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The Theme of Salvation in Six Novels of Graham Greene

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THE THEME OF SALVATION IN SIX NOVELS OF GRAHAM GREENE

By

Edward L. Shaughnessy

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
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for the Degree of Master of Arts
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Many great writers have tried to answer the question whether imaginative literature can be Catholic. Cardinal Newman, Leon Bloy, and Andre Gide leaned to the belief that it could not; M. Jacques Maritain, interpreting St. Thomas, believes that it can. Certainly the imagination of a Catholic will be profoundly affected by his religion, but the manner in which it will be affected is not easy to predict.*

*Donat O'Donnell, "Preface," María Cross (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. vii.

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CHAPTER I

THE QUESTION OF MORALITY

A Basic Problem of the Catholic Novelist

The man who believes in heaven and hell, who assumes the reality of salvation and damnation, is doubtless a man spiritually preoccupied with the state of his own soul. Given certain tendencies toward good (what he considers moral) and apparent propensities toward evil (what he considers immoral), he is concerned, often alarmed, about the nature of warfare within himself. Eschatological problems are fundamental. For him, ultimate salvation is the uppermost reality of existence.

The problem of salvation in fiction, as viewed by Catholic theologians and critics, does not lend itself to many interpretations. Catholic writers who attempt to probe and analyze this problem in imaginative works are naturally aware of these critical perspectives and may therefore feel restricted by the laws of objective morality and a significant body of Catholic dogma, a problem peculiar to writers of their faith.

Also serious and equally basic for the Catholic novelist is the question of interpretation put upon his writings by others, both those within and without Catholicism. This difficulty can arise because, as a Catholic, he may be

understandably but mistakenly regarded by his audience as a spokesman for his Church. Graham Greene has commented:

I would claim not to be a writer of Catholic novels, but a writer who in four or five books took characters with Catholic ideas for his material. Nonetheless for years - particularly after The Heart of the Matter - I found myself? [sic] hunted by people who wanted help with spiritual problems that I was incapable of giving. Not a few of these were priests themselves.¹

Laymen, of course, not charged with and customarily not encouraged to carry out the responsibility of promulgating dogma, seldom have to do with drafting Catholic moral theology. The question, therefore, is a delicate one, and is one which is unique to the writer who is Catholic.

It is natural that the novelist should want to reach as wide an audience as possible. The Catholic novelist, moreover, encounters a significant challenge when he endeavors to make his work universally appealing, while simultaneously he seeks to create situations reflecting reality without emphasizing or forcing a pointedly Catholic perspective. He may not desire, indeed he may eschew, the possibility of causing his readers to be continually aware that he views all situations dealing with moral issues in the light of Catholic morality. Therefore, the Catholic writer is burdened not only with problems usually associated with his profession but in addition with the exceptional problem of maintaining artistic integrity within the subjective limitations of his faith.

Important to any understanding of the question of salvation is that the morality, the state of grace, and the

¹Graham Greene, In Search of a Character (New York, 1962), pp. 13-14.

ultimate salvation or damnation of a soul are conditions and effects determined in a man-God relationship, intrinsically intimate in nature. Nevertheless, while man, erring and awkward, seeks to comply with the will of God according to his ability to comprehend it, he often labors under circumstances and with faculties which may not be compatible with or conducive to spirituality. The individual, possessing a conscience and a unique combination of characteristics, is an entity created by God, yes, but he is further a creature conditioned and disposed largely by the accidents of environment, his intellectual capacities, his tendencies toward good and evil, ad infinitum. Only a minority of philosophers will be found (e.g. the Pelagian and Manichaean) who will suggest that homo sapiens is committed totally to good or evil. Rather, the individual soul, most philosophers and theologians agree, grows and matures as it experiences more of good and evil and the myriad of states in between. A man may have a capacity for good, but his membership in a fallen race is a qualification against a purity of nature. Conversely, a man may possess a capacity for evil, not wholly his own responsibility. The loss of innocence, perhaps unfortunate but inevitable in a fully developed human existence, may be considered the primary and necessary experience with evil.

Thus, fundamentally, the problem of salvation is first, and most important, the problem of the individual. Whether he gains a victory over evil or whether finally he succumbs to it, his ultimate judgment by God is the culmination or effect of decisions which the individual has made on the

criteria of subjective morality or, at least, on subjective comprehension of explicit moral law, because the individual, equipped differently from all others in all aspects of personality, reacts to his problems within the limitations of his own capacities and the development of his own potential. The novelist, therefore, Catholic or not, who is treating of this eschatological problem, deals with the individual and must resolve that problem in relation to the fictional character who represents reality in the novel.

Definitions of Objective and Subjective Morality²

Many Catholic theologians have rendered definitions of morality and interpretations of these various definitions. Naturally, such analyses and explications are rendered in terms of human acts, since morality presupposes the possession of a reasoning faculty, not attributed to any other animal. Little disagreement will be encountered about the meaning of the term "morality," that which is "the rightness or wrongness [of an act], its good or its evil, its suitability to praise or blame, to merit or punishment."³ There may, however, be extensive disagreement about that which causes man overtly to commit an act, good or evil, and of how to judge or interpret the nature of a man's acts.

²Definitions and explanations of morality are necessarily to be from two points of view throughout this thesis: morality and dogma of Catholicism are essential to the development of this argument, and Mr. Greene's personal interpretations, Catholic but often not orthodox, are fundamental.

³Walter Farrell, O.P., S.T.M. and Martin J. Healy, S.T.D., My Way of Life (The Summa Simplified for Everyone) (Brooklyn, New York, 1952), p. 176.

Objectivity

Aquinas equates morality with human actions performed in quest of spiritual happiness (the attaining of God's love), since man's final goal is to experience the Beatific Vision. Human acts performed and freely rendered with this pursuit in mind must be in agreement with the conditions of morality. Aquinas states that essentially four conditions are necessary if an act is to be judged an objectively moral one: 1) that the will follow the intellect; 2) that the will always seek what is good; 3) that freedom be found chiefly in the act of choice; and 4) that command be the guiding force of a human act.

An attempt can be made here to simplify the nature of these conditions, if we are to have an adequate understanding of them. To comply with the conditions of objective morality (the seeking of that which is good), an individual must possess knowledge, will, and capacity. That is, he must recognize the difference between what is good and what is not; he must be an agent acting freely, making a choice on the knowledge he possesses. The individual must deliberately seek the end of an act, whatever its nature, and he must possess the power to make the act reality.

Perhaps it is valid to say that objective morality is compliance with Eternal Law, existing in the mind of God and by its very nature everlasting and immutable. Perfect knowledge and unchangeability are aspects of God's infiniteness, and His laws reflect these qualities. Man's knowledge of the

nature of God is finite; man seeks to comprehend God's will and to act in accordance with the knowledge he acquires. "The judgment of human reason on the morality of human actions is only a reflection or a participation of the human mind in the eternal, unchangeable mind of God."⁴

Subjectivity

Catholic theologians consider that man's fallibility is the harmful effect of the original fall and of his membership in an erring race. The apprehension of moral good, natural to man in his sinless state, has been blunted and obscured, so that the individual descendant must seek with limited understanding to comply with divine justice.

Thus, the necessary conditions for fulfilling objective good -- knowledge, will, and capacity -- were concurrently corrupted or weakened. They may be considered spiritual deficiencies in the degree that an individual has not actually developed them. The absence or imperfection of knowledge is the first of these subjective wants. The three most significant barriers to intellectual comprehension (and thus to knowledge) are fear, concupiscence, and ignorance. Man in essence is acting without a certain amount of freedom if he acts contrary to moral law owing to one or more of these deficiencies; thus, his actions in such neutralizing circumstances may only be judged amoral. Insofar as he possesses knowledge, unhampered by these deficiencies, his actions can be judged accordingly in terms of good or evil.

⁴Ibid., p. 180.

Man's will, also imperfect, seeks what it knows to be good; however, since knowledge may be only partial, the will that acts in accordance with limited understanding can be innocent of guilt. Here it is succinctly put:

But the will is not only an inclination. It is a rational appetite . . . The will seeks, therefore, not simply the good, but the good as apprehended, as recognized by human reason. Hence, though the will seeks only the good, it is possible for man to seek something harmful to him because it appears to him to be good.⁵

There are, then, cases where men err in completely good faith.

The third condition, capacity, also liable to error, can be another cancelling factor, annulling subjective evil associated with an objectively immoral act. The power or ability to perform what is good can be impeded by the external counterpart of power, namely violence. The individual may be rendered helpless by external forces; when his resistance is minimal or completely ineffectual, the objective guilt inherent in an act is negated by his inability to withstand, thus making his action or reaction to the external agent a necessary accession.

