiguous word. His yellow shaven middle-aged face was deeply lined with legal decisions. He carried a brown leather portfolio and wore striped trousers which seemed a little too new for the rest of him. He came into the room with hollow joviality, a dockside manner: he had long pointed shoes which caught the light. Everything about him, from his breeziness to his morning coat, was brand new, except himself and that had aged in many law courts, with many victories more damaging than defeats. He had acquired the habit of not listening: innumerable rebukes from the bench had taught him that. He was deprecating, discreet, sympathetic and as tough as leather.<sup>9</sup>

This style seems an excellent vehicle for the theme Greene usually deals with; the theme of contemporary violence, loneliness, betrayal and evil.

With these preliminaries in mind, we can now look at Brighton Rock and try to see what Greene has done in this novel. Greene was actually breaking new ground when he wrote

Brighton Rock. As I mentioned earlier, the old themes are present in the writing, but they often have a new significance. Furthermore, there are new themes introduced.

Far and away the most important factor in distinguishing Brighton Rock, and the three succeeding novels, from the pre-Brighton Rock writing, is the fact of 'realization' in one or more of the main characters. This realization seems to be almost a projection of one side of Greene on to his characters at this point.

Greene became a convert to Catholicism in 1926 when he was only twenty-two. It was not until 1938, however, that he actually began to make his Catholicism an integral part of his writings. The presence of moral evil and its significance to man had not yet been perceived by any of Greene's characters. But in Brighton Rock, the theme of moral evil, if not directly of a fallen world, became overt. This theme of the fallen world, and man's realization of his position in it is a vital part of his four big novels. Greene's views, of course, reflect the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. Man, through Original Sin, has brought about a fallen world, where he is susceptible to evil temptations. Man is prone to commit evil acts because his passions are not under the control of reason. However, Greene realizes that man need not fall prey to the passions.

It is this world of violence and evil that Greene sets out to portray in Brighton Rock. The theme is enhanced in this novel because two of the characters recognize the gravity

and implications of sin. They realize man's perilous position in this world where evil predominates, a world where redemption and salvation are only accomplished by the initial gratuitous grace of God. Greene is fond of quoting a famous line from Marlowe's Dr. Faustus which is apropos to our world: "Why, this is Hell, nor are we out of it." There is definitely a hell on earth for Greene, and I think that this is the main idea he sets out to illustrate in Brighton Rock.

Greene is obsessed by the idea of evil in this novel and it becomes an almost unrelieved picture of horror. The only relief in the book is the presence of the boisterous, good-natured, fun-loving Ida Arnold. Other than her we see nothing but frightened, fleeing, lonely figures, like 'Fred' Hale and Pinkie, or slick, shallow, and superficial parasites like Colleoni and Mr. Prewitt. From one end of the novel to the other there is a procession of violent incidents; they could be compared to the tableaux and stalls in a museum of horror. The mood is set from the beginning in the masterful opening to the novel and is sustained to the horrifying death scene of Pinkie.

The very first paragraph forebodes what is to come. The relentless tracking down of Hale, one feels, is going to end inevitably in his death. To add to the grimness of this conclusion and of Hale's last few hours of life, the whole scene is set against the background of surface gaiety, manufactured fun and commercial hilarity. Everyone is seriously set on having a good time at any cost. In the midst of the music,

the sunshine and the pleasure seekers, was 'Fred' Hale. Here is the first paragraph:

Hale knew they meant to murder him before he had been in Brighton three hours. With his inky fingers and his bitten nails, his manner cynical and nervous, anybody could tell he didn't belong - belong to the early summer sun, the cool Whitsun wind off the sea, the holiday crowd. They came in by train from Victoria every five minutes, rocked down Queen's Road standing on the tops of the little local trams, stepped off in bewildered multitudes into fresh and glittering air; the new silver paint sparkled on the piers, the cream houses ran away into the west like a pale Victorian water-color; a race in miniature motors, a band playing, flower gardens in bloom below the front, an aeroplane advertising something for the health in pale vanishing clouds across the sky.<sup>10</sup>

This is the perfect setting for Hale's last look at life. A world of shallow pleasure-seekers where the only sparkle comes from fresh silver paint. Hale, unfortunately, needs more than 'something for the health' at this point.

This relentless and remorseless tracking down and killing of Hale during the opening pages, against the background of holiday Brighton, is surpassed in horror only by Pinkie's death, where, his eyes blinded by vitriol, with which he had once threatened Rose, he plunges to his death:

Then she couldn't tell what happened: glass - somewhere - broke, he screamed and she saw his face - steam. He screamed and screamed, with his hands up to his eyes; he turned and ran; she saw a police baton at his feet and broken glass. 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 schoolboy flying in panic and pain, scrambling over a fence, running on. "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>11</sup>

This then is our last view of Pinkie, and almost the last scene Greene leaves us to meditate. But not quite! This is the last

scene of all, Rose, walking alone after Pinkie's death:

She turned out on to the front opposite the Palace Pier and began to walk firmly away from the direction of her home towards Frank's. There was something to be salvaged from that house and room, something else they wouldn't be able to get over - his voice speaking a message to her: if there was a child, speaking to the child, 'If he loved you' the priest had said, 'that shows...' She walked rapidly in the thin June sunlight towards the worst horror of all.<sup>12</sup>

This is the last scene in the book. And what are the words of love she will hear? what is the worst horror of all?

"God damn you, you little bitch, why can't you go back home forever and let me be?"<sup>13</sup>

In between these two scenes, the first and the last of the book, there are numerous comparable incidents of despair, violence and evil: there is the sordid affair between Dallow and Judy, the wife of the blind tailor; there is Mr. Prewitt at home, with his loneliness, perversion and gruesome wife; there is Mr. Colleoni, the successful man, with his competent machinery for eliminating opposition; there is the murder of poor old pathetic Spicer.

But besides all these obvious things, there is a far more important presentation of our fallen, but not lost, world; this is the presentation of the two children, Pinkie and Rose. They are certainly no more than children in years, although their experience is such that we all might go a lifetime without confronting similar circumstances. Greene felt that nowhere was the existence of evil made more evident than in regard to children; here it has innocence as a background. Greene illustrates in many of his novels that this innocence is not long uncorrupted. We have seen the



tragedy of early evil influences on the life of Raven in A Gun for Sale. In this respect, Greene's technique is often similar to that of Henry James in The Turn of the Screw - I shall have more to say about Greene and James in a later section.

In Brighton Rock there is the added element that the children, Pinkie and Rose, are Catholics. Therefore, they are the characters who 'know' or 'realize', in the special sense in which I use the word. As the priest says to Rose when she goes to the confessional, "A Catholic is more capable of evil than anyone". If you will recall, that is what Sebastian Flyte said in the passage from Waugh's Brideshead Revisited quoted in the first chapter. When Sebastian tells Charles that he (Sebastian) is very, very much more wicked, he means that as a Catholic he is committing greater evil because he recognizes evil for what it is: the willing of something, in this case, which is not in accord with the will of God. Rose and Pinkie are in similar circumstances. When Pinkie has just signed the marriage register at the civil ceremony, and Rose is about to sign:

He stood back and watched Rose awkwardly sign - his temporal safety in return for two immortalities of pain. He had no doubt whatever that this was mortal sin, and he was filled with a kind of gloomy hilarity and pride. He saw himself now as a full grown man for whom the angels wept.<sup>14</sup>

But this realization of the implications of his actions is not his great tragedy. Rather, Pinkie's great tragedy is that, for him, hell is the only reality; it is all he has ever known: "Credo in unum Satanum" he says at one point. And he grows

familiar with hell and accepts it, which is the worst sin of all - despair:

But he had a sense that he would never be scared again: running down from the track he had been afraid, afraid of pain and more afraid of damnation - of the sudden and unshriven death. Now it was as if he was 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, [not his wife, notice, as he knows he has not really been properly married] 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>15</sup>

This recalls the earlier quotation, "Why, this is Hell, nor are we out of it".

In order to add greater emphasis to the dichotomy of the secular and religious views of life that he is establishing here, Greene develops the relationship between Pinkie and Rose, on the one hand, and Ida Arnold, on the other. Rose, for instance, resents Ida's prying, and asking questions; she resents this because it means trouble for Pinkie. She loves Pinkie, partly because of their common background and beliefs. She resents Ida because **Ida** shares none of these:

We were all Romans in Nelson Place. You believe in things. Like Hell. But you can see she doesn't believe a thing. She said bitterly: 'You can tell the world's all dandy with her.'<sup>16</sup>

And you can tell the world's not all dandy with Rose, nor Pinkie. Notice that when you are a Roman in Nelson Place, you believe in things like hell, not God or heaven; when beliefs are mentioned, it is hell that comes to the mind first. With Pinkie, too, this separation from Ida is realized, as well as his close tie with Rose. Despite his perverted

view of sex and his frequent revulsion from Rose, partly because of her immaturity, partly because of her lack of color, largely, just because she is a female who is anxious to play the 'game', Pinkie realizes that Rose complements him. When he first meets her at Snow's and is trying to win her, for his own protection, he says, ironically, "I'll be seeing you... You and me have things in common."<sup>17</sup> Their complementing of each other is again indicated in this passage, which occurs during their first walk together:

"But you believe, don't you," Rose implored him, "you think it's true?"

"Of course it's true," the Boy said. "What else could there be?" he went scornfully on. "Why," he said, "it's the only thing that fits. These atheists, they don't know nothing. Of course there's Hell. Flames and damnation," he said with his eyes on the dark shifting water and the lightning and the lamps going out above the black struts of the Palace Pier, "torments".

"And Heaven too," Rose said with anxiety, while the rain fell interminably on.

"Oh, maybe," the Boy said, "maybe."<sup>18</sup>

Once again it is hell and damnation that is thought of. Pinkie is the bad side and Rose the not-so-bad side, of the same coin. At another point, Pinkie himself points out his closeness with Rose, by saying: "She was good, he'd discovered that, and he was damned; they were made for each other."<sup>19</sup>

With this pair of characters who 'realize', who together make one complete person, aware of heaven and hell, is contrasted Ida Arnold. Ida, who believes in good times, sensual pleasure, Guinness beer, and fair play; buxom, motherly, happy Ida, always determined that her kind of justice **be** done. Ida is a humanitarian; she explains to her lovers that everything is all right as long as no one gets hurt. Rose cannot forget

the gulf that separates her and Pinkie from Ida: "Right and wrong. That's what she talks about. Right and Wrong. As if she knew."<sup>20</sup> There is a vague reminder of T. S. Eliot when Greene describes Rose after Ida's attempts to win her over. He says: "The Nelson Place eyes stared back at her without understanding; driven to her hole the small animal peered out at the bright breezy world: in the hole were murder, copulation, extreme poverty, fidelity and the love and fear of God." Despite the close contact with evil, there is still belief and love of God. This is important to remember because later we will see that suffering, for Greene, is a means of attaining and strengthening one's love of God.

Some critics have maintained the thesis that Greene, although a competent technical writer who never bores, maintains interest by other than legitimate artistic means, namely, by caricature. Richard Hoggart, writing in Essays in Criticism, says that Greene's obsession with certain ideas, leads him to overstatement of his case and to unfair, one-sided caricatures. He says:

Hell is certainly pictured with a certain intimacy, with more intimacy than heaven, than the instances of goodness and love. They are included, are recognized intellectually, but do not seem to be felt anywhere near as strongly as the wickedness. Indeed, Greene sometimes finds only sinfulness where many of us would find something less reprehensible. Ida, the fat Guinness-and-oysters barmaid of Brighton Rock who has clearly all kinds of virtues, even though she may not recognize sin and will go on talking about right-and-wrong, is several times directly and violently disparaged by Greene. I think particularly of the way he vilifies her as she prepares to spend the night in an hotel with Phil Corkery. Or of his comment on the workers who came in thousands for a day at Brighton, people very like Ida: [and then Hoggart quotes from Brighton Rock] 'her amusements were their amusements, her

superstitions their superstitions... she had no more love for anyone than they had.'

It is this last clause which grates, which is - one's own experience of life insists, and without being simply a jolly humanist - just not the whole truth. Greene has misunderstood; his obsession has blinded him to an important part of the truth.<sup>21</sup>

I do not want to give an unfair example of Mr. Hoggart's views, because he does go on to make some critical comments on Greene's strong points. For example, he says, "Greene's style is nervous, vivid, astringent, the vehicle of a restless and pungent imagination: it picks out the shopkeeper in the Lehr's village with his 'three commercial chins';...". But surely in the long passage of criticism quoted above Mr. Hoggart is missing the whole point; and it is the point which Greene is trying to make throughout the whole book.

The point is that the world of 'realizers', such as Pinkie and Rose, is separated by an abysmal chasm from the majority of people, who are in Ida's category. Hoggart says that 'Greene sometimes finds only sinfulness where many of us would find something less reprehensible'. Surely this is missing the theme. Greene does not find Ida sinful simply because she is not one of the characters that 'realize', and without realization one cannot sin. That is, unless you recognize something as evil you cannot sin by choosing it. That is why Pinkie and Rose are shown to be so aware of what they are doing; they realize. That is the reason for Pinkie's being called a really damned person, because he went about choosing evil consciously. Greene does not, as Mr. Hoggart claims he does, consider Ida sinful. He has pictured her as she is: a fun-loving, humanitarian-type person, who

believes that 'a little fun never hurt anyone'. She is not said to be one of the damned; this is a destiny that Pinkie predicts for himself. Greene wisely makes no pronouncement on Ida's future. She is in the novel primarily to illustrate the secular outlook of the majority of people and to contrast the more complete outlook of Pinkie and Rose. Mr. Hoggart feels rather indignant that Greene should several times 'violently disparage' Ida. The examples he gives of this are rather unfortunate for his position. First he says, "I think particularly of the way he vilifies her as she prepares to spend the night in an hotel with Phil Corkery." Well, surely to anyone who considers this a morally wrong act, vilification is not too strong an attitude. But I am not convinced that Greene is indulging in vilification in this particular section. I have read the section over and to me it seems a perfectly realistic picture of what Ida would do and experience. Greene's only marginal comments at the time are to the effect that Ida was expectant and was certainly going to enjoy herself. I think that Greene gives a very true indication of just what is happening, at the more significant level, when he describes Ida as she undresses and prepares for the illicit bed: "She sucked the chocolate between her teeth and smiled, her plump toes working in the rug, waiting for Mr. Corkery - just a great big blossoming surprise."<sup>22</sup> I think there is something lacking in Mr. Hoggart if he cannot detect in this passage a certain tongue-in-cheek tolerance on the part of Greene. The second example Mr. Hoggart suggests as an instance of Greene

'violently disparaging' Ida is this: "her amusements were their amusements, her superstitions their superstitions... she had no more love for anyone than they had."<sup>23</sup> However, immediately prior to this, Greene has said: "she was honest, she was kindly, she belonged to the great middle law-abiding class." I think it is clear that here once again, Greene is merely pointing out Ida's symbolic position as the representative of the secular attitude.

I have examined this passage of Mr. Hoggart's at some length because I feel that this is one of the things Greene is trying to point out: the immense difference between those who have a complete system of thought, those who have an awareness of the order of things, and the place of God and evil in that order, as contrasted with those who wander through a spiritual desert, with material well-being their only concern. I am not for a minute maintaining that Mr. Hoggart belongs to this latter group; but I do think he is missing this distinction in Greene's novel. This distinction is illustrated by the recent reception given Greene's play, The Living Room, on Broadway. The play had quite a respectable run in London and Paris and was well received by audience and critics alike. However, it was surprisingly a 'flop' on Broadway. The reason for this, advanced by most responsible critics, was that the American people are not interested in sin, suffering and salvation, which is what the play primarily treats of, but rather they are interested in material progress and physical pleasure, which is illustrated, said one critic, by the recent Broadway success with the significant title, The Solid Gold Cadillac.

There is another theme that Greene treats of in his novels which arises out of the evil; this is the desire for peace. Peace is alluded to in various ways and through different symbols, but its purpose is always the same: to escape the violent, evil world we live in. Sometimes peace is darkness; sometimes it is a dream of a rural idyl; sometimes it is just a vague, indescribable longing. When asked his name, Hale says:

"Fred". He said it automatically: it was the name he always gave to chance acquaintances; from some obscure motive of secrecy he shielded his own name, Charles: from childhood he had loved secrecy, a hiding place, the dark."<sup>24</sup>

For Pinkie it is music that offers peace and escape; I suppose a psychologist would say that the music is a means of returning Pinkie to the peace of the church and the mystery of the mass, a time when he was less damned and did not continually have to fight to keep himself free and independent, as he must do now in the cruel world.

