

CHAPTER III

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

Graham Greene, English novelist, was born at Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire, where his father was headmaster of the Berkhamstead School. He was educated at Balliol College, Oxford, and then was sub-editor of the London Times from 1926-1930. In 1927 he married Vivien Dayrell-Browning, and they have a son and a daughter. He has travelled a good deal in America and lived for some time in Mexico, which has been a scene of more than one of his books. His inner life is considerably more important. A convert to the Roman Catholic Church, his religion has colored everything he has written. Harry Sylvester, in the *Commonweal*, called him the first major English novelist who was a Catholic.

Greene has been a widely acclaimed and popular author throughout most of his long career. His prominence derives mainly from his novels, most of which pursue his obsession with the darker side of human nature within the context of a spy thriller or adventure story. Greene is described as a Catholic writer: the human struggle between faith and doubt and the despair and alienation of modern humanity are

constant theme in his work. In spite of his many decidedly Catholic concerns, Greene is an intellectual nonconformist. He rejects systematic adherence to the precepts and any contemporary religion or institution.

World travel has been an integral part of Greene's life. His impressions and experiences during these trips are recorded in his nonfiction and contribute to the authenticity of detail and setting in his novel. He is known by *Greenland* because of the observed details in his novels are carefully and accurately describe. The idea of *Greenland* irritates Greene:

This is Indo-China, I want to exclaim, this is Mexico, this is Sierra Leone carefully and accurately described. I have been a newspaper correspondent as well as a novelist....(1939:60)

Childhood in Greene's world is the nearest thing to heaven on earth: a time of peace, trust, confident identity, relaxed communal living, absence of those twin anxieties loss and hope and above all, through the medium of children's fiction, of magically reconciling perfect taken for granted security with unlimited adventure. If his own fiction often seems desolate and pessimistic, it is not because it contains no glimpses of a better world: on the contrary, like the blue passages that this better world is constantly flashing its signal to us.

Greene's early novels are dominated by religious themes and are considered his finest work. Brighton Rock (1938), The Power and The Glory (1940), and The Heart Of The Matter (1948), which received the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, explore the gray moral area between right or wrong and examine the relationship between sin and redemption.

In addition to his Catholic novels, Greene has written comedies and spy fiction, Our Man in Havana (1958) is set in Cuba months before Fidel Castro's revolution, Travel with My Aunt (1969), Human Factor (1978), and The Tenth Man (1985).

There are three aspects of the same time, guarantee Greene's staying power. The first is that behind the attitudes--Greene does explore real pain and unhappiness and not always solely in his protagonists. The pain is felt through his protagonists, but it is often drawn off the subsidiary characters. In this sense, one can say that Greene's fiction has a genuine religious dimension, not to be confused with that melodramatic backdrop of good and evil which he used as a way of raising the stakes and laying on the colours.

The second thing that makes Greene more than a temporary phenomenon is, paradoxically, what is most contemporary about him: his settings and situations. In spite of its distortions, Greenland is real. No European writer since

Conrad has put the hot, poor and foully governed places of the earth on paper as vividly as Greene. This is not to say that he has described them as they are, from the point of view of God or even of their inhabitants, but as they appeared and smelt and felt and tasted to the European visitor in the middle decades of the twentieth century. So the true political element is intrinsic to his settings and forms a kind of parallel to the spiritual element, for it too involves the tension between apartness and collusion.

The third thing, in a generation or two, if it does not already, this kind of detachable sentiment which can be put into the mouth of any protagonist, will sound as quaint as some of Richard Hannay's sentiments. But in that the protagonists' self examinations, however slickly expressed reflect those of a man who could never forgive and forget the process of growing up, they will continue to have meaning: not just for students of the particular author Graham Greene, but for any reader trapped in that narrow but sometimes lifelong defile leading from dependence and immaturity to responsibility for one's actions and the happiness for other.