When man acts in accordance with the principles of morality, he is seeking God and therefore ultimate happiness. To say that man does not seek happiness, peace, and security in this life, however, is to deny all that we have come to understand of man by observing his behavior and nature. We know he seeks temporal happiness, but how does he attain it, and how is he to keep his quest for worldly happiness consistent with his quest for God? Human reason seeks what it thinks

⁵Ibid., p. 171.

suitable, and it is reason which makes the judgment that some actions lead to happiness and others do not. The judgment of man's reason on the appropriateness of an act to bring good is the fundamental criterion of human actions. And the judgment of reason (which we have considered to be imperfect) "is the immediate foundation of morality in human actions."⁶

Man must conform to the moral law whenever possible. He cannot intentionally keep himself ignorant of it, nor can he reasonably attempt to thwart the development of his capacities for good, because he finds the latter in greater conformity with his weaker nature. This is to say that man cannot willfully seek to escape the responsibility to know and to accomplish good.

Morality is subjective insofar as the individual is lacking in or incapable of expressing his potential to comply with the will of God. Rationalization, man's attempt to justify what he knows to be contrary to the moral law, can never be tolerated because to rationalize is to do violence to reason, man's noblest faculty.

Graham Greene and Subjective Morality

Morality is not man acting in a vacuum. It is man and his relationship to God. To consider man as an isolated and independent agent is to lose the whole significance of his existence. He was made by God, to be happy with God. Our discussion has touched upon two of God's attributes, His

⁶Ibid., p. 179.

knowledge and the immutability of His nature. The qualities, nevertheless, are aspects, not the total, of God's nature. Also intrinsic to His Being are the virtues of compassion and mercy. These divine attributes are infinite, and they are, like justice, perfectly reasonable. They are equally essential to God's judgment of the individual. Is it presumptuous of man to put great faith in God's pity and mercy? If it were so, all men who are not perfect, who fail to live in strict compatibility with the will of God, are without the possibility of salvation. If it were so, mankind is lost.

Subjective morality is a sine qua non of characterization in Greene's novels. Often his protagonist is committed to evil. Because of circumstances and an involvement through pity and compassion for others of God's creatures, the hero is, at least in his own mind, often constrained to act contrary to the objective law. The priest of The Power and the Glory continues a life of sin so that he is available to those who need his ministry. Scobie in The Heart of the Matter offers his own damnation to God if He will spare those Scobie pities. How are such lives to be justified? Not at all? Surely, not on the basis of objective morality.

Graham Greene believes that our world is a place where perfect evil abounds, a theme which will receive full development in a later chapter. He has remarked:

Anyway she [Miss Marjorie Bowen, author of the Viper of Milan] 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.⁷

Man must deal with it; he must struggle against it. Evil, therefore, is not merely an abstract quality whose nature is to be examined by philosophers; it is indeed, a reality, the actual cause of man's temporal unhappiness and the potential cause of his damnation.

St. Paul has stated in a letter to the Romans that where evil abounds, grace superabounds. Graham Greene is committed without reservation to that belief. Furthermore, he accepts the reality of Christ's crucifixion and the unlimited redemptive grace wrought by the resurrection. Only the sacrifice of the Son of God is completely acceptable to God Himself, and since that sacrifice is perfectly pleasing, its merits and saving graces are the source of unending salvation for the sinner, for the man implicated in evil. Since the redemption was the perfect gift of love, Love's sacrifice, it is the only force sufficiently powerful to overcome perfect evil. There can be no question about God's interest in, indeed love for, the sinner. "He so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son."⁸ It is upon this theological fact that Graham Greene bases his thesis for salvation.

Greene's major characters are sinners, no mere dabblers in evil. If they are to receive salvation, it is then

⁷Graham Greene, The Lost Childhood (New York, 1952), pp. 16-17.

⁸John 3:16.

through the love of God, demonstrated in His perfect gift. Furthermore, however, there must be a love within the character, for God or man, which is the complement in human nature to the love of God. They are evil; of this there can be no question in the mind of any of Greene's readers. Rose in Brighton Rock, the whisky priest in The Power and the Glory, Sarah Miles in The End of the Affair, Scobie in The Heart of the Matter, Thomas Fowler in The Quiet American, and Querry in A Burnt-Out Case -- all are characters involved with and in evil. Each, however, demonstrates a love for others (in terms of pity, mercy, or sacrifice) which is the sole quality that is Christ-like. We are led to comprehend that God reacts to this love and that through this quality the power of redemptive grace is able to operate.

In Greene's novel The End of the Affair the heroes, Maurice Bendrix and Sarah Miles, wage a long war against the power of sin. Their relationship, though one of love really, is basically evil because it transgresses the moral law. Nevertheless, it is their love which ultimately brings about a victory over evil. Love - not sexual attraction or promiscuity - is of its own essence good, and because it is positive, is greater than evil.

Greene does not say sin is sanctified by love. Francis L. Kunkel explains:

Greene does not sprinkle holy water on sin or endow it with the character of a felix culpa or invite someone to sin with the hope of bringing about good results. Instead he instills a reverence for the individual person despite his sin and cultivates a more profound respect for the mysterious transforming powers of grace which

can enable a penitent thief on the cross to "steal" paradise.⁹

He does not maintain that it behooves an individual to live in lust. Graham Greene is a champion of the inherent goodness and redemptive faculty of true love. He indicates that such love is a conqueror of evil; even if love is born of passion, even if love has evolved from an illicit relationship, its power can crush the evil origin. The quality of genuine love can evolve and cause good to be the lasting effect. Greene's purpose is to show that the wrath and justice of God can be tempered with His mercy and compassion. It is his theme to prove that God and the sinner can be reconciled, not to prove that evil can be reconciled or justified in any way except to be recognized as a force in the lives of men.

This is Greene's approach, his plan, and the reason for his work. He is a profound writer, that is true. He is necessarily profound. In his writings Greene deals with a subject that is a true mystery - the perfect love of God. He undertakes to analyze conditions which are not finite; there is no statistical measurement of the infinite. Such an approach is, he doubtless feels, the only one because, while love cannot be estimated or evaluated, its effect upon evil is obvious and supernatural.

Graham Greene has said that sooner or later the child awakens to the reality of evil in the world; this early awareness is the loss of innocence. It is a paradox, of course,

⁹Francis L. Kunkel, The Labyrinthine Ways of Graham Greene (New York, 1959), pp. 144-5.

that the loss of innocence and the knowledge of evil are the first steps to ultimate salvation.

CHAPTER II

GRAHAM GREENE AS A CATHOLIC

A Healthy Controversy

There exist within the Catholic Church, among both its hierarchy and laity, a ringing controversy and intellectual arguments concerning the writings of Graham Greene. This controversy is a logical development, arising from the inherent authoritarian nature of the church and from the quality of individualism in Greene. It is generally held within the church that Catholic dogma and moral theology have emanated from a divine source and that, as such, they do not lend themselves to interpretations and judgment by laymen. Catholics accept that valid explanations of Eternal Law must come from the legislative body of the church and that only official proclamations given ex cathedra are considered universally binding.

Intrinsic to Catholic teaching, however, is the right, indeed the duty, of the individual to make some judgments about the morality of his own acts based on his individual conscience. For example, a Catholic availing himself of confession is expected to indicate not only the specific sin but the circumstances, accusing or extenuating, associated with the act. Hence, the individual makes the immediate judgment about the gravity of his guilt. So Greene, as the

spokesman for his characters, is constrained to give a fair picture of the circumstances under which they perpetrate an evil deed, insofar as these circumstances affect, at least in Greene's mind, the degree of culpability or demonstrate the power of God's mercy.

Because Greene has made such judgments about his characters, he has been accused by some critics, mostly Catholic, of a tendency toward heresy. He has, they believe, taken upon himself the role of the church in determining degree of guilt and goodness of his characters.

An examination of specific criticisms of Greene's morality may be useful. He has been described as Jansenist by Helen Gardner.¹⁰ The term implies that Greene adheres to that seventeenth-century doctrine that man cannot be saved by his own efforts, that he is helpless alone. Further, if he is a Jansenist, Greene believes that man depends for salvation upon the arbitrary gift of grace. If he were of that view, his characters who appear to cut themselves off from God's grace (e.g. Ida and the Lieutenant in Brighton Rock and Helen in The Heart of the Matter) would be far greater sinners than those Catholic characters immersed in evil (e.g. the priest in The Power and the Glory, Scobie in The Heart of the Matter, and Sarah in The End of the Affair). Greene does not make that judgment about them. If anything, he is closer to Pascal, who saw God's mercy as limitless.

¹⁰Helen Gardner, "François Mauriac: A Woman of the Pharisees," Penguin New Writing, XXXI (1947), 102.

