

The Portable

GRAHAM GREENE

Edited by Philip Stratford

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THE PORTABLE GRAHAM GREENE

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—Arthur Mizener

Philip Stratford, Professor at l'Université de Montréal, has written on Greene in depth before in his book *Faith and Fiction: Creative Process in Greene and Mauriac*, and in many articles.

THE PORTABLE GRAHAM GREENE

Editor's Introduction

After more than forty years in the métier and over thirty books, Graham Greene is drawing into perspective. Such a mobile writer has never been easy to fix. In the thirties, after a false start as poet and historical novelist, he broke out as a writer of contemporary thrillers, and on the side became known as one of London's cleverest cinema critics and book reviewers. That was his English period. In the decade of the war he made his reputation as a major Catholic novelist, added Mexico and West Africa to his fictional territory, and began to work in film. In the early fifties he forsook Catholic themes, extended the range of his travels to the Far East, took to journalism, and tried his hand at drama. Having passed the grand climacteric of *A Burnt-Out Case*, by the sixties he had relaxed into comedy and political fiction and, stepping outside the novel, became an effective *franc-tireur* on international issues. Now, at the beginning of the seventies (at sixty-eight Greene is not quite as old as the century), he is writing prefaces to the Collected Edition of his novels and has published a volume of autobiography, *A Sort of Life*, which closes the circle on the unknown early years.

There have been many other complete men of letters but few have resisted definition better. Edward Sackville-West once called Greene "the electric hare whom the greyhound critics are not meant to catch." His pursuit fiction was criminal-centered; his Catholic novels skirted heresy; his journalism espoused unpopular causes; his comedies were sad and his politics paradoxical.

At the root of these contradictions lies a carefully nurtured ambiguity. From his earliest memories, when he used to play a game in the family garden called "England and France," Greene has been irresistibly drawn to frontiers. Where they didn't exist, he invented them; where they did, he assiduously sought out some of the remoter of them; once

across, he hearkened back to the place he had left; when caught in some no-man's-land, he suffered from it, exquisitely. In *Another Mexico* (*The Lawless Roads*) Greene describes how, at thirteen, he lived a divided life between the bleak school where he was a boarder and his father was headmaster and—across an almost invisible boundary line—the weekend world of home and family, where his father was just his father. This passage is related to another further on in the book where, twenty years later, we find him hovering restlessly on the American side of the Mexican border, waiting “on the dangerous edge of things.” The situation inspires this reflection:

The world is all of a piece, of course; it is engaged everywhere in the same subterranean struggle, lying like a tiny neutral state, with whom no one ever observes his treaties, between two eternities of pain and—God knows the opposite of pain, not we. It is a Belgium fought over by friend and enemy alike. There is no peace anywhere where there is human life, but there are, I told myself, quiet and active sectors of the line. Russia, Spain, Mexico—there's no fraternization on Christmas morning in those parts. . . .

This is typical of the way that Greene broadens the significance of his own border experiences.

A physical frontier occurs in many Greene novels: Dr. Czinner, the exiled revolutionary in *Orient Express* (*Stamboul Train*), crosses home to his death in Subotica; Pinkie disputes territorial claims with a rival gang in the wasteland of Brighton; the Mexican priest in *The Power and the Glory* tastes momentary peace on one side of the border before being drawn back to capture and a firing squad; Scobie, in a key scene in *The Heart of the Matter*, stands peering into Vichy France and sees his destiny carried toward him on a stretcher across a boundary river; Harry Lime is betrayed and shot on an underground frontier in the sewers of occupied Vienna. . . . Even a buoyant character like Aunt Augusta in *Travels with My Aunt*, who can hardly be said to

suffer from frontier-phobia, depends absolutely on international boundaries for her brisk contraband trade.

But more important than the mere presence of a border is the sense of conflicting allegiances that it breeds. With a headmaster-father, Greene likens his fate to that of being "Quisling's son." Betrayal has always been the capital sin in Greene's book, and the classical dilemma of his hero is to find himself unwillingly but inevitably forced to betray someone or something he holds dear. The problem was set in his first novel, *The Man Within*, which took its title from Sir Thomas Browne's phrase: "There's another man within me that's angry with me." The crux of nearly every subsequent novel was to be some variation on the Judas theme: Pinkie's betrayal of Rose; the whisky priest's presumed betrayal of his office and the mestizo's betrayal of the priest; Scobie's triple betrayal of his wife, his mistress, and his God, which leads him to the self-betrayal of suicide. . . . Even Greene's predilection for espionage and counterespionage, for agents and double agents, points to the obsessive nature of the theme.