"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 - the lighted corner below the organ, the smell of incense and laundered surplices, and the music. Music - it didn't matter what music - "Agnus dei", "lovely to look at, beautiful to hold," "The starling on our walks," "credo in unum Dominum" - any music moved him, speaking of things he didn't understand."<sup>25</sup>

This 'dona nobis pacem' becomes the theme song, so to speak, throughout the novel. Pinkie, as he walks into his room, the only place where he finds anything resembling peace, sings:

"Agnus dei qui tollis peccata mundi..."; he walked stiffly, the jacket sagging across his immature shoulders, but when he opened the door of his room - "Dona nobis pacem" - his pallid face peered dimly back at him full of pride from the mirror over the ewer, the soap-dish, the basin



of stale water.<sup>26</sup>

And at still another point we find the same longing, the same desire, *Dona nobis pacem*, "How could you think out a larger strategy under those conditions? He had a sudden nostalgia for the small dark cupboard room, the silence, the pale light on the harvest Burgundy."<sup>27</sup> Although this peace is an elusive thing, it is the desire for it and the promise of it implicit in this desire, that allows one to tolerate the evil that one endures and contributes to in this world. It is a hope that even Pinkie shares. As he says: "Between the stirrup and the ground...".

The next logical step for Greene, and for us in examining him, is to consider the eschatological aspect, the four last things; death, judgement, hell and heaven. In some of his earlier books Greene has portrayed characters of the blackest hue; Raven, for example, in A Gun for Sale, is a professional killer. In a recent (1948) short story, A Hint of an Explanation, there is a character of the same type (significantly called Mr. Blacker), who tries to corrupt a little boy's belief. But surely Greene never created before or since a character the like of Pinkie. The portrait of Pinkie is one of almost unrelieved evil. When Rose tells Pinkie to keep on if he enjoys it, at a time when he is pinching her wrists 'until his nails nearly met', he is irritated because she does not respond normally and Greene observes: "He sat there, anger like a live coal in his belly, as the music came on again: all the good times he'd had in the old days with nails and splinters: the tricks he'd learnt later with a razor blade: what would be the fun if people didn't squeal?"<sup>28</sup>

Later, we see the delight and cold-blooded thoroughness with which Pinkie slashes the face of the small time bookie who has gone over to Colleoni's 'protection agency'; this grim pleasure is also present when Pinkie does away with Spicer. But in spite of all this, Greene wisely will not pronounce on any individual's future in eternity. No matter how black a character is painted in Greene's novels, there is always an attitude of pity to be detected on the part of the author. I think this will be made clear by reflecting on Brighton Rock; despite his satanic outlook we are made to feel a vague pity for such a character as Pinkie. Greene implies that there are extenuating circumstances in every such case over and above the ones we know.

But apart from justice, Greene's concern in regard to eschatology is with mercy, the mercy of God. I am reminded of a speech of Portia's in The Merchant of Venice, where she is pleading Antonio's case in a court of justice: "...in the course of justice, none of us should see salvation: we do pray for mercy". Rose believes in this mercy and is able to imagine it even for Pinkie. "She would have found the courage now to kill herself if she hadn't been afraid that somewhere in that obscure countryside of death they might miss each other - mercy operating somehow for one and not for the other."<sup>29</sup> The priest in the confessional backs up this thought, even though rather perfunctorily: "'We must hope and pray,' he said, 'hope and pray. The Church does not demand that we believe any soul is cut off from mercy.'<sup>30</sup> It is this mercy

that Greene treats of in many of his novels. When we come to examine some of his more recent books we will find the theme handled at greater length.

The great tragedy for Pinkie and Rose, and for all men, is that they can know and realize, yet, because they are free and because they are fallen, they are liable to choose evil in place of good. Pinkie knows that mercy might be there even for him. He tells Rose he does not go to mass any longer, and she answers:

"You might die sudden."

He closed his eyes under the bright empty arch, and a memory floated up imperfectly into speech. "You know what they say - 'Between the stirrup and the ground, he something sought and something found.'"

"Mercy."

"That's right: Mercy."<sup>31</sup>

Later, when he is being chased by the razor-gang from the race course, he reflects:

You could be saved between the stirrup and the ground, but you couldn't be saved if you didn't repent and he hadn't time, scrambling down the chalk down, to feel the least remorse.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly with Rose, she knows what she is going into, but she makes the conscious choice:

People coming back from seven-thirty Mass, people on the way to eight-thirty Matins - she watched them in their dark clothes like a spy. She didn't envy them and she didn't despise them: they had their salvation and she had Pinkie and damnation.<sup>33</sup>

This does not seem a very wise choice, but Greene is here making the point that it is because the world is what it is, a place of evil where the legions of satan "roam through the world seeking the ruin of souls", a place where the innocence of youth is deflowered by the carnality and violence of age,

that these children are so confused, even though they realize the error, that they can consciously choose evil and damnation. There are so many factors to consider. What can we say about an environment that has given Pinkie this view of life:

She got up and he saw the skin of her thigh for a moment above the artificial silk, and a prick of sexual desire disturbed him like a sickness. That was what happened to a man in the end: the stuffy room, the wakeful children, the Saturday night movements from the other bed. Was there no escape - anywhere - for anyone? It was worth murdering a world.<sup>34</sup>

In that passage we see what vision Pinkie has of the future. In the following passage we catch a hint of what has brought him to this frame of mind:

Even if death came suddenly, driving home to-night, the smash on the lamp post - there was still 'between the stirrup and the ground'. The houses on one side ceased altogether, and the sea came back to them, beating at the undercliff drive, a darkness and deep sound. He wasn't really deceiving himself - he'd learnt the other day that when the time was short there were other things than contrition to think about. It didn't matter anyway ...he wasn't made for peace, he couldn't believe in it. Heaven was a word: hell was something he could trust. A brain was only capable of what it could conceive, and it couldn't conceive what it had never experienced: his cells were formed of the cement school playground, the dead fire and the dying man in the St. Pancras waiting-room, his bed at Billy's and his parent's bed. 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....<sup>35</sup>

This then is Greene's sad commentary on the world: that it can produce a Pinkie. The world, after all, in this case, is nothing but the people in it. It is people who have brought about the corruption of a once innocent boy, be the corruption ever so far back. But Greene leaves no delusion about Pinkie's own pride having the principal part to play in his eventual judgement.

I think Greene has been a little carried away by his theme in Brighton Rock. I shall have more to say on this subject in the conclusion of the thesis. I should like to point out, in regard to this matter, something which is relevant to the next chapter, and which will serve as a connecting link.

At one point in the novel, Ida Arnold is trying to convince Rose that she (Rose) is making a mistake by sticking with Pinkie. To all this Rose remains obdurate, and when Ida points out Pinkie's unsavory past record and so forth, Rose responds with, "People change". This affords Greene an opportunity to express his view of human nature and also to show the relevance of the title. Ida replies: "Oh, no they don't. Look at me. I've never changed. It's like those sticks of rock: bite it all the way down, you'll still read Brighton."<sup>36</sup> Now this is all very well; Greene's metaphor may be quite appropriate; perhaps human nature is as homogenous and as hard as a stick of Brighton Rock. However, it seems to me that Greene, in Brighton Rock, is obsessed with one color and one flavor of Brighton rock; the truth is, he has let us sample only one stick. Earlier I quoted Greene as saying in one of his autobiographical essays, that human nature was not black and white, but black and grey. I think that in Brighton Rock, we get little opportunity of examining the grey variety. That is why I feel that, as far as themes go, The Power and the Glory is a step forward; it shows that he can handle the grey, as well as the black variety of human nature.

## NOTES

1. Graham Greene, A Gun for Sale (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1953), p. 33.
2. Graham Greene, The Lost Childhood and other essays (London: Eyre & Spottiswoods, 1951), p. 13.
3. Ibid., p. 15.
4. Ibid., p. 16.
5. Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), p. 15.
6. Graham Greene, The Lost Childhood and other essays (London: Eyre & Spottiswoods, 1951), p. 16.
7. Arthur Calder-Marshall, "Graham Greene," Living Writers (London: Sylvan Press, 1946), p. 40.
8. Ibid., p. 40.
9. Graham Greene, Brighton Rock (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1938), p. 165.
10. Ibid., p. 3.
11. Ibid., p. 353-354.
12. Ibid., p. 361.
13. Ibid., p. 256.
14. Ibid., p. 246.
15. Ibid., p. 263.
16. Ibid., p. 125.
17. Ibid., p. 36.
18. Ibid., p. 71.
19. Ibid., p. 179.
20. Ibid., p. 289.
21. Richard Hoggart, "The Force of Caricature," Essays in Criticism, III (October, 1953), p. 449-450.

## NOTES

22. Graham Greene, Brighton Rock (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1938), p. 211.
23. Ibid., p. 110.
24. Ibid., p. 20.
25. Ibid., p. 70-71.
26. Ibid., p. 137.
27. Ibid., p. 159.
28. Ibid., p. 70.
29. Ibid., p. 358.
30. Ibid., p. 359.
31. Ibid., p. 126.
32. Ibid., p. 152.
33. Ibid., p. 282.
34. Ibid., p. 127.
35. Ibid., p. 332.
36. Ibid., p. 288.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE LABYRINTHINE WAYS OF THE POWER AND THE GLORY

In Brighton Rock, Graham Greene seemed to put all his skill to the task of portraying a scene of almost uninterrupted evil. There was some indication that the central figure, Pinkie, was a victim of environment: the squalor of home-life, the Saturday night 'game', and his early training on the tracks. But although Greene presents a convincing picture of the evil environment that Pinkie is confronted with, the fact that Pinkie chooses the evil consciously and deliberately is also evident. He is not driven necessarily to the evil; often it seems just an arbitrary choice. Usually Pinkie is able to weigh the situation and it is after doing this that he chooses evil. It is this fact, besides the evil environment that is described, that makes Brighton Rock one of the best pictures of the satanic influence on earth. Pinkie, if not the devil incarnate, is the first lieutenant of satan on earth. I have tried to show in the first chapter how his 'blackness' is increased by the fact of his 'knowing'.

A somewhat different situation is encountered in The Power and the Glory. In this novel, Greene gives a very full portrait of a Mexican priest, who, although he has fathered a child and is an alcoholic, is serving his flock at the peril of his life. The important difference between this figure and Pinkie is that the priest has much good in him and can yield to the 'temptation' of God and good occasionally. It



is this point that puts The Power and the Glory ahead of Brighton Rock, not necessarily in technical excellence, but rather in penetration of character, and in dramatic effect.

At the beginning of The Lawless Roads, (a travel book about Greene's journey through Mexico, from which most of the characters and incidents in The Power and the Glory are taken) there is an autobiographical sketch. Greene recalls moments in his youth when he had surreptitiously slipped away from prescribed activities to spend a few minutes alone or on some clandestine mission. In the course of this reminiscence Greene makes a general remark that applies to the whole of life:

One was an inhabitant of both countries; on Saturday and Sunday afternoons of one side of the baize door, the rest of the week of the other. How can life on a border be other than restless? You are pulled by different ties of hate and love. For hate is quite as powerful a tie; it demands allegiance.<sup>1</sup>

And later, on the same topic, Greene says:

And so faith came to one - shapelessly, without dogma, a presence above a croquet lawn, something associated with violence, cruelty, evil across the way. One began to believe in heaven because one believed in hell, but for a long while it was only hell one could picture with a certain intimacy....<sup>2</sup>

These two passages illustrate two important points. First, there is the drama implicit in the figure of a man with a foot in two worlds and owing allegiance to both; a man living on the border of good and evil, that is, this world. Second, there is 'a hint of an explanation' in the second passage that there is a purpose for the evil in the world.

The passage above from The Lawless Roads, which places

man as an inhabitant of two countries, is certainly a foresight of what Greene was going to develop in The Power and the Glory. It appears from the passage quoted that Greene's penetration into man's problems and his situation is also something that is carried over from his travelogue on Mexico to his novel on the same subject. The whiskey priest is certainly a man who has a foot in two different worlds and feels the two antagonistic pulls.

The Power and the Glory is a more successful novel than Brighton Rock because the central figure in the former is more real and the reader can identify himself with this protagonist and sympathize with him. Pinkie in Brighton Rock is certainly a pathetic character. However, I do not think that many readers find themselves in Pinkie's position or feel an urge to solve his problems. Rather, he is looked upon as an oddity; someone who is plausible in every way, but whom you are not likely to meet even in the course of a varied career. A boy of seventeen, head of a razor-swinging race-course gang, who has killed at least two people and injured countless others, and who attempts to have his child bride commit suicide in order to insure his own safety, is hardly a common figure in our society. There are few readers who feel inclined to identify themselves with a person who, consciously and deliberately, chooses evil almost for its own sake; Pinkie's only reason for choosing evil seems to be to assert his own individuality. On the other hand, the whiskey priest in The Power and the Glory, is humble, confused, and anxious to

serve God, but his problem is no less real than Pinkie's; as a matter of fact, his problem is greater. Both he and Pinkie realize the enormity of their evil deeds, and also that, seemingly, the contrition necessary for mercy will not come to them. However, whereas Pinkie only experienced a faint nostalgia and longing for peace, the priest is every moment striving within himself to induce the necessary repentance. He realizes not only the gravity of his sins, (Pinkie also realizes that), but also the fact that he is losing an eternity of happiness with God. As he says just before he is to be put to death:

He felt only an immense disappointment because he had to go to God empty-handed, with nothing done at all. It seemed to him at that moment that it would have been quite easy to have been a saint. It would only have needed a little self-restraint and a little courage. He felt like someone who has missed happiness by seconds at an appointed place. He knew now that at the end there was only one thing that counted - to be a saint.<sup>3</sup>

It is this realization of a missed opportunity, the good life, that gives to the priest a dimension missing in Pinkie, or at any rate only present in a vague way.

The whiskey priest is like so many people in our modern world. He is torn on the one side by despair, abandonment and the urge to assuage these passions by indulging in excessive and illicit sensual pleasures; and on the other side, he is 'tempted' by God to conform his will with the divine will. As a son of man, the priest is tempted to the former course; as a Son of God, he is provided with the grace necessary for the latter. Because Greene is convinced we inhabit a fallen

world, the priest is tempted by evil and succumbs to it; because Greene also believes in the mercy of God working through actual grace on earth, the priest is apparently one of the people who obtain salvation.

As in Brighton Rock, the world in which The Power and the Glory is set is a fallen world. Greene, the master of technique, makes this obvious in the first paragraph. If one were to pick this novel up at random, and start to read the first chapter, he would be immediately aware that this was not a novel of polite manners. This is the first paragraph:

Mr. Tench went out to look for his ether cylinder; out into the blazing Mexican sun and the bleaching dust. A few buzzards looked down from the roof 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 up at them. One of them rose and flapped across the town: over the tiny plaza, over 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 on across the plaza.<sup>4</sup>

The images here are hardly gay or even peaceful; they seem portentous: 'blazing sun', 'bleaching dust', 'buzzards', 'carrion', 'splintering finger-nails', 'ex-human being', 'sharks', and 'carrion', once again. The militaristic state, the aura of despair, the corrosive effect of evil, all these things are implicit in the first paragraph. Greene, fearing perhaps that one might take the attitude 'Oh well, but that's Mexico', hastens to point out that this is a picture of the world he is giving, not just of Mexico:

Home: it was a phrase one used to mean four walls behind which one slept. There had never been a home. They moved across the little burnt plaza where the dead general grew green in the damp, and the gaseous stalls stood under the palms. It lay like a picture postcard on a pile of other postcards: shuffle the pack and you had Nottingham, a Metroland birthplace, an interlude in Southend.<sup>5</sup>

The indication is that your city too is in the pile of postcards. Once again, therefore, Greene is setting the scene for his novel in a particular part of the world; but the choice for the part is arbitrary. It is the whole world that is fallen.

The ostensible theme of the novel is the struggle between the Catholic Church and the militaristic secularism of a communist state. However, in view of the fact that Greene is seldom interested primarily in specific and superficial themes, we can expect more meaning attached to this ostensible theme than is evident at first sight. There is involved the struggle between those who realize the worth of the individual as a child of God and those who seek to dominate all men in order to aggrandize themselves; it is, basically, the war between good and evil. In connection with this theme, Walter Allen in a short essay on Graham Greene says:

The Power and the Glory was published in 1940, but re-reading it today one realizes that it takes on a universal meaning: here, set in a remote state of Central America, is expressed with a poet's imagination a vision of the universal struggle, the struggle that is being fought at all times and which today [the essay was first written in 1943] is being waged conspicuously by clergymen and school teachers in Norway against the Gestapo, by the Jews of Warsaw, by Greek guerrillas and French saboteurs, wherever, in fact, men are prepared to fight for their own conception of the good life against brute power.<sup>6</sup>

The person reading this comment today is moved to add the struggle of similar groups behind the iron curtain. It is this sentiment, too, of the importance of the individual, that moves the priest to say when he is trying to win his daughter over:

"I would give my life, that's nothing, my soul....my dear, my dear, try to understand that you are - so important." That was the difference, he had always known, between his faith and theirs, the political leaders of the people who cared only for things like the state, the republic; this child was more important than a whole continent.<sup>7</sup>

It is obvious that the ostensible theme of the struggle between the Church and this particular secularistic state in Mexico is transcended; the struggle is one of 'the good life against brute power'.