Francis X. Connolly has seen a hint of Manichaeism in Greene. "Greene's whole emphasis, however, would tend to suggest that it is bad to be right, bad to be cheerful, healthy, companionable."¹¹ Connolly argues that Greene represents the state of euphoria. But Greene maintains that "only in pain does one discover oneself," that without suffering, pain, and the loss of innocence, man lives in a spiritual vacuum. Without an awareness of evil, the individual is unknown to God and by God; he is, Greene will have it, unqualified for salvation. This is not Manichaeism; it is, rather, a thesis which insists that unhappiness in the sinner is a sine qua non of spiritual fertility; ". . . the guilt-riven, tormented sinner knows that Christ alone can save him."¹²

Greene has been accused by Kenneth Tynan as a dabbler in "sin mysticism."¹³ This description would indicate that Greene glorifies sin, that he feels sin holds the seed of virtue. Greene does not glorify sin, but he glorifies the redemptive power of Christ to save the sinner. Alexander Boyle calls Greene an "inverted Pharisee,"¹⁴ because he sees in the novelist one who welcomes the evil and wretched and who is indifferent to or contemptuous of those who have not

¹¹Francis X. Connolly, "Inside Modern Man: The Spiritual Adventures of Graham Greene," Renaissance, I, (Spring, 1949), 20.

¹²Kunkel, p. 143.

¹³Kenneth Tynan, "An Inner View of Graham Greene," Harper's Bazaar, (February, 1953), 128.

¹⁴Alexander Boyle, "The Symbolism of Graham Greene," Irish Monthly, (March, 1952), 108.

sinned. But Greene's work makes a judgment of the sinless an impossibility. In his novels there are no sinless characters. At the same time, however, Greene has been charged with puritanism. He denies that charge categorically. It is obvious that Greene has been placed in all moral extremes by different critics. Surely he is not so talented as to have argued well these many varying views of morality, as his critics suggest.

Undoubtedly, one of the chief objections of Greene's Catholic critics is that there is an obvious moral laxity discernible in his Catholic characters and that, because of this weakness, Catholics feel that his works expose the church to misunderstanding and the actions of her faithful to misinterpretation. These criticisms will serve to show that indeed there is, particularly within the framework of formal Catholicism, a manifold controversy about the writings of Graham Greene.

There is about Greene something far subtler than these surface controversies his writings have provoked. There is within him a striking paradox and a unique personal controversy. His writings, while obviously incapable of easy classification, are but a reflection of this singular paradox and dichotomy. It is a fact that Greene belongs to a church which has often been described as absolute in its authoritarianism. Yet there is within Greene himself an almost neurotic hatred of authority. Walter Allen sees it thus:

Greene remains a nonconformist, and his conversion seems to have accentuated his nonconformity. His values seem to be held in defiance of the church to which he has committed himself; which is one reason why Catholic reviewers often smell heresy in his work. The Catholic Church is

an authoritarian body, and Greene loathes authority.¹⁵ He claims faith in that which broaches no personal interpretation or individual judgments of its dogma and teachings of moral theology; at the same time he reserves to himself the right to consider the problems of salvation and evil in strikingly subjective analyses. Moreover, he seems to find it reasonable to justify this unusual fusing of views (universal and individual), and he finds it possible to subscribe to these formal and personal philosophies simultaneously.

He may dislike authority, but it is doubtful really that he defies it. Rather, Greene expresses a faith far beyond the evidence of authority. There is in his work no projection of bitter scoffing at the code, but he insists that it is possible and worthy to demonstrate that it is not only wrath and justice which constitute the wisdom of God. It is the artist's stern duty to reflect reality; Greene seems to see that mercy and compassion are divine and real forces that he is determined to portray.

The "Catholic novelist" must portray Catholics and their behavior as influenced to some believable degree by the church. Greene claims not to be of such a group of writers, yet his work has evoked and stimulated much Catholic criticism, favorable and unfavorable. There are critics who believe Greene, as greatly as any, puts forth intelligent and profound Catholic

¹⁵Walter Allen, "Awareness of Evil: Graham Greene," The Nation, CLXXXII (April 21, 1956), 345.

thought. Francis Kunkel believes Greene carries out that mission:

We should not infer that Greene is, in any sense, a propagandist for the Church. Far from offering Catholicism as a panacea, he often presents it as if it were a season in hell. . . .

A Catholic novelist in the profound sense will, as Greene does, linger at the intersection where God confronts man and grace encounters free will. . . . Graham Greene is a Catholic novelist, in the ultimate sense of that term, because he invites us to participate with him in the conviction that the meaning of life is centered in the redemptive sufferings of Christ. Rather than edify us, Greene troubles us. By presenting the mystery of suffering people, thus inviting the reader to meditate on his own destiny, he fulfills the function of the Catholic novelist.¹⁶

The controversy within Greene himself is that which must be worked out by himself for himself. But, by dealing with such a profound and compelling subject as evil, he seems, by contrast, to perceive deeply the love of God for suffering humanity. For the Catholic, at least, this is healthy.

The controversy which has developed within the church is also a profitable one. That he drives his opponents to the difficult task of attempting to refute his arguments is to cause them to consider most seriously and carefully that which is most important to them. The conservative Catholic philosopher may find Greene impossible; the liberal philosopher may find him radical, but each is compelled to meet Greene on his own terms because Greene refuses to be moved by the power of authority.

The Catholic Church has never placed any restrictions on the reading of Greene's works. Moreover, most Catholic

¹⁶Francis L. Kunkel, "Graham Greene: The Anatomy of a Catholic Novelist," Catholic Book Reporter, I (May, 1961), 8-9.

critics feel not only that Greene's view of man's eternal dilemma is profound but also that its presentation is marvelously perceptive and scintillating.

Greene and the Nature of Evil

Graham Greene first experienced an awareness of evil very early in his life; he has never lost it. For him, evil is not a morbid obsession, for he looks upon it as an absolutely necessary step to sanctification for all sinners. In his essay, The Lost Childhood, Greene recalls this early experience. At the age of fourteen years, he says, he read Marjorie Bowen's novel The Viper of Milan which provided him the understanding that evil is at the heart of a world of unhappiness and that all things normally considered good should be suspect, for they carry within them potential, even probable evil:

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.¹⁷

This necessary corruption was, in Greene's view, the beginning of spiritual maturity, since he could, for the first time, make an intelligent choice between good and evil.

Greene will not define evil, nor will he allow his characters to do so. He permits characters to reveal the nature of evil only by their actions and reactions to events; they never state it definitively, but we are to infer Greene's

¹⁷Greene, The Lost Childhood, p. 16.

view from their behavior, states of unhappiness, and occasional despair. It seems to be his intent to communicate to his reader that evil is rampant in a world which attempts by all devious methods to deny the existence of such a condition. Greene loathes the lukewarm who will not acknowledge the spiritual extremes. Such a judgment of those uncommitted is traditionally Christian.

Apparently, then, to perceive Greene's concept of the nature of evil, we must infer it from his characters' complicity with evil. Pinkie, the wretched and criminal youth of Brighton Rock, like Greene, remembers childhood with little fondness, and we recall that he says innocence was "the ugly cry of birth." Beyond that, one knows only evil intimately; unhappiness is all that one recognizes. Only a character convinced of the monumental presence of evil in life could cry, as Pinkie does, "Credo in unum Satanum."

The dissolute priest of The Power and the Glory sees that his illegitimate daughter, only seven years old, is already pitted against evil even in the earliest years of what will be a lifetime struggle. "The world was in her heart already, like the small spot of decay in a fruit. She was without protection - she had no grace, no charm to plead for her; his heart was shaken by the conviction of loss."

Alden Pyle, the eternal innocent who is "the quiet American," is Greene's archetype of consummate evil, for he never loses his innocence; he never realizes that altruism and charity can be misdirected and misunderstood. He fails

to know the world in which he lives because it is an evil world and he has no comprehension of evil. Fowler, the cynical British correspondent amazed at Pyle's lack of perception and depth, is utterly perplexed; perhaps he speaks Greene's contempt of ignorance of evil, which is ignorance of Christ's sacrifice for the sinner. "Innocence is a kind of insanity."

It is Greene's view that only those who have the knowledge of hell and a capacity for damnation are those who possess a capacity for salvation. Scobie, God's quarry in The Heart of the Matter, admits, "Only the man of good-will carries always in his heart this capacity for damnation." The theme runs throughout his writings that the greatest sinners are those who ignore God, those who inhabit "the empty, sinless chromium world." Greene believes that the individual's potential for salvation is evidenced by his never-ceasing combat with evil in which he is immersed. Perhaps it is not presumptuous to say that a belief in hell led him to Catholicism, for he has stated:

And so faith came to me -- 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.¹⁸

Finally, essential to Greene's view of evil is the belief in God as a relentless pursuer of his creatures, but One Who loves them and will not let them rest or find satisfaction

¹⁸Kenneth A. Lohf, "Graham Greene and the Problem of Evil," The Catholic World, CLXXIII (June, 1951), 197.

in sin. God, as depicted thus by Greene, is the Hound of Heaven. Major Scobie, haunted by love and fleeing its overwhelming power, finds no escape. "How desperately God must love," he says. God is a gadfly, perplexing the sinner again and again with the offer of grace.