Of course his treatment of the border psychosis is never simplistic nor exclusive. No one escapes it. Just as he describes the world as "a tiny neutral state . . . warred over by friend and enemy alike," so Greene considers it the general human condition to be a victim of divided loyalties. When he deals with this universal predicament in a comic and not a tragic way, he becomes an exponent of "the virtue of disloyalty," as in *Our Man in Havana*, or in that anarchic little tale "The Destroyers." In yet another light he has described as the only distinguishing mark of a Christian civilization "the divided mind, the uneasy conscience, and the sense of personal failure."

The possibility of living under a double standard is also for Greene fundamental to the art of the novel. One must be able to write, he says, recalling Bishop Blougram's chessboard, "from the point of view of the black square as well as of the white." An expert in creative duplicity himself, he has

drawn his characters from both sides of the board (or the border), presenting them always with their full share of inner contradictions. If he has shown a preference at all, it has been for the black, for the doubters and dissenters, because they offer more of a challenge to the imagination. "Disloyalty," he writes, "encourages you to roam through any human mind: it gives the novelist an extra dimension of understanding." This was one of the main lines he developed in his literary criticism, finding the extra dimension in James, Ford, Mauriac, Waugh, and a few others. He sometimes called it "a religious sense" but meant nothing more parochial by that than: "The creative act seems to remain a function of the religious mind."

In theory and practice Greene applied the liberating principle of disloyalty. But, turning the coin, one must admit that disloyalty has a dark face too. If, as Greene seems to suggest, it is the human lot to be led into the temptation of betrayal—"In the lost boyhood of Judas / Christ was betrayed"—is there no way to ward off the temptation, or to transcend betrayal? The answer is, of course, that while there is plenty of despair in Green's fiction, there is also an unbroken thread of hope, and even his most illusive characters do aspire to virtues less unconventional than the virtue of disloyalty.

The prerequisite to virtue of any kind in Greene's catechism is an act of humility, performed by a conditional admission of failure. Heroes as different as Wormold in *Our Man in Havana*, Fowler, the jaded British war correspondent in *The Quiet American*, Father Clay in *The Heart of the Matter* (their very names smack of mortality), are obsessed with a sense of personal failure, as is Greene himself. The pious, the powerful, and the self-righteous in Greene's fiction—the Captain Seguras, the Pyles, the Wilsons—exist as foils to the unsuccessful characters; and even in the proud, Greene tries to trip the trigger of humility by subjecting them to minor humiliations.

From this base, the next quality that Greene's uncertain

heroes share is not an overwhelming faith but a small tough core of faithfulness. "If you have abandoned one faith, do not abandon all faith," Doctor Magiot writes to his friend Brown in *The Comedians*, and agnostic Doctor Colin in *A Burnt-Out Case* tells the sceptic Querry that a man needs, if not a faith, at least "a superstition to live by." This irreducible grain of faith is the weight that sways the balance in many Greene stories. The split-second of doubt that flashes through the World Dictator's mind as he personally executes the last Pope is an extreme illustration of Greene's faith in the dogged persistence of faith.

But faith in what? What is it that is so bitter to betray?

Faith in individuals, not creeds, in the first instance. "Would the world be in the mess it is now if we were loyal to love and not to countries?" exclaims Beatrice in *Our Man in Havana*. The Mexican priest's virtue resides in the fact that in the prison cell he is ready to trust murderers—and they respond to that trust. The saddest admission that Scobie makes, just before the murder of Ali, is that he has "lost the trick of trust." The element that lifts *The Third Man* above the level of fast-paced thriller is Rollo Martins' fidelity to the memory of his shifty schoolboy friend Harry Lime. This personal involvement puts him on the track of the mystery quicker than the police. (Colonel Calloway attributes it to the fact that he is "an amateur" and, in the most literal sense, his analysis is quite correct.) It also gives to the capture of the criminal an extra dimension—the significance of betrayal—for betrayal isn't worthy of the name if one doesn't love what one betrays.

Faithfulness to others as persons then, and, as far as one-self is concerned, faithfulness to a kind of residual innocence. A characteristic of Greene's fiction is that childhood plays such a large part in it—either a child's actual experience, like Francis Morton's mortal terror of the dark in one of Greene's earliest stories, "The End of the Party," or the childlike reflexes that mark the old man's fear of loneliness in one of his latest stories, "Cheap in August." Many of

Greene's characters are situated in relation to a childhood or schooltime image of themselves: Harris, Wilson, and Helen Rolt are examples of this in *The Heart of the Matter*, and the short story "The Innocent" is a perverse little paradigm of Greene's belief in innocence.

Critics have delighted in underscoring the atmosphere of tawdry, monotonous degeneracy which prevails in Greene's fiction and which they call Greeneland, as we find it, for example, in Minty's character, room, and habits in *The Shipwrecked (England Made Me)*. What they have failed to see is that other quality—now heroic, now merely pathetic—which throws the "seediness" into relief: a remembered idealism, a latent purity, the residual innocence. Even in Minty's case, his threadbare fantasies of family and school provide another standard, make room for that other voice, however wavering, that speaks from the past in criticism of the inadequate present. "To render the highest justice to corruption, you must retain your innocence," Greene writes. "You have to be conscious all the time within yourself of treachery to something valuable."