This fact, the struggle of secularistic brute power for dominance, adds an important element to the dramatic presentation of the priest. The priest has two problems; he is fighting against two different evils. On the one hand, he is struggling to fulfil his function as a priest in a state that has decreed that churches and priests are both prohibited from functioning as such. On the other hand, he is struggling against the personal temptations that beset him. His struggle is both external and internal. Greene, therefore, has the task of portraying both struggles, the inner and the outer, and of showing the presence of evil in two spheres, the external worldly sphere and the internal world of the soul. The technical problem here, of integrating these two struggles, these two separate worlds of evil, is no small task for Greene.

Part of Greene's difficulty is solved, of course, by the fact that the priest is, *ex officio*, a foe of both worlds: the world of political evil and the world of moral evil. Both these evils can be ascribed to the same cause: pride and self-aggrandizement. However, there is a difference; they are different levels or types of evil. Whereas everyone experiences the temptations that drive the priest to sin (although not necessarily to the same degree), it is not everyone who is willing to trample on others in order to aggrandize himself. The priest succumbs to the former temptation, but the other type of evil is only an antagonist not a temptation. The priest, then, is highly dramatic material. He is opposed to moral evil, and as a priest he should be militant in his opposition; but he himself has transgressed the moral law. Further, he is bound to serve the faithful, and, as a priest, to celebrate mass frequently; but he finds himself in a state where his life is at stake if he is even caught, let alone caught celebrating mass. In this novel, therefore, Greene has ample opportunity to show evil in the world; he also has an excellent opportunity to show the reaction to this evil of a real, 'knowing' person.

The priest's external struggle against the state is made more vivid and more easily understood, by the use of a symbol for the state and all it stands for; the symbol in this case is the lieutenant. It is the lieutenant personally who pursues the priest; it is the lieutenant who states explicitly all the ideas to which the priest is opposed. In a sense,

the lieutenant is not too good a symbol of secularistic power and self-aggrandizement. He seems genuinely moved, in part, by a desire to better the lot of the peasants. His error, however, is common to his type of person. He wishes to bring about a heaven on earth through an abandonment of God, and a deification of man. This is one of the most insidious evils present in the modern world. It is this type of thing that Arnold Toynbee was referring to when he said, "man-worship is a bad religion in itself". After the priest has been caught, and they are heading back to the capital, he and the lieutenant have time for a conversation. At one point the lieutenant says:

"You're a danger. That's why we kill you. I have nothing against you, you understand, as a man."

"Of course not. It's God you're against. I'm the sort of man you shut up every day - and give money to."<sup>8</sup>

Later, the priest makes clear the real difference between the two idealogies; one puts a trust in God, the other in man.

The folly of this latter trust is made evident:

"But I'm not a saint," the priest said. "I'm not even a brave man." ...he said: "That's another difference between us. It's no good Your working for your end unless you're a good man yourself. And there won't always be good men in your party. Then you'll have all the old starvation, beating, get-rich-anyhow. But it doesn't matter so much my being a coward - and all the rest. I can put God into a man's mouth just the same - and I can give him God's pardon. It wouldn't make any difference to that if every priest in the Church was like me."<sup>9</sup>

The evil inherent in the system of the state rulers is perhaps more obvious in the jefe than in the lieutenant. He is doing exactly what the priest has indicated in the passage quoted. The jefe uses his power and influence to make life pleasant



for himself, at the expense of whoever interferes. At any rate, the evil of the political system, the whole system of thought, is evident; the problem it presents to a person with beliefs such as the priest's is equally plain.

What things hinder the priest from fulfilling his function? The first and most obvious thing that the priest does not have is a church. We learn early in the novel about the fate of all the churches: "The whole town was changed: the cement playground up the hill near the cemetery where iron swings stood like gallows in the moony darkness was the site of the cathedral."<sup>10</sup> The fact that there is no church in the state is the occasion of a very moving scene later in the book when the priest comes across a building in the neighboring state which appears to be a barracks. This is his reaction on hearing that the building is the church:

"A church?" The priest ran his hands incredulously over the wall like a blind man trying to recognize a particular house, but he was too tired to feel anything at all... He sat down suddenly on the rain-drenched grass, and leaning his head against the white wall, he fell asleep, with home behind his shoulder-blades.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, when the churches were closed in the state, the priest no longer had a home. He was not only alone; he was alone without shelter, in a jungle of enemies.

The evils of the political system presented other problems for a priest. He had no money to buy wine with which to celebrate mass. This lack of wine, too, is made into a very pathetic scene, where we see the priest with some difficulty and much danger to himself finally obtain some 'bootleg'

wine, only to see it drunk down by the 'bootlegger' and the jefe, while he is powerless to stop them. Then too there is the fear of the people which militates against his continuing as a priest in their midst. The majority are courageous and willing to aid him to a certain extent; but on the other hand there is always the fear of betrayal by such ones as the half-caste. Over and above all these things there is the fear of death. No man wants to die, even though on occasion he may be led to believe that this is the only way out and therefore will not resist death. But to the priest no such course is open; he has a sacred duty to live as long as possible and minister to his flock. When he is almost caught, as the lieutenant questions everyone in the village, the priest thinks: "Would they shoot him out of hand? A delusive promise of peace tempted him."<sup>12</sup> But he soon returns to the truth and sees that this is a false hope, "Death was not the end of pain - to believe in peace was a kind of heresy." Later, during the same incident, when the people have not betrayed him and his attempt to be exchanged for the hostage has failed, he says: "I did my best."..."It's your job - to give me up. What do you expect me to do? It's my job not to be caught."<sup>13</sup> The priest is by his very nature bound to fight the evils of the system; he realizes his duty in this respect, and though he often despairs of gaining any advantage, he never really neglects his duty.

There is an ironic little circle connected with the series of events in the priest's life. First he is an up-

right, though self-satisfied, priest; then the secularistic government abolishes religion; this oppression leads to his despair; this despair in turn leads to his sin; his sin, presumably, then leads him to salvation and possibly martyrdom. A few rough edges have been smoothed in the process of making this circle, but I think that the thesis basically is sound. It is ironical that apparently his sin has left him with a greater sense of duty than he formerly had. The series of events also indicate a possible meaning of suffering.

Greene's perceptive analysis of the feelings and reactions of the priest, serve to illustrate one main point. The human goodness of the priest is seen as something that cannot be separated from his many base faults. In other words, as always in Greene, goodness and evil are seen as almost integral parts of the human make-up. It is this fact of the priest having a foot in both worlds that puts The Power and the Glory above Greene's previous novels, and also puts him ahead of most of the writers of his day. This borderline situation of man, coupled with man's awareness of his situation, render a fuller vision, a more complete portrait than most writers are able to give.

I have entitled this chapter "The Labyrinthine Ways of The Power and the Glory". The title of the novel in its first edition, published in England, was The Labyrinthine Ways, and I think this fact is significant. The reference in the earlier title is to Francis Thompson's famous poem, The Hound of Heaven. The poem concerns the flight of the protagonist

from God, The Hound of Heaven, and his eventual surrender to God. The first few lines of the poem will show the significance of the title:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days,  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.<sup>14</sup>

It is the 'labyrinthine ways' of the priest's mind down which Greene leads us. We see the priest fleeing not only from the lieutenant, but also from God, even though he is strongly attracted to Him. Near the end of the poem just quoted there occurs this passage on love:

Wherefore should any set thee love apart?  
Seeing none but I makes much of Naught, (He said),  
And human love needs human meriting:  
How hast thou merited -  
Of all man's clotted clay the dingiest clot?  
Alack, thou knowest not  
How little worthy of any love thou art!  
Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,  
Save Me, save only Me?<sup>15</sup>

It is this love that the protagonist has been fleeing all through the poem. The relation of the poem to the priest is noticed in this statement of the priest's as he is talking about God's love:

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? Oh, a man like me would run a mile to get away if he felt that love around.<sup>16</sup>

The priest, with a confused feeling of humility, fears the 'challenge' of so great a love. But as was pointed out before, the priest is possessed of goodness as well as by some base qualities. Greene is writing here about salvation, not, as he presumably did in Brighton Rock, about damnation. There-

fore, let us see what merit the priest had; in what fashion did he handle his problem of evil on the personal level? We have already seen that he acquitted himself quite well in the matter of the external evil of the state. The least that can be said in his favor is that he did not follow the example of most of the other priests, who fled, or of the one priest who stayed, Father José, who accepted the condition of remaining imposed by the state and married his housekeeper.

The pathetic, all-too-human priest does not believe himself worthy of any merit; he is quite unconscious of the goodness and heroism which he certainly does possess. The following scene is in his cell on the morning of his execution:

When he woke up it was dawn. He woke with a huge feeling of hope which suddenly and completely left him at the first sight of the prison yard. It was the morning of his death. He crouched on the floor with the empty brandy flask in his hand trying to remember an act of contrition. "Oh God, I am sorry and beg pardon for all my sins...crucified...worthy of Thy dreadful punishments." He was confused, his mind was on other things: it was not the good death for which one always prayed. He caught sight of his own shadow on the cell wall: it had a look of surprise and grotesque unimportance. What a fool he had been to think that he was strong enough to stay when others fled. What an impossible fellow I am, he thought, and how useless. I have done nothing for anybody. I might just as well have never lived. His parents were dead - soon he wouldn't even be a memory - perhaps after all he wasn't really Hell-worthy. Tears poured down his face: he was not at the moment afraid of damnation - even the fear of pain was in the background. He felt only an immense disappointment because he had to go to God empty-handed, with nothing done at all. ...He knew now that at the end there was only one thing that counted - to be a saint.<sup>17</sup>

This overwhelming humility of the priest is seen on several striking occasions. At one time, he is talking to the

lieutenant:

"Listen," the priest said,... "Why do you think I tell people out of the pulpit that they're in danger of damnation if death catches them unawares? I'm not telling them fairy-stories I don't believe myself. I don't know a thing about the mercy of God: I don't know how awful the human heart looks to Him. But I do know this - that if there's ever been a single man in this state damned, then I'll be damned too." He said slowly: "I wouldn't want it to be any different, I just want justice, that's all."<sup>18</sup>

These little touches of humility and statements by the priest on his own unworthiness are prevalent throughout the book.

While he has been struggling to keep alive in the hostile state, the priest has sinned; from venial sins, "feast days and fast days and days of abstinence had been the first to go", to more significant sins, "Five years ago he had given way to despair - the unforgivable sin - and he was going back now to the scene of his despair"<sup>19</sup> the village where his natural daughter lives. In addition, the priest now drinks brandy habitually for the promise of "temporary relief from fear, loneliness, a lot of things"<sup>20</sup> which it brings. Although there are extenuating circumstances for these sins, the priest realizes what he is doing and he admits that the choice is his; he could have done otherwise. There is no denying that in many ways Greene presents him as being all-too-human. He is just another character in the fallen world that Greene sees around him. This world is shown explicitly, along with the priest's faith and love, when the half-caste, trying to prove that he has discovered the priest and therefore earned the reward, forces his confession on the priest:

"You can't take me in. Listen. I've given money to boys - you know what I mean. And I've eaten meat on Fridays." The awful jumble of the gross, the trivial, and the grotesque shot up between the two yellow fangs, and the hand on the priest's ankle shook and shook with fever. "I've told lies, I haven't fasted in Lent for I don't know how many years. Once I had two women - I'll tell you what I did..." 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 - Man was so limited: he hadn't even the ingenuity to invent a new vice: the animals knew as much. It was for this world that Christ had died: the more evil you saw and heard about you, the greater glory lay around death; it was too easy to die for what was good or beautiful, for home or children or a civilization - it needed a God to die for the half-hearted and the corrupt.<sup>21</sup>

The priest realizes that he too is a part of this evil world. But he also realizes, and once again this is what distinguishes the portrayal of his character, the tremendous love of God for man.

In the face of all these difficulties, the fundamentally good priest plods doggedly on, doing his duty, loving and fearing God, and trying to live as his truly christian inclinations lead him. For example, after the police have searched the village and his face has become known to them he is advised by the villagers to go north and over the border to safety. However, he chooses to stay and tend his flock:

A man said: "Better go north, Father," and stood waving his hand. One mustn't have human affections - or rather one must love every soul as if it were one's own child. The passion to protect must extend itself over a world - but he felt it tethered and aching like a hobbled animal to the tree trunk. He turned his mule south.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, after the half-caste has been the means of the priest's capture by the police, the priest feels compassion for the pathetic, but treacherous mestizo:

He could hear the half-caste panting after him: his wind was bad: they had probably let him have far too much beer in the capital, and the priest thought, with an odd touch of contemptuous affection, of how much had happened to them both since that first encounter in a village of which he didn't even know the name: the half-caste lying there in the hot noonday rocking his hammock with one naked yellow toe. If he had been asleep at that moment, this wouldn't have happened. It was really shocking bad luck for the poor devil that he was to be burdened with a sin of such magnitude. ... Poor man, the priest thought, he isn't really bad though.<sup>23</sup>

Time and time again the priest shows his real humility by self-deprecation, and mental scourging; he feels himself not worthy of even God's love. When he is soon to die, he tries mental confession, but the words fall meaninglessly; he finally decides it is hopeless. His thoughts turn once more to his daughter, and he prays: "O God, help her. Damn me, I deserve it, but let her live for ever."<sup>24</sup> It is tragic that the priest is so confused as to believe that this very love he feels for his daughter is a reason for his damnation. He is thinking of course, that one must not love the fruit of one's sin. However, surely this is over-ruled here by the natural desire of a father to love his child, and also by the second most important injunction of God: 'and love thy neighbor as thyself'.

It is part of the priest's tragedy, as well as his humility, that he can not look at himself objectively (as few of us can), and therefore he sees everything he does as the action of a sinful man who has lost favor with God. He does not realize, as Greene certainly does, that if by staying and administering to the spiritual needs of the people, he



has helped in the salvation of just one soul, he has done more than most people accomplish in a lifetime to please God. His vision is dimmed by his vivid awareness of his own unworthy and sinful actions. While talking to the lieutenant he says:

"Pride was what made the angels fall. Pride's the worst thing of all. I thought I was a fine fellow to have stayed when the others had gone. And then I thought I was so grand I could make my own rules. I gave up fasting, daily Mass. I neglected my prayers - and one day because I was drunk and lonely - well, you know how it was, I got a child. It was all pride. Just pride because I'd stayed. I wasn't any use, but I stayed. At least, not much use. I'd got so that I didn't have a hundred communicants a month. If I'd gone I'd have given God to twelve times that number. It's a mistake one makes - to think just because a thing is difficult or dangerous..."<sup>25</sup>

He trails off here; presumably he was going to say that 'just because a thing is difficult or dangerous' it is meritorious. That is true. However, it does not follow from this that if one neglects one's duty and obligations that there is no merit in anything one does. This seems to be the inference that the priest makes. Because of this inference, the priest keeps going through the state doing his duty as a priest; he absolves the penitents and offers up their sacrifice. His deep humility can allow him only to hope that this devotion to duty will serve as a very small part of the reparation that is due to God, because of the grave offenses he has committed against Him. As Greene says in The Lawless Roads, commenting on the real whiskey-priest he hears of: "Who can judge what terror and isolation may have excused him in the eyes of God?"

The human portrayal of the priest as a man beset with problems of one sort or another is what adds distinction to The Power and the Glory. Greene has progressed in this novel to a real understanding and an excellent portrayal of the dramatic figure of a man who realizes the evil nature of his temptations; but at the same time has a deep conviction about the commandments of God and is torn in the opposite direction by this attraction to good. Greene has used every means at his disposal to highlight this paradoxical figure of a shabby, sinful man doing the work of God, spreading God among the people.