Greene and the Anatomy of Pity

Necessary to valid analysis of Greene's point of view is a differentiation between the qualities of pity and compassion. Pity, based on ethical judgments, is portrayed by Greene as less worthy than compassion, which is based on a knowledge and acceptance of moral judgments and divine love. A surprising number of critics fail to make the essential distinction between these two qualities; therefore, they are willing to believe that Greene finds salvation for his characters who demonstrate great pity and who seek themselves to correct human errors and to sacrifice anything in spiritual consideration of others. This view is fallacious. It is not Graham Greene's view that pity is supernal.

Pity for the sinner and the wretched is not, we infer from Greene's novels, a moral virtue. Its weakness is that it is not modest. It betokens a lack of humility. No Christ-like love, Greene holds, is without humility, because such a dearth is contrary to the essence of love. The Greene character who pities is often proud, seeking satisfaction through the act of sacrificing himself for others. It is this quality which Scobie, at first, and Alden Pyle, consistently, exhibit; they love themselves, not those upon whom they lavish pity.

Pity cannot comprehend a love tolerating, sometimes even

effecting, suffering. It is "the ethic of those who try to substitute themselves for God."¹⁹ Pity is an obsession to annihilate the pain which is an essential characteristic in Greene's suffering world. For the character who would relieve all sufferings of mankind, there is no understanding of a world in which God allows pain and evil; he is a character who seeks to set right what is bad in a world committed intrinsically to human error, and he recognizes only that which he sees, perceiving no power or will beyond himself. When misdirected, pity can become man's power to damn himself. Scobie will offer his own damnation if he can force God to relieve the pain and wretchedness of Louise, his wife, and Helen, his mistress. He would make a bargain with God, because he realizes only a personal winning of salvation, not the gift of salvation.

Compassion, according to Greene, is an acceptance of suffering in this world as a means of attaining happiness in the next. A profound sympathy for the sinner and hatred of evil form the chief and paradoxical fusion of attributes found in compassion, and the compassionate man recognizes that evil must be, that (as indicated earlier) it is a sine qua non in the salvation of the individual member of fallen humanity. The compassionate man accepts not only the reality of the sinner but also the fact of the world in which he exists. With the exception of Major Scobie (who ultimately

¹⁹Francis L. Kunkel, The Labyrinthine Ways of Graham Greene (New York, 1959), p. 104.

recognizes a higher power) Greene's characters who evince pity are those who possess the least capacity for happiness because they have least capacity for unhappiness. An acceptance of the possibility of damnation as well as that of salvation is the hallmark of a Greene character, and he is often willing to offer his own loss of grace for the redemption of others. However, he does not endeavor to provide temporal happiness.

The compassionate view is the eschatological view. It is in sympathy with divine perspective, not with human misunderstanding. The whisky priest cannot take away the pain of his Mexican peasants who suffer the communist scourge. Why then does he remain with them? Opportunities are provided for his escape. He might flee the country, confess his sins of the flesh, and find asylum from his tormentors. But, living in a state of sin, he is willing to provide his flock with Communion and the Mass. Such provisions, he knows, do not relieve temporal suffering. An abject symbol of Christ, he assumes their guilt, even in the knowledge that those he serves are disgusted by him and disapprove of him. His is, paradoxically, the consecration of a soul in the state of mortal sin (spiritual death), while he offers the wretched eternal life in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. The whisky priest is perhaps a twisted, even blasphemous, symbol of Christ, but surely Christ, more than any other man, was willing to accept the sufferings of a wounded world.

Of all Graham Greene's novels The Power and the Glory

offers the most striking contrast of pitying and compassionate individuals. The Mexican lieutenant, fully committed to the communist line of erasing pain and building a worldly utopia, condemns the Catholic view of the willing acceptance of suffering. The soldier pities his miserable countrymen and takes it upon himself to correct the abuses of the world. His philosophy alone, he feels, can give meaning and happiness to men's lives. An exchange between the soldier and the priest illustrates the divergent views of pity and compassion:

The lieutenant said: "Those men I shot. They were my own people. I wanted to give them the whole world."

"Well, who knows? Perhaps that's what you did."²⁰

Greene's attitude toward pity is elusive and subtle.

As such it has trapped many critics. Because Greene speaks often of pity and because many of his characters pity suffering humanity, critics and theologians have wrongly inferred that Greene recommends pity as spiritually salutary. He does not. Rather in Greene's view is the suggestion that compassion makes all men worthy, not for themselves alone but because they are important to God.

Pity is founded in pride. Compassion is founded in humility, springing from one's own feelings of inadequacy but selfless resignation to impotence. When the priest, waiting sadly in the Mexican prison for the death he senses to be imminent, reviews his recent ministry, he is contrite, feeling

²⁰Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory (New York, 1962), p. 267.

his compassion had been ineffective:

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.²¹

Graham Greene sees compassion as the reflection of God's infinite love, since only an infinite concern could separate a man from his deeds, the sinning but potential saint from his wickedness.

²¹Ibid., p. 284.

CHAPTER III

GREENE AND THEMATIC CONSISTENCY

If one has reasons to search, he will likely find it difficult to support the proposition that the larger percentage of the greatest writers have been those who maintained a consistency of ideas or point of view throughout their works. One thinks first and naturally of Shakespeare, whose themes and interests doubtless ranged farther and reached deeper than those of any other man. And the Russian genius Dostoevski was a writer hardly committed to singleness of purpose. While each of these was a probing master in his own field, surely both sought to entertain and placed the audience's or reader's pleasure high among considerations.

And yet, no insignificant number of the greatest literary minds have channeled and directed large bodies of poetry and prose with single and specific intents uppermost. One recalls that Ibsen and his disciple Shaw were bent largely upon smashing the complacency and the gross social inequities of their times. Each man ran a full range of ideas, but always with the purpose of making men aware of the stagnating effect of stupidity and of striving to provoke their fellows into a rational habit. Melville, Dickens, Hemingway, Hardy,

and James are but a few who have used the novel again and again as a vehicle to project an idea, a theme. It ought not to be overlooked that each of these writers assigned the greatest importance to a single theme throughout his works -- i.e., social blights, man's relationship to his world, the quest for God, an analysis of the human psyche.

The thread of a single theme running through an author's work cannot be called the common literary attribute of the greatest writers. This fact notwithstanding, it is valid and useful for the student of literature to recognize that some of the most penetrating and esteemed playwrights and novelists have devoted full attention to examination and explication of psychological, social, spiritual, or other problems and to those circumstances bearing upon them. Since Brighton Rock Graham Greene has been such a writer. Posterity will determine his greatness.

Salvation is Greene's theme. And he is a Catholic. Salvation, however, is a problem no more to be identified with Catholicism than it is to be associated specifically with Christianity. Far back into the Old Testament the Jewish people were searching for salvation to be won for them by a Messiah. They continue to search. One could trace hundreds of religious histories and philosophies to support the point that those who accept the belief of an after-life are largely those who hope eternally for salvation. Graham Greene's novels are classified often as "Catholic novels," but for Greene the problem of salvation is a problem common

to all searching for God. In his works herein considered, a character's pride is not the fundamental problem, nor is it materialism, fornication, adultery, sacrilege, or despair. These represent individual struggles with evil in this world, and the individual dissociation from them or the resignation to them for a spiritual motive is always the means to salvation. The greatest sinners, Greene will hold, might be those immersed most actively in the sordidness of the world; the fact that they are saints is attributable not to a specious denial of evil but to a willing submission to God's inscrutable tolerance of His Own creation.

The Greene character who attains salvation finds it because of evil, not in spite of it. Greene's major characters -- the priest, the criminal, the disdainful, and the indifferent -- all are sinners; many of them are great sinners. If they are to achieve salvation, they must experience a profound and often prolonged spiritual metamorphosis. A close study of this writer's thesis reveals again and again the spiritual transformation of his central characters. Essentially, this phenomenon occurs in three stages.

Initially, an individual must become aware of evil and its compelling power if he is to experience and become aware of God. The personal struggle seems inevitable; none of Greene's characters who he intimates gain salvation is able to escape the awful force of sin in himself and in all humanity. Such an awareness, however, is spiritual immaturity if nothing more comes of it. Pinkie, who really arrives at no

state beyond the acceptance of evil, seems a dubious candidate for salvation among Greene's characters. For, in him, there is a belief only in evil, and he claims credence in none but Lucifer.

According to Greene a fully and spiritually mature individual has gone beyond this first stage of metamorphosis, and the awareness of evil will, if salutary, have led one to pity, the middle ground. He may, at this point, develop a feeling of pity for his corrupted and suffering fellows. Like Scobie and Sarah, he will likely pass through pity, an ungallant phase in which he will assume a pompous generosity and love for the race. This concern is not ultimately beneficial because the character will not have placed himself in proper perspective and relationship to God, Whose wisdom can accommodate and recognize the place of sin. The "God-smitten" man will attain salvation only when he attains the third phase of metamorphosis. And this progression will effect his willingness to accept the need for evil and to elicit compassion for despicable humanity, including the self, as God accepts this awesome fact. The humble realization that all man's efforts are futile like all his attempts to fathom the incomprehensible ways of God is the most direct step toward the love of God. Such a willingness to accept all as it is, admitting one's own and others' spiritual disgrace, may then effect salvation.