Chekhov may seem a strange writer to invoke here, but Greene has frequently referred to his views on the role of the writer. "The best artists are realistic and paint life as it is," Chekhov had written and Greene quoted approvingly, "but because every line is permeated as with a juice by awareness of a purpose, you feel, besides life as it is, also life as it ought to be." Chekhov's double standard is the heritage of most of Greene's characters. Minty, the whisky priest, Scobie, Pinkie, bound though they may seem to be by life as it is, never completely lose sight of life as it ought to be; the possibility of change endures like an indissoluble sediment of hope at the bottom of the brain.

To discover the presence of such characteristics in Greene's fiction shows him for what, essentially, he has always been: a subversive romantic. His trek through the hinterlands of Liberia at the beginning of his novelist's career was an attempt to cut back through the crust of civilization

to an age of innocence, to "the finer taste, the finer pleasure, the finer terror on which we might have built." Thirty-five years later, in his recent introduction to *Brighton Rock*, he confesses that the kind of book he had always wanted to write was "the high romantic tale, capturing us in youth with hopes that prove illusions, to which we return in age in order to escape the sad reality." The ambivalent play between the light and dark faces of faithfulness and failure, innocence and seediness, hope and despair, realism and romance, has always characterized Greene's creative outlook. Is it any wonder that his restless, disloyal heroes inhabit a twilight borderland?

But here I must abandon my pretence to deliver "the heart of the matter" and ask the reader to be content with "the hint of an explanation" only. Despite the misleading title of the novel, hints are all we ever do get in Scobie's story—or in any other of Greene's inventions. It is tempting to say that all the hints add up to a cryptic message of love. But that, perhaps, is too unqualified a statement to make about a writer who, after so many journeys in fact and imagination, and after so many different fictional incarnations, has never consented to reveal himself directly. Nevertheless, one *can* say that for more than forty years he has, with courage and tenderness, explored the unmapped region that lies between the risk of betrayal and the risk of love. And that, I think, is the extra dimension that Graham Greene has added to the twentieth-century novel.

I am extremely grateful to him for having freely discussed the contents of this book with me, for providing material, approving the choice of texts, and checking my translations, and for permitting a very few minor amendments to make certain excerpts read more smoothly.

And now, having led the reader up to the frontier of Greene's world, I must leave him the excitement of making his own discoveries in "the outlands of danger."

PHILIP STRATFORD

Principal Dates, Travels, Books

October 2, 1904

Born at Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, son of Charles Henry Greene, history and classics master and later headmaster at Berkhamsted School

1912-1922

Berkhamsted School

1922-1925

Balliol College, Oxford

Babbling April (verse), 1925

February 1926

Nottingham; received into
Roman Catholic Church

1926-1930

Sub-editor on *The Times*

October 1927

Marries Vivien Dayrell-Browning

The Man Within, 1929

1932-

Begins regular book reviewing for
The Spectator; continues until
the early 1940s

Stamboul Train (*Orient Express*),
1932

It's a Battlefield, 1934

Winter 1934-35

Journey to Liberia

England Made Me (*The Shipwrecked*), 1935

July 1935-March 1940

Regular film critic for *The Spectator*

Journey Without Maps (travel), 1936
A Gun for Sale (*This Gun for Hire*),
1936

July-December 1937

Co-editor and film critic of *Night
and Day*

Winter 1937-38

Journey to Mexico

Brighton Rock, 1938

1939

First of many film scenarios

The Lawless Roads (*Another Mexico*),
1939

The Confidential Agent, 1939

1940-1941

Literary editor and drama critic
for *The Spectator*; Ministry of In-
formation. London

The Power and the Glory, 1940

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1941

Hawthornden Prize for *The Power
and the Glory*

1941-1943

Department of Foreign Office, *The Ministry of Fear*, 1943
Sierra Leone

1943-1944

Department of Foreign Office,
London

1944-1948

Director, Eyre & Spottiswoode

June-October 1945

Book reviewer for *The Evening
Standard*

Nineteen Stories, 1947

January 1948

Speaker, with François Mauriac,
at Les Grandes Conférences
Catholiques, Brussels; visits
Czechoslovakia; Vienna

The Heart of the Matter, 1948

The Third Man, 1950

1951

Malaya for *Life*, Indochina

The Lost Childhood (essays), 1951

The End of the Affair, 1951

1952

Indochina for *Paris-Match*

1953

Kenya for *The Sunday Times*

The Living Room (drama), 1953

Essais catholiques, 1953

1954

Indochina for *The Sunday Times*
and *Le Figaro*; Cuba; Haiti

Twenty-One Stories, 1954

1955

Indochina and Poland for *The
Sunday Times* and *Le Figaro*

Loser Takes All, 1955

The Quiet American, 1955

1956

Haiti

1957

Cuba; China; Russia (twice)

