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Make yourself at home : home and the pursuit of authenticity in the writing of Graham Greene

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**“Make yourself at home”:
Home and the Pursuit of Authenticity
in the Writing of Graham Greene**

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Summary

This thesis examines Graham Greene's treatment of ideas of home through the full course of his writing career and finds that, while the sense of home proves elusive for Greene's characters, they nonetheless consistently search for such a place. As Greene's career progresses it becomes ever more apparent that "home" is not necessarily the home of traditional expectation, but may be found in a variety of unforeseen places and experiences.

Chapter One deals with the 1930s—the upheaval of the inter-war period and nostalgia for the lost security of the Victorian world—as experienced by Greene's youthful characters, all of whom are, in varying degrees, either actually or metaphorically homeless.

Chapter Two sees the characters moving on into adulthood, becoming settled (or trapped) into conventional family homes. The background of the Second World War brings a sense of danger into ordinary life; many characters revel in this intrusion of the unheimlich into the everyday.

In Chapter Three, which considers Greene's work in the 1950s and 1960s, Greene's characters struggle with the new uncertainty of the post-war, atomic age. Facing the fear of total destruction, many retreat into detachment, leaving behind old notions of home. Their aim is to go ever further, never back.

Chapter Four covers Greene's last years and his fiction in the 1970s and 1980s, as he sought and found his own final home. His characters discover a more abstract sense of home, as Greene plays with ideas of fiction and reality and finds a blurred line between the two.

Ultimately, my thesis finds that Greene and his characters are made more, not less, concerned with ideas of home by their homeless status, and that eventually, a sort of home is available to almost all who will look beyond the obvious, conventional means to it. These characters will attain a sense of personal authenticity without which, in Greene's work, no real home may be found.

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List of Works by Greene Cited in Textual References & Abbreviations Used—

<u>BA</u>	<u>Babbling April</u> (1925)
<u>BR</u>	<u>Brighton Rock</u> (1938)
<u>BOC</u>	<u>A Burnt-Out Case</u> (1961)
<u>CAE</u>	<u>The Captain and the Enemy</u> (1988)
<u>CE</u>	<u>Collected Essays</u> (1969)
<u>CP</u>	<u>Collected Plays</u> (1985)
<u>CS</u>	<u>Collected Stories</u> (1972)
<u>C</u>	<u>The Comedians</u> (1966)
<u>CA</u>	<u>The Confidential Agent</u> (1939)
<u>DF</u>	<u>Doctor Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party</u> (1980)
<u>EA</u>	<u>The End of the Affair</u> (1951)
<u>EMM</u>	<u>England Made Me</u> (1935)
<u>GFS</u>	<u>A Gun for Sale</u> (1936)
<u>GKG</u>	<u>Getting to Know the General</u> (1984)
<u>HOM</u>	<u>The Heart of the Matter</u> (1948)
<u>HC</u>	<u>The Honorary Consul</u> (1973)
<u>HF</u>	<u>The Human Factor</u> (1978)
<u>SC</u>	<u>In Search of a Character</u> (1971)
<u>B</u>	<u>It's a Battlefield</u> (1934)
<u>JWM</u>	<u>Journey Without Maps</u> (1936)
<u>LW</u>	<u>The Last Word and Other Stories</u> (1990)
<u>LR</u>	<u>The Lawless Roads</u> (1939)
<u>LTA</u>	<u>Loser Takes All</u> (1955)
<u>MW</u>	<u>The Man Within</u> (1929)
<u>MF</u>	<u>The Ministry of Fear</u> (1943)
<u>MQ</u>	<u>Monsignor Quixote</u> (1982)
<u>MD</u>	<u>Mornings in the Dark: The Graham Greene Film Reader</u> (1993)
<u>NA</u>	<u>The Name of Action</u> (1930)
<u>NS</u>	<u>Nineteen Stories</u> (1947)
<u>MH</u>	<u>Our Man in Havana</u> (1958)
<u>PG</u>	<u>The Power and the Glory</u> (1940)
<u>QA</u>	<u>The Quiet American</u> (1955)
<u>R</u>	<u>Reflections</u> (1991)
<u>RN</u>	<u>Rumour at Nightfall</u> (1931)
<u>SL</u>	<u>A Sort of Life</u> (1971)
<u>ST</u>	<u>Stamboul Train</u> (1932)
<u>TA</u>	<u>Travels with My Aunt</u> (1969)
<u>TM</u>	<u>The Tenth Man</u> (1985)
<u>WE</u>	<u>Ways of Escape</u> (1992)
<u>WMO</u>	<u>A World of My Own</u> (1992)
<u>YE</u>	<u>Yours Etc.</u> (1989)

Introduction:

“All which is expressed by ‘home’”¹

What is home? What is a home? In its simplest form, home is the place in which you live, have lived, and will live: your permanent residence. It may be the place in which you were born or grew up, from which your family come, the place where you now live, even the place in which you hope one day to live. But home denotes much more than an actual geographical location. It is not simply a house, village, town or even country; it is a less tangible entity and a much more complex concept. When we speak of “home,” many of us are referring not so much to a place as to a feeling inspired by that place. Home may be a state of mind.

Home is undoubtedly related to personal identity: the places we call “home” are the places which define us, the places to which we feel we belong, and which we feel belong to us, whether or not they are also the places of our longstanding residence. Such places inspire us with hope and confidence, and they allow us to grow, to become more like the people we wish we were. “People are made by places,” Greene himself notes (LR 16), and this is inescapable. It is impossible to live for any significant period of time in a place without building a relationship with it, being shaped by it; whether you love or hate the place is immaterial in this respect. We are not detached from our domestic surroundings, even in the modern age when travel is cheaper and easier than ever. Home remains home. The childhood home is the first place of all, the most familiar, the most intimately known. It cannot be forgotten. The homes of adulthood will generally be attempts either to recreate or to

¹ Graham Greene, The Name of Action (London: Heinemann, 1930) 203.

escape that first known dwelling, to build for ourselves the home—and thereby the life—we most desire.

The popular mythology of home is endless: there is a proverb for every occasion relating to “home sweet home.” “There’s no place like home,” people have been insisting for generations, because “home is where the heart is,” and in the end: “east, west, home’s best.” Home, historically, has always been a lauded and idealized location, regarded as one of life’s absolute necessities. In the nineteenth century, for example, Robert Southey declared: “Show me a man who cares no more for one place than another, and I will show you in that same person one who loves nothing but himself. Beware of those who are homeless by choice!”² Robert Louis Stevenson (one of Greene’s favourite writers, as well as a relative on his mother’s side of the family: see SL 50, 143) offers a last wish: “Be it granted to me to behold you again in dying, / Hills of home!”³ this need ultimately to return home is echoed elsewhere in Stevenson’s work: “Here he lies where he longed to be; / Home is the sailor, home from the sea, / And the hunter home from the hill.”⁴ Similarly, from Walter Scott (Greene’s childhood favourite: see SL 41) comes the question:

Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
 Who never to himself hath said,
 This is my own, my native land!
 Whose heart hath ne’er within him burn’d,
 As home his footsteps he hath turn’d,
 From wandering on a foreign strand! . . .⁵

² Robert Southey, The Doctor (1812; London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longman, 1849) 81.

³ Robert Louis Stevenson, “To S. R. Crockett,” Songs of Travel, Collected Poems, ed. Janet Adam Smith, 2nd ed. (London: Hart-Davis, 1970) 284.

⁴ Robert Louis Stevenson, “Requiem,” Underwoods, Collected Poems 130. Greene also has Aunt Augusta misquoting these lines in one of his own novels, Travels With My Aunt 73.

⁵ Walter Scott, The Lay of the Last Minstrel, The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott (London: Frederick Warne, nd) 35.

This traditionally accepted attitude to home is sentimental and simplistic; in reality the ideal of the warm, happy family home—to which one may always return to find a welcome, and to enjoy the ordinary luxuries of “fires and food and the wind shut outside” (NA 203)—is often difficult to live up to, and offers very little comfort to the man or woman left for some reason without a home, roots or family.

In modern times, home has become a much more complicated affair. As Scott McQuire has remarked, our understanding of “home” in the present day has significantly altered from that of our (even fairly recent) ancestors; thus “[t]he older geographical question ‘where is my home?’ has been replaced by a newer question: ‘What is the meaning of home?’”⁶ The decline of the traditional sense of home began surely in the nineteenth century: a century of change and innovation. The Industrial Revolution in Britain led to the uprooting of a previously rural, settled people; migration to growing industrial towns and cities meant leaving the places where generations had lived and died in unbroken succession. And, as modes of transport improved through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the population enjoyed a new level of mobility and was no longer tied to any one place. Why stay at home any longer?

The climax to this gradual but definite shift away from generations of acceptance that the home of one’s birth was the place in which one would live and die perhaps came in the form of the First World War, which changed attitudes not only to home but also to the world at large. In the aftermath of this war, which had taken vast numbers of men away from their homes, leaving millions dead on foreign

⁶ Scott McQuire, “The Uncanny Home: Television, Transparency and Overexposure,” Paradoxa 3.3-4 (1997): 528.

battlefields, never to welcomed home again, those who were left behind found their confidence and security irrevocably shaken in a world which had become the empty barren waste land of T. S. Eliot's poem. As the century progressed, those born, like Greene, at its outset could only watch as their hopes and security crumbled still further: another world war—almost ceaseless war and destruction, in fact—and later, with the coming of the atomic age, the fear that even the world itself, along with everyone and everything in it, might be destroyed with the simple push of a button. This was hardly a world in which to feel “at home”; likewise, how could one's home possibly fulfil its promises of shelter and endurance in the face of such massive change and uncertainty? Rather, as Martin Heidegger observed in 1947: “Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world.”⁷

The sense of homelessness in modern times has been felt particularly acutely by writers and other artists. “Home” is not a concept that seems especially compatible with twentieth-century writing and writers from the Modernists onwards; rather it is the sense of homelessness—the loss of home—which seems to be more generally perceived. In the age of Modernism, writers became ever more introspective: the individual became the focus of the novel; in contrast, home, family and community lost much of their former weight and meaning. The modes employed by Modernist writers too—such as the stream of consciousness technique—tended to reflect the sense of the individual's isolated and fragmented existence: both the characters and their authors stand quite alone. As Andrew Gurr notes, “[. . .] the normal role for the modern creative writer is to be an exile. He is a

⁷ Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) 219.

lone traveller in the countries of the mind.”⁸ Greene himself declared in an interview after his move to France: “I have certain sentimental roots in England but I never had deep roots—I write as a rootless person.”⁹ His fiction would, however, actually seem to declare otherwise, with its cast of eternally homesick expatriates and the many references to Greene’s own hometown of Berkhamsted, but certainly his roots never prevented him, nor indeed his fictional characters, from roaming long and far abroad, or, ultimately, from leaving England altogether.

Homelessness, in any case, is not simply the opposite of being at home: the two states are linked and intertwined; so Andrew Gurr writes of the “stronger sense of home which the exile has, and [. . .] the clearer sense of his own identity which his home gives him,” even if that home has been left far behind.¹⁰ Nobody gives more thought to the concept of home, and to its attractions especially, than the person who no longer has such a home, who has lost that luxury. Home, for the modern writer, may well be understood in terms of nostalgia (a word whose Greek origins are in the words *nostos* and *-algia*, meaning “return home” and “pain”; the loss implied by the word “nostalgia” is, therefore, specifically the loss of home): home exists primarily in the past, and had added value for being lost now and apparently unattainable.

Bereft of the comforts of home, the twentieth-century writer becomes a figure on the margins looking in: thus in the post-World War Two period the experience of the outsider was much considered in both fiction and criticism, most notably in Colin Wilson’s groundbreaking study, *The Outsider* (1956). Wilson contemplates the

⁸ Andrew Gurr, *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature* (Brighton: Harvester, 1981) 13.

⁹ James Lemoyne, “I Write as a Rootless Person,” *Newsweek* 9 June 1980: 58.

¹⁰ Gurr 9.

prevalence in fiction of such outsider figures: men (and they usually are men, not women, since women as “homemakers” have, at least until recent years, always been more securely rooted in the domestic sphere) who find themselves unable to fit in, to feel comfortable within society, to feel “at home” anywhere. This problem goes some way beyond the search for the perfect home, town or country in which to live: the quest here is not merely to feel at home in one’s immediate surroundings, but to feel at home on this earth, and in oneself. For, if home offers roots and identity, so homelessness promises only rootlessness and the loss of the sense of oneself. With the realization of one’s homelessness, one loses not only that one place which was or might have been home, but all places, all reference points. The pursuit of “home” is, therefore, the most fundamental—the first—search of all, because it is also the search for oneself. As Wilson notes: “The outsider is not sure who he is. [. . .] His main business is to find his way back to himself.”¹¹ But, while the experience of being an outsider might seem to be a curse, it may equally well be a blessing: the outsider is such because he has higher expectations than other men and must therefore find his own way through life. As Wilson judges, “Compared to his [i.e. the outsider’s] own appetite for a purpose and a direction, the way most men live is not living at all; it is drifting.”¹² While other men give in to their “herd instinct,” and to their need for “brotherhood with other men,” for the outsider “a sense of brotherhood with something other than man is strongest, and demands priority.”¹³

¹¹ Colin Wilson, The Outsider (1956; London: Pan, 1963) 160.

¹² Colin Wilson, The Outsider 155.

¹³ Colin Wilson, The Outsider 155.

Nietzsche too had suggested that homelessness might be more a privilege than an affliction, a mark of superiority in an inferior society:

We Homeless Ones. —Among the Europeans of to-day there are not lacking those who may call themselves homeless ones in a way which is at once a distinction and an honour [. . .]. For their lot is hard, their hope uncertain. But what good does it do! We children of the future, how could we be at home in the present? We are unfavourable to all the ideals which could make us feel at home in this frail, broken-down transition period [. . .].¹⁴

Thus to accept the fate of homelessness may be regarded as an act of courage: it is brave to venture beyond the confines of an insufficient homeland, out into the wider world. To leave home is to embark on the search for truth, for the authenticity that is so much less easily found amid the comforts of home.

This quest is a matter of locating oneself, but equally of finding a broader, more general knowledge or understanding of the world or of life itself. Wittgenstein neatly sums up the whole of philosophy when he judges that the essential complaint of the philosopher is “I don’t know my way about,”¹⁵ so that the primary effort must be to find that way and that knowledge, assuming that this will prove possible. In the eighteenth century, the poet Novalis had been still more specific, finding that “[p]hilosophy is really homesickness; it is the desire to be at home everywhere.”¹⁶ It is the same desire to be at home everywhere, or at least somewhere, which drives the writers of novel and short stories: Rosemary Marangoly George remarks that “[t]he search for the location in which the self is at home is one of the primary projects of

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Joyful Wisdom,” The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, ed. Oscar Levy, vol. 10 (Edinburgh: T. N. Foulis, 1910) 342-43.

¹⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953) 49.

¹⁶ Quoted in Rosemary Marangoly George, The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 1.

twentieth-century fiction in English”; in fact she goes so far as to argue that “all fiction is homesickness.”¹⁷

Homelessness, in this context, is a matter of estrangement from self and from the domain in which the self ought to exist absolutely, as well as the need to rediscover that true self. Home is thus an existential concept, and lies at the very heart of life itself. As David Farrell Krell points out, “[. . .] the English verb to be originally has the sense of place-dwelling.”¹⁸ So the decline of the sense of home and rootedness in the course of the twentieth century represents our loss of understanding of ourselves, of our proper modes of existence. Certainly this is what Heidegger contends: “Homelessness [. . .] consists in the abandonment of Being by beings. Homelessness is the symptom of oblivion of Being. Because of it the truth of Being remains unthought.”¹⁹ And furthermore, he insists, “the real plight of dwelling does not lie merely in a lack of houses. [. . .] The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals must ever search anew for the essence of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell.”²⁰ Humankind, it would seem, has lost the understanding of how best to live, has lost the essential connection to the earth on which it lives. In order to make the connection once more, humankind must strive to think more deeply, and see more clearly, than it is now accustomed to do. As Karsten Harries expresses it:

If inauthenticity characterizes everydayness, authentic existence must be sought beyond the usually accepted and taken for granted. Authenticity requires a questioning leave-taking from the security offered by what one says

¹⁷ George 3.

¹⁸ David Farrell Krell, Introduction, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” Basic Writings, by Martin Heidegger 321.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” Basic Writings 218.

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” Basic Writings 339.

and does. We must lose our usually taken-for-granted place in the world if we are to see and act for ourselves.²¹

In other words, we must cast aside the everyday complacency in which we have come to feel at home because it is easy, and take a harder route, by means of which we may reach a truer, more authentic mode of being and a more fulfilling sense of “home.” This quest for authenticity is well-developed in Greene’s fiction: as S. K. Sharma observes, “[t]he quest for harmony and wholeness is a recurrent theme in Greene [. . .],” and so as his career progresses “[. . .] Greene is increasingly fascinated by the rebels [,] outsiders and the misfits who scorn conventional morality and yet manage to retain their inner integrity through a personal commitment to a forlorn hope.”²² Similarly, Cates Baldrige has commented on Greene’s “angry impatience with the lives of security that most of us long for and strive to attain,” and his craving for “contact with final, awful, and absolute questions—matters of life and death, good and evil, salvation and damnation.”²³

Even for those not compelled into homelessness—the fortunate people who enjoy the satisfaction of a secure and peaceful home—it is rarely sufficient simply to rest there for a lifetime. One must see other places, if only in order to understand home better in comparison. As Rosemary Marangoly George considers: “Home and nations are defined in the instances of confrontation with what is considered ‘not-home,’ with the foreign, with distance.”²⁴ This is a long-acknowledged fact: “[. . .]