Such a final disposition is a lonely state, but, if one interprets Greene accurately, the search for God is a lonesome

affair, and salvation is essentially a victory over or a self-effacing acceptance of sin in oneself. The metamorphosis is intrinsically individual in nature; moreover, the act of reconciliation to the will of God may be sorrowful because of the loneliness its struggle implies but happy because of the union it promises.

A careful analysis of various Greene characters who best represent souls in particular stages of this metamorphosis can now be rendered effectively. This analysis will consider those of his characters who brilliantly illustrate the soul's awakening to an awareness of evil. Others will be studied who evince terrible pity for hapless humanity, a quality damning in itself when it fails to assume truly charitable proportions. And our discussion will deal at length with those ultimately yielding to the fact that they are inextricably bound to human nature and human misery and who feel at last a kinship with mankind through compassion but who never presume a relationship with Infinite Goodness. A willingness to accept simply, even to offer supplicatingly, their own damnation is the mark of those who have achieved this third phase of metamorphosis. They have unquestionably the greatest potential for salvation, for they have the magnificent will to fuse with the unholy species Christ died to save.

It is not necessarily purposeful to submit these analyses in the order of the three stages of metamorphosis they represent. Indeed, such a clinical approach can, paradoxically, do violence to the theme herein presented. If one

commits himself to a regularized or chronological development of spirituality in these characters, he will doubtless distort Greene's own theme. The perspicacious reader will discover that characters may be first encountered whose spiritual maturity has already been achieved. The reader may, moreover, encounter a character who has lapsed from one condition into a former. (It is certain that there can be spiritual deterioration in a Greene character as well as spiritual growth. We need only cite the spiritually moribund Querry to validate the point.) Much more to the point is to examine the characters who represent the novels in order from Brighton Rock through A Burnt-Out Case and who thus represent Greene's own consistent development of the theme of salvation.

Many of Greene's characters openly express an affinity with beloved and beleaguered humanity, and this quality or kinship is the first of the profound and paradoxical essentials for salvation. Rose, the innocent love of Pinkie in Brighton Rock, is implicated in evil because of her association with him. It is an association, however, far beyond what the letter of the law may call charity. She loves him, not in spite of what he is, but for himself. Rose demonstrates a Christ-like humility in love, willing to sacrifice name and reputation. She has no knowledge of right and wrong, and yet she perceives the difference between good and evil. Rose lives not by the ethical standards and judgments of a vain world but by the moral virtues of charity and compassion. The true lover, Greene seems to imply, is the man or woman who is

interested in the final disposition of his love; more than that, however, he seeks to share that final state. Love implies a loyalty far beyond the demands of legal and moral justice.

Rose realizes what Pinkie is. She seeks to be like him and with him. In conversation with a priest who refuses her absolution yet speaks to her of the "appalling . . . strangeness of the mercy of God," Rose is compelled to say, "I'm not asking for absolution. I don't want absolution. I want to be like him — damned."²²

It is likely that an unquestioning acceptance of this philosophy or attitude is too much to ask of the soul reared under traditional and worthy codes of morality. The willingness to seek complicity in evil, even if actuated by love, appears strikingly out of tune with the tenets of Christian morality. Rose's utterance, and those of the priest and Scobie which we shall recall directly, may lead the reader quickly to the specious inference that Graham Greene is little more than a sensationalist. He seemingly glorifies evil through love's acceptance of it, for the sake of love. Such a position would do great injustice to this author's point of view which is not cheap and vulgar, no matter how untraditional. Attributing a philosophy of amor gratia amoris to Greene is unrealistic and unfair. The reader who searches through the labyrinth of Greene's mind may indeed become lost

²²Graham Greene, Brighton Rock (New York, 1956), p. 355.

in these convolutions, but he is never led to a dead end nor is he left without guideposts. The fact is that Greene demonstrates that goodness has a natural kinship with evil, "because they [good and evil] lived in the same country, spoke the same language, and came together like old friends."²³

This is the very profound point: Rose demonstrates that one who is willing to be one with the sinner is more Christ-like and humbly self-immolative and is therefore closer to the sinner than the ethical judge who is concerned merely with right and wrong and who would impose a traditional chastisement on the spiritual pariah.

Shall we call this disposition that Rose exhibits a form of compassion? Indeed, if we do not, we lose the point of Greene's message. Rose is a simple individual; it is Greene's analysis that is esoteric. Compassion is a relatively simple virtue seeking, perhaps unknowingly, to love the despised and to chase him not merely to the borders of evil but far into the world of evil. It is the ethical quality which is ramified and complex, but which is finally willing to make ultimate judgments.

Doubtless an attempt to single out Greene's greatest character is sheer indulgence. Such a choice is the result of many intangibles and is hardly provable. To those who know his novels well, however, and who comprehend Greene's purpose, there can be little doubt that the whisky priest of The Power and the Glory is the character unrivaled in assuming the compassionate attitude and a kinship with hapless humanity. As

²³Ibid., p. 180.

a priest he is an alter Christus; as a man he is wholly immersed in the sadness of the human tragedy.

The Power and the Glory is set against Mexican civil war and the internal threat of communism. Desperate economic circumstances and universal social inequities (conditions that have so often wrought political and civil strife in poor countries) were the immediate cause of the overthrow of the established government. Catholicism was, as it is today, the predominant religion of the Mexican people. Necessarily, then, the Catholic Church was among the first institutions in the country to feel the tyranny of the new regime, the government devoted to the temporal welfare of the Mexican downtrodden. Church officials were forced into exile, were imprisoned, or were executed. Only a formal and public recanting of Rome might effect safety for a priest of the Church. If a priest should sympathize with the communists, his temporal needs and wants were guaranteed.

Greene's priest is a public fugitive. Many years separated from official organs of Catholicism, he was compelled to minister to the peasants in secrecy. He was constrained to shed his sacerdotal robes, to steal bread and wine to offer Mass in the vilest huts and shacks, and to endure the constant threat that desperate members of his own flock might inform on him for peso or protection. Harboring the priest became a capital crime. In time he was not only mistrusted by his government but also rejected by the main body of Mexican Catholics who were his charge. It is against this

background and under these humbling circumstances that he learns to feel compassion. It is, ironically, an avenue opened to humility for a man once haughty and without genuine concern for the plight of others. In the first years after his ordination he possessed the innocence that Greene so loathes in human nature. In a prison, wretched and racked, he much later was able to reflect:

What an unbearable creature he must have been in those days -- and yet in those days he had been comparatively innocent. . . Then, in his innocence, he had felt no love for anyone; now in his corruption he had learnt. . .²⁴

The priest becomes intimately involved with those he had never really known or understood before, involved to such an extent that he lives with them, sins with them, loves and suffers with them! The priest, despising himself, becomes a whisky priest seeking escape from the reality of his own being. An adulterer, he becomes a father in flesh and thus "complements" his spiritual fatherhood. This priest is literally a man brought low, but in the depths, when he cries out, he never hates: he does not hate those who hate him, who inform on him, or his bastard child who is indifferent to him. In all, the most abject and contemptuous, he is finally able to see suffering Christ:

. . . that was a quality God's image carried with it . . . When you saw the lines at the corners of the eyes, the shape of the mouth, how the hair grew, it was impossible to hate. Hate was just a failure of the imagination.²⁵

Apparently, then, Greene puts it that man can love God only when he knows God. The nearest he can come to knowing

²⁴Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory (New York, 1958), p. 187.

²⁵Ibid., p. 177.

God in this evil but real world is to know and love those who are made in God's image, who are his creatures, erring likely, unattractive perhaps, but flesh corrupted with whom the humble and compassionate man must happily mingle himself.

When the whisky priest feels he is unworthy of ministering to those he once despised, he has attained the compassionate attitude. In the prison he sees a hostage murdered by the government which is unremitting in its torture until the priest is turned in by the people. Thereupon the priest feels greater compassion for those suffering than he feels fear for his own life.

He prayed silently: O God, send them someone more worthwhile to suffer for. It seemed a damnable mockery that they should sacrifice themselves for a whisky priest with a bastard child.²⁶

What is the final disposition of the priest? Is he to gain salvation or not? If he is saved, it must depend on how much he loves Christ's suffering Mystical Body, on how thoroughly implicated he is in the plight of those he serves, and on how willing he is to assume their guilt and suffering as Christ did. In argument with the communist lieutenant near the end, the priest asserts:

"I'm not as dishonest as you think I am. 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

²⁶Ibid., p. 183.

said slowly: "I wouldn't want it to be any different. I just want justice, that's all."²⁷

He will have it no other way than to share in the guilt and eternal suffering, if necessary, because he has become a feeling and loving member of mankind. Christ once said that there is no greater love than to give one's life for one's friend. The whisky priest will take Christ at His word, for he is willing to give his spiritual life for his friends. In Graham Greene's eyes, at least, the priest wins salvation.