Most of the characters in the book are used at some time or another to contrast or throw into relief the figure of the priest and his dilemma. The lieutenant, of course, is the most obvious example of this. Time and again he is compared to the priest either implicitly or explicitly; quite often he comes off the better. He, too, is devoted to an ideal; he, too, strives for the welfare of the people. Even the priest at one point says to the lieutenant: "We agree about a lot of things."<sup>26</sup> In various places the lieutenant is described as being priest-like in his manner and devotion to his ideal: "There was something of a priest in his intent observant walk - a theologian going back over the errors of the past to destroy them again."<sup>27</sup> And another time: "He had the dignity of an idea, standing in the little whitewashed room in his polished boots and his venom. There was something disinterested in his ambition: a kind of virtue in his desire to

catch the sleek respected guest of the first communion party."<sup>28</sup> It is an ironical fact that it is the lieutenant who is the real ascetic, not the priest. It is not a virtue in him, as he does not have the temptation; but, nevertheless, the quality is present: "For if they [the clergy] really believed in heaven or hell, they wouldn't mind a little pain now, in return for what immensities.... The lieutenant, lying on his hard bed, in the damp hot dark, felt no sympathy at all with the weakness of the flesh."<sup>29</sup> This seems an ironic comment on the weakness of the priest in this regard; it serves to heighten this weakness and his human frailties. But the important point in the comparison and contrast of the priest and the lieutenant is that the lieutenant is one of the people who do not 'know'. He has his ideal, his ambition, his 'knowing'; but it is obvious that he is 'barking up the wrong tree' in search of the elusive prey - heaven. He is searching for it on earth. The comparison with the priest and the world of difference between them fundamentally is made quite evident in this passage:

The lieutenant sat down upon his bed and began to take off his boots. It was the hour of prayer. Black beetles exploded against the walls like crackers. More than a dozen crawled over the tiles with injured wings. It infuriated him to think that there were still people in the state who believed in a loving and merciful God. There are mystics who are said to have experienced God directly. He was a mystic too, and what he 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.<sup>30</sup>

This passage seems very important to an understanding of what Greene is doing in the novel. The similarities between the

priest and the lieutenant are most superficial. The priest is fundamentally living on a different level; a level where there is a scale of values based on a loving God, a God who is love, but also, on a fallen world, a world of violence and evil.

The priest is really an improvement on and synthesis of many of Greene's earlier characters; and he is placed in the old familiar setting. There is no new quality in the priest that has not been used before by Greene. However, the most dramatic and significant traits of earlier characters have been put together in this novel, to give a sharp, life-like portrait of a man beset by evil. The scene is the same. There is a universality to all Greene's particular settings. This was pointed out earlier in the image of the postcards; no matter how corrupt a place is, one can shuffle through a set of postcards and see the same things in one's own city. The reason for this is obvious: man is the same no matter where one goes; we are all inhabitants of a fallen world.

The fallen world is sufficiently obvious from the foregoing examination of the novel; the particular themes that Greene is partial to are also here. The theme of betrayal, of course, is dealt with in the treachery of the Judas-like half-caste. The threat of betrayal is something the priest always has to worry over, and it is the mestizo who is the eventual betrayer. The hunted man is the priest. However, even this theme is no longer quite the same as it formerly was. The priest is hunted in a more dramatic way than most of Greene's former characters: his life is sought by the

lieutenant and he must flee from him; but also, his soul is sought by 'the Hound of Heaven', and he is fleeing from Him and his conscience. The theme of the rapid loss of innocence in childhood is also present. Greene is astounded (as Ivan Karamazov was) that the innocent are subject to such evil and suffering. The priest loves his daughter desperately and the thought of her corruption pains him deeply:

He thought of the immeasurable distance a man travels - from the first whipping-top to this bed, on which he lay clasping the brandy. And to God it was only a moment. The child's snigger and the first mortal sin lay together more closely than two blinks of the eye. He put out his hand as if he could drag her back by force from - something; but he was powerless; the man or the woman waiting to complete her corruption might not yet have been born: how could he guard her against the non-existent?<sup>31</sup>

All these themes are present in The Power and the Glory, as they were in Greene's previous works. They are all part of the world that the whiskey-priest and all thinking people are confronted with.

There is one other point in The Power and the Glory that seems significant in regard to the topic under discussion: a vague solution to the theological problem of evil. In a short story entitled A Hint of an Explanation written in 1948, Greene gives dramatic form to a 'hint of an explanation' as to the purpose of evil in the world. In this story a little boy is tempted with an electric train, in order that he will steal a consecrated Host at mass and give it to the satanic character of the village, Mr. Blacker. The boy takes the sticky Host from his mouth, wraps it in a scrap of newspaper and takes it

home. That night when Mr. Blacker calls, the boy has had time to realize the enormity of his act, and as Mr. Blacker threatens at his bedroom window, the boy swallows the Host, paper and all, as they cannot be separated. This story is narrated in a flashback by a stranger to his fellow passenger on a train. When the narrator gets up to leave, the other person notices that he has a Roman collar. The implication of the story is that this evil act in youth caused him to realize more fully his debt to God. The priest says that possibly because of this he has been a happy man. I think that this idea is present, implicitly at any rate, in The Power and the Glory. I shall point out a few reasons for thinking so and leave it up to the reader to agree or disagree.

The first reason is that the priest, ironically enough, only through his sin reaches anything like the selflessness and devotion he feels to be required of the saint. In other words, his early sin with Maria, not to mention his persistent drinking, proves to be seemingly the motivating force that keeps him to his selfless task of administering to the spiritual needs of his people. The second reason is perhaps a little less obvious, but it is nevertheless present. The little boy Luis, who rebels at his mother's romantic little stories of the martyrs and who is courted as a disciple by the lieutenant, comes to realize, after the execution against the wall, that it is the priest who is really a hero; it is he whom he should pattern his life after, not the lieutenant.

The boy is changed in part through the suffering of the priest; the priest's suffering may be the difference between a life of violence and eventual damnation, and a life of piety and eventual salvation. The last words of the book concern Luis, when the new priest arrives at the town:

"'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>32</sup>

However, the most important thing in this novel is the portrait of the priest. Greene presents him as having human goodness and human frailty. Only such a character can attract all our sympathy. Further, this priest is one who 'knows' and 'realizes' and his handling of his problems should be significant because of this.

## NOTES

1. Graham Greene, The Lawless Roads (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950) p. 4.
2. Ibid., p. 5.
3. Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), p. 284.
4. Ibid., p. 9.
5. Ibid., p. 15.
6. Walter Allen, "Graham Greene", Writers of Today (London: Gale and Polden Limited, 1946), p. 26-27.
7. Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), P. 111.
8. Ibid., p. 261.
9. Ibid., p. 262-263.
10. Ibid., p. 32.
11. Ibid., p. 214.
12. Ibid., p. 104.
13. Ibid., p. 106.
14. Cleanth Brooks, Jr. and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Poetry (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938), p. 402.
15. Ibid., p. 406.
16. Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), p. 269.
17. Ibid., p. 283-284.
18. Ibid., p. 269.
19. Ibid., p. 82-83.
20. Ibid., p. 82.
21. Ibid., p. 131.



## NOTES

22. Ibid., p. 112.
23. Ibid., p. 247-248.
24. Ibid., p. 111.
25. Ibid., p. 264.
26. Ibid., p. 262.
27. Ibid., p. 32.
28. Ibid., p. 31.
29. Ibid., p. 34.
30. Ibid., p. 32-33.
31. Ibid., p. 92.
32. Ibid., p. 301.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE HEART OF THE HEART OF THE MATTER

"A paradox, a paradox, a most ingenious paradox."

Gilbert & Sullivan

As in The Power and the Glory, Greene in The Heart of the Matter, is trying to portray for us a character who has the goodness and the base qualities that are both inherent in the nature of man. Once again, as he did with the whiskey-priest, Greene has integrated these qualities in a convincing and realistic way to give a moving and dramatic description of one man's problems and conflicting desires. There is a danger in this novel, as there is in most novels, that the reader might be tempted to read things into it that are not there and to speculate on unmentioned and non-existent actions and thoughts of the protagonist. However, by remembering that it is a novel and that we are justified in considering only what Greene has made artistically clear and explicit, the difficulty of interpreting it should be lessened. What Greene has done in this novel I have indicated above: an integration of disparate attractions in a human breast and the subsequent problems and conflict. It is the conflict, once again, that is emphasized.

Greene has enhanced this struggle by portraying it in the usual type of person; a character with christian beliefs living in a fallen world. But the theme is given a new twist in The Heart of the Matter. The central character, Scobie, is

not torn from his practice of christian morals by the pleasures of the flesh, as most protagonists of such novels are, but rather by pity. There is a paradox in the book, therefore, which heightens its interest: how can love, which is a virtue, and which seemingly motivates Scobie's pity, put a man in danger of damnation. In other words, Scobie loves his fellow man so much that he is damned; that is the paradox. The paradox, however, is only on the surface; a little thought and examination of concepts will resolve the riddle.

In this chapter I intend to examine rather carefully Greene's portrayal of Scobie, with a view to showing what evil there is inherent in his situation and what evil is brought about by human agents. Along with this, I shall attempt to show with what success or lack of success this evil is met by the central character. From this material Greene's views and philosophy of life will become evident, as they have from the examination of the previous novels.

This is a rather complicated novel and it is not always clear just exactly what Greene would like us to make of it. On the one hand, Scobie seems to be a victim of his own good nature. As the story opens he is universally admired and respected as one of the few competent and honest officials in the pay of the government, and yet he goes from bad to worse and finally kills himself. On the other hand, in the latter part of the book we see Scobie revealed as a man who will stop at nothing, if forced, to secure his own peace of mind; surely such a character is to be watched and not trusted.

This sudden change in the fortunes or the nature of Scobie is certainly open to several interpretations. However, I think Greene's purpose in the novel is made clear by one rather insignificant event, which, though Greene very likely did not intend it to, points out the theme developed. The scene occurs early in the novel when Scobie is checking the waterfront area late at night. The native patrol men are afraid of this area and are apprehensive when Scobie picks up a mysterious bottle:

Scobie picked the bottle up. It was a dimpled Haig, and when he drew out the palm leaves the stench of dog's pizzle and nameless decay blew out like a gas escape.... He should have left the bottle where it stood: it had been placed there for one purpose, directed at one person, but now that its contents had been released, it was as if the evil thought were left to wander blindly through the air, to settle maybe on the innocent.

The novel is intended to show the insidious effect of evil. Evil, like the gas in the bottle, has only to be let loose once, has only to be given a small opening, and its insidious effect will spread all around the area affecting indiscriminately, as gas will, those who are near. Scobie's life-long pity for others and for himself has so far made him only a little lonely, a little too sensitive for his job. But when the pity he feels becomes so strong as to break the bonds of prudence, which must guide it at all times, then the stopper is out of the bottle of evil and there is no end to the things that will come to pass. It is a subtle foothold that evil gets in the door; but once it has got this it proceeds to take over the house. It is pity that is Scobie's evil,

his downfall. This subtle 'enemy' is mentioned by Greene when Scobie and Helen first become lovers: "What they had both thought was safety proved to have been the camouflage of an enemy who works in terms of friendship, trust and pity."<sup>2</sup>

The obsessional theme of The Heart of the Matter is the same as that which motivates The Power and the Glory and The Ministry of Fear - pity. The whiskey priest was moved by a feeling of great pity when he said that he would give his soul in return for the happiness of his daughter. Arthur Rowe, in The Ministry of Fear, feels such pity for his bed-ridden wife that he gives her an overdose of sleeping tablets. However, it must not be assumed from this superficial similarity that Greene has repeated himself in The Heart of the Matter. There are many differences; differences which, in some respects, indicate progress in the latter novel. I will try to point out these differences, along with some similarities, and their significance in regard to the question of evil.

Scobie is a more complex figure than any that Greene has previously created. The whiskey priest had his unusual actions forced on him by an unusual situation: a priest living in a 'Godless state'. Pinkie was a seemingly lost young boy who was apparently possessed by the devil almost from infancy. Scobie is a relatively commonplace person; a vaguely dissatisfied, middle-aged man, with good intentions but a muddled intellect. Due to this somewhat commonplace character, Greene's job is made much greater in devising a convincing downfall.

The violent downfall of the priest and Pinkie arises out of the situations mentioned above. With Scobie, however, Greene had to devise a means for his downfall that was common, and yet not so common as sensual lust might be. The answer to this problem of a means was pity - pity was to be the 'tragic flaw' in Scobie's character. Perhaps it is necessary now to establish briefly the nature of pity in Greene's world.

Pity, in this world, is not a virtue, nor is it love. It is the confusion of pity and love that leads people to think that Scobie's case is a paradox; a person who loves so much that he is damned. Pity can arise from love, but it need not. You can pity the suffering of another for two reasons: because you love them and cannot remain unmoved as they suffer, or because you cannot bear to see anyone suffer as it is a vague reminder of your own capacity for suffering, and perhaps a direct cause of it. The line between the two is obviously fine and usually difficult to draw. Arthur Rowe, in The Ministry of Fear, wonders whether he has really killed his wife to end her suffering or to relieve his own. This is something that is not too clear in regard to Scobie's pity either; that is, whether he acts for others, in his pity, or for himself; or is it a complicated union of both reasons?

One thing is clear, however, from Greene's handling of this theme: pity is indeed an evil. This is clear throughout the novel because of the corrosive effect of pity on everything that it touches. Those who are addicted to pity are not under any misapprehensions as to its effect on them-

selves. Arthur Rowe speaks of it: "He wanted to warn them - don't pity me. Pity is cruel. Pity destroys. Love isn't safe when pity's prowling around." Here, pity is set up as antagonistic to love, not just different from it. Scobie also notes this distinction and the nature of pity and its effect is once more pointed out: "The word 'pity' is used as loosely as the word 'love': the terrible promiscuous passion which so few experience."<sup>3</sup> In Greene's world, therefore, pity is another facet of evil; pity, like evil in other forms, is 'cruel', 'destructive' and a 'terrible promiscuous passion'.

In tracing the effect of this 'passion' on Scobie, and watching his reaction to and handling of the problem, an important difference will be noted in The Heart of the Matter. Something important has been added to this novel that was not present in Greene's previous novels. Scobie's problem is made more complex because he is confronted with both the theological and the literary, or moral, problems of evil. This is the first novel that Greene has used to exploit the theological problem explicitly. This certainly adds a further dimension to the novel as well as to Scobie's character and the scope of his problem.

The theological problem of evil seeks to explain the co-existence of evil and a just God; the literary problem deals with the problems of the individual in confronting the evil and having either to choose it or the good. Scobie is concerned with both problems. First and foremost he is concerned

with the theological problem. Early in the book this is made evident. Scobie is watching the native bearers bringing the stretcher cases up from the beach, the survivors of the torpedoing. One of the survivors is a young child, near death:

Scobie watched the bearers go slowly up the hill, their bare feet very gently flapping the ground. He thought: It would need all Father Brule's ingenuity to explain that. Not that the child would die - that needed no explanation. Even the pagans realized that the love of God might mean an early death, though the reason they ascribed was different: but that the child should have been allowed to survive the forty days and nights in the open boat - that was the mystery, to reconcile that with the love of God.<sup>4</sup>

This is reminiscent, once again, of Ivan Karamazov, and it states the problem of evil in its most common form: the suffering of the innocent, usually children. As far as I remember, this is the only place in the novel where the problem is stated directly. However, it is implicit in numerous episodes in the remainder of the novel. There is a vague mistrust of God, a misunderstanding of His love and mercy. Thus, we see Scobie rationalizing his act of despair, his suicide, by speaking to God in church:

No. I don't trust you. I love you, but I've never trusted you. If you made me, you made this feeling of responsibility that I've always carried about like a sack of bricks. I'm not a policeman for nothing - responsible for order, for seeing justice is done. There was no other profession for a man of my kind. I can't shift my responsibility to you. If I could, I would be someone else. I can't make one of them suffer so as to save myself. [i.e. Helen or Louise] I'm responsible and I'll see it through the only way I can. A sick man's death means to them only a short suffering - everybody has to die. We are all of us resigned to death: it's life we aren't resigned to.<sup>5</sup>

Here we see Scobie exercising his 'imperfect judgement' on



life. He has reduced it to mathematics: 'My death (one) will make two people happier, and will also relieve the pain that Christ experiences if I keep on sinning'. The reasoning here is obviously faulty: he is ignoring God's commandments and blinding himself to real consequences by sentimentalism. At any rate, here is Scobie's prime problem: how can a just God allow these things to happen?

Scobie, by exercising his 'imperfect judgement', is certainly expecting more than he has a right to, and more than he should, as a Christian. The Bible tells us nothing if not that life is hard. But it also tells us to bear up to it and that it is through suffering that we attain salvation. Scobie, however, wants to make a heaven on earth. And more than this, he feels a personal responsibility, although a misguided one, to produce this peaceful atmosphere for those around him. His pity, when deprived of real love, is nothing but a destructive element similar to any other evil. Love must often hurt in order to achieve its ends. This is something that Scobie will not allow.