²¹ Karsten Harries, “Fundamental Ontology and the Search for Man’s Place,” *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Michael Murray (London: Yale UP, 1978) 75.

²² S. K. Sharma, *Graham Greene: The Search for Belief* (New Delhi: Harman, 1990) 48, 206.

²³ Cates Baldrige, *Graham Greene’s Fictions: The Virtues of Extremity* (London: U of Missouri P, 2000) 2, 1.

²⁴ George 4.

what should they know of England who only England know?" Kipling asks,²⁵ while Nietzsche advises that "[. . .] one must do as the traveller who wants to know the height of the towers of a city: for that purpose he leaves the city."²⁶ Thus travel becomes a necessity through which to discover more of one's surroundings and of oneself, for, as Alain de Botton suggests, "[i]t is not necessarily at home that we best encounter our true selves. The furniture insists that we cannot change because it does not; the domestic setting keeps us tethered to the person we are in ordinary life, but who may not be who we essentially are."²⁷ It would seem that the home that has shaped us may also hide from us our true nature, insulating us against reality. To leave the home environment behind may well prove a testing experience, but it is a necessary test.

Travel is often a reaction against home, against home's sameness and familiarity. Yet to travel may also be to search for a better home than one has previously known, a home that more accurately reflects one's own character and inclinations. This is travel as the quest for a personal Utopia, a truly ideal home, whether in the form of Kipling's "thoughtful islands" and "just Republics,"²⁸ or the place imagined by Baudelaire (and quoted by Greene in his own travel journal—see JWM 25):

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,

²⁵ Rudyard Kipling, "The English Flag," The Complete Verse, rev. ed. (London: Kyle Cathie, 1995) 181.

²⁶ Nietzsche, "The Joyful Wisdom," Complete Works, vol. 10, 347.

²⁷ Alain de Botton, The Art of Travel (2002; London: Penguin, 2003) 59.

²⁸ Rudyard Kipling, "The Broken Men," The Complete Verse 80.

Luxe, calme et volupté.²⁹

Such places, imaginary or actual, offer an antidote to the homes into which we are (so often unhappily) born. They are the homes we wish we had, and the modes of existence we wish we had. De Botton remarks upon such a desire in Flaubert, who detested his homeland of France and developed instead a love of Egypt, his home of choice: “And hence he proposed a new way of ascribing nationality: not according to the country one was born in or to which one’s family belonged, but according to the places to which one was attracted,”³⁰ that is, the places in which one could feel at home, complete, more truly oneself. Such places can become motifs, almost sacred ideals: for Greene that ideal was found in Africa. “At thirty-one in Liberia I had lost my heart to West Africa,” he recalled (WE 97), and from that time on, whether or not he was in Africa, Africa was in him.

During the twentieth century, the place one called home became ever more unlikely to be the place in which one had been born, the first home. Lynne Pearce notes this phenomenon: the tendency to view the home in terms of “‘destination’ rather than ‘origins.’”³¹ In an uprooted and ever more mobile world one comes to view home, she judges, “as not where we come from, but ‘where we’re at.’”³² Home may indeed be one’s personal construction, or at least one’s own choice; there is no need in modern times merely to accept the home one was allotted by birth or

²⁹ Charles Baudelaire, “L’Invitation au Voyage,” The Flowers of Evil, ed. Marthiel Mathews and Jackson Mathews (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955) 291.

³⁰ de Botton 98.

³¹ Lynne Pearce, “Devolution and the Politics of Re/location” (Introduction), Devolving Identities: Feminist Readings in Home and Belonging, ed. Pearce (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) 35.

³² Pearce 35.

circumstance. Greene was far from unique in his wish—his compulsion, one might say—to leave his staid and unfulfilling birthplace in search of something more, of an alternative home elsewhere. In Forever England, Alison Light's comments on Daphne du Maurier and her adoption of Cornwall as "home" could equally well apply to Greene's own understanding of the nature of home; Light notes:

Du Maurier was actually a newcomer to Cornwall, moving there in the late 1920s, and her sense of homecoming was built out of a very modern disaffection. She was a shining example of that paradoxical modern ability to 'put down roots quickly': she became almost instantaneously attached to this place, felt it was 'home' without having grown up there, worked there, or had connections with the place. It is a sense of belonging which need not depend on actual ownership or possession of land or on being the home of forefathers—a 'family home'. In fact, although du Maurier beat a retreat in to a Cornish past in her twenties, she was typical of modern youth in not wanting to live at home. Cornwall was the home du Maurier wanted to have rather than the one she was born with.³³

This desire for reinvention is shared by many of Greene's characters, eager as they are to escape the homes of their birth and to find a "better" place in which to settle. And, at the same time, "that paradoxical modern ability to put down roots quickly" might well define the general modern attitude towards home.

The modern world moves so very quickly that few people are willing to spend decades becoming at home: it ought, we think, to be an instantaneous happening. We are unwilling to accept what is allotted to us, what develops, or not, of its own accord; instead we seek to manipulate our lives, our futures, our homes. Twentieth-century progress has removed the permanence, the history, from our understanding of the concept of home, along with the need to be involved not only in a location, but in its resident community. The modern home is a home for the individual: a private

³³ Alison Light, Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars (London: Routledge, 1991) 192.

and personal matter. Another of Alison Light's evaluations of du Maurier's attachment to Cornwall might equally well be applied to Greene himself, or his characters, and their attraction to multiple and various possible "homes": she concludes that

Cornwall could provide a territory of independence and, if need be, of splendid isolation. Like Compton-Burnett's imaginary landed estates, or Christie's Little England villages dreamt up in Baghdad, du Maurier's Cornwall was a place of contradictions, where uneasy selves could meet.³⁴ [my emphasis]

Any attempt to define so complex a concept as "home" is necessarily fraught with contradictions and ambiguities. Except in its most sentimentalised and unconvincing form, home is never simple. For the majority of people, for writers more than most, and for Greene more than for most writers, "home" is many things, some of them seemingly incompatible, and a mixture of positive and negative qualities: if "home" is a refuge, it may also be a prison; if it is loved, it may also be hated. Even in the final analysis, it has meanings that may never be fully understood, even by its inhabitants, its possessors. Perhaps home in fact can never truly be possessed or controlled: an uncanny idea.

The "Uncanny" as a concept is closely allied to ideas of home and homelessness, and the complex differences between the two. In German it is the "Unheimlich"—literally the "unhomely"—the subject of Freud's essay of 1919. That which is unheimlich, Freud explains, is that which frightens us, for reasons sometimes beyond our comprehension; specifically, "[. . .] the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads us back to what is known of old and long familiar."³⁵

³⁴ Light 204-05.

³⁵ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth, 1955) 220.

As Nicholas Royle sees it, the uncanny is “a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. [. . .] It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home.”³⁶ Similarly, Scott McQuire describes Freud’s “Uncanny” as “a disturbed domesticity, the return of the familiar in apparently unfamiliar form.”³⁷

This brings the home into the arena of the uncanny: our home might be expected to guard us against that which is frightening, to protect us against the outside world, but the uncanny/unheimlich reminds us that it does not and cannot, because, alarmingly, home itself also contains elements of the frightening. The home may become unhomely and the heimlich, unheimlich. The uncanny unsettles us, leaving us without any firm foundations, anything reliable or certain: it brings the sudden sensation of homelessness. Through the uncanny, the home—the familiar—proves itself worryingly unknown—and unfamiliar—after all. Maria M. Tatar remarks upon this revelation of duality within the nature of the house or home:

A house contains the familiar and congenial, but at the same time it screens what is familiar and congenial from view, making a mystery of it. Thus it comes as no surprise that the German word for a secret (Geheimnis) derives from the word for home (Heim) and originally designated that which belongs to the house. What takes place within the four walls of the house remains a mystery to those shut out from it. A secret, for the Germans in any case, literally ex-cludes other from knowledge.³⁸

Thus, a home need not be a welcoming place to all comers, but can also function as a means of shutting others out, as an exclusive place and a means of rejection. If any place is home to one person, it must necessarily be the very opposite to many more

³⁶ Nicholas Royle, The Uncanny (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003) 1.

³⁷ McQuire 529.

³⁸ Maria M. Tatar, “The Houses of Fiction: Towards a Definition of the Uncanny,” Comparative Literature 33.2 (1981): 169.

people. A home can have many meanings, many faces; it may be as hostile as it may be nurturing. As George asserts: “[. . .] homes are not neutral places”;³⁹ they may be good or bad, but never merely negligible.

The flip side of the uncanny—the opposite of the home that proves itself unhomey—is the apparently alien place that reveals itself ultimately to be oddly familiar and known: an equally disconcerting experience. This is the realization felt by Marlow in Joseph Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness” (1902) as he journeys into the unknown landscape and culture of Africa. Looking out of the steamer onto the banks, “[. . .] there would be a glimpse of rush walls, or peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage.”⁴⁰

Marlow has never seen anything like this before, and he feels “wondering and secretly appalled,” but as he looks on he is struck by a realization:

It was unearthly, and the men were—— No they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces, but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend.⁴¹

Greene made his own journey into this heart of darkness, and Africa offered him similar lessons. In his journal of his first trip to Africa in the 1930s, Greene

³⁹ George 6.

⁴⁰ Joseph Conrad, “Heart of Darkness,” *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* (1902; Oxford: World Classics-Oxford UP, 1990) 186.

⁴¹ Conrad, “Heart of Darkness” 186.

recalls watching the “devil”/blacksmith of a village dancing, and he finds himself reminded of the dancing Jack-in-the Green he had seen as a child in rural England. He detects unexpected parallels between the traditions of such different territories as Africa and England:

[. . .] here in Liberia again and again one caught hints of what it was we had developed from. It wasn't so alien to us [. . .]. One had the sensation of having come home, for here one was finding associations with a personal and a racial childhood, one was being scared by the same old witches. (JWM 99)

At the end of his journey, about to return to England, Greene considers that “[. . .] what had astonished me about Africa was that it had never been really strange. [. . .] The ‘heart of darkness’ was common to us both” (JWM 295). Greene certainly sought, and found, indications of his and our roots on his travels: in travelling beyond Europe and the USA, heading for the primitive, Greene was, Adam Schwartz suggests, “pursuing not only his own lost childhood, but his race’s as well.”⁴² He was, in a way, seeking a home for us all.

But why should this search for home make itself so strongly felt in Greene and in his writing? After all, he came from a perfectly secure, perfectly English upper middle-class family, went to a (minor) public school and then Oxford. He had no obvious reason not to feel at home. And yet he never was quite at home, quite settled; the tension between staying put and moving on was never resolved, certainly not until old age and infirmity settled him at last in one place. Partly, this was simply because of the generation into which he was born: a generation which grew up with the First World War, had reached maturity by the time of the Second World War and had, in the meantime, seen the miseries of the Depression. It is hard to imagine that

⁴² Adam Schwartz, “From Granite to Grass: Graham Greene, Travel and the Primitive,” Renaissance 55:1 (2002): 28.

men of Greene's age could not have had their sense of security in the world shaken by the events they had seen, and continued to see, in the course of the twentieth century. But Greene's interest in concepts of home, and also of homelessness, goes beyond the level which can be explained by the era, by the wider background to his life and writing: Greene's fascination with the idea of home is a very personal obsession which finds its roots in his own experiences, and in his own psyche. Superficially, Greene's life and background were such that the unremitting obsession with the theme of home—with its potential or actual loss, with its fragility, with its failures and disappointments—could seem simply inexplicable: he had a family and a home, he was not poor, he was free to choose the course of his own life. But Greene's particular response to that comfortable, secure background was unusual from the beginning: for example, while his elder brother's schooldays were a success—he was head boy—Graham Greene was simply unable, and unwilling, to adapt to life as a boarder and eventually ran away. He and his characters keep on running for years, escaping the places they nonetheless long to be able to fit into.

Critical studies on the subject of home in recent years have been plentiful, but they have tended to deal with the matter from the perspective of those homeseekers who are on the margins of society, rather than at its heart. They are frequently written from a postcolonial or feminist perspective, and address the difficulties of those who are still in the process of constructing or reconstructing their own personal spaces, whose homes have not previously been properly their own. It is improbable that many studies will be written dealing with the struggles of white, upper-class men—those seemingly born to be part of the Establishment—to find their true home. But this is precisely Greene's struggle and that of many of his fictional characters.

Here are men who should, and yet do not quite, “fit,” to whom home remains a precious but elusive dream, and whose one goal is to find a place to belong, a place to be themselves, their very own home. The question is: when and how, if at all, can such a place be found?

Chapter One:

“The sad houseless world”:¹ Unhomed in the 1930s.

The England of the inter-war years in which Graham Greene began his writing career was a changing country, a place of contrasts and conflicts, a country in which it was perhaps difficult for anybody to feel truly and securely “at home.” England existed in a kind of limbo, stuck between the last war and the growing possibility of another war, between the old world and the new. The social and political Establishment, though still very much in place, was growing uncertain of its future security. And in the present moment there was economic instability and depression, which separated those living in miserable poverty ever more from those who were wealthy enough to take advantage of the low cost of living. Greene recalls “that sense of capitalism staggering from crisis to crisis” (WE 38): the situation seemed out of control.

If Britain was still “the centre of the greatest Empire the world has seen,”² the “greatness” of Britain was less noticeable from within than from without. An individual living in Britain (particularly if he were lower-middle or working-class and fearful of—or already afflicted by—unemployment) felt an insecurity and uncertainty that was new. Even the most middle-class of Greene’s central characters share in this apprehension: they have generally seen better days, though not all of them go so far as Anthony Farrant in England Made Me when he declares: “[. . .] I haven’t a future [. . .]” (EMM 29). English society in the inter-war years experienced

¹ Graham Greene, The Bear Fell Free (London: Grayson and Grayson, 1935) np.

² Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, Britain in the Nineteen Thirties (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) 2.

a huge sense of disappointment and a pessimism which built to a climax by the time of the approach of the Second World War, so that Greene could comment simply (in a film review of 1939) that “[. . .] the world is nobody’s oyster” (MD 356).

The rapid decline in the nation’s confidence began with the mass slaughter of the First World War: how could any society survive such pointless destruction with its values unaltered? Ronald Blythe suggests that it was during the horror of the Somme that “[. . .] the old world died,”³ and notes that there was no revival of spirits once the war had ended, even if the Bright Young Things of the 1920s did their best to keep up the appearance of youthful exuberance with an endless, soulless whirl of parties, cocktails and dancing. In Evelyn Waugh’s Vile Bodies, one of the central figures—a Bright Young Thing himself—stops for just long enough to exclaim, “what a lot of parties,” and Waugh details the multitude and variety of these gatherings of the privileged youth of England:

. . . Masked parties, Savage parties, Victorian parties, Greek parties, Wild West parties, Russian parties, Circus parties, parties where one had to dress as somebody else, almost naked parties in St John’s Wood, parties in flats and studios and houses and ships and hotels and night clubs, in windmills and swimming-baths, tea parties at school where one ate muffins and meringues and tinned crab, parties at Oxford where one drank brown sherry and smoked Turkish cigarettes, dull dances in London and comic dances in Scotland and disgusting dances in Paris—all that succession and repetition of massed humanity . . . Those vile bodies . . .⁴

Yet beneath the surface gaiety, Blythe notes, “[l]ife would go on, but without the ancient spiritual certainty” which had been felt by generations of the English nation

³ Ronald Blythe, The Age Of Illusion: England in the Twenties and Thirties, 1919-1940 (London: H. Hamilton, 1963) 3.

⁴ Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies (1930; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000) 104.

prior to the war.⁵ He quotes a song by Jacques Reval which observes that “[t]he world is one huge dancing floor”; but it seems a rather frantic and joyless dance, only intent upon achieving oblivion, whose dancers “have no time to think or feel” and who encourage others: “Come, dance before the music stops, / And who can bear to be alone?”⁶ The parties were an escape from the sense of disillusionment and insecurity which had its origins in the Great War, a war which had shattered once and for all the English people’s shared confidence—previously taken for granted—in such notions as courage, self-sacrifice, patriotism and national identity.

Greene and his generation were too young to have fought in this war; they had grown up steeped in its dramas and losses, watching their elders in school leaving to fight, some never to return. But by the time Greene and his peers were adults, it was all over: “[. . .] the war ended too soon for us,” wrote Greene (SL 65); he and his contemporaries reached adulthood primed for action but trapped in a peace-time world which was unceasingly domestic and career-oriented, a world lacking stimulation. Looking back, Greene judges: “We were a generation brought up on adventure stories who had missed the enormous disillusionment of [fighting in] the First World War, so we went looking for adventure [. . .]” (WE 45-46), which seemingly could not be found at home in England. If the war itself had not crushed the spirits of Greene’s generation, its dull, depressing aftermath threatened to.

Alison Light has suggested that the years following the war saw a critical change in the very nature of English life, as a strongly masculine and heroic world surrendered itself, however reluctantly, to the advance of a more feminine world in

⁵ Blythe 7.

⁶ Blythe 15.