The discussion in Chapter II touched upon the importance of an awareness of evil in gaining spirituality. Without this awareness there can be no salvation, according to Greene. It is vain and futile unless it leads the individual to a comprehension of God's love for all men. Let us consider one of Greene's characters who evinces pointedly an awareness of sin and corruption in the world but who never grows spiritually beyond it. And since he does not mature, his final state is dubious.

Pinkie, the tortured adolescent of Brighton Rock, is cognizant of sin even from the first hours of recollection. His childhood was extremely unhappy; no one had ever made the effort to protect him from the evil around him or to give him an insight into love and beauty. As a result of these early miserable experiences, Pinkie develops a profound distrust of people and their motives. He vows never to be taken advantage

²⁷Ibid., p. 298.

of, always to be master, and never to yield to the wiles of those who might attempt to dupe him by promising love -- a power of which he has no understanding. He habitually quells any glimmerings of pity or kindness, qualities he considers weakening and capable of being used against him.

Greene paints the picture of Pinkie's youth and nature in this way:

There was a poison in his veins, though he grinned and bore it. He was going to show the world. They thought because he was only seventeen . . . he jerked his narrow shoulders back at the memory that he'd killed his man, and these bogies who thought they were clever weren't clever enough to discover that. He trailed the clouds of his own glory after him: hell lay about him in his infancy.²⁸

Pinkie is not without a belief in God, at least in the awful wrath and justice of God. He knows God created hell. He believes in damnation, perhaps more than in any other reality. Once he is fully committed to evil and reconciled about his own impending damnation, Pinkie seems to find an ironic and twisted justification for complicity in evil and premeditated interaction with it. In a moment of tremendous self-determination and confidence, he seems to shed the restrictions of his inactive Catholicism to assume forever a private and ruthless code:

. . . 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.²⁹

²⁸Graham Greene, Brighton Rock (New York, 1956), p. 93.

²⁹Ibid., p. 264.

Pinkie's short life was a burning, constant torture. Perhaps it is too much to say that is what he wanted: no man wants pain for its own sake. But he did choose it, and once immersed in it, he never forsook evil. To admit the necessity of evil permitted by God for good seems a straight-way path toward acknowledging the love of God. To admit of evil inflicted by God as an intolerable curse is never to go beyond the primary lessons of spirituality. Pinkie, then, could never be drawn to a love of a compassionate Creator. The central point of Pinkie's problem seems to be incisively struck by R. W. B. Lewis:

There can be no doubt, finally, about the damnation of Pinkie Brown: except the enormous doubt that, according to Greene, must attend our every human judgment and prediction.³⁰

It would seem, even in fiction, presumptuous to make any final judgments about the state of a human soul. Greene, one presumes, would be the first to admit that he cannot comprehend a character fully. It is a fact, however, that Greene does not give Pinkie an awareness of God's love or a hope of sharing unhappiness with others. Pinkie has unhappiness, but he covets it and clutches it to himself, denying any other a partnership with him. He never seeks salvation. It would not be valid to presume that Pinkie is damned. Perhaps it would merely be the greater presumption to believe he has been given salvation.

³⁰R. W. B. Lewis, "The 'Trilogy' of Graham Greene," Modern Fiction Studies, III (Autumn, 1957), 203.

When Graham Greene finished The Heart of the Matter in 1948 and The End of the Affair in 1951, both international best-sellers, he did not depart from the theme with which he had become very much identified. Again he considered at length the compelling force of evil in the lives of sensitive individuals, and again his was the theme of salvation. Through Major Scobie, hero of The Heart of the Matter, and Sarah Miles, the unhappy heroine of The End of the Affair, we see characters who experience the spiritual maturity that Pinkie never knew. In them we can study Greene's interest in the individuals who become aware of the love and compassion of God after they have a full knowledge of evil.

Scobie is an officer in the British colonial police force in an outpost of Africa. He is a man obsessed with justice according to the law. He possesses a policeman's awareness of the importance of facts and truth in applying justice unyieldingly according to the civil code. Scobie, unable for a long time to comprehend the need of evil and suffering in his world, is compelled through pity to attempt to right all wrongs. If God will not take pity on the unfortunate sinners, Scobie will intercede.

For various reasons Scobie is a guilt-riven man. He feels guilt because he was not present when his daughter died, because he tried to but could not love his wife, and because he finds his mistress too shallow to comprehend his nature. The guilt he feels for not being able to make his

wife and his mistress happy drives Scobie to further indiscretions. Guilt and pride lead him farther onto the path of sin. He begins to sympathize with criminals because he has learned how extenuating circumstances can be. He becomes obsessed with relieving pain and eliminating unfair conditions which cause those dependent on him great misery. Scobie is among the greatest of modern characters with a tragic flaw. It is ironic in the classic sense that Scobie falls because of concern for others. He cannot abide the thought of unhappiness in them. He would sacrifice his own happiness, his own position, even his state of grace, if that were necessary, to give succor to unjustly suffering humanity. "It had always been his responsibility to maintain happiness in those he loved."³¹

One might say truthfully that Scobie had always been aware of God, but his awareness was a narrow thing. He had never sought to understand, in the very limited way man can, the compassionate nature of God. His thoughts of God early in the story are simple, child-like, and comfortably unconfused in the knowledge of his faith. It is greatly significant to his spiritual development that he never feels close to God until after he has sinned, and until he finds that his ingenuously simple attempts to relieve men of suffering are hollow and futile. A transcending of pity, the bane of the haughty and self-sufficient soul, ultimately brings Scobie

³¹Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter (New York, 1960), p. 20.

into a closer relationship with God. Pity is a phase through which he passes.

It is an integral part of Scobie's spiritual growth that he finally becomes aware of God's love for him and for all men and of the overwhelming truth that the Creator will go to almost any lengths to have His love returned. Even in this state of mind, though, Scobie feels it is perplexingly unfair of God to make Himself so vulnerable to man's abuse. Still, Scobie wants to make the nobler gesture, to give to God that which He needs:

It seemed to him for a moment that God was too accessible. There was no difficulty in approaching Him. Like a popular demagogue He was open to the least of His followers at any hour. Looking up at the Cross he thought: He even suffers in public.³²

And again, deeply involved in an adulterous love affair, he finds that his Hunter cannot leave him to his own devices, that, as it were, God makes a fool of Himself for the man He loves. He says to Helen, his mistress, about his sacrilegious reception of Communion, "It's striking God when he's down -- in my power."

Scobie plans suicide. The objective Catholic teaching here is that this sin is the greatest possible act of despair; the priests had taught him that it was the unforgivable sin, the final expression of an unrepentant reconciliation to one's own doom. Scobie doubts this teaching; he mistrusts those who attempt so finally to make known the mind of God.

³²Ibid., p. 232.

And he asks God to accept his suicide, his damnation, in atonement and supplication for the souls he would protect. Scobie tests his own reaction to the possibility of his suicide:

O God, give me death before I give them unhappiness . . . He took a bottle of filtered water out of the ice-box and dissolved the aspirins . . . The priests told you it was the unforgivable sin . . . and of course one accepted the Church's teaching. But they also taught that God had sometimes broken his own laws, and was it more impossible for him to put out a hand of forgiveness into the suicidal darkness and chaos than to have woken himself in the tomb, behind a stone? Christ had killed himself: he had hanged himself on the Cross. . .³³

Scobie eventually follows through with the plan to commit suicide. Theologians and Catholic critics have since pondered the theoretical fate of Major Scobie. For many his damnation is a foregone conclusion. They see little reason to argue the point. Others are rash enough to state unequivocally that he was saved. I think Greene gives fewest hints in this novel, very likely owing to the possibility that he himself is least capable of making a judgment.

Several important facts cannot be denied. Scobie lost his childhood innocence, late perhaps, but completely. He came fully into the realization of evil in the world, in the very personal world of his own soul. He achieved a break with pity which kept him from God, not God from him. Moreover, Scobie accepted finally that the world was God's to control or to tolerate, and with a greatly humbled spirit he begged for human souls. Like the priest he was willing even

³³Ibid., pp. 206-207.

to offer his own soul for theirs.

The great problem is, of course, the suicide. Such an act seems not to be asking God to accept his damnation, but to be giving God no choice. To compare it with Christ's divine sacrifice on the cross -- how grotesque, how insufferably vainglorious, or how monumentally stupid! (Perhaps all these things.) But Scobie was without divine wisdom; he was without perfect understanding of his own weakness. Objectively, Scobie will be counted guilty. His confessor offers to Scobie's wife an insight we might have expected from the whisky priest:

"For goodness' sake, Mrs. Scobie, don't imagine you -- or I -- know a thing about God's mercy."

"The Church says. . ."