This insidious aspect of pity and its particular prevalence in our modern era is spoken of by Donat O'Donnell in a recent book of criticism:

...it is likely that our future society will be as innocent of pity as was classical Rome.... This is a possible program: no need here for ambiguities and subterfuges and the collective nervous breakdown that is hidden at the heart of a word like pity.... That is before us: that is what we see from the edge of the plateau. But we still belong ourselves not to a Christian but to a Christ-pervaded culture. The corrupt

and shifty pity that permeates our laws, disarms our governors, and exposes us to our successors is the soul of our dying society. It is the merit of Mr. Graham Greene that he, more than any of our other writers, has sensed the importance and expressed the essence of this dissolving pity. The Heart of the Matter is a novel about the progress of pity; it exposes, not always consciously, the complex state of mind of two...inhabitants of Christendom, the police officer Scobie and Mr. Graham Greene.<sup>6</sup>

This is, essentially, what Greene has done in this novel. He has represented pity as one of the most dangerous evils confronting the individual. It is dangerous because of its deceptive and subtle methods of taking hold. The person moved by pity usually feels, as Scobie does, that this is a just emotion, a part of love, and therefore something that God should condone.

As well as being confronted with the theological problem of evil, Scobie also faces the literary or moral problem. However, the two problems are integrated, in a sense. That is, while he questions the propriety of some of his actions and wonders if he is not offending God and violating his own integrity, he is, at the same time, wondering if a just God would really present him with such dilemmas. But nevertheless, he is at times specifically aware of his transgressions and is torn between two loyalties. At the point in the novel where Helen says she is going to leave him and he is conscious of the fact that he should let her go and repent for what he has done, he is still unable to do the right thing, although he realizes what that thing is:

Oh God, he prayed, his hands dripping over the wheel, kill me now, now. My God, You'll never have more complete contrition. What a mess I am. I carry suffering with me like a body smell. Kill me. Put an end to me. Vermin don't have to exterminate themselves. Kill me.

Now. Now. Now. Before I hurt you again.<sup>7</sup>

But in a few lines he reaffirms his devotion to Helen and does, therefore, "hurt God" again: "I won't shut my eyes. I won't leave you. I promised that." In view of this awareness of error, one wonders if Scobie is really sincere when he questions God's justice in giving him these antagonistic tendencies. At one point Scobie says to Yusef: "It's never any good lying to oneself, Yusef. One sees through the lie too easily."<sup>8</sup> One cannot help feeling that Scobie has lied to himself quite convincingly at times.

Scobie's problems are further complicated by his having a set of beliefs, a code of morality; to be brief, he is a Catholic. He is therefore attracted by good, the life of virtue, as well as by the satanic powers, offering evil. Readers of Mauriac will be familiar with this 'temptation' by good. Here is Scobie lured by the good life:

He thought: I'd go back and go to bed, in the morning 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 sitting under the handcuffs in the office. Virtue, the good life, tempted him in the dark like a sin. The rain blurred his eyes: the ground sucked at his feet as they trod reluctantly towards the Nissen hut.<sup>9</sup>

The Nissen hut, of course, takes him back to his mistress and the life of sin. But his actions are complicated and made difficult by this antagonistic pull, the temptation of good. Scobie is also one of the ones who 'realize'. It is this realization which constitutes the struggle and the suffering.

Scobie's downfall is not sudden; he has unconsciously

been preparing himself for it most of his life. It requires only the initial push to start the snowball of evil rolling down hill, gaining in speed and size. However, the snowball had to be built first. Scobie has put himself in a situation where evil can win the ascendancy; pity and an unreasonable sense of responsibility have placed him, like the snowball, on top of the hill inviting a push. The push comes with the entrance of Helen Rolt, one of the survivors of the sinking. This is the picture that Scobie first gets of Helen: notice the subjective description, seeing only the pitiable elements; also, the child-like appearance that he ascribes to her, obviously moving him to think of his own daughter who had died as a young child, and whose death he is vaguely uneasy over because he was not present at the time:

The face was ugly with exhaustion: the skin looked as though it were about to crack over the cheekbones: only the absence of lines showed that it was a young face. The French officer said, "She was just married - before she sailed. Her husband was lost. Her passport says she is nineteen. She may live. You see, she still has some strength." Her arms as thin as a child's lay outside the blanket, and her fingers clasped a book firmly. Scobie could see the wedding-ring loose on her dried-up finger....Scobie always remembered how she was carried into his life on a stretcher grasping a stamp-album with her eyes fast shut.<sup>10</sup>

Even the stamp album contributes to both illusions: it enhances her innocence and child-like demeanor, and it also recalls his own daughter. It is this seemingly innocent encounter, however, that is instrumental in starting Scobie on his way downhill.

Allott and Farris, in their book on Graham Greene, neatly

sum up the events in the book and Scobie's regression (which is, I suppose, one and the same thing):

Book I sets the West African scene, establishes the relationship between Louise and Scobie, and leads up to Louise's departure for South Africa. Book II introduces Helen Rolt, describes her growing intimacy with Scobie and the early course of their love-affair, and concludes with the telegram announcing Louise's unexpected return....These two books are like the major and minor premises of a syllogism: the third book describes the conclusion that Scobie draws from the two incurred responsibilities - suicide.<sup>11</sup>

This neat summary does not suggest, however, the extent to which Scobie is changed or the magnitude of his suffering. To realize this, a systematic examination is necessary.

The scene of the novel is a British colony in Africa, presumably during the second World War. The atmosphere of corruption and sin is set early. At the beginning of the novel we see Wilson watching the young native school boys soliciting business for their sisters among some sailors, until: "...the schoolboys had swarmed again around a single able-seaman; they led him triumphantly away towards the brothel near the police station, as though to the nursery."<sup>12</sup> The overtones here are obvious. The 'nursery' suggests innocence and childhood, in contrast with the childhood of these young waifs; the proximity to the police station points out the futility of coercion. The fact that it is war time is an isolating factor, and indicates also that there is evil without the colony: evil is omnipresent in the world. Into this picture of untrustworthiness, spying and corruption, Scobie is introduced.

Scobie has devoted his life to the enforcement of law among a resentful people who have no qualms about putting up a barrier of endless lies and evasions to thwart established order. Because of his devotion, Scobie is admired by those capable of admiring the kind and honest. Yusef's respect for Scobie arises from the fact that he knows Scobie is too honest to frame him, and the evidence for a conviction does not exist. Scobie at one point tells Yusef that diamond smuggling is going to cause Yusef's downfall. Yusef retorts that the police do all right by their blackmarket in the staple food, rice. Scobie reflects: "There was a retort in this colony to every accusation. There was always a blacker corruption elsewhere to be pointed at."<sup>13</sup> But the finger pointing to corruption never turned to Scobie. As the Commissioner comments to Scobie, when telling him that he has been passed over for the commissionership: "You are a wonderful man for picking up enemies. Like Aristides the Just."<sup>14</sup> At another point, Tallit is reporting to Father Rank that he has seen Scobie driving Yusef home in a police car. Father Rank says:

"Why, if it was Scobie, I wouldn't think twice about it." His eyes roamed the room. "Not twice," he said. "I'd lay next Sunday's collection that everything was all right, absolutely all right," and he swung his great empty-sounding bell to and fro. Ho, ho, ho, like a leper proclaiming his misery.<sup>15</sup>

This is the picture we have of the central figure at the beginning of the novel; Scobie the Just, above suspicion.

These are our preliminary looks at Scobie; we have not yet seen him in action. When we first see him in action he

is with Louise, his wife. Two things are immediately evident in Scobie: he is dissatisfied and he is over-solicitous to his wife through pity. As he watches a young native girl leave his office, he is aware for the first time since he came to Africa that he has noticed another woman's body in a sensual way. He knows that this is because he no longer thinks of Louise as beautiful. As the girl leaves: "He watched her go out of the dark office like fifteen wasted years."<sup>16</sup> From his office, Scobie goes home and we have a devastating series of images of his wife and his feeling towards her:

He watched her through the muslin net. Her face had the yellow ivory tinge of atabrine: her hair which had once been the color of bottled honey was dark and stringy with sweat. These were the times of ugliness when he loved her, when pity and responsibility reached the intensity of a passion. It was pity that told him to go: he wouldn't have woken his worst enemy from sleep - leave alone Louise.<sup>17</sup>

Shortly after this Scobie returns when Louise wakes up and calls him:

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. "Are you feeling better, darling?"<sup>18</sup>

Louise is something of an outcast; 'Literary Louise' is her name to the white colony. She is selfish and only pays attention to her husband's career when he has lost the commissionership. "How different the whole day would have been, if you'd come home and said, 'Darling, I'm going to be the Commissioner'".<sup>19</sup> She does not consider the possibility that Scobie might be more upset by the turn of events than she is.

Scobie's first serious mistake is when pity prompts him to promise Louise he will get money for her vacation to South Africa, even though he has been refused a loan at the bank. At the funeral of their daughter he had promised himself, as a sort of penance for not being present with Louise at the death, that he will always see to Louise's happiness: "No man could guarantee love for ever, 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." So, later, when he has made the fatal promise to fix the passage:

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 the 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. Despair is the price one pays for setting oneself an impossible aim. It is, one is told, the unforgiveable sin, but it is a sin the corrupt or evil man never practises. He always has hope. He never reaches the freezing-point of knowing absolute failure. Only the man of goodwill carries always in his heart this capacity for damnation.<sup>20</sup>

Scobie is truly setting himself 'an impossible aim'; anyone who attempts to give unclouded happiness to another is in for disappointment. Despair is the price one pays and this is exactly what Scobie does pay. But he has a long road to travel before he reaches total despair. Along the way, the corrosive, destructive evil that he bears, diffuses until all those around him are affected by it.

The memory of his dead daughter also causes Scobie to take the next wrong step. Upon searching the cabin of the captain of the Portugese vessel, he finds a letter concealed in the



cistern of the lavatory. His duty was to take it immediately and leave, forwarding it to the censors, but the pathetic figure of the captain and the fact that the letter is to the captain's daughter, cause Scobie to stay, and ultimately, to destroy the letter. This is what moves Scobie:

The man had lowered his bulk on to the edge of the bath as though it were a heavy sack his shoulders could no longer bear. He kept on wiping his eyes with the back of his hand like a child - an unattractive child, the fat boy of the school. Against the beautiful and the clever and the successful, one can wage a pitiless war, but not against the unattractive; then the millstone weighs on the breast. Scobie knew he should have taken the letter and gone; he could do no good with his sympathy.

The captain moaned, "If you had a daughter you'd understand. You haven't got one," he accused, as though there were a crime in sterility.<sup>21</sup>

These two references to children, the captain compared to the fat boy of the school and the mention of a daughter, are enough to turn the trick. Scobie goes a little further on his down-hill journey.

The money for Louise's passage can be obtained from only one person: Yusef. He is only too willing to loan it to Scobie. Scobie looks on it in the nature of a loan, as it is, but he tries to convince himself that there is nothing ethically wrong in borrowing the money from Yusef. However, because he is dealing with a known criminal he should have reported his loan to the Commissioner. This omission is the second step in the loss of his integrity in relation to his job.

While Louise is away, Scobie becomes friendly with Helen Rolt, who has moved in not far from his home. Inevitably, it

seems, she becomes his mistress. I say inevitably because Helen seems to fill a void in Scobie's life: she is a reminder of his lost daughter, and she can also be far more of a wife to him than can his wife. She is able, being young and full of gratitude and loneliness, to take a real interest in Scobie. Greene has often been criticized for his preoccupation with sin, particularly his objective descriptions of sensual excitement. However, in this novel, quite the reverse is true. Scobie is almost described as a phantom lover, feasting on spiritual food, rather than a middle-aged man, who, in a moment of weakness, indulges his sexual appetite in an illicit affair. Be that as it may, the seduction scene between Scobie and Helen is certainly most unusual.

The scene takes place in Helen's Nissen hut and is quite charged with meaningful overtones and symbolic references. It is important as it marks a definite break in Scobie's integrity. By committing this act, Scobie is simultaneously breaking two previous loyalties, to his wife and to God. Scobie at first feels safe with Helen; he feels not desire but sadness and affection and 'an enormous pity... the terrible promiscuous passion that so few experience'. Flight-Lieutenant Bagster, in his cups, arrives and knocks on the door and calls for Helen to 'be a sport'. Obviously Bagster is not overcome with 'sadness and affection' at the moment. They stay quiet till he leaves and then:

When the sound of Bagster's feet receded she raised her mouth and they kissed. What they had both thought was

safety proved to have been the camouflage of an enemy who works in terms of friendship, trust and pity.<sup>22</sup>

After this they sleep together. He wakes and looks at her:

"she is lying in the odd cramped attitude of someone who has been shot in escaping".<sup>23</sup> She has the appearance of a "bundle of cannon-fodder". And as Scobie looks out at the sea, he

thinks: "Somewhere on the face of those obscure waters moved the sense of yet another wrong and another victim, not Louise, not Helen. Away in the town the cocks began to crow for the false dawn."<sup>24</sup> The references are obvious.

Helen is a figure of pity: innocence betrayed. But besides this betrayal, and that of Louise, there is another betrayal: Christ has been betrayed, Scobie has sinned. The crowing of the cock is linking the scene to the betrayal of Christ by Peter: 'three times before the cock crows'.... Commenting on this scene, Donat O'Donnell classes it "surely the most lugubrious seduction in literature".<sup>25</sup> However, the significant point here is that Scobie realizes the implications of his act:

In the future - that was where the sadness lay. Was it the butterfly that died in the act of love? But human beings were condemned to consequences. The responsibility as well as the guilt was his...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 those victims who had not yet bled.<sup>26</sup>

After this he goes on to mention the betrayal of Christ in the section that I have quoted earlier in the paragraph. All of which goes to illustrate the fact that Scobie realizes the implications: he is now torn by three antagonistic

responsibilities, Helen, Louise and God. Two of them, God and Louise, can be reconciled, but this would involve the forsaking of Helen, which implies, in the complicated meanings, his dead daughter too.

The loan from Yusef places Scobie in unsavory company. This 'friendship' with Yusef, combined with his careless placing of a love letter to Helen where Yusef's spy can get it, bring about the next breach in the integrity of 'Scobie the Just'. Yusef has come into possession of Scobie's letter to Helen. In order to have some diamond jewels smuggled out of the country in case the British lose the war, Yusef must blackmail Scobie with the letter. Yusef says he will be forced to give the letter to Louise as she docks on her return from South Africa. Scobie "remembered the telegram signed Louise Scobie: 'have been a fool stop love'. It would be a cold welcome, he thought."<sup>27</sup> He is forced, therefore, to comply with Yusef and smuggle the packet of diamonds out of the colony. The previous breaches of duty were actually minor, they could have been confessed and corrected. But this was progress in crime; a flagrant act against his duty, and perhaps against his patriotism. His peace of mind counted more to him than did the security of his country. The snowball is getting bigger.

This incident occurs just at the end of Book II. In Book III, Scobie rolls more rapidly downhill until he reaches the bottom, despair and suicide. The evil that Scobie has started through his 'terrible promiscuous passion' has no end.

The insidious and destructive force of evil now diffuses all around Scobie. Ali, his faithful servant, is murdered, indirectly because of Scobie. He has a faint suspicion that Ali has been selling information about his clandestine meetings with Yusef and Helen to Wilson, the man sent as a spy on the colonial administration by the British government. Although he has every reason to trust Ali because of a long devoted service, he confides in Helen:

"I've had Ali for fifteen years," Scobie said. It was the first time he had been ashamed before him in all those years. He remembered Ali the night after Pember-ton's death, cup of tea in hand, holding him up against the shaking lorry, and then the remembered Wilson's boy slinking off along the wall by the police station.

"You can trust him anyway." Helen said.

"I don't know how," Scobie said. "I've lost the trick of trust."<sup>28</sup>

This is the end for Scobie. The comment he makes about losing the trick of trust holds for other things beside Ali: he can no longer trust God. It is the terrible thing about evil, as Scobie noted when he took the stopper out of the bottle on the wharf, that it spreads out like a gas and affects the innocent who are struck down arbitrarily, merely because of their proximity to evil. Scobie, speaking in another context, realizes this contaminating effect. Thinking of Louise:

"He could delay the suffering, that was all, but he carried it about with him, an infection which sooner or later she must contract."<sup>29</sup> And another time he cries out to Helen: "I want to stop giving pain."<sup>30</sup> Therefore, on top of his conflicting loyalties to Helen, Louise and God, Scobie now has the added problem of being a cause of suffering to untold innocent people that come within his range.

With the arrival of Louise, Scobie's series of lies and evasions begins: they will end in his sacriligious communion and eventually his suicide. The series starts when he first goes to the ship to meet her: "I was very anxious," he said and thought: that is the first lie. I may as well take the plunge now. He said. "I've missed you so much."<sup>31</sup> This, of course, is only an indication of the lies he will come to tell. Later in the day, he notices Louise's rosary lying on her dresser and he thinks of his own broken one in his pocket. We hear of this broken rosary when we first see him in his office. At that time the broken rosary has been hanging on the wall beside a pair of rusty handcuffs. These two imperfect items are symbolic of the potential breach in Scobie's integrity: one concerning his religious sense, the other concerned with his sense of duty to his calling. Now, as Scobie contemplates his wife's rosary: "He thought of the broken one in his pocket. He had always meant to get it mended; now it hardly seemed worth the trouble."<sup>32</sup> Scobie has almost reached the depths; this is the beginning of despair.