“a redefinition of Englishness.”⁷ Steadily, the private world of the home grew ever more significant and absorbing, and consequently harder to escape. Light offers the opinion that

[. . .] the 1920s and '30s saw a move away from formerly heroic and officially masculine public rhetorics of national destiny and from a dynamic and missionary view of the Victorian and Edwardian middle classes in “Great Britain” to an Englishness at once less imperial and more inward-looking, more domestic and more private—and, in terms of pre-war standards, more “feminine.”⁸

She takes exception to the (masculine) portrayal in fiction and in critical studies of the inter-war period as a time in which England and home were deeply undesirable, and in which to leave them behind, to seek the freedom of other countries and of the process of travel itself, was almost compulsory. She scorns the idea that post-1918 “Britain is the place where it is no longer possible to be properly male,” a place which is simply “a home unfit for heroes.”⁹ But it seems inadvisable to discard all idea of home (and wives and families) as an unexciting, stifling place to return to, merely on the basis that such feelings might now seem to be politically incorrect. Light also links this dissatisfaction with homes, and with the women within them, with the homosexuality of many writers of the period, but this does not take account of men like Greene who did not place themselves outside conventional family life in this way, but still shared some of the suspicions and feeling of discomfort towards that life.

Marriage and family life are frequently viewed, in the fiction of male writers of the inter-war period, as things not desired but inflicted upon men. Women, who had

⁷ Light 8.

⁸ Light 8.

⁹ Light 7.

been temporarily emancipated by the war, throughout which they had taken over the roles left vacant by the men away on the battlefields, were now forced back into their former, purely domestic roles by the men's return. One might expect that the women themselves would have resented the return of such limitations, just as the returning soldiers would find it hard to adapt to life at home once more. Greene's own fiction suggests repeatedly that men in this period are belittled by their home environments and weighed down by their duties and responsibilities. Thanks to the pressures of family life, an Englishman's home is far from being his castle, and—fairly or not—women are perceived as being at least partially responsible for this discomfort. Women make demands upon these men—deliberately or unintentionally—and thus they become simply another burden. Evelyn Waugh's Decline and Fall sums up the completeness of the sense of being trapped, in Grimes's complaint: "Oh, why did nobody warn me? [. . .]. They should have warned me about Flossie, not about the fires of hell," and in his ultimately resigned judgement that "[t]here's a home and family waiting for every one of us. We can't escape [. . .]."¹⁰

In Greene's work in this period the sense of imprisonment is at times stifling. For Pinkie in Brighton Rock, marriage is especially disturbing since his relationship with Rose is purely a necessity: he needs the legality of marriage to ensure that she can never be forced to testify against him. But he must also keep her happy—though he despises her—in order to be certain that she will never choose to testify. There seems, however, to be something more fundamental to Pinkie's distaste for marriage and home than merely the unfortunate circumstances of his own marriage to Rose. The very idea of marriage repulses him: "He didn't want that relationship with

¹⁰ Evelyn Waugh, Decline and Fall (1928; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1937) 102.

anyone: the double bed, the intimacy, it sickened him like the idea of age. [. . .] To marry—it was like ordure on the hands” (BR 122). In the event, from the moment of the marriage ceremony Pinkie begins to feel pushed out of his own home by this wife he has never desired. Rose has an idea of a wife’s duties and is eager to fulfil them. In making the effort to assimilate into Pinkie’s home and his life, she seems to exclude him: she begins to appear more comfortable than he does. When she suggests that she will tidy the place the next day, Pinkie is outraged, and the room becomes their battlefield, as they wrangle for territory: “‘You won’t touch a thing,’ he said. ‘It’s my home, do you hear? I won’t have you coming in, changing things’ He watched her with fear—to come into your own room, your cave, and find a strange thing there” (BR 224). But his outrage is impotent: Rose will win even unintentionally and without any malice, since the house is the woman’s sphere, her area of control. When he returns after a brief absence, Pinkie finds his room subtly but definitely altered: “It was her room now, not his [. . .]. It was her Hell now if it was anybody’s—he disowned it. He felt driven out [. . .]” (BR 265).

While Pinkie’s horror is obviously intensified by the fact that this is nothing more than a marriage of convenience—or of necessity—there seems to be a suggestion here that all marriages will eventually come to the same state of bitterness, and that all men will share to some extent this feeling of being controlled, stifled, excluded. They are evicted from their earlier masculine homeland—a free country—into a foreign, feminine, land. Pinkie listens with horror as Prewitt talks of his own wife, and of twenty five years of marriage which have worn him down: “She’s ruined me” (BR 261). Similarly, Baines, sitting alone downstairs in “The Basement Room,” temporarily freed from his wife’s control and surrounded by his

simple comforts—a newspaper, cake, ginger beer—invites the young boy Philip in to join him in this peaceful, undemanding masculine place where he is completely “at his ease, a man in his own home” (“The Basement Room,” CS 458). But this happy, relaxed holiday atmosphere can only last until Baines’s wife, the housekeeper, returns. She threatens the idyllic homeliness of the room with her constant surveillance and her restless tidiness, as a result of which the room itself has “the sense of bareness, of nowhere to hide a man’s secrets” (CS 459).

Philip, in spite of his youth, perceives that Mrs Baines is the threatening factor here: “He pitied Baines; it occurred to him how happily they could live together in the empty house if Mrs Baines were called away” (CS 461). Baines reminisces to Philip about his former life in Africa where he could be really a man—responsible, in control, respected—instead of only a hen-pecked husband: “I’d go back tomorrow if I had the chance,” he tells Philip, but of course he never will (CS 459). He is now far too securely under his wife’s domination ever to break free. He simply sits and hates her, with “the sad hopeless hate of something behind bars” (CS 463). Even her death at his hands is simply part of a chain of events set off by her discovery of his affair, by her anger, and is not a deliberate rebellion on Baines’s part. As the police learn the truth of her death, he will merely move from one prison to another, never regaining in Africa or in England that sense of home—of freedom and the sense of his own distinct identity as a man, not merely as a husband—which is his most cherished memory.

Maria Couto suggests: “A dream of England, precious and fleeting haunts all Greene’s work [. . .]”;¹¹ her use of the word “dream” is accurate and revealing. In the 1930s, Greene—like Anthony Farrant and others in the fiction—is less interested in the England of present day reality, than in an old pre-war England of his own construction. And the old dream of England as home—an enduring, protecting, familiar land—still persisted more widely in the disillusioning aftermath of the Great War. But this idyllic place—half reality, half myth—was being challenged by a modern world that had little room for romanticism or for peace. If the old England was unchanging, its modern reincarnation was ever-changing. The old England was essentially Edwardian or even Victorian in its ideals. Those who continued to live by those ideals were nostalgic for the old certainties, and for what they saw to be the very English qualities of decency, honour, fairness: the qualities of English gentlemen over centuries. In *England Made Me*, Anthony Farrant has been schooled by his late father to respect these rather out-of-date qualities, to be himself “a little bit of England” (*EMM* 73). The essential rules are clear: “Do not show your feelings. Do not love immoderately. Be chaste, prudent, pay your debts. Don’t buy on credit” (*EMM* 73). But these are truly his father’s rules, and Anthony can never live up to them, though he cannot live without them.

Though Greene himself was born too late—in 1904—to experience the pre-war world in its prime, he too nevertheless absorbed many of its standards, from a strongly middle-class upbringing and a public school education. After Greene’s death Paul Theroux remarked: “In his outlook and manners [. . .] he was an

¹¹ Maria Couto, *Graham Greene: On the Frontier: Politics and Religion in the Novels* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1988) 91.

Edwardian,”¹² suggesting a view of Greene himself, as much as any of his misfit characters, as having been born too late, being a little outdated in his standards and his basic ideals. His earliest work certainly betrays a greater degree of romanticism than would seem to be encouraged by the atmosphere of the late 1920s and the 1930s, though that could of course be viewed simply as the idealism of youth. But Greene and his fictional characters were not quite alone in their reluctance to relinquish entirely the old England to the most depressing aspects of the modern inter-war period. Pockets of resistance remained, and indeed other writers of the period went further, taking a reactionary stance against the entirety of the encroaching modern world; so Waugh writes in Vile Bodies of the hotel in which his hero, Adam, stays in London: “[. . .] one can go to Shepherd’s parched with modernity any day [. . .] and still draw up, cool and uncontaminated, great, healing draughts from the well of Edwardian certainty.”¹³

Similarly, in Christopher Isherwood’s novel of 1935, Mr Norris Changes Trains, the hero of the title is a fugitive figure, fleeing not only from the inconvenience of the law, but also from the restrictions of the modern world. He is one of the last remnants of the Edwardian age, and finds himself now out of place and uncomfortable. He tells the narrator, William:

I wish you had known me in the old days, in Paris just before the War. [. . .] Mine is a sensitive nature. I react immediately to my surroundings. When the sun shines on me, I expand. To see me at my best, you must see me in my proper setting. A good table. A cellar. Art. Music. Beautiful things. Charming and witty society. Then I begin to sparkle. I am transformed.¹⁴

¹² Paul Theroux, “Private View,” Independent on Sunday 7 April 1991: 4.

¹³ Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies 30.

¹⁴ Christopher Isherwood, Mr Norris Changes Trains, Berlin Novels (London: Vintage-Random, 1999) 57.

But the thirties in England, and for the English wherever they found themselves, were not years conducive to the enjoyment of such pleasures as art, music and beautiful things. There were more serious matters for consideration than personal enjoyment; there was little scope for an individual to “sparkle.” Norris and his young friend inhabit different worlds: Norris’s world is all but gone and communication between the two generations will soon be impossible. William remarks of one of his meetings with Norris: “Here we were as so often before, at the edge of that delicate, almost visible line which divided our two worlds. We should never cross it now. I wasn’t old or subtle enough to find the approach.”¹⁵ In contrast to Norris’s Golden Age, life in modern England has been very much undermined by uncertainty and discomfort, and by the conviction in particular that further decline and further war are inevitable.

England as it had always been known was under threat from the inevitability of war. The next war loomed large even at the end of the twenties and start of the thirties: even as early as 1929 the characters in Vile Bodies talk with gloomy assurance of “this war that’s coming.”¹⁶ The priest, Father Rothschild, understands the mood of the age and the inevitability of future conflict: “Wars don’t start nowadays because people want them. We long for peace [. . .] but there is a radical instability in our whole world-order and soon we shall all be walking into the jaws of destruction again, protesting our pacific intentions.”¹⁷ The pressure grew as the decade passed; by 1939 Greene demanded on his return to England from Mexico:

¹⁵ Isherwood, Mr Norris Changes Trains 205.

¹⁶ Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies 112.

¹⁷ Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies 112.

“How could a world like this end in anything but war?” (LR 271). He was far from alone in this certainty: George Orwell dwells almost gleefully upon the coming destruction in Keep the Aspidistra Flying (1936) and Coming up for Air (1939); his characters continually return to making apocalyptic prophecies of doom for the sick old society they see around them. In Keep the Aspidistra Flying, Gordon Comstock finds the work he has always done in advertising now depressingly and disgustingly symptomatic of the decline of England. Having effectively rejected his contemporary world and dropped out into bitter poverty, Gordon curses his society from its periphery:

He looked up and down the graceless street. Yes, war is coming soon. [. . .] The electric drills in our streets presage the rattle of the machine guns. Only a little while before the aeroplanes come. Zoom—bang! A few tons of TNT to send our civilisation back to hell where it belongs.¹⁸

In Coming up For Air, George Bowling offers a similarly scathing—though less hysterical—appraisal of the situation just before the outbreak of war: “It’s coming soon, that’s certain.”¹⁹ The failures which make war not only inevitable but desirable, he believes, are clear for all to see: even “[o]rdinary chaps [. . .] have got a feeling that the world’s gone wrong. They can feel things cracking and collapsing under their feet.”²⁰

At the same time, war and its threat of destruction by external forces was not the only fear in England in the inter-war period. Commenting on one of his short stories (“The Other Side of the Border,” almost certainly written, according to

¹⁸ George Orwell, Keep the Aspidistra Flying (1936; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989) 257-58.

¹⁹ George Orwell, Coming Up For Air (1939; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 157.

²⁰ Orwell, Coming Up for Air 166.

Greene, in 1936), Greene sees his writing as being “stamped unmistakably with the atmosphere of the middle thirties” (Note to “The Other Side of the Border,” NS 196). at which point foreign threats seem relatively minor: “[. . .] Hitler is still quite new, dictatorship is only a tang on the breeze blowing from Europe [. . .]” (NS 196). In England itself Greene sees “depression and a kind of metroland culture” (NS 196): the country was threatened from within, and the old life was crumbling. Betjeman contrasts the old world and the new in his poem “Death of King George V”: the new king’s accession signifies a break with the pre-war past, the coming of a new (and probably inferior) era, as

Old men who never cheated, never doubted,
 Communicated monthly, sit and stare
 At the new suburb stretched beyond the runway
 Where a young man lands hatless from the air.²¹

Even in the most mundane of situations the modern England has a nasty surprise at every turn for those who have been used to a different life; this is what George Bowling discovers in Orwell’s Coming up for Air, as he bites into the vileness of a fake, fishy hotdog:

It gave me the feeling that I’d bitten into the modern world and discovered what it was really made of. That’s the way we’re going nowadays. Everything slick and streamlined, everything made out of something else. Celluloid, rubber, chromium-steel everywhere, arc-lamps blazing all night, glass roofs over your head, radios all playing the same tune, no vegetation left, everything cemented over, mock-turtles grazing under the neutral fruit-trees.²²

²¹ John Betjeman, “Death of King George V,” Collected Poems, ed. Lord Birkenhead, 4th ed (London: John Murray, 2000) 35.

²² Orwell, Coming Up for Air 24.

And though Betjeman complains of what development has done in Slough, in “the mess they call a town,”²³ the same cries could be justified all over England. The damage was being done by what Betjeman referred to as “the innate suburbanism of modern life.”²⁴ The inter-war years were the Metroland era, and the basic idea was reasonable: to get people out of London and the cities (even if they still had to travel to work in those places) and into carefully designed estates of houses in the open, healthy countryside, thus fulfilling the dream of millions, of their very own home in the country. Betjeman recalls the idealism of the project:

We called you Metro-land. We laid our schemes
Lured by the lush brochure, down byways beckoned,
To build at last the cottage of our dreams,
A city clerk turned countryman again,
And linked to the Metropolis by train.²⁵

It was to have offered to thousands of British people the best of both worlds—the convenience of the city and the peace of the country—but the reality was rather less glorious as the fields were sold off to “[. . .] turn out the cattle, and fill the meadow land with houses.”²⁶ What it really meant was not a cleverly conceived rural idyll for all with all modern conveniences thrown in, but the rise and rise of suburbia, of the houses with pretty names they can never live up to:

“Rusholme”, “Rustles”, “Rustlings”, “Rusty Tiles”,
“Rose Hatch”, “Rose Hill”, “Rose Lea”, “Rose Mount”, “Rose Roof”.
Each one is slightly different from the next,
A bastion of individual taste

²³ John Betjeman, “Slough,” Collected Poems 20.

²⁴ John Betjeman, “Motopolis,” The Best of Betjeman, ed. John Guest (London: Penguin, 2000) 135.

²⁵ John Betjeman, “Metro-land,” The Best of Betjeman 215.

²⁶ Betjeman, “Metro-land” 216.

On fields that once were bright with buttercups.²⁷

The end result is the loss, not the gain, of a true sense of home and security: a fact of which Greene was well aware. As suburbia hovered indecisively somewhere between the truly urban and the genuinely rural, its inhabitants became inevitably rootless, since there was nothing to put down roots into. Greene realises that those who live in the mushrooming new settlements and the cities are living, in effect, outside their own country, “in the detachment and mystery of the completely disinherited” (CS 101).

In A Gun for Sale, the fugitive Raven takes his hostage, Anne, into one of the new housing estates on the most desolate edge of the already-dismal town. It is a place that seems more suitable as a temporary hiding place than as a place to settle down. Leaving behind them the “little dirty houses” of old Nottwich (GFS 50), they enter newer territory whose houses “represented something worse than the meanness of poverty, the meanness of the spirit” (GFS 50). These are “hire-purchase houses” (GFS 50) built amid a wasteland of “scarred fields [. . .] where the grass had been trampled into the clay and the stumps of trees showed where an old wood had been” (GFS 50). The construction of these houses seems to have destroyed far more than it has created. Though they are named “Cozyholme[s]” (GFS 50), their cosiness is superficial, cheap and unconvincing. This is where Raven plans to kill Anne, out of sight of the world, in a truly desolate and lonely place to die. The spiritual meanness of these houses seems to filter through into all aspects of life: life seems to offer less than ever before.

²⁷ Betjeman, “Metro-land” 223-24.

Evelyn Waugh thought that a collapse of standards had begun during the Great War in which, for civilians,

[. . .] the real and lasting injury was caused, not by danger, but by the pervading sense of inadequacy. Everything was a 'substitute' for something else, and there was barely enough even of that.²⁸

He saw the worst effects of this situation in the younger generation who had been growing up at that time, and had come to "turn instinctively to the second rate in art and life."²⁹ Capitalistic western society was following the lead of the USA into an ever-increasing consumerism, a hollow and unconvincing "civilization" built upon packaged food and man-made fabrics. The modern England relied upon artificiality in its every form: the "tinned fruit, tinned meat, tinned milk, tinned beans / Tinned minds, tinned breath" so despised by Betjeman.³⁰ This same post-war lifestyle had been recorded slightly earlier by T. S. Eliot in The Waste Land in his depiction of the bedsit life of the typist who, arriving home from work, "clears her breakfast, lights / Her stove and lays out food in tins."³¹ Her life, too, seems mechanized and sparkless; she is described as "bored and tired,"³² indifferent to her lover and only relieved when he is gone once more; she "[p]aces about her room again, alone / She smooths her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone":³³ this is a life in which modern conveniences prove insufficient to make drab, empty

²⁸ Evelyn Waugh, A Little Order (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977) 11.