"I know the Church says. The Church knows all the rules. But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart."³⁴

A study of Greene's Sarah Miles reveals facets of a completely different personality. She, like Scobie, attains a greater spirituality, but hers is wrought swiftly, some say melodramatically and therefore implausibly. The plausibility of a character must, in the last analysis, be determined by the individual reader. What is certain about Sarah Miles is this -- that in all her relationships with men and ultimately with God she demonstrates consistently a strange loyalty that forces her into various stages of unhappiness. Her love affair with God, if we may call it that, brings her the greatest state of unhappiness she knows in life. And

³⁴Ibid., p. 306.

this aspect of Sarah points up another of Greene's theses which has been considered only implicitly till now. A profound spirituality is not necessarily productive of peace or temporal happiness, according to Greene; in fact, a deep spiritual development is almost certain to bring with it cares and tensions which one could never have experienced without it.

The reader's early impression of Sarah is greatly different from his view of her in her final disposition. When The End of the Affair opens, she is fundamentally uncomplicated, seeking directly the exhilaration of carnal pleasures and lust. She is strikingly like many of Greene's male characters in this. Extra-marital relations are for her an escape from the tedium of her own marriage to Henry Miles. There is an unsophisticated absence of complexity which permits her a wide range of experiences. Greene describes her ingenuousness through the eyes of her lover, Maurice Bendrix:

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 had no doubts.³⁵

Sarah's first direct confrontation with the possibility of a God is traumatic, almost superstitious. She and Maurice rendezvous at his apartment during a blitz. A bomb strikes the building. In the confusion she thinks Maurice has been killed. Sarah prays:

Dear God, . . . make me believe. I can't believe . . .

³⁵Graham Greene, The End of the Affair (New York, 1961), pp. 59-60.

Let him be alive, and I will believe. . . I'll give him up forever, only let him be alive.³⁶

Sarah was a baptized Catholic, not a believing or practising Catholic, at that time. Her spiritual state had been zero; if anything, she had been amoral. In her prayer it is as though Sarah tempts God to prove His existence and power. The prayer is tragi-comically immature. Finally, she learns that a true love of God does not demand conditions or strike a bargain under the guise of promises.

Sarah's loyalty, a strange species, is initially to Henry. She vows not to hurt him. Even though she falls in love with Maurice, Sarah promises to stay with Henry who, she recognizes, needs her. In a belated but sincere gesture of marital loyalty, Sarah breaks off the affair with Maurice. It is significant that at this point in the story Sarah begins, like Scobie, to take upon herself the sufferings of others. After a conversation with Henry in which she promises to remain with him, she prays again:

I believe the legend. I believe You were born. You died for us. I believe You are God. Teach me to love. I don't mind my pain. It's their pain I can't stand. . . Dear God, if only you could come down from Your cross for a while and let me get up there instead. If I could suffer like You, I could heal like You.³⁷

Obviously, this prayer is rendered by one obsessed with the desire to ameliorate suffering, to correct what is sad in the world. Sarah would be God; she would be the Saviour of

³⁶Ibid., pp. 116-17.

³⁷Ibid., p. 147.

humanity. Her proud soul is full of poisonous pity that would recklessly effect a compassionless world if it could. For Sarah pity is the thin air one breathes at the summit. If one remains there, pompously surveying the wretched depths, this spiritual state is worse than the former. One must descend if he is to gain a humble recognition of the will of God and a simple compassion for his suffering peers. It is a stage through which she passes.

Sarah loves Maurice. Her loyalty to him is to continue to love him, more than any other man, even if he cannot comprehend the meaning of this love, even if he cannot share her belief that they must remain apart. In her last message, a letter to Maurice, Sarah writes:

I can't telephone and hear your voice go queer when I say I'm not going to come away with you. Because I'm not going to come away with you, Maurice, dearest Maurice. I love you and I can't see you again . . . I've caught belief like a disease. I've fallen into belief like I fell in love. I've never loved before as I love you, and I never believed in anything before as I believe now. I'm sure.³⁸

There seems little question about Sarah's last state. Her will was fused with God's, whatever sufferings came out of that. Perhaps her salvation is implausible, but our purpose is not to criticize Greene as technician and artist. An awareness of evil in the world brought her dramatically into an awareness of God. She struggled not to be discovered again by God, to ward off the onslaughts of His grace. Sarah Miles gains salvation because, like the priest and Scobie,

³⁸Ibid., pp. 181-82.

she submits her will and pitifully weak understanding to the vastness of His wisdom and comprehension. This is the greatest act of humility which, in Greene's view, seems to bring with it a concurrent compassion for the rest of those God must have suffer. This is Sarah's loyalty to Christ.

There is in the works of Graham Greene no other character like Querry, whose soul is that of a man who has exhausted himself of spirituality. Querry, the tragic hero of A Burnt-Out Case, suffers from a unique spiritual ennui; he feels neither love nor hate, concern or bitterness. Even the last flicker of pain has died away. His is the strangest paradox in Greene's fiction: he seeks pain, would welcome it, if only to confirm to himself that he still possesses the capacity to suffer. That gone, there can be no hope of salvation. A stultifying want of sensations -- intellectual, physical, psychological -- deprives him of hope. We have previously concluded that a love of God may be an utterly lonely affair for man. For Querry, though, loneliness is the abysmal and vapid state of a man helplessly and hopelessly out of communication with God. Loneliness is the psychic ennui, the insipid tedium which permits of no compassion and which atomizes all that is evil and all that is good so that particles in one's atmosphere are too infinitesimal to cause reaction. Such a spiritual aridity, Greene seems to imply, is the most tragic of all states because it denies not only the potential of salvation but even the capacity for damnation. Querry cannot care; and except for the intervention of

external agents, he has nought to care with.

Querry, a world-renowned architect and builder of great cathedrals, had drained success of further meaning. He had found no satisfaction in greater adulation. He had experienced physical love beyond the point of saturation. Even his family was without interest to him. A concerned friend questioned Querry:

"Have you no children?"

"I once had, but they disappeared into the world a long time ago. We haven't kept in touch. Self-expression eats the father in you, too."³⁹

He had lost God, too, and he came to the devastating conclusion that if there is no God, then whatever a man does he does for self-gratification. If there is nothing but to please oneself, there is no need of people. This is the emptiness that loneliness brings.

A Burnt-Out Case is set in the reeking jungle that surrounds an African leper colony. What brings a man to an outpost so remote and uncivilized? For the priests and nuns who operate the hospital, it is the fulfillment of vocation. For Doctor Colin, the agnostic, it is an area of practice for a man who feels deeply for simple and suffering humanity. But for Querry it is merely the literal end of a river on which he had been drifting without purpose or hope. One could go no farther, and one had no reason to retrace his journey. The leproserie is doubtless symbolic. It is the contaminated repository where slow decay and the ebbing of

³⁹Graham Greene, A Burnt-Out Case (New York, 1962), p. 41.

life are the uppermost facts of reality. Those who come to it are those who suffer grotesque mutilations, and the leproserie is the place where the loss of a part of oneself is terrifyingly evident. It is the place where those beyond suffering remain and wait through endlessly monotonous days, so diseased that one lives in a stupor, incapable of acknowledging any feeling of the pressure the world might exert upon one.

The problem of this novel, aside from delineating Querry's spiritual dilemma, is to bring him back into contact with God. If we understand the mind of Greene, we will recognize that this can be accomplished only through an immersion in humanity. Querry had fled Europe, feeling that those who were giving his work a shallow lip-service were making stupid demands on his time and talents. He had been thoroughly alienated from continued involvement with people. The escape from pressures applied by society and the feeling of utter futility that had overcome his spirit were his stated motives. When Querry arrived at the leproserie, he was able successfully to separate himself from all society. He had had a vague fear that even there he would be questioned and that the renown of his reputation would plague him again. But no one questioned him. He was allowed to indulge his loneliness, and after a time he began to sense a lessening of anxieties. "He was afraid of the questions they might ask until he began to realize that . . . they were going to ask

none of any importance."⁴⁰

The first indication of an awareness of others and their needs was apparent when, after a month's residence in the colony, Querry offered to assist the doctor. A second and more significant step toward renewed involvement with others occurred when he penetrated the jungle in search of Deo Gratias, a leper who had strayed from the leproserie. Querry could not account for his own motives, but "Interest began to move painfully in him like a nerve that has been frozen. He had lived with inertia so long that he examined his 'interest' with clinical detachment."⁴¹ To Doctor Colin, Querry later admitted, "I had an odd feeling that he needed me."⁴²

There is no doubt that Querry has regained active interest in himself and his fellows when he recognizes in himself the emotion of fear. His nature had been for a time frozen, and the slow process of melting uncovers emotions and qualities that are aspects of a living man. The attempt by M. Rycker, a factory owner in the nearby town of Luc, to publicize Querry's identity stirs a gnawing fear in his heart. He does what he can to confuse accounts and to preserve the interests he has so recently acquired.

Fear in Querry becomes smothered anger when Rycker, for various reasons, tries to identify with him. The

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 22.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 51.