The complicated relationship between Scobie and Louise on her return, is highlighted by touches of irony and light-heartedness. Scobie is obviously a man whose ship of hope has been sunk, and he himself is drowning fast. However, Louise has come back somewhat reformed: she intends to make the best of a bad job. It is not unnatural that she should want them to start their new life by receiving communion

together. She talks about this with Scobie and he says he has not got much to confess. Louise says: "'Missing mass on Sunday's a mortal sin, just as much as adultery.' 'Adultery's more fun,' he said with attempted lightness." To this, Louise makes the ironic comment: "'Dear Henry, I've never known you so cheerful.'"<sup>33</sup> In spite of this lighthearted and ironic atmosphere, or rather because of it, Scobie's position becomes blacker. He resigns himself to the sacriligious communion.

Before Scobie receives the sacriligious communion he makes a perfunctory attempt at confession with Father Rank. Greene uses this as a device to contrast the former Scobie with the present Scobie: he shows the distance Scobie has travelled. The first confession occurs before any trouble started. Scobie is the sensitive and almost blameless figure we first see; he has confessed a few rather venial sins. Before Scobie leaves the confessional, the priest:

began to speak the words of Absolution, but the trouble is, Scobie thought, there is nothing to absolve. The words brought no sense of relief because there was nothing to relieve. ....It seemed to him for a moment that God was too accessible. There was no difficulty in approaching Him.<sup>34</sup>

Scobie here is vaguely dissatisfied, but nevertheless he believes, and has access to God without difficulty. Later, when he goes to confession with Louise, Scobie can only tell the priest his sins, mortal ones this time, but he cannot put himself in the frame of mind of a penitent; the priest cannot absolve him. When he leaves the confessional this time the

contrast is obvious, and so is Scobie's deterioration:

When he came out of the box it seemed to Scobie that for the first time his footsteps had taken him out of sight of hope. There was no hope anywhere he turned his eyes: the dead figure of the God upon the Cross, the plaster Virgin, the hideous Stations representing a series of events that had happened a long time ago. It seemed to him that he had only left for his exploration the territory of despair.<sup>35</sup>

There is no approach to God here, only despair. This despair leads him immediately to his sacriligious communion, which by some perverted sense of values he offers up to God as his own damnation, to be used by Him in some mysterious way "for them", meaning Louise and Helen. But really, he knows that all he is accomplishing by this, as he had mentioned earlier, is a postponement of suffering for Louise; he has set himself 'an impossible aim'.

Scobie's suicide is foreshadowed in the book by a very significant episode. A young district commissioner, Pemberton, has got himself hopelessly into debt and has hung himself; Scobie is called upon to investigate. The situation is fraught with overtones of his own suicide. Scobie pities what he sees in Pemberton as child-like:

When Scobie turned the sheet down to the shoulder he had the impression that he was looking at a child in a night-shirt asleep: the pimples were the pimples of puberty and the dead face seemed to bear the trace of no experience beyond the classroom or the football field. 'Poor child', he said aloud. The pious ejaculations of Father Clay irritated him. It seemed to him that unquestionably there must be mercy for someone so unformed.<sup>36</sup>

As usual, Scobie sees only the pitiful, child-like elements. He and Father Clay differ about Pemberton's damnation: "The Church's teaching....' 'Even the Church can't teach me that



God doesn't pity the young..."<sup>37</sup> This illustrates a misguided attempt on Scobie's part at rationalization; but more important, it shows that Scobie is convinced that suicide for him is wrong. Later in a discussion about suicide at a dinner party, Scobie avers:

"We are taught, " Scobie said, "that it's the unforgivable sin."

"That you'll go to Hell?"

"To Hell."

"But do you really, seriously, Major Scobie," Dr. Sykes asked, "believe in Hell?"

"Oh yes, I do."<sup>38</sup>

Both of these incidents illustrate Scobie's stand on suicide; for him it is sure damnation. Before Scobie could resort to suicide, then, he would have to be changed radically by experience.

Scobie is confused as he prepares to die. Several abortive attempts to confess his sins only heighten this confusion. He has a feeling that by killing himself, he is stopping the 'reign of blows' he has been showering on 'the bruised face of Christ'. He also feels that by his death, from a heart disease ostensibly, he is leaving the way clear for a life of happiness for Louise and Helen. At the end, Christ seems to beckon to him and tempt him with His need, and Scobie moves to action at this call for help:

It seemed to him as though someone outside the room were seeking him, calling him, and he made a last effort to indicate that he was here. ...He had a message to convey, but the darkness and the storm drove it back within the case of his breast, and all the time outside the house, outside the world that drummed like hammer blows within his ear, someone wandered, 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 to act. He dredged his consciousness up from an infinite distance in order to make some

reply. He said aloud, 'Dear God, I love....' but the effort was too great and he did not feel his body when it struck the floor.<sup>39</sup>

Scobie, strikingly enough, apparently will attain salvation. He has arrived in his final situation partly through love, partly through a misguided and often suspect pity. His last words are the beginning of an Act of Charity: 'Dear God, I love....' But in spite of all this, the nature of Scobie's pity is rather puzzling. Scobie, in the last analysis, is untrustworthy; this is so, despite the early picture of Scobie the Just. Scobie, through his sympathy, has fitted into the scene of corruption; the child panderers, the vultures and the pye dogs. A character who can harmonize with such an atmosphere is suspect, unnatural.

Donat O'Donnell maintains that Scobie's is an imperfect attempt to emulate Christ. "Scobie's pity, his assumption of responsibility for all suffering, is a simulacrum of the Passion. 'Any victim' demanded his allegiance: he saw the lineaments of Christ in any suffering human being - Pemberton, Ali, the Captain, Helen, Louise."<sup>40</sup> This is certainly true in part. Scobie does go about in a blundering way trying to show a love of God by exercising his pity among fallen human beings. This situation, too, points out a further irony; in his abortive attempts at imitation, he is contributing to the suffering of God. Scobie progressively realizes this more and more and the situation culminates in his suicide, when he can no longer avoid the occasion of his sinning but at the same time he wishes to relieve God's suffering; his imperfect

resolution of the problem is suicide.

Occasionally we are puzzled by Scobie's actions in the light of Mr. O'Donnell's remarks. One often feels that Scobie's pity is nothing but a seeking of peace of mind for himself; an attempt to make his immediate circle happy, so that he might himself be content. This selfish attitude is particularly noticeable when Scobie reflects on Louise's voyage along the dangerous coastline of Africa, during war-time:

All Scobie's consciousness was on the telegram, on that nameless boat edging its way now up the African coastline from the south. God forgive me, he thought, when his mind lit for a moment on the possibility that it might never arrive. In our hearts there is a ruthless dictator, ready to contemplate the misery of a thousand strangers if it will ensure the happiness of the few we love.<sup>41</sup>

Surely this is an odd way to ensure Louise's happiness: by having her drowned at sea; to say nothing of the nameless innocents that would lose their lives. This is hardly a case of Scobie's 'assumption of responsibility for all suffering' that Mr. O'Donnell speaks about. However, even in this case it is Scobie's overwhelming pity that drives out the cruel idea.

At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned the paradox concerning Scobie. Seemingly, Scobie has loved so much that he has possibly damned himself. The explanation of the paradox is quite simple and has been indicated already; pity is not necessarily love. The paradox says that virtue has led a man to damnation. But the flaw in the paradox is this: pity without prudence is not a virtue. Scobie's pity is not

regulated by reason, therefore, it is not a virtue. As a virtue, pity is a part of charity; its other name is mercy. And we read of God that His mercy is above all His works. But with Scobie, pity or mercy becomes a passion.

At several points through the novel, Scobie's pity seems to be summoned up as a defence, a protection for himself. He often follows the line of least resistance. For example, he could have extricated himself from the affair with Helen Rolt. Their great difference in age and her relatively susceptible condition when they became lovers, should indicate to Scobie that their affair can only be transitory. She is lonely, young, and grateful. Scobie, being kind to her, is accepted for his friendship and kindness. For Scobie to construe this as an eternal dependency on him is obviously a mistake. Once the affair had started, how could Scobie delude himself into believing that pity and responsibility demanded he continue the affair even at the expense of a sacrilegious communion and his own suicide? When Louise came back, he could have repented and returned to Louise and to God. Reason should have told Scobie that he was not necessary to Helen; she could forget him in a few weeks. Apparently, Scobie feels that by doing this, breaking with Helen, he might also hurt Louise, as the affair might come out in the open. At any rate, there is a suggestion throughout that Scobie is unable to do the reasonable things for the precise reason that he is afraid of the muddle that will follow for himself, the endless explanations, apologies and soothing of upset people. Scobie

does not seem to have the moral courage to do the right thing. Scobie's pity, therefore, often seems a cover-up for his lack of moral courage.

However, all is not black in regard to the pity that Scobie feels. Some of it seems obviously motivated by real love, even though not by prudence. His vow, at the funeral of their daughter, to see that Louise is always happy is of this nature. In part, it may be said that this vow is motivated by his remorse at not having been with Louise when the child died; it is a sort of penance for the suffering he had missed. But this reasoning can be over-severe. He feels real love for Louise and realizes her great feeling of loss at the death of their only child. Louise, not making friends easily, would obviously build her life around their child. To compensate this loss and express his love, Scobie vows to see that Louise is happy. This in turn leads him to the deal with Yusef to get the money to send her on a trip. Even though we can see that this was an impossible vow to make, we cannot deny Scobie's genuine love in making it. It is only unfortunate that Scobie did not realize that life is hard and so is love. But the numerous acts of Scobie that are motivated by love are nonetheless real because he has not realized this. Nor is his love any less real when his reason deserts him.

However, suffice it to say that Scobie's is a very complicated case. What should be noticed particularly in this novel, as in most of Greene's novels, is the suffering. Almost

every aspect of the novel enhances, in some way, the picture of suffering.

## NOTES

1. Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1952), p. 37.
2. Ibid., p. 190.
3. Ibid., p. 189.
4. Ibid., p. 137.
5. Ibid., p. 316-317.
6. Donat O'Donnell, Maria Cross (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 64.
7. Greene, op. cit., p. 307.
8. Ibid., p. 241.
9. Ibid., p. 223.
10. Ibid., p. 137.
11. Kenneth Allott and Miriam Farris, The Art of Graham Greene (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951), p. 225.
12. Greene, op. cit., p. 2.
13. Ibid., p. 33.
14. Ibid., p. 9.
15. Ibid., p. 80.
16. Ibid., p. 13.
17. Ibid., p. 15.
18. Ibid., p. 17.
19. Ibid., p. 19.
20. Ibid., p. 67.
21. Ibid., p. 53.
22. Ibid., p. 190.
23. Ibid., p. 191.
24. Ibid., p. 192.

## NOTES

25. O'Donnell, op. cit., p. 75.
26. Greene, op. cit., p. 192.
27. Ibid., p. 241.
28. Ibid., p. 284.
29. Ibid., p. 254.
30. Ibid., p. 305.
31. Ibid., p. 246.
32. Ibid., p. 247.
33. Ibid., p. 248-249.
34. Ibid., p. 181.
35. Ibid., p. 267.
36. Ibid., p. 97-98.
37. Ibid., p. 99.
38. Ibid., p. 234.
39. Ibid., p. 326.
40. O'Donnell, op. cit., p. 83.
41. Greene, op. cit., p. 228.



## CHAPTER V

### THE END OF THE END OF THE AFFAIR

"Man has places in his heart which do not yet exist, and into them enters suffering in order that they may have existence."

Leon Bloy

The End of the Affair is, in many ways, a more difficult novel to deal with than the previous three. The traditional themes that Greene usually treats are not as obvious here. The fallen world is not so universally described; betrayal and the hunted man are not so evident; and the effect of childhood on man's adult life is not so definite. However, there is a way in which The End of the Affair complements the three 'big' novels of Greene that we have already examined. Taken together the four novels give a complete philosophy of life. As Greene is a Catholic writer, this philosophy will necessarily have a theological aspect.

The three central characters we have seen have one thing in common: a hope for God's mercy. In Brighton Rock we have a satanic character devoted almost unqualifiedly to evil. But Pinkie realizes that he may be going to suffer damnation for his deeds; he makes his choice with the realization that he is probably a lost soul. The important point is that even Pinkie has hope because of his 'understanding' of things. In Scobie and the whiskey priest, we have two characters who are similar in several ways. Both of them are sinful, but they are also humble; they go to meet their Maker with a sense of not having

done one meritorious deed, they feel empty-handed. The observer sees, however, that this is not so; they have both made sacrifices for others. The important thing to note in connection with these two characters is that they both have a belief and a trust in the tremendous love of God. They know that they can merit no mercy, but they do not deny that the love and mercy of God may in some miraculous way claim them for His own. Thus we see Scobie, as he sinks to the floor in death, starting an Act of Love: "Oh my God, I love...". However, in connection with these three characters, the question arises, what is the meaning of all their suffering? In answering this question we will have to return to the problem of evil and also to investigate the idea of grace.

The following things are to be looked for in The End of the Affair: first, Greene's handling of the problem of evil and the way the problem is faced by his characters; second, the aspects of this novel that distinguish it from the preceding ones. I have said that this novel complements the other three, and that suffering and grace are also involved. These topics will also be investigated and developed.

The End of the Affair is a novel about Sarah Miles. There is nothing extraordinary about Sarah. She is the wife of a senior civil servant, Henry Miles. He is a boring, mediocre man and Sarah, not with any intention of leaving or even hurting Henry, carries on an affair with Maurice Bendrix, a novelist. The affair ends; Bendrix pines; Sarah soon dies of pneumonia; then Bendrix moves in with Henry and they live

together. There is nothing too unusual with all this, except for the lover and the husband's living together at the end of the novel. And this odd circumstance is brought about by the central incident in the book, which, as the equivocating title may suggest, is 'the end of the affair'. What is the end ("Object for which a thing exists")<sup>1</sup> of 'the end of the affair'? To discover the answer to this important question, we must trace out what Greene has accomplished in his portrayal of Sarah.

Before examining Sarah's character, it is necessary to note what Greene has done in the way of presenting evil in this novel. I mentioned earlier that the presentation was made obscure or more complicated by the fact that it does not have the universal note about it that the previous novels had. Evil is presented in condensed form: a highly suggestive miniature portrait rather than a panoramic mural. In Brighton Rock there is Marlowe's line "Why, this is Hell, nor are we out of it" and its implications. In The Power and the Glory we find the port city described as a postcard; but you could flip through a packet of postcards and find your city in there, as squalid and corrupt. In The Heart of the Matter we see Scobie musing on whether one would have to weep for the stars and the planets too, as well as the fallen world, if one got "to what they call the heart of the matter". These incidents in the three novels imply almost literally a universal evil, and the tone of the novels in general substantiates this view. In The End of the Affair the view of evil is a particular

view; there are no attempts on the part of Greene to point and say 'This is evil, and it's going on all around. This is just a small part of our fallen world'. But the implications of the evil picture are no less damning or effective because of this. Rather, in many ways The End of the Affair presents images of evil that are far more vivid and tangible.

Moral and physical evil are both present in very vivid forms. There is the fact of adultery, but it is not merely alluded to, as in most of the other books. I do not have to quote chapter and verse to anyone who has read the novel, to indicate where the language and the description is explicit to the verge of licence. Integrally a part of this description is the consuming passion of Sarah and Bendrix; certainly a misguided passion at best. This misguided passion leads to Bendrix's corrosive jealousy, and his misconception of the nature of love, something all too prevalent:

"I'd rather be dead or see you dead," I said, "than with another man. I'm not eccentric. That's ordinary human love. Ask anybody. They'd all say the same - if they loved at all." I jibed her. "Anyone who loves is jealous."<sup>2</sup>

Still, this is true, as far as it goes; but Bendrix's jealousy turns to hate eventually, which is another thing again. This is a confused idea of love. Despite his protestations, love seems to be little else to Bendrix but sensual passion; certainly his uncharitable relationship with Sarah has nothing of 'self-giving' in it, which is the essence of love. Bendrix soon reaches the depths when his jealousy leads him to hate: "this is a record of hate far more than of love"<sup>3</sup> It is, of

course, the irony of the novel that it is a record of love far more than of hate. But the picture of the debasing adultery is nonetheless real. There is a hint of the universal fallen world in Bendrix's interview with the private detective Mr. Savage, where adultery is fitted into the world picture:

I said, "This is a very simple case," and I was aware with anger that Mr. Savage really knew all about it before I began to speak. Nothing that I had to say would be strange to Mr. Savage, nothing that he could unearth would not have been dug up so many dozens of times already that year.<sup>4</sup>

Although Bendrix considered his case something different, something unique, it was really nothing but the same type of sordid affair that goes on every day. However, this theme of universality is not developed, as it is in the other novels. Suffice it to say that moral evil is present in a very malignant form. This will be made increasingly evident as we examine Sarah's character.