²⁹ Evelyn Waugh, A Little Order 11.

³⁰ Betjeman: "Slough" 20.

³¹ T. S. Eliot, "The Fire Sermon," The Waste Land, The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1969) 68.

³² Eliot, "The Fire Sermon," The Waste Land 68.

³³ Eliot, "The Fire Sermon," The Waste Land 69.

existences more meaningful. Whichever way one looked one found examples of this unconvincing “progress.”

Greene’s own hometown, Berkhamsted, was not free of the taint of the modern world, ancient as its roots were. Berkhamsted had become part of Metroland; although it was not a new town, it was one in which the old, the beautiful and the noble were being overshadowed by the brand new, the ugly and the negligible. In the mid-thirties Greene writes: “I returned to the little town a while ago [. . .]” to find “my old home” (LR 4), with its “dim drab high street” (LR 5), much as it has been for years without end. But the town has nonetheless been changed by the arrival of the “estate agents’, the two cinemas, the cafés”; the signs of the old town with which he grew up are now only “faint” (LR 5). And Greene can no longer feel a simple home-comer’s affection for the town: he looks with the eyes of an outsider and sees that, for all its memories, the place “had no real hold. [. . .] You couldn’t live in a place like this” (LR 5). This rootless restlessness applies, not only to Greene and Berkhamsted, but also to England as a whole: “England was like a magnet which had lost its power. There was nothing any longer to hold you to it. It shook you off” (“The Other Side of the Border,” NS 216). It certainly shook Greene off, again and again, into foreign places in the 1930s.

Greene had the luxury of being able to escape when inter-war England became too boring, too anaesthetizing; millions of people at the same time did not have that advantage, crammed into the unsanitary and decrepit slums or pushed out of sight onto new housing estates far from friends and family. Though his fiction picks up faultlessly on the mood of that era, Greene did not suffer its worst miseries. Looking back, he remarks that “[f]or me it was the period of the Hunger Marches and the

General Strike,”³⁴ yet while he expresses sympathy for those who were genuinely hungry and without hope at that time, he was, of course, not one of them. In fact, during the General Strike he was very much on the side of the Establishment (continuing his work at the Times and patrolling as a special constable) and, like many of his age and class, was rather heedless of the seriousness of matters: to him it was all “a game, a break in the monotony of earning a secure living” (SL 175). But at the time of the strike he was still very young, only recently graduated from Oxford; his social awareness would develop noticeably during the 1930s. Even so, Greene stands apart from many of his fellow writers in this period, since he did not demonstrate their eagerness for what Valentine Cunningham calls “Going Over” to the proletarian side of life.³⁵ Greene remains always bourgeois in as much as he (like his characters) retains a belief in the importance of individuality, whereas for other writers of the thirties, as Cunningham notes, “[t]he proposition of the loss of self in the socialist plurality undoubtedly held extreme allure [. . .].”³⁶ In contrast, the very last thing either Greene or the majority of his characters seek is the “loss of self”: if the matter of personal identity is a puzzle and a problem for them, they wish to resolve that problem, not merely run away from it.

Greene was, and would remain, firmly middle-class. While his writing shows him to have been able to empathise with those working-class men and women who had the worst kind of life in the thirties, he did not share the embarrassment of men like Orwell, who compared the hardships of everyday working-class life with his

³⁴ Couto, Graham Greene: On the Frontier 207.

³⁵ Valentine Cunningham, British Writers of the Thirties (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 211.

³⁶ Cunningham 220.

own middle-class insulation and saw that life was “very different for a member of the bourgeoisie, even such a down-at-heel member as I am. Even when I am on the verge of starvation I have certain rights attaining to my bourgeois status”: that is, the right to be his own man, controlling his own fate, and treated meanwhile with decency and politeness.³⁷ In contrast, Orwell hates the “passive rôle” which has been forced upon the workers by men of his own class.³⁸ But Greene does not share Orwell’s shame at his relatively privileged and comfortable lifestyle, perhaps because he does not consider that anybody, whatever his class or income, can be truly comfortable in a time when Britain is so very unsettled. Nor does he share Orwell’s thoroughly socialist convictions, though Orwell had expressed hopes that Greene might become the first Catholic “fellow traveller.”³⁹ Greene had been a member of the Communist party for a mere two weeks during his time at Oxford, largely in the hope that membership might enable him to travel to interesting foreign places; as he matured his inclination for consistent political involvement seemed to decline still further. In Ways of Escape Greene comments:

I think of those years between 1933 and 1937 as the middle years for my generation, clouded by the Depression in England, which cast a shadow on this book [England Made Me], and by the rise of Hitler. It was impossible in those days not to be committed, and it is hard to recall the details of one private life as the enormous battlefield was prepared around us. (WE 34)

Yet “one private life” is exactly what Greene does concern himself with throughout his fiction and particularly in the 1930s, when his characters are still young, inexperienced and uncertain figures, who are only just learning their places in the

³⁷ George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (1937; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989) 44.

³⁸ Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier 44.

³⁹ George Orwell, “Letter to T. R. Fyvel,” Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, vol. 4 (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968) 497.

world and seeking their authentic identities. Greene has stated that his interest in politics is complete only when they are a matter of “life and death”:⁴⁰ when politics strike at the individual or when the individual strikes back.

Even if the desire for commitment was felt, to find a suitable object for that desire was difficult. Greene has admitted that, in political terms,

[. . .] I never went the whole hog like Auden, Spender, Caudwell. [. . .] I suppose I am suspect because I have never involved myself in the ideology of politics. My ambiguity makes me suspect to the literary and to the Catholic establishment.”⁴¹

But politics are not the whole of life, and even if Greene and his characters are not “at home” in the political arena—being unwilling to subscribe automatically to other people’s ideologies—they still hope to find somewhere in life some kind of home or secure sense of belonging, and that may well entail personal commitment: “If you live at all you become involved,” as Greene commented in an interview in later life.⁴² But perhaps in the 1930s Greene’s characters are simply not ready for involvement yet; the homelessness of a character like Anthony Farrant is a reflection of his total detachment from the world around him. He is not really living but only existing, simply passing time and hoping against all hope.

In so uncertain a time it can hardly be considered surprising that the younger generation of Englishmen and women despaired for their own futures. While the new suburban building developments were carving up the countryside, covering fields with second-rate, seemingly impermanent houses, the young rebelled with an

⁴⁰ Couto, Graham Greene: On the Frontier 217.

⁴¹ Couto, Graham Greene: On the Frontier 207.

⁴² Couto, Graham Greene: On the Frontier 219.

“almost fatal hunger for permanence.”⁴³ Yet, instead of planning to build up their own society on firmer foundations, as they might logically have done, the young (particularly in the 1920s) refused to play any serious, adult role in life. They effectively resigned from a world in which they could not believe, and from which they felt excluded. As Father Rothschild explains to Outrage, in Waugh’s Vile Bodies: “People aren’t content just to muddle along nowadays [. . .]. They say, ‘If a thing’s not worth doing well, it’s not worth doing at all.’ It makes everything very difficult for them.”⁴⁴

Greene too registers this contemporary inability to persevere with anything in the modern age. Everything is done for short-term (preferably financial) gain and, if a business venture or even a relationship encounters any difficulties, it is simply discarded. In this world, a house need no longer be also a home. In an article from 1938, Greene examines the inability of people to settle down in the “Metroland” of modern England: “Neither country nor city, a dormitory district [. . .]” (“Twenty-Four Hours in Metroland,” R 73). He describes one particular example, of a deserted house, formerly belonging to a newly married couple who have now separated:

The soil exacted no service and no love: among the beechwoods a new house was for sale. It had only been lived in a month: the woods and commons were held out by wire. The owners, married last December, were divorced this summer. Neither wanted the house. (R 74-75)

Now the house stands empty and neglected; the gardener, who tells the story of the house’s brief, sad history, has more loyalty to the place he has worked on so carefully, and ultimately so pointlessly, than do its owners.

⁴³ Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies 111.

⁴⁴ Evelyn Waugh, Vile Bodies 111.

Everything in this modern world of commuter districts is short-term and impersonal. Nothing lasts because nothing is expected to last. People do not connect with the world around them—the young couple have been living in an island of their own making among the trees—and they do not allow the time for attachments to grow. This “Siberian dormitory” of a town is cold and empty (R 75). The commuters do not truly live here; they only sleep and leave again. Greene likens the attitude of property owners in the area to that of people playing Monopoly: “The object of owning property is to collect rent from opponents stopping there. Rentals are greatly increased by the erection of houses and hotels . . .” (R 74): they are not seeking a “home” at all. A house here offers merely “an acre of land, a desirable residence for as long as the marriage lasts, no roots, no responsibility” (R 75).

Since permanence and continuity have become such unattainable ideals in this period, Greene’s concept of home seems to reside in the past, especially in childhood. Much has been written, both by Greene himself and by critics of his work, upon the significance for him of childhood and its continuing influence upon the adult.⁴⁵ John Atkins considers: “The secret of Greene’s personality lies in his childhood, as he would be the first to admit [. . .],”⁴⁶ and Atkins remarks in particular that, by the 1930s: “Childhood was beginning to take on for him the character of a primitive land from which the tribe had emerged, only partly freed of its totems and

⁴⁵ See e.g. Philip Stratford, Faith and Fiction (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1964) 48-62; also Roger Sharrock, Saints, Sinners and Comedians: The Novels of Graham Greene (Tunbridge Wells: Burnes & Oates, 1982) 26-36, and Grahame Smith, The Achievement of Graham Greene (Brighton: Harvester, 1986) 7-12.

⁴⁶ John Atkins, Graham Greene, new rev. ed. (London: Calder and Boyars, 1966) 46.

tabus.”⁴⁷ In his work, Greene frequently looks back into the first years of life for insight into all that follows: “It is in those early years that I would look for the crisis, the moment when life took a new slant in its journey towards death” (“The Lost Childhood,” CE 13). The childhood years are man’s “home” of sorts, for as T. S. Eliot notes:

Home is where one starts from. As we grow older
The world becomes stranger [. . .].⁴⁸

Greene himself remarks that “[p]eople are made by places [. . .]” (LR 5) and considers: “If I had known it, the whole future must have lain all the time along those Berkhamsted streets” (SL 11). For Greene, no one is ever truly free of the influence of the childhood home: it offers the most idyllic memories we possess—our purest taste of simplicity and happiness—and also our truest understanding of absolute fear.

Greene admired Herbert Read’s autobiography of his childhood—“one of the finest evocations of childhood in our language” (“Herbert Read,” CE 263)—which dwells at length upon the small, complete idyll of life on a self-contained farm. It is a childhood in many ways very different from Greene’s own, most obviously because Greene was a town child and Read very much a child of the countryside. Greene’s childhood home was not the whole world to him, even from a very young age; he could not, therefore, have written, as Read did in describing the local landscape of his childhood home: “This [. . .] was my world and I had no inkling of any larger world [. . .].”⁴⁹ Yet even if Greene was always aware of the outside

⁴⁷ Atkins, Graham Greene 46.

⁴⁸ T. S. Eliot, “East Coker,” Four Quartets, The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1969) 182.

⁴⁹ Herbert Read, The Innocent Eye (London: Faber, 1933) 10.

world, at times it could still seem distant, even irrelevant: Greene's descriptions of the gardens around his first home are perhaps less idyllic but scarcely less self-contained than Read's remembrances of the gardens and orchards of the farm. Greene describes the clearly-defined and separated areas of the tennis court, flower garden, greenhouses, croquet lawn, kitchen garden, stables, etc., each with its own particular memory for him. Each area seems enclosed, shutting one either in or out with gates, and Greene describes the school sanatorium as being "behind yet another wall" (SL 44). Even this early in Greene's life there were subtle suggestions of imprisonment and containment. Yet though his remembrances always seem to lead to thoughts of death in various forms—pouring salt onto snails, hitting his brother over the head with a croquet mallet in a childish attempt at fratricide, catching and preserving butterflies (SL 42-45)—they are not inherently unhappy memories. And certainly the gardens and grounds seem, to Greene's memory, huge enough to provide much of interest: "[. . .] what a vast estate the whole place seems to me now, when I live, like most of my contemporaries, an apartment-life between bedroom and sitting-room" (SL 44). But, unlike Read, Greene felt his containment, and was aware of an outside world which he longed (and contrived) to see, and to take part in. He used secretly to go to meet with some working-class boys from the town to play cricket (SL 45). Already secrecy and escape appealed, as when he would play truant, hiding in the bushes, happy simply to be "safely hidden" from detection (SL 66). The young Graham Greene clearly had a far greater a taste for adventure and exploration than did Read.

There was another crucial quality in Greene's childhood that was absent from Read's: the experience of absolute and paralysing fear. In Read's opinion: "Pity,

even terror, are emotions which develop when we are no longer innocent” and thus have no place in the child’s mind.⁵⁰ This is not Greene’s belief: the home of his infancy, while feeling constricting, also seemed to be insufficiently protecting. Even the route up the stairs to his bedroom held potential dangers for the young Greene: the “narrow climbing stair on the way to bed was the point of terror: anything might lurk there in ambush” (SL 47); he also recounts a recurring childhood dream of a witch who lurked in the linen cupboard blocking his route to the safety of the nursery (JWM 140). Innocence, for Greene, need not preclude fear; in fact he notes at the end of Journey Without Maps how he heard a child in a tenement crying: “a child too young to speak, too young to have learnt what the dark may conceal in the way of lust and murder, crying for no intelligible reason but because it still possessed the ancestral fear, the devil was dancing in its sleep” (JWM 313). Just like the isolated tribes Greene saw in Liberia—with their bush devils who could supposedly blind anyone who dared to look at them, and their instinctive and traditional belief in the supernatural—children, Greene suggests, understand implicitly that there is no such thing as total protection. A home, a family, a mother are not enough to keep away all the terrors of the world, or to prevent the uncanny intrusion of the strange into the familiar.

For Greene, childhood is a different world from that inhabited by adults, and innocence is the decisive factor in that difference. One may be afraid of the unknown or the supernatural, but, in early childhood, evil and ugliness are all but incomprehensible in the ordinary, everyday world. The world is still a beautiful place for Greene’s fictional children, as it never can be again for adults. In the short

⁵⁰ Read, The Innocent Eye 22.

story, “The Innocent,” Greene illustrates the gulf between innocence and experience in his depiction of the return of a man to his hometown. From the first moment the man regrets that he has brought a girl, Lola, with him. Anywhere else, he would feel perfectly comfortable with her, but here his adult lust seems out of place, as though he is sullyng his memories of childhood purity. The central event of the visit is his discovery of a message he had hidden as a young child for a girl to find. He is shocked to find, instead of a naïve childish image, “a picture of crude obscenity” (“The Innocent,” CS 456). But gradually it dawns on him that it is only his adult mind which perceives the obscenity—as a child “[. . .] I had believed I was drawing something with a meaning and beautiful” (CS 456). The road to adulthood seems to his shame to have been not so much a progression as a regression: “It seemed a long journey to have taken to find only Lola at the end of it. There is something about innocence one is never quite resigned to lose” (CS 455). But childhood homes must be left behind, and innocence cannot be retained for ever. The native cannot return in Greene’s fiction to the childhood home without finding it—and himself—changed, unfamiliar, unheimlich.

The perfect childhood home is an escapist’s ideal, something of which Greene can never entirely approve, though he can understand the desire for its protection in times of confusion and threats. The childish home is one where there is no serious danger, but only because there is no real life: nothing ever happens there. The routine goes on and on for ever, and life passes you by. In “The Basement Room,” Greene describes the first contact of the young boy, Philip, with the world beyond his insulated home life, while his parents are away on holiday, leaving him in the care of the Baineses. Philip begins to come alive as his parents leave, when he ceases to live

a carefully monitored and limited child's life. He becomes instead "a happy stranger in his home" (CS 457), seeing from a new perspective, and seeing into the Baineses' life for the first time. He is allowed into rooms he has never seen before—the limitations are removed—and even as he goes downstairs into the basement where the Baineses live he feels: "[. . .] this is life. All his seven nursery years vibrated with the strange, the new experience" (CS 458).

This time promises to be an adventure and an awakening for him, but the experience goes horribly wrong: Philip unhappily reveals to the manipulative Mrs Baines that her husband is having an affair, and the end result is a terrible argument in which Baines kills his wife. Merely to witness such events would be traumatic enough for a child, but Philip is expected to become involved, to protect his friend Baines from the police. The strain is simply too much for the child, who has already tried and failed to run away from the whole situation. He stubbornly refuses to participate in the deception: he betrays his friend in his desperation to return to a simple, secure life—to home—but bears the emotional scars of his actions for ever. He spends the rest of his life hiding from the potential stresses and burdens inherent in life, dying in old age, alone and utterly uninvolved. Having been shown the horrors of the adult world too soon, he chooses never to be a part of it: "Life fell on him with savagery, and you couldn't blame him if he never faced it again in sixty years," the narrator judges (CS 478). There are those who are not strong enough to face life without a shelter, a refuge to run to when things are difficult or painful, and Philip is one of these.