The Potting Shed (drama), 1957

1958

Cuba

Our Man in Havana, 1958

1958-1968

Director, The Bodley Head

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- 1959
Cuba; Congo *The Complaisant Lover* (drama), 1959
- 1960
Russia; Brazil for PEN
- 1961
Honorary Associate, American Institute of Arts and Letters (resigned May 1970); Tunis *In Search of a Character* (travel), 1961
A Burnt-Out Case, 1961
- 1962
Hon.Litt.D., Cambridge; Rumania
- 1963
Honorary Fellow, Balliol College; Cuba, Haiti for *The Sunday Telegraph*; Goa for *The Sunday Times*; Berlin and East Germany *A Sense of Reality* (stories), 1963
Carving a Statue (drama), 1964
- 1965
Santo Domingo
- 1966
Named Companion of Honour; Cuba for *The Sunday Telegraph*; settles in France *The Comedians*, 1966
- 1967
Hon.D.Litt., Edinburgh; Israel for *The Sunday Times*; Sierra Leone for *The Observer*; Dahomey *May We Borrow Your Husband?* (stories), 1967
- 1968
Shakespeare Prize, Hamburg; Istanbul for the BBC
- 1969
Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur; Paraguay for *The Sunday Telegraph*; Argentina; Czechoslovakia *Collected Essays*, 1969
Travels with My Aunt, 1969
- 1970
Argentina
- 1971
Chile for *The Observer*; Argentina *A Sort of Life* (autobiography), 1971

Bibliographical Notes

Greene's novels have appeared in England in several editions: Heinemann's Uniform Edition, Heinemann's Library Edition, Penguin Books paperback edition. A new definitive edition, revised and with introductions by Greene, is being published jointly by Heinemann and The Bodley Head; nine titles have now appeared and others will be forthcoming at the rate of one or two a year. In the United States most of Greene's works, with the exception of some of his very earliest novels and *A Sort of Life*, are available from The Viking Press. In the following selected bibliography only first English and American editions are listed, except in the case of books originally published by Doubleday and later reissued by Viking. Four of Greene's books were issued under different titles in the States; in this bibliography the English title is given first, as it usually appeared first; in my editorial notes, the order is reversed.

Books by Greene

- Babbling April*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1925; New York: Doubleday, 1925.
The Man Within. London: Heinemann, 1929; New York: Doubleday, 1929; Viking, 1947.
The Name of Action. London: Heinemann, 1930; New York: Doubleday, 1931.
Rumour at Nightfall. London: Heinemann, 1931; New York: Doubleday, 1932.
Stamboul Train. London: Heinemann, 1932; New York: Doubleday, 1933 (under the title *Orient Express*).
It's a Battlefield. London: Heinemann, 1934; New York: Doubleday, 1934; Viking, 1948.
England Made Me. London: Heinemann, 1935; New York:

- Doubleday, 1935 (under the title *The Shipwrecked*); Viking, 1953.
- Journey Without Maps*. London: Heinemann, 1936; New York: Doubleday, 1936; Viking, 1961.
- A Gun for Sale*. London: Heinemann, 1936; New York: Doubleday, 1936 (under the title *This Gun for Hire*); Viking, 1952 (in *Three by Graham Greene*) and 1971 (in *Triple Pursuit*).
- Brighton Rock*. London: Heinemann, 1938; New York: Viking, 1938.
- The Lawless Roads: A Mexican Journey*. London: Longmans, Green, 1939; New York: Viking, 1939 (under the title *Another Mexico*).
- The Confidential Agent*. London: Heinemann, 1939; New York: Viking, 1939.
- The Power and the Glory*. London: Heinemann, 1940; New York: Viking, 1940 (under the title *The Labyrinthine Ways*; reissued 1946 under the original title).
- The Ministry of Fear*. London: Heinemann, 1943; New York: Viking, 1943.
- Nineteen Stories*. London: Heinemann, 1947; New York: Viking, 1949 (one story changed). Reissued as *Twenty-One Stories* (with three stories added and one omitted). London: Heinemann, 1954; New York: Viking, 1962.
- The Heart of the Matter*. London: Heinemann, 1948; New York: Viking, 1948.
- Why Do I Write?* An exchange of views between Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene, and V. S. Pritchett. London: Marshall, 1948.
- The Third Man*. London: Heinemann, 1950; New York: Viking, 1950.
- The Lost Childhood and Other Essays*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1951; New York: Viking, 1952.
- The End of the Affair*. London: Heinemann, 1951; New York: Viking, 1951.
- The Living Room*. London: Heinemann, 1953; New York: Viking, 1954.