For the first time in Greene's novels, physical evil is present in a clearly operative way in The End of the Affair. Richard Smythe's "purple crumpled strawberry mark stretching from above the cheek-bone down to the point of the chin"<sup>5</sup> is an example of physical evil. It has changed his whole life; he defies any belief in a God who could so brand him. Smythe is influential, and even symbolic, in Sarah's life, but this point will be brought out later.

The importance of the book lies in the growth depicted in Sarah. The nature of this growth, the conditions and the seemingly insurmountable obstacles under which it flourishes,

constitute what is important. Greene has started with pretty shabby material and presented her in the end as someone approaching saintliness. In the course of this transformation we are afforded a view of moral evil, intense struggle and the grace of God. This, then, is another view of the problem of evil: how it presents itself, what it can accomplish, how it is handled by the individual.

We first see Sarah as a self-composed, amoral woman, no longer young, neglected by her husband, and with a sensuality verging on nymphomania. At the start of the book, Bendrix meets Henry on the common, after not having seen Sarah for two years, and asks after her. Henry answers:

"Oh, she's out for the evening somewhere," and set that devil in my mind at work again, remembering other days when Henry must have replied just like that to other inquirers, while I alone knew where Sarah was.<sup>6</sup>

The aura of impurity immediately envelopes Sarah. Shortly after this Henry confesses to Bendrix, not knowing that Bendrix himself was her lover at one time, "I'm worried about Sarah".<sup>7</sup> Henry proceeds to tell Bendrix that he is considering having her followed by a private detective. Even an unsuspecting and innocent person such as Henry worries about the conduct of Sarah:

He sat down in an easy chair as though somebody had pushed him and said with disgust, "Bendrix, I've always thought the worst thing, the very worst, a man could do..." I should certainly have been on tenterhooks in those other days: strange to me, and how infinitely dreary, the serenity of innocence.<sup>8</sup>

The thought of adultery is so appalling to Henry, in connection with Sarah, that he cannot phrase it; he trails off at that point.

Guilt hangs heavy over Sarah's head in these preliminary allusions to her, but the guilt is substantiated and even increased, when we see her directly. As Bendrix first sees her, she is being furtively embraced in an alcove of her front hall as Henry and Bendrix come in. Bendrix suspects an easy victory is not far away. Two days later they sleep together in a cheap London Hotel, reserved for such illicit meetings. Sarah is apparently far from inaccessible. From then on they make love whenever and wherever possible. Their lust is described in unequivocal terms: Bendrix's appetite is exceeded, if anything, by that of Sarah. However, any design to titillate that might be ascribed to such objective description is precluded by the real horribleness of the affair. I am thinking particularly of their love-making on the next floor to where Henry lies sick in bed. Sarah's complacency and the fact that it is at her suggestion, add a blacker hue to the already damning fact of adultery. Sarah's complete insensitivity and amoral attitude are clearly seen during this incident. After Henry has come down, offered Bendrix a drink, and gone back to bed, Bendrix asks Sarah:

"Do you mind?" I asked her, and she shook her head. I didn't really know what I meant - I think I had an idea that the sight of Henry might have roused remorse, but she had a wonderful way of eliminating remorse. Unlike the rest of us she was unhaunted by guilt. In her view when a thing was done, it was done: remorse died with the act. She would have thought it unreasonable of Henry, if he had caught us, to be angry for more than a moment.<sup>9</sup>

This then is the black side of Sarah as we first see her: a woman with a vehement passion and an amoral attitude.

But this is only one side of Sarah, the black side, as we first see her. She is going to grow in stature during the course of the novel and there must be seeds in the early Sarah which will develop. The seeds are there, on the natural level, in her loyalty, selflessness (in a sense) and her love. There are also seeds present on a supernatural level, but more of that later. Her loyalty is to Henry; she would like to leave him, but she refuses to hurt him directly. It is this loyalty to Henry, however oddly expressed, that often infuriates Bendrix when he wants to possess her completely. It leads him to torture her with Henry's mediocrity:

She had an enormous loyalty to Henry (I could never deny that), and in those clouded hours when the demon took charge of my brain and I resented even harmless Henry, I would use the novel and invent episodes too crude to write....<sup>10</sup>

At any rate, the loyalty is there and is capable of development, as we shall see. Similarly, there is much to say for Sarah's love, however misdirected. It is an intense, and an unselfish love, in many ways. When she tells Bendrix "I've never loved anybody or anything as I do you",<sup>11</sup> she obviously means every word of it, and she eventually proves that this is true.

Bendrix unwittingly says so much more than he means at one point, concerning Sarah: "She had so much more capacity for love than I had".<sup>12</sup> In her diary, Sarah confesses a selfless love for Bendrix; she is interested primarily in his happiness. Although it is not an absolutely noble sentiment, relatively speaking it is selfless of her to say that she would not mind Maurice seeking comfort in the 'desert' by having other women.



Given the fact of Sarah's character and their relationship, this is an unselfish attitude, and indicates the presence of the roots of real love. She sees herself as an instrument for making Bendrix happy. She does not give voice to the doubts and confusions present in her own mind, as Bendrix voices his, simply because they would cause him pain:

Sometimes I get so tired of trying to convince him that I love him and shall love him for ever. He pounces on my words like a barrister and twists them. I know he is afraid of that desert which would be around him if our love were to end, but he can't realize that I feel exactly the same. What he says aloud, I say to myself silently and write it here. What can one build in the desert?<sup>13</sup>

The futility and the transitory nature of their affair are as apparent to Sarah as they are to Bendrix. She shows herself capable of the greater love by her attempts to lighten the inevitable blow for Bendrix. This then, is the other side of the early Sarah. The less black side, one might say. Her loyalty and love are real qualities capable of development.

The central incident in the book is the bombing raid on London where Bendrix is apparently killed. Bendrix and Sarah have been sleeping together in Bendrix's house. After a near miss by a guided missile, Bendrix goes to investigate and to see if the landlady is safe. While he is gone an explosion shatters the front portion of the house. Sarah is unharmed; she goes to find Bendrix. Seeing him unconscious and covered with debris, she presumes he is dead and she goes back to the room and prays:

Dear God,...make me believe. I can't believe. Make me, I said, I'm a bitch and a fake and I hate myself. I

shut my eyes tight, and I pressed my nails into the palms of my hands until I could feel nothing but the pain, and I said, I will believe. Let him be alive and I will believe. Give him a chance. Let him have his happiness. Do this and I'll believe. But that wasn't enough. It doesn't hurt to believe. So I said, I love him and I'll do anything if you'll make him alive. I said very slowly, I'll give him up for ever, only let him be alive with a chance, and I pressed and pressed and I could feel the skin break, and I said, People can love without seeing each other, can't they, they love You all their lives without seeing You.<sup>14</sup>

This is Sarah's prayer and her vow. It is ironical that she prays all this for his happiness, when all it brings him is agony. But in this vow there is also humility and real love. Like Scobie and the whiskey priest, Sarah claims no merit; she confesses to being a 'bitch and a fake'. Like Scobie and the whiskey priest, she also puts her trust, at the crucial moment, in the mercy of God: His gratuitous gift that is in no sense earned.

Bendrix, before narrating the events of the night of the bombing raid, reminisces: "I remembered the end of the whole 'affair'".<sup>15</sup> It is ironical that Bendrix looks on this episode, the moment when Sarah walks out of his life forever, as the end of the affair and the end of love. The irony is contained in the fact that this is just the beginning of love, the beginning of an 'affair'. It is the consummation of Sarah's love for Bendrix that she should make the vow, but it is also the beginning of Sarah's love for God and her affair with Him, one might say. This is the end of 'the end of the affair': it is the flowering of Sarah's love for Bendrix, and more important, it is the beginning of her love for God.

In order to explain this incident more convincingly, we must turn to the theological premises upon which the novel rests. Sarah has been baptised a Catholic as a baby. She has never known about this. It was brought about secretly by her mother, because her father was vehemently opposed to the idea. The sacraments are a conditioning factor in a person's life. Being baptised, Sarah is a child of God, and therefore a recipient of grace. Sarah is unconscious of the fact that she is in such a state. When she prays after finding Bendrix, she prays to "anything that might exist". She thinks about it later and says: "I knelt down on the floor: I was mad to do such a thing: I never even had to do it as a child - my parents never believed in prayer, any more than I do."<sup>16</sup> Later Sarah tells Smythe: "I may have been christened - it's a social convention isn't it?"<sup>17</sup> But her ignorance does not weaken the efficacy of the sacrament. She is branded for life. Later, Mrs. Bertram, Sarah's mother, tells Bendrix prophetically:

"Well, you see, she was once a Catholic, only she didn't know it. I wish Henry had buried her properly....Why if she'd been brought up in the right way, if I hadn't always married such mean men, she could have been a saint, I truly believe....She was a good girl."<sup>18</sup>

So there is a supernatural element to consider in examining 'the end of the affair'. God presumably touched Sarah with the finger of grace, and she was given the strength to make her vow and adhere to it. From this she reaps the reward of salvation. But salvation does not come painlessly. Certainly the price that we see Sarah pay in mental and physical suffering is a

great one; but it is a tribute to Sarah as a person and Greene as a writer that her suffering is made vivid and real, and her conversion is made convincing. Father H. C. Gardiner, S.J., writing in America says this on the subject:

It is an interesting and key fact that once the reader turns, with the narrator, to the pages of the diary in which Sarah recounts her agony to be true to her promise to end the affair, the sensuousness of the language progressively gives way to a reflected and filtered treatment of passion that removes even the slightest suspicion of undue preoccupation with sense at the expense of Spirit. As Sarah's realization of real love and purity grows, Greene's style mirrors the purity of her new-found world.<sup>19</sup>

And this 'new-found world' is due in part to the power of actual grace that God has bestowed on Sarah. So many of Greene's other characters are in pain from a sense of loss or of lack, such as Scobie and the whiskey priest, but in The End of the Affair we have a positive concept, grace operating on an individual. In the same article, Father Gardiner comments: "The significant forward step in The End of the Affair is that one character, at least, stands at last horrified at the edge of the chasm and through God's grace, goes about filling it with God's grace."<sup>20</sup>

But before Sarah reaches this state of grace, her suffering is great. In the prefatory quotation of the novel, which I have prefixed to my chapter, Leon Bloy says: "Man has places in his heart which do not yet exist, and into them enters suffering in order that they may have existence." The 'places' in Sarah's heart are for grace and God, and by her suffering these things come to be. We hear of her suffering as we read her diary. This is a particularly effective way for us to come

to appreciate and realize the significance of her suffering. There is the immediacy of the first person, in a diary, and at the same time a detached, unselfconscious attitude on the part of the protagonist; a diary somehow by its nature rings true.

Human love is easier to grasp, understand and enjoy than the love of God. This makes Sarah's task all the greater, because she has an extreme capacity for enjoying human love, and her love for Bendrix is real. The very fact of God's existence is not immediately evident to Sarah. She rationalizes with herself:

A vow's not all that important - a vow to somebody I've never known, to somebody I don't really believe in. Nobody will know that I've broken a vow, except me and Him - and He doesn't exist, does He? He can't exist. You can't have a merciful God and this despair.<sup>21</sup>

Her confusion is obvious: denying and affirming God's existence in the same sentence. The main reason here for her doubt is of course the theological problem of evil. But integrated with this is the other problem, the moral one; Sarah longs passionately for Bendrix.

Because she desires Bendrix so much and is driven nearly mad with her frustrated desire, she tries to hurt God and at the same time satisfy herself, by offering herself to other men. She resolutely refuses to break her oath as yet, but she tries to evoke the old amorality by giving herself to an air raid warden and then to one of Henry's associates from the ministry. But neither scheme works out. Sarah cannot go through with it; the reason is because this is lust and hate,

not love. But the war goes on in Sarah's brain:

Henry's away again tonight. If I go down into the bar and pick a man up and take him on to the beach and lie with him among the sand-dunes, won't I be robbing you of what you love most? But it doesn't work. It doesn't work any longer. I can't hurt you if I don't get any pleasure from it. I might as well stick pins in myself like those people in the desert. The desert. I want to do something that I enjoy and that will hurt you. Otherwise what is it but mortification and that's like an expression of belief. And believe me, God, I don't believe in you yet, I don't believe in you yet.<sup>22</sup>

From the very fact of her protestations and keeping of the vow, Sarah is admitting that there is a God to protest to and to love. However, she is not yet prepared to allow that openly to herself. She tries to let herself be convinced rationally by Smythe, but that is a hopeless failure because she realizes Smythe has been forced into his indefensible views by his stigma, his birthmark. She pities Smythe; and because of this pity, along with her constant supplications to God asking for the ability to love Him, Sarah gradually reaches the exhilaration of victory; it is not a victory, however, which eradicates entirely every vestige of war.

Ironically, it is through Smythe that Sarah is finally convinced. Smythe has told her that he is in love, but he cannot expect her to love a man with such a hideously marked face. "You are beautiful. You have no complaint, but why should I love a God who gives a child this?" To which Sarah replies:

"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>23</sup>

This is of course humility and love of the finest order, and with the joy of this new-found love, Sarah seems to penetrate to the 'heart of the matter':

Did I ever love Maurice as much before I loved You? Or was it really You I loved all the time? Did I touch You when I touched him?...But was it me he loved or You? For he hated in me the things You hate. He was on Your side all the time without knowing it....He gave me so much love, and I gave him so much love that soon there wasn't anything left, when we'd finished, but You. ... Even the first time, in the Hotel near Paddington, we spent all we had. You were there, teaching us to squander, like You taught the rich man, so that one day we might have nothing left except this love of You.<sup>24</sup>

But, as always, the peace does not last, and two days later, after a particularly vivid dream, Sarah writes:

Then I woke up. I'm not at peace any more. I just want him like I used to in the old days. ...I want Maurice. I want ordinary corrupt human love. Dear God, you know I want to want Your pain, but I don't want it now. Take it away for a while and give it me another time.<sup>25</sup>

The temptation is always there, even after the biggest battles have been won; the temptation continues till death. Sarah succumbs and arranges to see Maurice, but she realizes it is futile. She is only confirmed in her love for God. When she meets Maurice, she succeeds in convincing him that her conversion is real. She pleads with him: "Just go away. Please, Maurice, have a bit of mercy."<sup>26</sup> After this, Bendrix, too, is changed as well as convinced:

I could imagine a God blessing her: or a God loving her. When I began to write our story down, I thought I was writing a record of hate, but somehow the hate has got mislaid and all I know is that in spite of her mistakes and her unreliability, she was better than most. It's just as well that one of us should believe in her: she never did in herself.<sup>27</sup>

A few days after their encounter, Sarah dies.

A perplexing part of this novel is the introduction of the miracles by Greene. Smythe miraculously is cleared of his birthmark after the kiss that Sarah places on it. Lance, the little boy of Mr. Parkis the private detective, is apparently miraculously cured after reading an old child's book of Sarah's. Lance dreams that Sarah comes in the middle of the night and touches him to cure him. Granted the fact of the miracles, they are very significant. They show the grace of God working through a human agent. Sarah, presumably, has merited this special favor of God's through her humility and love. To those who are still convinced that the device of the miracles is suspect, perhaps these words of Father Gardiner will prove rewarding:

The weakness of the book lies, I feel, in the introduction of the 'miracles', though, granting their intrusion, they are well handled. I believe that they do intrude, for we are not prepared for them by a sufficient portrayal of Sarah's saintly life. Her sacrifice - great as it was, and her conversion - deep as it was, aren't enough to give base to miraculous intervention. Perhaps Greene introduced them to avoid the charge of leaving this story as ambiguous at the end as many thought The Heart of the Matter was....There is nothing ambiguous about it, either in the values it upholds, the deep and valid sympathy it evokes, or the place it deserves in the world of literature.<sup>28</sup>

Before closing this chapter, there is just one other point to mention. I have indicated in earlier chapters that Greene is possibly resolving the theological problem of evil at some points in his novels. The End of the Affair is one of the novels where I feel he has this in mind. The purpose of Sarah's suffering is fairly obvious. Through her suffering, Sarah obviously attains salvation. Furthermore, through



Sarah's suffering, and his own, Bendrix also seems destined to a better life with greater realization. At the beginning of the novel he is unrelenting in his denunciation of God; when, that is, he even allows that God exists. When he realizes that it is because of God that Sarah has left him, he is roused to the same fury that causes him to give way to the horrible tirade delivered to Henry and the visiting priest, in which he almost catalogues Sarah's sins. At this point, Henry embarrassedly apologizes for Bendrix: "'I'm sorry Father.' 'You don't need to be,' the priest said, 'I know when a man's in pain.'"<sup>29</sup> And it is from this pain, which the priest would naturally recognize, that realization and love may come to Bendrix. The very fact that the book ends with Bendrix in a similar 'winter mood' to that of Sarah's when she realizes that Maurice is, for her, dead, is indicative of a new start of the process that converts Sarah:

I wrote at the start that this was a record of hate, and walking there beside Henry towards the evening glass of beer, I found the one prayer that seemed to serve the winter mood: 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>30</sup>

This is the same mood that pervades the early days for Sarah after Maurice is lost to her forever. And although Bendrix might not have the grace due to those who have been introduced to the sacrament of baptism, he certainly will have the prayers of Sarah to lead him from his 'winter mood' to the implied love of spring, and the fruition of summer.