Childhood, with its simplicity and security, is a safe haven into which Philip retreats in time of stress and pain; yet for others in Greene's fiction of this period

childhood is the very thing from which they wish to escape. Childhood memories of home and family are indelible, whether good or bad, and the recollection of the childhood home can be a burden, a past which can never truly be left behind. In Brighton Rock, the greater part of Pinkie's corruption is provoked by the wretched childhood home he remembers in the ironically named "Paradise Piece": as Grahame Smith notes, "Pinkie is not simply a metaphysical creation; what he is is at least partly conditioned by environment."⁵¹ In his absolute desperation to leave behind him the misery of that environment, by whatever means, Pinkie has elected to become rootless, to deny his past and his home; and yet his home will not let him escape so easily. The physical structure of his childhood home is no longer standing, and Pinkie is glad—"[...] it looked better as air" (BR 174)—but the atmosphere of the place lingers. Though he would be happier homeless, with no reminders—no proof—of where he comes from, homelessness seems to be an impossible dream of freedom for him.

When Rose appears in his life, he finds that they shared much the same dingy, impoverished childhood, and she becomes a permanent, walking, talking reminder of that hateful past, an inescapable burden: "He thought he had made his escape, and here his home was: back beside him, making claims" (BR 109). When confronted with Rose, Pinkie can no longer deny what he really is: she reminds him uncomfortably of his helplessness and littleness, his insignificance. How can a boy from Paradise Piece hope to compete with the money and security and confidence that his rival gang leader Colleoni enjoys? He is not like these successful, cosmopolitan men: though he longs for the insulated "peace" of Colleoni's life, for

⁵¹ Grahame Smith 65.

the hotels, the respect and the money, he is not part of that slick, shiny world, for his true habitat is found in poverty and failure. When he visits Rose's parents in their cramped, evil-smelling house in Nelson's Place, he is returning to his own roots as well as to hers; negotiating with Rose's parents for their permission for their marriage, "[. . .] he bargained for his sister and felt no desire. . . ." (BR 177). They are already like family, made by the same kind of people, the same events, the same place. And that place provides Pinkie with ample justification for the escape he has made into the freedom of Frank's house and the gang; it even seems to justify the extremity of that escape: "He looked with horror round the room: nobody could say he hadn't done right to get away from this, to commit any crime . . . [. . .]" (BR 177).

Greene is very aware of the matter of inheritance: the fact that physically and (especially) mentally we are created by our parents, and by the homes we are born into; indeed every ancestor may have a role to play in our make-up. Like Pinkie, Raven—the doomed anti-hero of A Gun for Sale—feels that there can be no escape from his past, from his miserable childhood, uncared-for and unwanted, and from the ever-present memory of his mother's suicide. "Sometimes you want to begin fresh [. . .]," he complains (GFS 149), but his parents and the children's home he has been sent to have ensured that he will never do this:

He had been made by hatred; it had constructed him into this thin smoky murderous figure in the rain, hunted and ugly. His mother had borne him when his father was in gaol, and six years later when his father was hanged for another crime, she had cut her own throat with a kitchen knife; afterwards there had been the home. He had never felt the least tenderness for anyone, he was made in this image and he had his own odd pride in the result; he didn't want to be unmade. (GFS 76-77)

Raven has read of psychoanalytical theories, and to him these mean that "[. . .] you carry a load around you; you are born with some of it because of what your father

and mother were and their fathers . . . seems as if it goes right back, like it says in the Bible about the sins being visited” (GFS 150). The burden is far-reaching and seemingly inescapable.

Another of Greene’s earliest, most youthful, fictional heroes holds much the same attitude: Andrews in The Man Within disclaims all control over his own creation, his identity, insisting: “My father and mother made me. I didn’t make myself” (MW 46). He is particularly troubled by his father’s influence, which he believes has made him into the cowardly traitor he has become. Andrews hates his father for his brutality and cruelty, and worries that he too has (or will) hurt people just as his father hurt him and his mother. When Elizabeth takes her own life rather than be assaulted by the intruders in her home, Andrews feels as though he himself has struck the blow that killed her: “[. . .] I did kill her, or my father in me” (MW 229). His difficult task is to prove to himself that he is more than an inferior copy of his father: “[. . .] was there anything of himself that was not his father?” he wonders (MW 226). Ultimately he asserts his independence and proves himself his own man, and yet he can only achieve this by choosing to die, to end the inheritance finally.

For Greene, inheritance need not be a matter of shared blood or of genetics. Pinkie has deliberately removed himself from his parents’ lives and from their small world; instead he has allied himself with Kite, his predecessor as head of the gang. After Kite’s death Pinkie has taken on Kite’s role completely, and the responsibility absorbs him. Looking at the familiar town, Pinkie thinks:

It had been Kite’s territory, it had been good enough for Kite, and when Kite had died in the waiting-room at St. Pancras, it had been as if a father had died, leaving him an inheritance it was his duty never to leave for strange acres. He had inherited even the mannerisms, the bitten thumb nail, the soft drinks.

(BR 161)

This is the life Pinkie would have preferred to have been born into, the father he could have admired and emulated; now he has chosen Kite as his role-model, just as Andrews selects Carlyon for hero-worship in The Man Within. And just as Andrews's choice makes him a wanderer like Carlyon, so Pinkie's ties him to the same territory that once was Kite's.

But perhaps an inheritance so deliberately chosen never quite seems to fit. Pinkie may wish for a different childhood, but it is his infancy and youth in the despised Paradise Piece that have really moulded him, not Kite's influence. Eventually, and inevitably, the assumed mask slips and the teetotal Pinkie takes a drink: "I'm not a drinking man and I'm not a marrying man,' the Boy said. 'So you think. But I'm liking one, so why shouldn't I like the other. Give me a glass'" (BR 183). He has been acting a part which he wishes could be a reality and in which he might be genuinely at home, but now the boy from Paradise Piece must face up to his true fate. He can emulate Kite no longer, and must somehow be himself. Andrews too realises that his admiration for Carlyon is not enough to enable him to become like him. Though Carlyon tells him: "We are made to be friends" (MW 179), that is not enough to save Andrews from his natural inheritance: "[. . .] how different it would have been if Carlyon had been his father. [. . .] Carlyon would have satisfied his mother's heart, and he himself would have been born with will and backbone" (MW 176). But this is only an insubstantial fantasy; Andrews has instead been shaped and doomed by his home life, by his parents, and by what these have made him.

Greene recognises the fact that there are certain things that belong to us instinctively—or to which we feel that we belong, in which we are at home—

because they form part of our natural inheritance, and we can therefore understand and accept them effortlessly. This is true not only on a personal level, but also on a cultural level. As a film reviewer, Greene comments upon the landscape and setting of a Finnish film, *Fredlös*, noticing that it seems somehow familiar even to English eyes. He compares it favourably with the relatively alien landscapes and events of American movies, suggesting that, to us as Europeans, the scenes of snow and firs seem “more intimately part of our inheritance” (MD 156); in spite of obvious differences between England and Finland, our homelands are not entirely dissimilar, for both are essentially “small scale” (MD 156), comforting and almost cosy. Greene notes that English people are familiarized with the Nordic landscape from childhood, for it is there that most of our common fairy-tales are set; as a result, the wolves and reindeer of the film are “images from our racial memory, as the Texas plains will never be [. . .]” (MD 156). The USA certainly could never be a home for Greene: it is too large, too alien, too impersonal.

Home, to the English in Greene’s work, is by preference a small, protective place. Coming from a country as small and cramped as England, and isolated by the sea all around, the characters develop a mentality to suit their homeland. Hence, even though Anthony Farrant has been travelling the world since a very early age, he still aims to settle in places that have an English character or at least an English quarter. Thus in Sweden he feels for the first time truly foreign and at a loss: until now, at least mentally if not physically, “[. . .] he had never [. . .] been far away from England. He had always worked in places where others had established the English corner before he came [. . .]” (EMM 88). Home for men like Anthony is always a “corner” somewhere, something suitably small-scale and unimposing. As his sister

struggles to find him work within Krogh's firm and within its huge, internationalist, ultra-modern glass and chrome building, Anthony resists her efforts, insisting: "I'd be lost in a business like that. I'm used to something smaller" (EMM 28). England is his natural inheritance, but his wandering nature has dispossessed him.

Greene has remarked that it was his own teenage experience of psychoanalysis that first made him realise the significance of inheritance upon our lives. Initially "[. . .] I was led to think no further back than to my childhood, and my relation with my father and mother" (SL 92), although in later life he realised that the influences went much further back in time, and that his own youthful rebellion was "only one of a long string of rebellions stretching back into the years before I was born" (SL 92). Most significantly, to Greene at least, his paternal grandfather had abandoned his family in England to return to the Caribbean island on which he had lived as a young man. He had been compelled to return to England after illness, but the island home of his youth apparently retained a magical allure in his mind:

We always leave too soon the Coral Islands where we have happily been wrecked, but the memories of Mount Misery with its head buried in the clouds, of the green wastes of sugar-cane, the black sands of Dieppe Bay, of the little church of Christchurch outside which his brother lay under a grey slab of stone were powerful enough to draw back the middle-aged man from the family life at Bedford with eight children and enough money to live on in reasonable comfort [. . .] (SL 93)

This desire to be "shipwrecked" far from home and family, free from responsibilities, constraints and duties, was apparently, in Greene's view, a recurring impulse for the Greene family. The child's wish for escape from the demands and restrictions of the adult world all around him seems to Greene never to wane even in the adult mind.

Graham Greene's own first attempt at escape was prompted by his difficult relationship with school. In his fictions, school is presented as a surrogate home, but

a generally unsuccessful one, because it is always ultimately an institution. The most adaptable can fit in, make alliances, gain approval and take away fond memories into adulthood; for the rest, school is an alien place that must be survived as best one can. So it is for Anthony Farrant in England Made Me: like Greene himself, Anthony ran away from his hated school, but was forcefully advised by his sister to return. He did so, but it seems that her judgement was faulty; she wonders whether all his failures and his restlessness stem from that point. Greene's attitude to school in his fiction is based on his own experience at Berkhamsted School, his first taste of exile, the place "where the misery of life started" for him (SL 12). Greene's authorised biographer, Norman Sherry, describes the "profound culture shock" felt by Greene when he became a boarder rather than a day-boy at the school where his father was headmaster,⁵² "totally cut off from the secure life that had succoured him."⁵³ Greene himself recalls that at the age of thirteen he had "left civilization behind and entered a savage country of strange customs and inescapable cruelties: a country in which I was a foreigner and a suspect, quite literally a hunted creature, known to have dubious associates. Was my father not the headmaster?" (SL 72). From that point onwards, his schooldays were filled with "monotony, humiliation and mental pain" (SL 86). The green baize door which divided the family's living quarters and "home" from the bleak discomfort and misery of the schoolrooms is Greene's most prominent motif from his school days, emphasizing his sense of divided loyalties as both pupil and headmaster's son and ultimately his feeling of estrangement from school life and his "fellow" pupils. Sherry remarks: "The green baize door was to

⁵² Norman Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 1 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989) 68.

⁵³ Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 1, 69.

become the division between heaven and hell, the gate that separated Eden from the wilderness of the world,”⁵⁴ and there was surely a particular agony for Greene in the knowledge that all the time refuge was so very close and yet still utterly unattainable.

Greene is suspicious of loyalty towards one's school, because it seems to him to be artificial and contrived. A family has ties of blood to hold it together; a school has nothing concrete with which to stake its claim. In The Old School, Greene collects the school memories of a number of writers, and, though their recollections are not exclusively favourable, they generally demonstrate greater affection and loyalty than Greene can even comprehend, far less feel. Greene wonders why a pupil “should feel more loyalty to a school which is paid to teach him than to a butcher who is paid to feed him.”⁵⁵ The possibility of feeling love for a place which to him is little better than a prison—with its rules, its cruel inhabitants and the apparent impossibility of escape—is unimaginable to him. Greene demonstrates the proximity in his mind between school and prison in It's a Battlefield: the minister's private secretary and the Assistant Commissioner visit the prison where Jim Drover is being held awaiting his execution. As they drive there, the secretary points at a building and asks whether this is the prison, but it is actually a “school for girls” (B 12). One of the prison staff boasts of their care of the inmates: “It's just like a school,” and “[w]e look after 'em just like children” (B 14), but for Greene this is not so much a recommendation of the quality of British prisons as an indictment of the starkness and brutality of British schools.

⁵⁴ Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 1, 34.

⁵⁵ Graham Greene, ed., The Old School: Essays by Divers Hands (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984) 236.

Even those of his characters who are less completely hostile than Greene himself to their old schools still demonstrate a strange and complicated ambivalence towards them. In England Made Me, Minty never really leaves his schooldays behind him—it is school attitudes and rules that guide him in his adult life. Even his language still contains traces of the schoolyard: “Ex for All, thought Minty. The school phrases stung his lips, but they were always first to his tongue” (EMM 99). His attitude to his school contains elements of a host of emotions: “He hated and he loved. The school and he were joined by a painful reluctant coition, a passionless coition that leaves everything to regret, nothing to love, everything to hate, but cannot destroy the idea: we are one body” (EMM 99). In Minty’s case, school was his one experience of a (very imperfect) home, the only place to have given him a sense of identity and belonging, however flawed. He was devoted to his school, though it did not (and could not) return that loyalty or that love. His present-day insecurity stems largely from the premature loss of that first home. He was not even able to spend his full quota of years at Harrow; he was “not expelled but taken away by his mother. Everything was very quiet, very discreet: his mother subscribed for him to the Old Boys’ Society” (EMM 99). And so Minty learned that he did not belong, he was “unhomed” in the world.

If the public school education of people like Greene, during and after the Great War, was difficult and uncomfortable, it nevertheless did its job, as it had done for generations. It filled Greene and his contemporaries permanently with old-fashioned pre-war ideas, with codes that no longer applied in the real world. Hence the nostalgia of Greene’s fictional characters; for men like Anthony Farrant and Minty, in England Made Me, home is rooted in remembrance. They remember wistfully

their own pasts—their earliest, most innocent and carefree years—but more importantly, they are consumed by a nostalgia for something—security, values—which they themselves have never truly known, but which has been instilled in them by their schools and by the older generation of their families. Farrant particularly is rooted in a past he is too young to have experienced at first hand. He has adopted the habits and memories of men one or two generations older than himself: out for the evening with his sister he urges her, in the colloquialisms of an earlier generation to “shake a leg,” and, as the evening progresses:

The more he drank, the further back he plunged in time. His slang began the evening bright and hollow with the immediate post-war years, but soon it dripped with the mud of the trenches, culled from the tongues of ex-officers gossiping under the punkas of zero hour and the Victoria Palace, of the leave-trains and the Bing Boys. (EMM 32)

In doing this he has adopted an idealized version of “home,” because in reality he has never had a home that he hasn’t ultimately run from. Just as Minty carefully nurtures his links with the school he was compelled to leave so shamefully and prematurely, desperate to manufacture the sense of belonging which the Old Boys dinner brings him (“It keeps us in touch. One evening in the year when one’s not a foreigner” (EMM 104)), so Anthony constructs his own background within the framework of a bygone era.

This nostalgia stems from an envious desire to share in other people’s rootedness. In the girl from Coventry, Loo, Anthony finds his last chance to settle down and is determined this time to take it, though he is perfectly aware when he talks of going “home” to England, that “[. . .] we haven’t a home. It’s a manner of speaking” (EMM 228). In It’s a Battlefield, Conrad Drover drifts in the same hopeless fashion; having bought a gun, he has nonetheless not dared to make a stand

for his imprisoned brother's sake. He rebukes himself inwardly for this failure and feels "a strange homesickness" (B 185-86) as he imagines how differently events could have ended: "[. . .] he recalled the opportunity for murder with the same poignant sadness as a city-bred child might remember a field of grass or corn" (B 186). This is a very abstract homesickness, for a lost chance of happiness, for someone else's home. His memory is of something desired but never possessed, just as he desires, and indeed loves, Milly, his brother's wife, in a way which can never involve possession or security. In The Man Within, Andrews experiences a similar longing when he happens upon Elizabeth's cottage, and quickly finds that for him it represents a home in its most simple and comforting form. When he leaves, he is glad of an excuse to turn back: "I was homesick for here," he tells Elizabeth. But this is not, and can never be, his home: he is rootless and unable to settle. The home he is looking for here is an illusion, just as men like Farrant and Minty delude themselves when they imagine that they have any ties to anyone, anywhere in the world, except each other—the people Greene refers to as the "fellow outsider[s]" (WE 37):

[. . .] they were really only happy when they were together: in the clubs in foreign capitals, in pensions, at the old boys' dinners, momentarily convinced by a wine they couldn't afford that they believed in something: in the old country, in the king, in 'shoot the bloody Bolsheviks,' in the comradeship of the trenches [. . .]" (EMM 223)

Such Englishmen are "the refuse of a changing world" (EMM 222); they are flawed and damaged by life, unable to cope in the modern, international, capitalist world. "[W]e live in a shrinking world," Orwell observed in the thirties,⁵⁶ and, in a

⁵⁶ Orwell, George. "Inside the Whale," Inside the Whale and other Essays (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962) 18.

shrinking world, England too becomes ever tinier and more insignificant. For a man like Farrant who defines himself by his Englishness, and by all the moral conditioning this entails, the change is catastrophic. His sister, Kate, may hope to set him up in the overseas business which has made her secure and established, but he doesn't share her ability to move with the times, to merge into the soulless internationalist success of Krogh's Sweden: "[. . .] he was hopelessly lost in the world of business that she knew so well, the world where she was at home: he had a child's cunning in a world of cunning men [. . .]" (EMM 6). Kate tries to convince him of the progressive nature of the firm, and indeed of the world she inhabits, telling him: "[. . .] we're internationalists there, we haven't a country" (EMM 6). Her words may have the tone of a boast, but this pride is lost on Anthony. The idea of internationalism is far from appealing to him, since he is, by his own admission, "dusty" (EMM 8), old-fashioned and national. He admits that Sweden and the modern way of life are not for him. In fact, they seem to be uncomfortable even for their advocates, for Kate and Krogh. Kate too misses the "gentleness and kindness" of "the poor national past" to which her brother clings (EMM 167). And Krogh, in spite of his business success, is an interloper, out of place in his own country: "like a man without a passport, without a nationality; like a man who could only speak Esperanto" (EMM 127). It may be modern to dispense with roots altogether, to make everyone alike; but if nobody can be a stranger, then nobody can be at home either.