⁴²Ibid., p. 53.

officious Rycker forces his attentions on Querry and attempts endlessly to compel Querry to admit higher motivations, to admit in fact that he had fled fame because he is ascetic. Rycker would have Querry acknowledge his own saintliness. Rycker's need and motive come quickly into focus; his own ego will be flattered if he can form an association with "Querry the humble," Querry who is a saint and seeking to obscure his greatness. The tormented Querry's reaction is the honest wrath of a man pushed beyond endurance, but it is also proof that he has assumed again graces and faults that are integral parts of a soul concerned. There is here a propensity toward revived implication in the world in which he lives.

When Querry's sympathy for Rycker's pregnant wife causes him to take her to the clinic in Luc for examination, his compassion for this simple girl pleading openly for his assistance involves him deeply in the Ryckers' problem. Marie Rycker does not want her husband's child. She has only loathing for him, and she fears the child will stifle forever what chance she has of leaving him. Later, Rycker, misunderstanding an entry in his wife's diary, believes Querry is the father of the child, and he is prepared to bring Querry to account. Blinded with rage, the impetuous and irrational Rycker hunts Querry down and murders him.

A Burnt-Out Case does not follow closely the pattern of Greene's other novels we have considered. The man Querry, as his name probably implies, is an individual searching for

reasons, the reasons for his own existence and the answers to ultimate questions. Unbelieving, Querry is driven to search. The acceptance of God, the credibility of the "Christian myth," the worth of his own soul all elude him. The final disposition of this character poses our most profound problem.

If we are careful not to make unwarranted inferences and if we analyze carefully Querry's spiritual development (for it most assuredly is that), we likely will determine that Greene has not treated this character in a manner very different from his other major characters. Some of them are saved; some of them are damned. The lots of Scobie and Querry are most enigmatic.

Querry's spiritual emptiness is a subtle form of pride. An indifference to his own existence and a grudging reluctance to accept the concept of God are important facets of his state of mind. It is through an interaction with the missionaries, the suffering lepers, and the supercilious Rycker that he finally begins to realize the importance of God to others.

Greene's critics have often charged that his denouements are too melodramatic, that his characters are swayed to one extreme or the other through outlandish and implausible displays of emotion. If it is ever a valid criticism of his work, surely Greene is free of it in A Burnt-Out Case. In this novel the author only hints at changes in the spiritual attitude of his hero; any changes are subtle, to

the extent in fact that Querry may be wrongly considered a static character. Yet the hints can reveal a definite spiritual progress. Pride in independence of God and man is gradually broken down and replaced by a feeling of his own unworthiness, an attitude indicative of humility. Near the end, when the wild Rycker accosted him sarcastically as "the Querry," he replied:

"I don't make any claims to one [an immortal soul] . You can be God's important man, Rycker, for all I care. I'm not the Querry to anyone but you. Certainly not to myself."⁴³

At the end his awareness of others, their needs and their weaknesses, is only in the initial stages of development. Querry is never out-going or hail-fellow well-met. An assumption based on the Greene thesis, however, will lead us to conclude that had he been given the opportunity to react longer to external stimuli and had the obvious development been allowed to continue, Querry would unquestionably have come to that compassionate attitude that so marks other subjects of our discussion. A priest was the last to speak for Scobie. The Superior at the leproserie, interestingly, makes this comment to the doctor after Querry's murder:

We all analyse motives too much . . . You remember what Pascal said, that a man who starts looking for God has already found him. The same may be true of love -- when we look for it, perhaps we have already found it.⁴⁴

Greene has commented in a number of places that worldly

⁴³Ibid., p. 192.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 195.

success is that which is most likely to cause one's spiritual downfall. It is only too apparent that it was just that which helped to wreck Querry. This fact is germane, however: Querry rejected his own success. In a way it was the repudiation of the evil of which he had become aware. When he had rid himself of all the reminders of his worldly glory, there was room in his mind for the troubles of others. It seems to be the only way to make room for God.

CHAPTER IV

A NEW INSIGHT INTO AN ETERNAL DILEMMA

One who undertakes to evaluate Graham Greene the writer must assume certain risks which eternally plague the critic. An analysis of Greene is a probing of greatness. And one is hard put, challenged indeed, to define the qualities of the superlative. There can, of course, be no serious question about the impact and compelling appeal of his writings. He is universally acclaimed among the truly brilliant and profound authors of the twentieth century. What is more, there is an appeal so fundamental in Greene's fiction that the result is an international popularity. Many writers have been accorded wide followings while they lived. Few ever come to know that the world acknowledges a capacity of greatness in them. Mr. Greene must be aware that as an artist he is held in all quarters in the highest regard.

Part of our purpose in this thesis is to evaluate the work of Greene as a Catholic. The discussion intermittently has credited him with the noble capacity to drive others to a defense of their views and therefore to a more thoughtful examination of them. Thanks to its vitality Greene's fiction is capable, too, of calling forth a greater respect for all humanity and a deeper appreciation for the need of compassion.

In this brief and final commentary we do not set for ourselves the unlikely task of describing the countless skills of Greene's art or the various facets of his personality that may assist his greatness. Rather, let us turn attention immediately to the most important aspect of his productions -- the great effect of his work. Graham Greene gives us much, but far more significant than any other is the insight he affords us into the problem of salvation. It is his chief purpose. Salvation is the problem of most men who believe in a life after death, and it is doubtless Greene's unyielding commitment to this reality in fiction that accounts largely for his world-wide audience.

Exactly what is unique in his view? A considerable number of writers have been primarily concerned about the struggle between good and evil for the soul of man: Catholics -- Dante Alighieri, Mauriac, Bernanos, Pascal; non-Catholics -- Bunyan, Hawthorne, John Donne, Henry James. Often, the dynamics of good or the power of God is represented by some force, usually symbolic, in fiction.

It is Greene's belief that there cannot be a substitute for God. It is the treatment of this concept in his fiction which is unique. Could any character be as compelling as the suffering Christ? Christ the Redeemer is characterized in Greene's novels. If the reader will bear a further explanation, he will be able to evaluate the proof of that statement.

It is a tenet in Catholic theology that the suffering

faithful are a living part of Christ's Mystical Body. They are the Church militant, and they share this holy union as completely as any soul that has been judged and not damned. The dogma of the Mystical Body is not to be considered allegorically or symbolically by Catholics. St. Paul's allusion to Christ as the Vine and the faithful as the branches is not considered mere analogy. It is a fact of Catholicism.

Mr. Greene is wholly in accord with this teaching. When the whisky priest ministers to the wretched and the vile, he interacts with Christ. Rose's effort to comfort the tormented Pinkie is a working of Christ's compassion on the woeful and faithless committed to evil. Was it not Christ Himself Who said, "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me"⁴⁵ Such a statement implies the presence of Christ among the humble. It is not to overstate the point to say that whatever expression there is of compassion, there is to that extent the presence of the compassionate Christ in the narrative. It is not symbolism. To the extent that Greene's fiction represents reality and to the degree that compassion neutralizes suffering and that love wars with evil, Christ is characterized. Sarah's willingness to love Maurice and to prove it by keeping from him is a marvelous acceptance of Christ's point of view -- that profound love must often stand aside to allow pain to effect its good. The awful misery

⁴⁵Matthew 25:40.

endured by individuals is the unceasing suffering of Christ's Body and a continuation of the sacrifice of Calvary.

Although Greene's characterizations and plots may be ramified and grave, the essentials of his thesis are relatively easy to state. Salvation cannot be wrought by man living in a vacuum. The exhausted Querry had least opportunity for salvation when he had no feeling for other souls. The individual must be in the world, and realistic involvement with the world presupposes a knowledge of evil. Mere knowledge, however, is insufficient. The despairing Pinkie cannot expect salvation, for he was never concerned enough to hope for others. Man cannot solve his own problem or the problems of others. He will, if well disposed, humbly commiserate with those who suffer like him. But he will leave final judgments and dispositions to the will of God. Even so, in the perspective of justice, he finds it impossible to be disdainful of proud men, because he sees himself least worthy of love and most unlikely to receive salvation.

While there is a powerful and unique quality to Greene's fiction, there is also a magnificent grasp of traditional Catholic thought. For example, the necessity of an awareness of evil is hardly new with Greene. Six hundred years ago the greatest of all Catholic writers painted a graphic and awful picture of evil in the Inferno. Obviously, the Florentine poet considered that such a knowledge was requisite for the soul seeking to be united with God.

Perhaps it is valid to draw a parallel between Dante's

plan of the Divine Comedy and Greene's concept of spiritual metamorphosis. The awareness of evil can easily be compared to the journey through the valley of darkness and the experience of hell. Awakening to the fact of one's own and others' spiritual helplessness is very like the mount of ascent on which one comes closer to God only through pain and purification. The Greene character who is prepared to accept God's wise and just tolerance of evil is the character who has made the noblest preparation to experience the Beatific Vision.

Far surpassing all other faculties and capabilities for salvation in the view of Graham Greene is man's willing interaction with the Mystical Body of Christ. This fact implies a willing involvement in and an onerous concern for all who suffer, for suffering is the only common bond one has with all others.

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