## NOTES

1. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1951), under "end".
2. Graham Greene, The End of the Affair (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1952), p. 63.
3. Ibid., p. 1.
4. Ibid., p. 19-20.
5. Ibid., p. 94.
6. Ibid., p. 3.
7. Ibid., p. 8.
8. Ibid., p. 10-11.
9. Ibid., p. 56.
10. Ibid., p. 6.
11. Ibid., p. 57.
12. Ibid., p. 57.
13. Ibid., p. 107.
14. Ibid., p. 112.
15. Ibid., p. 78.
16. Ibid., p. 112.
17. Ibid., p. 126.
18. Ibid., p. 201.
19. H.C. Gardiner, S.J., "Second Thoughts on Greene's Latest", America, December 15, 1951, p. 312.
20. Ibid., p. 312.
21. Greene, op. cit., p. 110.
22. Ibid., p. 120.

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23. Ibid., p. 146-147.
24. Ibid., p. 147.
25. Ibid., p. 148.
26. Ibid., p. 158.
27. Ibid., p. 158.
28. Gardiner, op. cit., p. 313.
29. Greene, op. cit., p. 223.
30. Ibid., p. 237.

## CHAPTER VI

### BETWEEN THE STIRRUP AND THE GROUND

#### Conclusion

The Christian writer is presented with a dilemma: he can write from a militantly Christian standpoint, making the propagation of Christian doctrine his main theme, in which case his writing has about as much drama and suspense as a medieval morality play, or, he can ignore his Christian background and write as though a standard of morality did not exist, in which case he is either branded as a hypocrite, or as being intellectually obtuse. I intend, in this concluding chapter, to point out what Graham Greene has done to solve this dilemma, and also, to point out how he has made his novels things of beauty, despite their seeming preoccupation with evil in the world, and the problem it presents for the thinking man. In other words, this will be an attempt to show two predominant threads that run through Greene's novels, and how the one is justified by the other.

The task of the Christian writer of today is made even more difficult, because of the predominance of evil in the modern world. People are, as a rule, not anxious to stop and reflect and consider sin. I mentioned in a previous chapter a recent issue of America, where there was a review of Greene's play, The Living Room, which had, this year, a very short run on Broadway, after having a long and successful run in both London and Paris. The reviewer diagnosed the reasons for the

play's failure:

What made the play a failure in New York...is recognition of sin. In the contemporary New York theatre, sin is an almost forbidden word, rarely mentioned except in mockery. In The Living Room sin is not treated as a joke. A specific sin, adultery, is given a close study, its nature and consequences examined, as under a microscope, against a background of Christian morals... The critics who lauded The Voice of the Turtle and A Streetcar Named Desire, and the sex-conditioned theatre-goers who made the plays phenomenal hits, can hardly be expected to understand why so much fuss should be made over a little illicit love.<sup>1</sup>

This fact, then, increases the difficulty of the Christian writer's dilemma; with the predominance of evil in the world, there is a commensurate indifference to sin and its consequences. If the writer is honest and treats these themes of evil, his words are apt to fall on deaf ears. Greene, I feel, should be classed as courageous to have been one of the instigators of the recent trend to write from a moral standard, and to recognize sin and suffering for what they are, and for trying to explain them. He examines sin and suffering under a microscope, 'against a background of Christian morals'.

I hope that it has been made evident, in the body of this thesis, that Greene has dealt with evil and recognized it as such when it was encountered. Greene has been obsessed with certain themes of evil in his writing, and this is often held against him; but obsession is not necessarily a bad thing. Greene himself has said, in an essay on Walter de la Mare:

"Every creative writer worth our consideration: every writer who can be called in the wide eighteenth century use of the term a poet, is a victim: a man given over to an obsession."<sup>2</sup>

Allott and Farris, in their work on Greene, comment:

In what is one of the best short pieces of criticism on Henry James, he [Greene] has described how a ruling passion may unify the work of a writer, binding the story-telling together by recurrences of theme, incident and image, and giving it weight, direction and a 'symmetry of thought' that lends to half a shelf of novels 'the importance of a system'.<sup>3</sup>

I think this is certainly true of Greene himself. One of the two threads that I mentioned above is this preoccupation with certain themes. All of these themes are similar in being manifestations, to varying degrees, of evil. In order to understand what Greene has done, it is important to recall these themes. Greene, by presenting these themes concerning evil, has emphasized man's struggle and suffering, and shown that through this suffering man attains an awareness of and a participation in, Divine grace.

Greene writes from the Christian premise of original sin and a consequent fallen world. Man is, through his fallen nature, weak. Therefore, he cannot merit the love, mercy and grace of God. It is only the initial gratuitous grace of God given to the individual that can initiate a friendly relationship between that individual and God. However, even after this relationship has been established, weak man is beset on all sides by conflicting temptations. Greene has lent unity to his depiction of man's struggle by using certain central themes throughout his work that serve to highlight and enhance his sorry plight.

We have seen earlier what these themes are: betrayal and the theme of the hunted man, the early corruptive effect of

evil on children, illicit sexual relations. And these particular themes are very effective for Greene's purpose. Betrayal and the hunted man, which are found in almost all of his books in one form or another, serve to illustrate the isolation and loneliness of man. The corruption of children is evil in a particularly obvious and insidious form, made hideous by reason of the contrast with previous innocence. Illicit sexual relations are a common, and of course, sensational, form of evil; as such they are recognized by most thinking people, and one is more likely to understand and sympathize with this particular aberration. Greene has molded these common themes into a singularly bleak and horrid world.

In the prefatory quotations to his Mexican travel book, The Lawless Roads, a book presenting just such a bleak world, Greene quotes Cardinal Newman:

To consider the world in its length and breadth...the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the pervading idolatries, the corruptions, the dreary hopeless irreligion, that condition of the whole race, so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle's words, "having no hope, and without God in the world" - all this is a vision to dizzy and appal; and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery...What shall be said to this heart-piercing, reason-bewildering fact? I can only answer, that 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.<sup>4</sup>

It is this 'human race implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity' that Greene has succeeded in depicting. It is a

world of thieves, cutthroats, murderers, erotics; but in spite of this, few of his characters (one of the exceptions being Pinkie), are so sensationally bad that we cannot put ourselves in their place, and understand their difficulties. Pinkie, the whiskey priest, Scobie and Sarah are all members of the race of aboriginally fallen men. One thing they all have in common is pride, that which caused the fall of the angels; and pride, in its elemental sense, is love of self over God.

The very backgrounds of the novels we have examined, enhance the atmosphere of evil that Greene creates. And it is fitting that in each case the sordid background is caused by the pervasive evil of man. In Brighton Rock there is the traditionally immoral resort life; The Power and the Glory has as its setting, 'the godless state'; the action of The Heart of the Matter unfolds in the steaming heat of Liberia, in a corrupt African port city, during a global war. These several backgrounds provide a fitting locale for the peculiar 'Greeneland' which we set out to study. The settings enhance each hero's struggle with the diseased element in his nature.

The theme of evil is a grave one, because evil is so rampant in all the world and so costly in its effect. But Greene does not handle it for its own sake; the ubiquitous evil forms a background for human actions. People are seen against this background, struggling to assert their individuality and failing. The struggle and the suffering is what is seen and found important by Greene, not the evil as such.



It is what the evil evokes in the individual that is dwelt upon. Greene has emphasized this importance of the human act in an essay on Francois Mauriac:

For with the death of James the religious sense was lost to the English novel, and with the religious sense went the importance of the human act. It was as if the world of fiction had lost a dimension: the characters of such distinguished writers as Mrs. Virginia Woolf and Mr. E.M. Forster wandered like cardboard symbols through a world that was paper thin. Even in one of the most materialistic of our great novelists - in Trollope - we are aware of another world against which the actions of the characters are thrown into relief. The ungainly clergyman picking his black-booted way through the mud, handling so awkwardly his umbrella, speaking of his miserable income and stumbling through a proposal of marriage, exists in a way that Mrs. Woolf's Mr. Ramsay never does, because we are aware that he exists not only to the woman he is addressing but also in a God's eye. His unimportance in the world of the sense is only matched by his enormous importance in another world.... Mr. Mauriac's first importance to an English reader, therefore, is that he belongs to the company of the great traditional novelists: he is a writer for whom the visible world has not ceased to exist, whose characters have the solidity and importance of men with souls to save or lose, and a writer who claims the traditional and essential right of a novelist, to comment, to express his views.<sup>5</sup>

This is fundamentally what Greene has done. He has made his central characters aware, as he is aware himself, of the importance of what they do. They realize they have souls to save or lose through their own thoughts and actions. They are part of a hierarchy with which they must conform, or order is violated. When order is violated, the individual suffers, and perhaps others. It is the objective description of sin and consequently suffering that has motivated Greene, not the portrayal of evil for its own sake. It was never his intention to glorify evil.

It would seem that a difficulty arises here, and many have been quick to point this out when writing articles on Greene. If Greene is concerned with the creating of a world of evil and showing the struggle and suffering of the individual in that world, then how can his work be considered a thing of beauty; is he not taking an overly pessimistic and misanthropic view of life? Several reviewers have pointed out Greene's affinity to T. S. Eliot and other twentieth century writers in this regard. They have all been accused of seeing only an arid 'wasteland' as their environment, and of seeing nothing good.

But I think that this criticism, while not wholly indefensible, stems from a misunderstanding of what Greene has actually done in his writing. Certainly, beauty is part of the artist's aim. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the difficulties in our world, any more than one can the triumphs. It cannot be said that Greene denies the difficulties; but, I do not think he can be said to deny the triumphs either.

The rendering of both aspects of the world, the fallen and the triumphant, is the greatest difficulty for a modern writer, because the times are evil. If he is to give an authentic picture of his age, this dominance of evil must be shown. But Greene has, I feel, a more profound and understanding view of the age, compared with the majority of his contemporaries, and therefore the triumphs are there as well as the difficulties.

Speaking at a convention of writers in 1952, Jacques Maritain referred to the Christian writer:

The immediate task and purpose of a writer is either to produce an artifact in beauty or to solve some problem according to the truth of the matter. Of course, he can and must have further aims, dealing with his life and destiny as a man, but they are distant aims, which are not the operative rule and measure of the work. It is impossible for a writer who believes in God not to be concerned with the spreading of divine truth... It is an urgent need of the world today that Christians firmly attached to their faith dedicate themselves to the labor of intelligence in all fields of human knowledge and creative activity, while realizing that the keys provided by sound philosophy and theology are intended to open doors, not to close them.<sup>6</sup>

Graham Greene has met these demands. He is 'a writer who believes in God' and is 'concerned with the spreading of divine truth'. With his background of a 'sound philosophy and theology', Greene has not locked the door on humanity with a picture of despair and misanthropy; he has opened the door with the concept of divine love and mercy. This is the second thread running through Greene's work that justifies the other thread, the portrayal of evil and suffering, and at the same time ennobles his work. The iniquity of man forms a background for the better manifestation of some of the divine attributes.

Only the very naive could think that Greene is one of those writers who glorify sin. One would have to be very insensitive not to hear the agonizing cry that is uttered by his poor, never-quite-defeated people. One would need to be equally insensitive not to detect, also, the pity that Greene himself feels for the characters he portrays. Even Pinkie, the most fallen of all his characters, evokes a contagious pity in his biographer. Greene is continually emphasizing the loneliness, the isolation, the responsibility resting on

those narrow shoulders; a mere boy who had never known parental affection; a boy whose nursery had been dissipation, whose playground had been corruption. In spite of this pity, however, Greene realizes and points out that God never burdens one to such an extent that evil need be chosen. Rose, also, was brought up in Nelson Place. At any rate, Greene's pity and remorse at this evil in the human act is evident. The words of the priest in The Heart of the Matter sound very much like Greene himself talking, "I know when a man's in pain". Greene's main concern, then, is with men in pain.

But beside this concern, there is always Something Else implicit in his novels, if not explicit. The mercy and love of God are as much a theme in Greene's writing as anything else. Ultimately, the mercy and grace of God are as important a theme as is the problem of evil, in Greene's major works. In fact, Greene's interpretation of the problem of evil requires the theme of divine grace to give it meaning. With this latter theme omnipresent, the suffering and conflict take on a new light. Indeed, a complete and satisfying understanding of "Greeneland" is impossible without realizing this interdependence of the themes mentioned. Both themes are undeniably present in his important novels. That is why his novels can attain artistic beauty even though they deal with evil and suffering and corruption - because of the presence of God's mercy and love. Therefore, even though evil is superficially the dominant theme the books have their beauty and their satisfying completeness, because of Greene's pene-

tration and understanding, and his realization of the presence of divine love in spite of all.

Greene is intensely aware of the fallen state of human nature. And although political, social and psychological conditions are advanced in various novels as extenuating factors for the central characters, these conditions are never represented as being the primary causes of man's aberrations. Pinkie is a victim of psychological maladjustment and social inequality; the whiskey priest is a victim of corrupt politics and its subsequent coercion; and Scobie is in a social milieu where a wife who does not understand him and who demands pity is a particularly heavy cross to bear. But Greene never suggests that these are factors which completely exculpate the sinners. These factors are taken into account in the divine plan, and do not force the individual to choose evil. This is Greene's view on the subject of evil's effect on man's moral actions: though evil conditions make the right choice difficult for man, conditions are never so severe as to demand that man make the evil choice.

Since the fall, evil is the way of the world; a world of evil is man's natural habitat in his fallen state. If, however, after struggling with it, man attains humility and understanding through his very suffering, he will have penetrated to the heart of Christianity. Through this humility and understanding he will have attained, be it ever so slight and unknown to himself, some contact with the divine.

Such a transformation is portrayed in a convincing and

extremely dramatic form in The Power and the Glory, The Heart of the Matter, and The End of the Affair. Through their suffering, the priest, Scobie and Sarah attain an understanding of humility and the love of God.

Therefore, Greene has solved the dilemma of the Christian novelist in a unique way. He has portrayed evil in such an objective, vivid and unflinching manner, that he cannot be accused of being a Christian 'morality story' writer, that is, of making his writing a mere vehicle for Christian platitudes. On the contrary, he has written with the Christian morality and philosophy as a background and has been unequivocal in his portrayal of evil and his denunciation of it. In view of this background to his writing, Greene is almost unique as a novelist. In his four major novels, he has not only transcended his own earlier works but those of most of his contemporary novelists. This has been accomplished by the incorporation into his works of a realization of the enormity of sin but also of the tremendous love of God. It is a trust in this love that he offers as man's only hope.

Greene discerned in the world of Evil the possibility of Good. With this evil as a foundation, he has attempted to make manifest the boundless mercy and forbearance of God. In our fallen world, evil is a component of the whole, and it pervades and corrupts all that it touches. Because of evil, man suffers, mentally and physically. But out of this base rubble and suffering rises a spiritual awareness, aided always by divine grace. It is this awareness that leads man to his

final end - salvation. Furthermore, once this awareness is attained, the evil in the world is seen in its true perspective and is handled accordingly. This then, would seem to be Greene's achievement, that he has presented a vivid picture of the evil and suffering in our world, and made the picture truly dramatic, significant and beautiful through the presence in his vision of divine grace - love and mercy.

## NOTES

1. Theophilus Lewis, "The Living Room", America, January 8, 1955, p. 386-387.
2. Graham Greene, The Lost Childhood and Other Essays (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1951) p. 79.
3. Kenneth Allott and Miriam Farris, The Art of Graham Greene (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951) p. 13.
4. Graham Greene, The Lawless Roads (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950) prefatory quotation, citing Cardinal Newman.
5. Graham Greene, The Lost Childhood and Other Essays (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1951) p. 69-70.
6. Jacques Maritain, "The Apostolate of the Pen", America, May 24, 1952, p. 228-229.



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