It is evident that Greene is very much aware of the way in which the word "home" stands not only for one's own private world, but also for one's country: a place which is home, and which provides a sense of identity for millions of people.

But if a sense of national belonging is desirable, it is also elusive. It is particularly hard for the very individual, independent characters in Greene's work to ally themselves closely enough with their countrymen to feel genuinely part of Britain. Valentine Cunningham has described Greene's characters as "marginal people,"⁵⁷ and they certainly feel themselves to be living on the very periphery of society, even in their own homeland. Nationality is clearly an arbitrary thing in a work like It's a Battlefield, in which Jules Briton (a name which has been deliberately chosen for him by his mother in her bitterness against the French husband—Jules's mysterious father—who left her) fails to live up to his name. He feels no real bond with England or Britain, living alone, without family, left to "fight his way in a land which was only his by an accident of birth" (B 45). If patriotism is a logical result of an era in which Britain was very much threatened by foreign enemies, Greene's characters nonetheless find it difficult to participate, to believe in the country as a real, living entity.

Indeed, Greene's England is a noticeably difficult place to fit into—its codes and conventions are closed, learned in infancy and in schools or other institutions, and kept for life. Thus they are almost impossible for foreigners to penetrate, and very nearly as difficult for its own children to understand. The Assistant Commissioner in It's a Battlefield returns from years working in a foreign country, only to feel more isolated, excluded and alien than he ever did abroad. Sitting alone in a car being driven through the London streets, he is acutely aware of his inability to understand the lives that are being lived around him, and feels estranged from—and oddly inferior to—the young working-class people he sees around him, buying

⁵⁷ Cunningham 373.

fish and chips, chattering, and clearly feeling comfortable in their own worlds as he cannot in his:

They were poor, they were overworked, they had no future, but they knew the right tilt of a béret, the correct shade of a lipstick. [. . .] They are admirable. he thought, and as the car left the crowds and the tramlines, he was saddened for a moment like a man leaving his home. (B 12)

He repeats the phrase “I don’t understand” almost automatically, like a mantra: “It was one of his favourite expressions [. . .]” (B 8). Understanding is crucial to belonging; for the Assistant Commissioner, returning to a country he no longer recognises as his own, neither understanding nor belonging is possible. Just as the foreign agent D. is baffled in The Confidential Agent by the mysteries of English customs, speech, actions and so on, so years of absence in a distant land he loved have made the Assistant Commissioner a foreigner in his own country.

Greene’s characters may love the idea of the old welcoming England, but the modern day England of the 1930s is anything but welcoming or inclusive. The family unit seems to be disintegrating, and with it the myth of the cosy, loving family home. People seem compelled to stand quite alone in life—“I haven’t got a people,” says Rose Cullen in The Confidential Agent (CA 71). When even the very wealthiest youth of England seems unprotected, shelterless, almost orphaned, how can there be any chance of a home for the vast majority of English people? The foreign agent D. pities Rose: though he can expect no better a life, coming from a ruined, war-torn country, he had hoped that in a peaceful country like England there could be some sense of home. Instead he sees her “standing harshly in her father’s house with a background of homelessness, private detectives and distrust” (CA 110). He tells Rose that they are both living in a “No Man’s Land”: their only chance of

escape is “to choose our side, and neither side will trust us, of course” (CA 71). It isn’t enough simply to choose a likely home, people or allegiance; one must also be chosen, accepted.

The reality of home, in that brand of modern life experienced by Greene’s characters in the 1930s, is that there is no ideal home to be found: all ideals are shattered in the end. In It’s a Battlefield the inhabitants of the miserable, isolating city are efficiently disillusioned by the lonely lives they lead in the modern urban landscape. London is not a place for happy families, but for single people with no reason to look forward to going home at the end of their day’s work. At first Conrad Drover equates home with perfection, with true love: home “should mean comfort, tenderness, knowledge, understanding” (B 189). But this is only a dream for him, and the realities of life teach him that such dreams are unattainable. He can have nothing more than a guilty affair with his brother’s wife; he cannot save his brother from prison or death and bring him home; he will never have a home or family of his own. His unhappy affair with his sister-in-law forces him to see that home, for him, is a matter of taking what he can get as he tries to forget his isolation and misery: “[. . .] home is hunger about to be satisfied, bitterness about to be forgotten, that’s all one wants of a home” (B 193). He returns shamefaced to this makeshift home, “like a dog to its vomit” (B 192). He learns that a home need not be happy, though it is nearly always more desirable than the alternative; he tells Millie, “I didn’t mean to come. I couldn’t keep away [. . .]” (B 193). “Home” here means simply two lonely, unhappy people, each attempting to comfort the other, and to take away some reassurance themselves.

This is the most basic kind of home—merely a shelter from an unkind world, a refuge. But there is no place of perfect safety in life for Greene’s characters. They would need to go further back even than childhood for that, right back to the undisturbed calm and warmth of the womb. The “battlefield” of London seems especially prone to provoke such desires for refuge—a noisy, overcrowded and hostile city. Jules Briton is another of these lonely individuals, who is longing to fit in, failing to fit in, and hoping to find somewhere and something else, though it is apparent that he is “searching in the dark for something as hopelessly gone as the sheltered existence of the womb” (B 44). The impossible, mostly unconscious, desire of the characters to return to this former place of security echoes Freud’s work on the “unheimlich.” One of the most notable aspects of the unheimlich is the remembrance of—and desire for—the womb, which can also have sexual connotations. As Freud comments:

It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This unheimlich place, however, is the entrance to the former Heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that “Love is home-sickness”; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming; “this place is familiar to me, I’ve been here before”, we may interpret the place as being his mother’s genitals or her body. In this case too, then, the unheimlich is what was once heimisch, familiar [. . .]”⁵⁸

In Brighton Rock, much of the appeal of Ida Arnold to men is rooted in her quasi-maternal qualities. She is not a mother, but she reminds the men she befriends and seduces of their own mothers. When Hale is restlessly wandering Brighton, fearing for his life, his chance encounter with Ida offers him hope of safety: “She smelt of

⁵⁸ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” Complete Psychological Works, vol. 17, 245. Greene acknowledged the influence of Freud’s work upon his own life and writing: “Freud to me is almost a father figure [. . .]” (Graham Greene, “The Last Decade,” Time and Tide Autumn 1984: 48).

soap and wine: comfort and peace and a slow sleepy physical enjoyment. a touch of the nursery and the mother, stole from the big tipsy mouth, the magnificent breasts and legs [. . .]” (BR 16). Though she does appeal to Hale—and other men—sexually, her greatest, most lasting appeal is as a maternal figure. She herself is aware of this: “It comes of me being so big, I suppose. They think I’ll mother them” (BR 19). Ida’s appeal is deeply physical, the embrace of the lover and the mother at once: the mother’s body offering comfort to the weary and the fearful, and blotting out the world. Even in his desperately frightened state, looking over his shoulder for the appearance of Pinkie and his gang, Hale is half-ashamed of his attraction to Ida; his need for her “shelter, knowledge, common-sense” (BR 8) cannot overwhelm his conviction that this need makes him less of a man: “[. . .] pride bobbed up again, taunting him, ‘Back to the womb . . . be a mother to you . . . no more standing on your own feet’” (BR 8). But his awareness of his motivations makes him no less powerless to overcome them. Ida is like home to him, and the need for a home (in the sense that a child might understand the term: mother, protection, rest) is an admission of weakness. Hale needs a protective shell to keep him from the dangerous world outside. Failing to find one in time, he perishes.

But even the dream of the security of the womb has its own particular menace. Hale may long for the security of a mother’s body, but the security threatens also to stifle. Freud notes:

To some people the idea of being buried alive by mistake is the most uncanny thing of all. And yet psychoanalysis has taught us that this terrifying phantasy is only a transformation of another phantasy which had originally nothing terrifying about it at all, but was qualified by a certain lasciviousness—the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Freud, “The Uncanny,” Complete Psychological Works, vol. 17, 244.

It is the helplessness of the situation that so appals those of Greene's characters who find themselves similarly trapped. D. is haunted throughout The Confidential Agent by a memory of "the air raid of December 23 when he was buried for fifty-six hours in a cellar" (CA 8). Such a confinement has the power to move a character to near-hysteria—"[...] he remembered the dead tom-cat close to his face: he couldn't move: he just lay there with the fur almost on his mouth" (CA 84). The experience has left D. terrified of enclosure, especially underground. When he has to go down in a lift into an underground station, he has to force himself against all his instincts: "He had never been below the surface of a street since the house had caved in on him—now he watched air raids from a roof. He would rather die quickly than slowly suffocate with a dead cat beside him" (CA 92). The most uncanny thing about being buried alive, in Greene's work, again, is how the familiar suddenly becomes strange, incomprehensible, terrifying. Much of D.'s memory is focussed on the dead tomcat, on its fur on his face, not on his own pain, or even his fear of the whole situation.

Similarly, when war comes to Britain, too, Greene writes of another man, Arthur Rowe in The Ministry of Fear, who finds himself trapped in an exploded house, with his own familiar room turned upside-down and rendered not only shattered but unrecognisable and alien. Acclimatising to his devastated room, Rowe feels

as though he had been walking in his sleep; he was lying in a strange position, in a strange place. He got up and saw an enormous quantity of saucepans all over the floor: something like the twisted engine of an old car turned out to be a refrigerator. He looked up and saw Charles's Wain heeling over an armchair which was poised thirty feet above his head: he looked down and saw the Bay of Naples intact at his feet. He felt as though he were in a strange country without any maps to help him, trying to get his position by the stars. (MF 25)

Thus it is possible for your home to turn against you, suffocating and confusing. The familiar may become newly strange at any moment. Equally an alien place may be rendered apparently familiar and comforting by the smallest detail of sight, sound, smell or atmosphere. Greene himself was certainly prey to such unheimlich feelings about unfamiliar places: when he went to Africa for the first time, he was surprised by the instant familiarity of the country (JWM 104). In his film reviews he mentions the same phenomenon, commenting in his review of Fredlös that “[. . .] the lovely dark Lapp faces convey a nostalgia, as when we see a village or a house for the first time which somehow we seem to recognise” (MD 156).

The longing for a return to the mother’s body, or to one’s most familiar home, seems to be related to her absence or its distance; Greene’s characters generally feel the most affection for the people, places and things they are denied. Greene reveals in his autobiography that his own mother was a remote figure in his childhood, idolised from a distance, though he insists that this caused him no pain: “I associate my mother with a remoteness, which I did not at all resent, and with a smell of eau-de-cologne [. . .] She paid occasional state visits to the nursery [. . .],” at which times she seems to him an august and queenly figure who is able to “eliminate all confusion” (SL 17). Mothers are absent, or scarcely described in much of Greene’s fiction; difficult relationships with fathers take precedence, as in the cases of Anthony Farrant and Andrews. Home and family seem totally alien concepts to such men: Andrews’s father made a suitably adventurous life for himself as a sailor and smuggler. For all his faults, he is in some ways still as much a hero to Andrews as is the gentler figure of Carlyon: his father’s masculinity is something Andrews tries, and fails, to live up to. Though Andrews recalls perfectly well that his father was

“domineering, brutal, a conscious master, not chary of his blows to either child or wife” (MW 30), still his own lack of resemblance to that cruel man seems to Andrews to be a personal failure, rather than a success. For while Andrews senior was a failure as a husband and father, he seems nonetheless, both to his son and to the crew of his ship, to have been a great man, “a legend” (MW 68), a hero of sorts. And, as Alison Light judges, “heroes are by definition incapable of domesticity.”⁶⁰ Home is too small a place to contain the energy and the scope of such figures; they must roam further afield and accomplish other things than domestic happiness. A hero makes a poor father.

In contrast, mothers are much less dominant, less confrontational, and therefore less problematic figures. The only peaceful and simple relationship that Andrews has ever experienced was with his mother, “a quiet pale woman who loved flowers” (MW 69). Home became suddenly idyllic when his father was absent, since mother and son made a natural, harmonious pairing, sitting pressing flowers together until their peace was suddenly broken: “[. . .] he found us. We were so busy that we didn’t hear him when he called” (MW 69). By the time of the action of the novel, destroyed by her marriage, Andrews’s mother has already “died with the serene faithfulness of a completely broken will” (MW 31). Mothers, and surrogate mothers like Ida Arnold, are the figures who could offer a home in the sense of a refuge—the chance to relive the safety of infancy—if only men (and especially fathers) would cease their domination for long enough.

The peace shared by Andrews and his mother seems surreptitiously enjoyed, something forbidden, fleeting and unreal: when the father returns it is though he has

⁶⁰ Light 7.

disturbed the secret meeting of two lovers. Among the many overlapping dictionary definitions Freud offers for the term heimlich (a word often interchangeable with its equal and opposite, unheimlich) he lists “concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others.”⁶¹ The longing felt by Greene’s characters for the mother and for the womb reveals a desire for a very personal, private home, away from all other people and unknown by them. This is clearly not so much a home as a hiding place, or perhaps an animal’s lair. Such a hiding place has an air of unreality: Andrews, happening upon Elizabeth’s home as upon a mirage in the desert, chooses to make it represent the things he is looking for—safety and peace—though in reality it can offer these no more than any other place. In the light of day, remembering his arrival the night before, exhausted and desperate, Andrews realises that “[. . .] unexpressed in conscious thought, he had felt of this house as of a cottage in a fairy-story [. . .] It had given him shelter and a sense of mystery; it had not belonged to the world which he had known [. . .]” (MW 23-24). Daylight reveals the cottage to be far less isolated than he had imagined, and Andrews feels “unreasonably grieved” at this discovery (MW 26). The fairy tale is exposed as an illusion: this is no refuge for the Hansel and Gretel of his dreams.

A crucial factor in this desire for a hiding place, therefore, is the need for darkness, and for the obscurity and oblivion it can offer. In Brighton Rock, Ida Arnold seems to Hale “like darkness [. . .], shelter, knowledge, common-sense; his heart ached at the sight (BR 8). But Hale is, like Ida, unusual in Greene’s work for the simplicity of his desires; others are more complicated creatures for whom darkness offers less an escape from life than a different life. Rose flees from Ida

⁶¹ Freud, “The Uncanny,” Complete Psychological Works, vol. 17, 223.

Arnold's insistent questioning like an animal into the darkness of its lair: "Driven to her hole the small animal peered out at the bright and breezy world: in the hole were murder, copulation, extreme poverty, fidelity and the love and fear of God [. . .]" (BR 151). This darkness not only protects against that which one does not want to face, but it also contains the whole of that real, vital life, which is the only life that matters. Darkness is composed of good and evil as opposed to the watered-down life of right and wrong, the shiny, bright, modern, carefree existence enjoyed by Ida. The darkness is a contradictory place: a place that offers safety and protection from the outside world, but one that also has its own dangers. Hale, who is killed by Pinkie's gang at the outset of Brighton Rock, meets his painful and terrifying end because of his longing for darkness, because "[f]rom childhood he had loved secrecy, a hiding place, the dark, but it was in the dark he had met Kite, the boy, Cubitt, the whole mob" (BR 17). Once he has moved into these dark, unknown regions, he is entirely alone, and there is no one to save him when the blow finally falls, as he has known that it must.

One of the greatest attractions and dangers of darkness is that it allows those characters who are oppressed by the demands or threats of the world or of other people to find absolute isolation. But isolation, in the wrong place, when it is enforced and not desired, can be soul-destroying. What Krogh is only beginning to realise at the outset of England Made Me is that it is difficult, or even impossible to feel at home when you are alone. Friendship—or even simply human companionship—is a necessary ingredient of any home. But he has cut himself off from his roots, his childhood home, his family, his country. He is unwilling and even unable to find friends, to cross "the vast distances which separated him from other

men” (EMM 40). Krogh seems simultaneously protected and threatened by his isolation: sitting alone in a taxi travelling through the streets of the city in darkness, he feels cocooned by the shell of the car, keeping him safely apart from the mass of humanity outside:

He lay back in the car and watched the faces swim up to the window through the mist, recede again. They flowed by in their safe and happy anonymity on the way to the switchbacks in Tivoli, the cheap seats in cinemas, to love in quiet rooms. He drew down the blinds and in his dark reverberating cage tried to think of numerals, reports, contracts. (EMM 43)

Krogh lives this lonely, functional life because it is all that he has ever known, and all that he feels capable of. But his isolation is not entirely deliberate: he is aware that even if he did not choose to keep himself apart, he would still naturally live outside the centre of life. The taxi is a safe haven, a place where he can pull down the blinds and shut out the world, but it is also a “cage.” He is confined to his own small district of life, which is more a prison than a home to him.

In his offices, Krogh is surrounded, not by other people, but by the void left by their absence. He is left with himself only, with empty reminders of his success: he is, for example, surrounded by his own endlessly repeated initials:

E.K. in the waiting rooms; E.K. in the board-room; E.K. in the restaurants; the building was studded with his initials. E.K. in electric lights over the doorway, over the fountain, over the gate of the court. [. . .] E.K. flickering across the cold plateau a tribute from his shareholders; it was as close as he got to a relationship. (EMM 40)

Yet, although he begins to feel that he would prefer to be able to communicate more easily with others, to connect with them, Krogh also believes that any such connection would only put him at risk. As it is he feels unsafe in public; when a taxi-driver recognises him from his photographs in the newspapers, Krogh feels exposed, conspicuous and vulnerable. Other people exist for him only as a threat. He

considers that he has need of protection, but to arrange this would mean that the police, and probably also the press, would learn the secrets of his business, and would get too close to him: “It came home to him that he could not afford to be protected. [. . .] he felt his isolation for the first time as a weakness” (EMM 43). It is the immensity of his success that has isolated Krogh: he has money, his own firm, and power within that field, but once outside the gates he becomes less than nobody. Everybody knows him by name, sight and reputation, but keeps him at a distance, forcing him back into the only sphere he knows—business—and making it his prison. The glass of the modern building allows him to look out at the world, but maintains its invisible barrier at all times: “[. . .] Krogh was surrounded by Krogh’s. The cold clear afternoon sky roofed in the cube of glass and steel” (EMM 36). Even within his own company building he feels uneasy and out of place, surrounded by art he has commissioned because it is supposedly the best, the most modern, and not understanding a thing about it. The intensely modern fountain—a simple, stark cube—that Krogh has chosen to install in the courtyard of the building

accused him of cowardice. He had pandered to a fashion he did not understand; he would have much preferred to set in the fountain a marble goddess, a naked child, a nymph with concealing hands. He paused to examine the stone; no instinct told him whether it was good art or bad art; he did not understand. (EMM 36)

Kate Farrant believes that Krogh is simply living in the wrong world: “He’s one of us, fighting for his own security like one of us, he’s not the future, he’s not self-sufficient, just one of us, out of his proper place” (EMM 196). Krogh was not born for this level of success, but for the same companionable obscurity as Anthony: now instead he finds himself trapped alone in the wrong circle. Because he was not groomed for success, he does not understand it; he fails to realise that success need

not mean keeping people at an arm's length. So even in the theatre he keeps himself apart, booking the seats on either side of him in order that he may sit in "a small wilderness of his own contriving" (EMM 39). Krogh wants to feel at ease with other people, to have friends rather than business associates, but he simply does not know how to break through his isolation. One might suggest that Krogh's unease stems from his sense of being, as Kate suggests, out of place: the poor boy elevated to extreme wealth but remaining aware that he was not born for this life. Certainly his rise in social position has not been an easy one: "[. . .] after twenty years of prosperity he was still uneasy, still afraid of a slip in manner which would betray his peasant birth" (EMM 51). But this is not the whole story. Krogh is no more at ease with the poor than with the rich, and never was so. He is perfectly aware of his failings: "[. . .] I must enlarge my scope—the human side. He told himself: there must have been a time when I was at ease with other men, and tried to remember [. . .]" (EMM 56). But there is nothing to remember: he has always been alone, always excluded. He is an outsider by nature: this is a core personality trait, and as such it is an unalterable fact. To varying degrees the same is true of virtually all of Greene's outsider figures: though circumstance and location may conspire to isolate them, they also isolate themselves, either deliberately or else (and more frequently) unconsciously, instinctively.

The impossibility of any real fulfilment of the need for human companionship for Greene's characters is made clear in the desolate, isolating atmosphere of London in It's a Battlefield. Milly Drover is oppressed by the emptiness of the house where she lives: as she sits waiting for her sister to return, "[t]he thought of the empty floors above her head was becoming difficult to bear" (B 71), so she wanders the empty

rooms, trying to fill them with her own presence, to bring life back to the dead space. She wishes that her brother-in-law, Conrad, had not left the house because he had been “a fellow drop of human life to make the vast emptiness of the house less complete” (B 69). A house without people to fill it can never be a home; it is merely a shell. Now that her husband is away from her, in prison, his absence makes the house seem alien and uncanny and the bed they have shared for the last five years becomes like “the map of a strange continent, a blank space waiting to be explored through many years (B 70).

Some of the miserable lonely places that Greene’s characters call home—by default, because they have no better home—really can offer nothing better than the refuge of an animal’s hole in the ground. They are bedsits, rooms in boarding houses: single rooms, sparsely furnished, without home comforts or human company. No character better illustrates this cheerless existence than Minty in England Made Me; he has lived in Stockholm for twenty years but is no closer to making a home for himself than when he arrived. He inhabits the archetypal Greeneian miserable lodgings: a single room, four floors up; his only home comforts are “the brown woollen dressing-gown hanging on the door, the cocoa and water-biscuits in the cupboard, the little Madonna on the mantelpiece, the spider under the tooth-glass” (EMM 136). The spider he has kept trapped under the glass for the past few days is the nearest thing he has to a companion; an odd relationship develops as Minty watches it endure its imprisonment: “He wondered how long it would live. He watched it and it watched him back with shaggy patience. It had lost a leg when he put the glass over it” (EMM 78). The spider is no more damaged or trapped than Minty himself, who lies in his own darkened room “humbly tempting God to lift the

glass” which keeps him similarly trapped and alone (EMM 138). But Minty’s desire for a better life is half-hearted: he is at least safe where he is now. David Pryce-Jones remarks that “Minty can live like a creature flung down a well [. . .],”⁶² in a mood of total resignation; Pryce-Jones judges that, like the spider, Minty “clings to life [. . .] asking for neither more nor less and receiving accordingly”.⁶³

Minty is oddly content and secure in this place, for all his bitterness towards the people and experiences which have brought him here. As he walks up the long flights of stairs to his room, he is approaching a place of safety:

[. . .] treading upwards from Purgatory (left behind on the other bank the public lavatories with the smutty jokes, envy, and the editor’s dislike, mistrust, the nudist magazines) to Paradise (the house groups, the familiar face flannel, the hard ascetic bed), mounting unscathed, I, Minty. (EMM 135)

As long as he is left alone he can reconstruct his world in a more favourable shape—remembering his days at Harrow with nostalgic pride, and the warm feeling of inclusion, choosing to forget his unhappiness there and the quiet removal which followed. He lacks human contact, and feels the lack, but he is safer without it: when Anthony and Loo visit him in his lodgings the result is that he is pushed out of the only place that he can call his own. He encourages them: “[. . .] make yourself quite at home” (EMM 156), but they seem from the outset more at home and at ease than he does, simply because they are together, a couple. Anthony and Loo had been feeling uncomfortable together before arriving at Minty’s room, but now: “He [Minty] was so lonely, so isolated that he drove the others back into the

⁶² David Pryce-Jones, Graham Greene, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1973) 26.

⁶³ Pryce-Jones 27.

companionship they had lost; even a shared uneasiness, a shared bickering, had a friendly air compared with his extreme friendlessness” (EMM 156).

It is failure—financial, social and spiritual—that brings this isolation, and leaves the characters trapped for the foreseeable future alone in a room, in their own individual circles of hell. It is a sure sign of Ida Arnold’s spiritual bankruptcy that, far from being dissatisfied with her surroundings, she really does find the tired room in a Brighton boarding house, or her own room in London with its cupboard containing the sum of her possessions and her life, homely:

In a glass-fronted cupboard her life stared back at her—a good life: pieces of china bought at the seaside, a photograph of Tom, an Edgar Wallace, a Netta Syrett from a second-hand stall, some sheets of music, The Good Companions, her mother’s picture, more china, a few jointed animals made of wood and elastic, trinkets given her by this, that and the other, Sorrell and Son, the Board.
(BR 48)

And in Brighton, waking up in the morning, Ida “looked round the room; it didn’t look so good in the morning light as when she had booked it, but ‘it’s homely,’ she thought with satisfaction, ‘it’s what I like’” (BR 82). She at least is not trapped: she has chosen this life for herself. It takes very little to make Ida feel comfortable, because she carries her home around with her, in her confidence and her assurance that the world is a good place, to be enjoyed as such. She always feels at home because she is oblivious to all that is unfamiliar to her—she sees only what she wants to see, and what she understands. Thus, looking out of the boarding house window, “[. . .] she saw only the Brighton she knew; she hadn’t seen anything different even the day Fred died” (BR 85). Pinkie and his gang, even Rose, all live in a different world from that which Ida knows: they live in the real world where horrible things can happen which can never be put right, where justice is meaningless. Ida lives in a

protective bubble; her ignorance is also a kind of innocence, for she is untouched (and untouchable) by the more painful realities of life. She is safely at home in her world, in her little room.

Those characters who for whatever reason lack even the boarding house room to call their own are constantly looking for places to escape into and to hide in: they seek to put “four sheltering walls” (MW 89) between themselves and the rest of the world. Even the darkest, emptiest, most uncomfortable shelter is greeted with relief. This applies in A Gun for Sale to Raven, who is hunted by the police and takes refuge in a shed in a railway goods yard with Anne, the hostage he hopes to make into a friend. The sense of refuge is more apparent than real: the police are waiting outside, to move in at the first opportunity, but in the meantime Raven has found a place where he can feel oddly at home even in the darkness and the bitter cold with no more than a few sacks to keep them vaguely warm. Even as they make their way to the yard Raven tells Anne: “I got it all fixed up for myself early this morning. [. . .] It’s going to be like home [. . .]” (GFS 121). Anne, used to a more hospitable life, judges it “a bit bare for a home” (GFS 121), but Raven judges by different standards. After his father’s execution and his mother’s suicide, Raven—parentless and homeless—was sent to live in a children’s home. His memories of that time are bitter; that past has helped to make him what he is: a loner, untrusting and untrustworthy, a criminal, a murderer, not valuing life at all. He finds a painful irony in the fact that such orphanages are known as “homes” for children:

They call them that—homes. What do you think a home means? [. . .] You are wrong. You think it means a husband in work, a nice gas cooker and a double-bed, carpet slippers and cradles and the rest. That’s not a home. A home’s solitary confinement for a kid that’s caught talking in the chapel and the birch

for almost anything you do. Bread and water. A sergeant knocking you around if you try to lark a bit. That's a home. (GFS 147)

In comparison with this misery, bareness is irrelevant if one can only find a place where one can feel safe. The main attraction of the shed for Raven is that, once inside, he is “out of the way of the whole damned world of them” (GFS 141).

Again and again, Greene takes his characters to a similar small, enclosed place for the most crucial scenes in his fictions, moving in with the literary equivalent of a film close-up, removing all outside distractions in order that his chosen characters can “come alive” (WE 29). Greene considers: “It was as though I wanted to escape from the vast liquidity of the novel and to play out the most important situation on a narrow stage where I could direct every movement of my characters” (WE 29). And just as Greene takes this opportunity to avoid temporarily the greater demands of the novel as a whole, so his fictional characters take their chance to escape the wider world for a refuge. Though the shelters may bear little resemblance to the average person's home, they perform much the same role: here, as at home, a character like Raven can be himself, free from outside pressures. The ordinary outside world is temporarily irrelevant. And Raven is not part of that world at all: he knows it only as a threat, full of enemies and distrust. Why would he not be happier away from the danger, enclosed in what Roger Sharrock describes as his “almost cosy hiding place”?⁶⁴ If Raven cannot be at home in the outside world, the world of other people, then he can at least make his own little world, his own home of sorts, however temporary.

⁶⁴ Sharrock 54.

For Raven this small, enclosed space is absolute relief to him, but he has sought it out. For others of Greene's characters in the 1930s, enclosure is enforced and undesired. One of the most persistent images of It's a Battlefield is of cages, boxes and prisons of various kinds: almost all of the characters spend their lives in various enclosures of steel, brick or glass, and they are painfully aware of their imprisonment. Conrad Drover ought to be one of the more comfortable characters: he has intelligence and has had moderate success, so that while his brother works as a bus-driver, Conrad is a clerk. In fact, Conrad is no less entrapped than his brother who spent his working hours sitting "in a steel cage driving through the rain" (B 58). Conrad's solitude is similarly complete as he sits working in his office "alone between the glass walls, isolated between his superiors and his subordinates" (B 96). Even his success at work seems precarious: "[. . .] his glass room was a tiny raft of security round which they all swam hoping to dislodge him [. . .]" (B 97). That the barriers are made of glass is discomfoting, since one cannot hide behind these walls, but must be constantly visible, and thus under threat (and painfully aware of that threat). The journalist Conder works in a similar building, in the offices of a newspaper in which each man's working space is one of a limitless number of "sound-proof boxes" (B 19). Every character in this novel has his or her own very definite place in life, though most would prefer to be elsewhere, or free to wander at will.

People's lives in It's a Battlefield, their personalities and their behaviour, are all informed by their surroundings; they are largely the products of their place. Though some rebel against this fact, most are more apathetically accepting. When Milly Drover visits the home of the widow of the policeman her husband has killed,

she finds a woman utterly resigned to her fate and place in life. The widow is unexpectedly calm and reasonable, not blaming Milly or even Jim, but Milly detects that “[. . .] Mrs Coney’s goodness [. . .] meant nothing at all. It was only her surroundings which lent her an air of positive virtue. Mrs Coney was encircled by death and crime and implacable justice [. . .] (B 99). Though she is theoretically the injured party, she is far more content than Milly: she accepts the world as it is, and is satisfied with her own place in it. She has no freedom, but she desires none: “She was as unconcerned by argument as a dead woman, a woman happy dead, who fears the removal of the nails which pinned down her coffin-lid” (B 103). This modest, ordinary home is a refuge for Mrs Coney; the very last thing she wants is to be released from her limited existence into a life which would make demands upon her, necessitate thought and action, and expose her to the risk of pain.

Mrs Coney is fortunate enough to know her rightful place, but many of Greene’s characters do not. Most of these rootless and isolated figures are from various levels of the English middle classes: Greene remarks upon “the general exile of our class,” which was to some extent his own experience (MD 142). While he may not have been an enforced outsider or exile himself, he could understand the state of homelessness and feel the pull of the foreign over the claims of home. Perhaps to some extent Greene deliberately placed himself on the outskirts of his own class, finding it useful as a writer to observe rather than to participate in events. Those characters in Greene’s work who most epitomise the state of homelessness are, like Greene, firmly middle-class, though they are down on their luck: middle-class failures such as Anthony Farrant, Minty and Andrews. Those characters who are working-class may be convincingly rootless, but they convince simply as people.

not as working-class people. They speak and act in the same way as the middle-class men and women, since Greene has placed his own understanding of alienation into their mouths. Thus they have the benefits and the burdens, and the mentality, of a public school education at second hand. Raven considering psychoanalytical theory, and Pinkie reciting and corrupting church Latin—“Credo in unum Satanum [. . .]” (BR 205)—are remarkably well-informed and self-aware, considering their positions in life and the hardships with which they have grown up. John Atkins finds that Greene’s “working class characters are not impressive. His visual observation is excellent, he can reproduce atmosphere, but there are frequent faults in his dialogue.”⁶⁵ He judges that Greene’s “seediness belongs to the lower middle-class and the shady inter-classes” rather than to the workers of the country.⁶⁶

But if Greene seems most concerned with the insecurity of the middle classes, this is not necessarily a subjective stance. He is indeed writing about the people and life of which he has most experience, but also perhaps about those people and that life which were the most palpably insecure—in a psychological sense, if not through actual danger of poverty or destitution—in the 1930s. As the English way of life shifted during the thirties, the middle classes were those with the most to lose, and, when disaster did strike, they were expected to fend entirely for themselves. In one of Greene’s short stories of this period, a young, middle-class man decides to commit suicide rather than face further years of disappointment. He has been “trying for a good many years now” to find employment (“A Drive in the Country,” CS 444), but no longer has any expectation of success. He is still dependent upon his parents and

⁶⁵ Atkins, Graham Greene 90.

⁶⁶ Atkins, Graham Greene 90.

tired of their inability to understand the plight of his generation; though they give him pocket money of ten shillings a week, “[t]hey grudge it me. They think I ought to get a job. When you’re that age you don’t realise there aren’t any jobs for some of us—any more for ever” (CS 438). It was not only the working classes who faced the problems of unemployment in this period; for the first time middle-class young men found themselves similarly without prospects. They were without even the State’s limited help, for the dole was not aimed at the middle classes; as the young man complains with bitterness and heavy irony: “I’m not an insured worker. I’m one of the ruling class” (CS 444). His social position offers him no privileges; it is only one more burden in an unforgiving world which demands above all that he keep up appearances: “[. . .] we’ve got our pride haven’t we [. . .]” (CS 444). This middle-class pride means that he must stand alone, fail alone, die alone.

It is hardly surprising that Orwell, for instance, was so inclined, in spite of the poverty he witnessed, to romanticise the ordinary working class—particularly the working-class family—for its warmth and inclusiveness, to feel that “[i]n a working class home [. . .] you breathe a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which it is not so easy to find elsewhere.”⁶⁷ In contrast, this atmosphere is generally shown to be absent, in Orwell’s work as also in Greene’s, from middle-class family life, which seems to hinder rather than help its members through its demands and criticisms, crushing them with “that deadly weight of family prestige.”⁶⁸ Greene, however, seems to be more realistic than men like Orwell; he understands that there is nothing magical about working-class life, and that “the experience of exile,” far from being

⁶⁷ Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier 107-08.

⁶⁸ Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier 106.

exclusively middle-class (though it may seem predominantly so). is “common to everyone” (MD 193). His characters show that in England in the inter-war years, working-class family circumstances too could often be anything but idyllic: in It’s a Battlefield, people like Millie and Conrad are far from close to their family, however much they love them. They may live alongside them, but communication seems at best stilted and at worst impossible. And more isolated even than these are men like Jules and Conder, neither of whom has a home or family. However, Conder has invented for himself an alternative life in which he is “Conder the family man”; he is quite capable of relating to his colleagues a tale of an imaginary case of whooping cough, suffered by an imaginary child, and of keeping up the pretence for so long that he has forgotten who he really is: “an unmarried man with a collection of foreign coins, who lived in a bed-sitting room in Little Compton Street” (B 22).

Such isolation is a symptom of urban life whatever one’s class: the anonymity which makes the city so attractive to some can backfire upon its inhabitants, keeping them apart from others even when they live amid a massive density of human life. The city is thus the natural backdrop to much of Greene’s work set in England—a place where a sense of community may be very much desired but is always absent. Yet the city does not drive its natives away with its hardships; they stay because they know it intimately, because it is the only place whose quirks and secrets they can truly understand. Greene’s characters are part of the city in which they live: Anne in A Gun for Sale knows that “London had its roots in her heart [. . .]” (GFS 227). Returning to the city by train after the action of the novel is completed, she is returning to her own familiar place of safety. Looking through the window, she sees a gang of screaming children running along a street: “[. . .] she could tell they

screamed because she was one of them, she couldn't hear their voices or see their mouths [. . .]" (GFS 227). After her unsettled life in the chorus line, moving from one dismal town to another and another, she is finally home. Similarly, in England Made Me, London is the only place where Anthony Farrant truly seems to belong, perhaps not in spite of, but because of his own poverty which blends him into the mean city which is his natural habitat: "London," he said, "there's nothing like it" (EMM 8).

This is the "home" of the homeless, and a return to London, for these characters, is like returning to the family home, if not necessarily a conventionally warm or welcoming one. London itself is like a family member, well-known and with its own personality and identity; Roger Sharrock suggests that in It's a Battlefield the city has "an independent life so that human beings are simply components in a vast automated puppet play."⁶⁹ It is London's overwhelming power and vitality that determines Greene's engagement with the city: all real human life is there. London's streets attract because they are alive and surprising and authentic, and they are the home of all extremes—of joy and terror, of exhilaration and misery. Most notably, what makes London alive is its menace, its capacity for danger. The Assistant Commissioner in It's a Battlefield shows his unfamiliarity with England—after his long absence in the East—when he assumes that England is comparatively safe and unthreatening. His housekeeper contradicts his assumption, assuring him darkly: "Them as knows what London is [. . .] would not be surprised to find their nearest and dearest bleeding" (B 194).

⁶⁹ Sharrock 61.

In sharp contrast, however, to the confusion of the Assistant Commissioner or of D. in The Confidential Agent, the true city-dwellers like Anne do know their habitat intimately and instinctively. Similarly, the young couple in Greene's story, "A Drive in the Country," are firmly attached to the urban, not the rural, areas of England. In a precursor of Pinkie's drive with Rose, they drive into the unknown landscape of the sleeping countryside, and feel themselves to be totally lost: "They belonged to the city; they hadn't a name for anything around them [. . .]" (CS 440). Outside their natural habitat they can find "nothing to catch hold of, to hold you down to this and that, adrift together in a dark vacuum" (CS 441). The countryside is another world to these ignorant children of the modern age, and indeed to Greene himself. The accepted ideal of England in the 1930s was still a traditionally rural one (Valentine Cunningham notes even in the socialist writers of that period an "unprogressive" hankering after the land and the villages,⁷⁰ which represent the "real' England that English leftists are imaginatively drawn to and want to preserve or restore," but with which most people in the twentieth century had little connection in their everyday lives).⁷¹ Yet for Greene, England is primarily an urban concept, centred firmly on London. It is a place of bustling towns and cities, not sleepy villages and fields; while the cities are full of human life and activity, the countryside seems to be populated instead only by unrecognisable creatures, sounds and sights. In Journey Without Maps, Greene remembers living in the Cotswolds as a young married man: "I had taken a cottage in Gloucestershire and the country scared me" (JWM 156). This is as much foreign territory as the African villages he describes in

⁷⁰ Cunningham 230.

⁷¹ Cunningham 234.

the same book, the people operating according to similarly incomprehensible logic or tradition. The country and Africa have even the same terrors in common: the total darkness of night, the rats and other wildlife, which leave Greene cold and shuddering with distaste (see SL 200; JWM 142-43, 147-49). Greene's own English idyll is far from traditional: his is not a green and pleasant pastoral retreat but something urban and "seedy," a place that is reassuringly shabby.

Greene was drawn to Liberia too by its promise of "seediness":

There seemed to be a seediness about the place you couldn't get to the same extent elsewhere, and seediness has a very deep appeal: even the seediness of civilization, of the sky-signs in Leicester Square, the tarts in Bond Street, the smell of cooking greens off Tottenham Court Road, the motor salesmen in Great Portland Street. It seems to satisfy, temporarily, the sense of nostalgia for something lost; it seems to represent a stage further back. (JWM 7-8)

This is exactly what Anthony Farrant is attracted to in the shabbier parts of London.

There is an affection and a sympathy which one cannot feel for the modern, the successful and the hygienic; this unconditional attachment is only satisfied by the old, the grubby and the flawed: qualities which may be found either in places or in people. It is the variety of love one feels for home, even while admitting its imperfections and failings; no amount of flaws can dim the affection, or erase the familiarity one feels. Anthony has a certain seediness about him and so does the London he loves:

[. . .] he was right when he remarked that he was dusty too: the grit of London lay under his eyes, he was at home in this swirl of smoke and steam, at the marble-topped tables, chaffing in front of the beer handles, he was at home in the one-night hotels, in the basement offices, among the small crooked flotations of transient businesses, jovial among the share pushers. (EMM 7)

Anthony is the opposite half of his twin sister, Kate: she has ambition and drive, and, crucially, these qualities lead her to succeed. When she decides upon a project, in

business or private life, she can make it happen. Anthony, in comparison, seems flawed and hopeless. Kate is “his elder by half an hour; she had, she sometimes thought, with a sense of shame, by so little outstripped him in the pursuit of the more masculine virtues, reliability, efficiency, and left him with what would have served most women better, his charm” (EMM 3). But Kate loves her twin for these unreliable traits which make him her other half, her opposite and equal: “[h]e was pain, [. . .] he was fear, despair, disgrace. He was everything except success” (EMM 11); and Anthony adds: “What a pair we are” (EMM 11).

Anthony and his sister inhabit different worlds now—she in bright, international, modern, ruthless Sweden, he still in grimy, old-fashioned, welcoming London (or any place which reminds him of it). And while Kate seems stiff and uncomfortable even in her success, whatever Anthony’s circumstances—living in miserable digs, abandoned by his young “girlfriend” because he has no money, dating an older woman because she in turn has got money, pawning his possessions, moving on when failure overwhelms him again—still he loves this seedy environment and all that it stands for to him. He tells Kate as she plans his future, plotting success for him:

“If only you could stay with me here.” “Here” was the twin dials on the gas-meter, the dirty pane, the long-leaved plant, the paper fan in the empty fireplace; here was the scented pillow, the familiar photographs, the pawned bags, the empty pockets, home. (EMM 11)

Seediness has a place in his heart; even near-destitution can feel homely. And to struggle in this way at least reminds you that you are still alive. But even Anthony is not fully alive, whatever scrapes he may get himself into and out of again. His dingy “home” and his obsession with the past are ultimately a means of retreat from life.

He and many others of Greene's characters in the inter-war years are generally unready to face the real world, but look for escapes from the difficulties and miseries which life throws at them. Instead of seeking a stimulating life—and with it a truly fulfilling home—they settle for an attempt at second best, a place that is a refuge only, while at the same time longing for something more satisfying, a sense of home and fulfilment which would also bring them peace.

Peace is like the memory of a childhood home, offering a sense of comfort and safety, the chance to be happily cocooned in the feeling that all is well with the world. Peace may be sought in many places and in many ways in Greene's fiction: when Andrews offers to leave Elizabeth alone in her cottage, to take away with him the infection of hate and violence which he fears must otherwise damage her too, for all his fears, he is unwilling to leave this place behind: “[. . .] inside he would leave someone who seemed to carry [. . .] the promise of his two selves at one, the peace which he had discovered sometimes in music” (MW 72-73). The good and the evil, the strong and the weak within Andrews are at war, but the things he loves—music, or Elizabeth, her quiet cottage or his old friend Carlyon—can calm his inner conflicts into a temporary truce. Greene comments that “[. . .] only the cinema and music among the arts have been able to convey this sense of poignant happiness, the quickness and lightness and transience of a sensation you cannot call by any name so heavy as joy [. . .]: the nearest to a Utopia poor mankind is ever likely to get” (MD 79). Why “poor mankind”?—because all its hopes are unfounded, and its Utopias prove ultimately imaginary. But the wistful hope remains for Greene and is evident even in his very earliest writing. In the volume of poetry published while Greene

was still an undergraduate at Oxford, one particular poem captures this longing for escape from the turmoil of life into an unbreakable peace; Greene writes:

Somewhere long deserts are, deep sultry peace.
Perfect release [. . .] (“The Back Porch,” BA)

Greene’s fictional characters keep searching for this personal haven of peace. It is not only the conventionally “good” characters who long to make a perfect home in peace: even while Pinkie continues to wreak destruction upon Brighton—causing chaos, lying, betraying and murdering without conscience—he still desires a peace he can scarcely even imagine. He blames the inflammatory and antagonizing world for his own sins:

He thought, it’s not my fault they get me angry so I want to do things: if people would leave me in peace His imagination wilted at the word. He tried in a half-hearted way to picture “peace”—his eyes closed and behind the lids he saw a grey darkness going on and on without end, a country of which he hadn’t seen as much as a picture postcard, a place far stranger than the Grand Canyon and the Taj Mahal. (BR 186)

Peace is totally outside his experience and his comprehension, but he desires it nonetheless (at least in theory) for its promise of escape, privacy and total solitude. It would offer an escape from the world and from himself. Rose is actually less idealistic and naïve than Pinkie in this respect: she knows that peace is not for them. In the car, driving through the night towards death, she denies his hopes:

He began softly to intone—“Dona nobis pacem.”
“He won’t.”
“What do you mean?”
“Give us peace.” (BR 284)

Peace is certainty, the ability to believe in something, anything: a very desirable and rare ability in the years after the Great War. Richard Johnstone judges that the writers of the 1930s

shared a profound need for something they felt had been lost from the world, something which would have to be replaced—belief. It was a need which grew out of the past they had in common, and it marked them, by the particular forms it took, as men of their time.⁷²

This need led men like Auden and Orwell to seek their own sense of belonging, within left-wing political beliefs. Greene dabbled in socialism, but made his own personal commitment to the Catholic Church, a similarly popular choice of belief at the time; Greene was only one of many converts in this period. But even in matters of religion Greene would not wholeheartedly involve himself: he insisted that he had been convinced into the Church by logical argument alone, not by faith.⁷³ He believed, at least at the outset, with his intellect rather than with his heart. If the Church was a comfort to him, still as a new convert it did not offer the same kind of home that Jules enjoys in It's a Battlefield as a cradle Catholic. In England Jules feels lost in a country he cannot love as his own, but once inside a church, he has entered a country to which he unquestioningly belongs:

Always in the badly lit church, surrounded by the hideous statues of an uncompromising faith, listening to the certainty of that pronouncement—peché, peché, peché—he was given confidence, an immense pride, a purpose. However lost in the café, forgetful of knives and sugar, here he was at home.
(B 148)

Involvement in the Church, it seems, is not purely an issue of religious faith and observance, but is akin to national identity. Anywhere in the world, the Church can offer a haven for those who feel otherwise rootless, a body to which to belong and to understand.

⁷² Richard Johnstone, The Will to Believe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982) vii.

⁷³ Greene told Marie-Françoise Allain: “[. . .] my conversion was not in the least an emotional affair. It was purely intellectual. It was the arguments of Fr Trollope at Nottingham which persuaded me that God’s existence was a probability. [. . .] I eventually came to accept the existence of God not as an absolute truth but as a provisional one” (Marie-Françoise Allain, The Other Man: Conversations With Graham Greene, trans. Guido Waldman (London: Bodley Head, 1983) 154).

Yet, while the Church can provide a sense of belonging and a refuge from the demands of life, it cannot offer a geographical home. It is international, joining millions across continents in a common bond, but its faith will not provide actual, local roots. Like the pilgrim in particular, Christians in general are travellers, not settlers: Cunningham notes that “[. . .] classic Christianity does not evade but reinforces a sense of earthly irresolution and restlessness.”⁷⁴ And while Greene’s characters are far from saintly, they share the Christian sense that this world is not a place that can reasonably be expected to provide security, however much they desire it. Even though, by the 1930s, Christian belief and practice have been largely eradicated from everyday life for most people, so that there is little hope now of an eternal home in Heaven, the sense of homelessness in this world remains.

In Brighton Rock, Pinkie and Rose are made even more isolated and excluded from society by their shared religion: Catholicism is another detail that marks them out as different. After their civil wedding the couple stand on the pavement outside the hotel that has turned them away, and they realise the sordidness of their position, neither of them believing in any marriage that has not been blessed by the Church. They can never have the life of simplicity and ease enjoyed by the people inside the hotel, because they are excluded not only by their class but by the impossible demands of their religion: “[. . .] they felt as if they were shut out from an Eden of ignorance. On this side there was nothing to look forward to but experience” (BR 212). Like Milton’s Adam and Eve, they stand ejected from their Paradise, uncertain where to go and what to do next: “The world was all before them, where to choose /

⁷⁴ Cunningham 412.

Their place of rest.”⁷⁵ Even with so much choice—a whole world—they can still find no real home and no rest, since they don’t belong anywhere and nothing belongs to them. Pinkie and Rose are part of the underclass of the thirties: the archetypal dispossessed. They were brought up in poverty and misery and are unable to leave them behind.

They belong, not to the modern secular world, but to a separate world where God’s laws alone have significance, but even this sense of belonging need not bring comfort or happiness in the long term: if Heaven is essential to Christian belief, then so too is Hell. Greene himself, in his childhood and earlier Catholic years, was perhaps more “at home” with the concept of Hell than of Heaven.⁷⁶ Greene’s belief began with Hell, and Anthony Burgess has remarked: “I get the impression sometimes, from Greene, that he was converted to Catholicism not out of a desire to go home to God, as it were, but out of an interest in evil.”⁷⁷ In the nightmare of the modern world, torment is more easily understood than eternal happiness. Pain is familiar territory to Greene and to his characters. Pinkie, like the young Greene, believes instinctively and totally in Hell, but is grudging in his admission of Heaven. Rose realises that Pinkie is like her—in a way that Ida could never be—because of their shared understanding of evil and pain as taught them by the Church: ““You’re a Roman too. [. . .] You believe in things. Like Hell. But you can see she doesn’t

⁷⁵ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Everyman-J. M. Dent, 1995) 12.646-47.

⁷⁶ Greene recalled how, while he was an unhappy schoolboy, “[. . .] faith came to me—shapelessly, without dogma [. . .], something associated with violence, cruelty, evil across the way. I began to believe in heaven because I believed in hell, but for a long while it was only hell I could picture with certain intimacy [. . .]” (LR 3). He also told Marie-Françoise Allain that: “I was ready to believe in the existence of evil. Many people are ready enough to accept the idea of heaven while they fail to notice the garbage at their door” (Allain 157).

⁷⁷ Philip French, “Man of Mystery: The Enigma of Graham Greene,” *Listener*, 4 Oct. 1979: 442.

believe a thing.’ She said bitterly, ‘You can tell the world’s all dandy with her’” (BR 110). Whatever its terrors, Hell is familiar to them—as familiar as home itself. This earthly hell is where they have started from in the slums of Brighton: Greene writes of Pinkie that “[. . .] hell lay around him in his infancy” (BR 81), not Wordsworth’s heaven.

Heaven is a very much more remote and insubstantial place, but one which is longed for even so as a possible future home. Even Pinkie, while revelling in his evil nature and actions, simultaneously seems to assume that one day he may be able to return to God and His Church, to seek forgiveness “[b]etween the stirrup and the ground” and go home to heaven (BR 110). In the present he is concerned only with his earthly safety and comfort, determinedly eliminating all those who might pose a threat, who know too much; but once he has made himself safe from the law, he imagines,

[. . .] then, when he was thoroughly secure he could begin to think of making peace, of going home, and his heart weakened with a faint nostalgia for the tiny dark confessional box, the priest’s voice, and the people waiting under the statue [. . .] to be made safe from eternal pain. (BR 132-33)

In comparison with this, the allure of political allegiances can only be a pale imitation. Jules Briton tries to believe in Communism, but cannot summon any enthusiasm for an organization that says a lot but seemingly does nothing. On his way to a meeting of the party he is already disillusioned, knowing what to expect, again: “Men would be making speeches to a late hour, reconstructing England in theory, abolishing poverty on paper. He felt sullen and dissatisfied [. . .]” (B 37). Like the Assistant Commissioner, who “dreamed of an organisation which he could serve for higher reasons than pay” (B 137). Jules is desperately keen to find a cause

to which he can devote himself, something that will happily absorb him, both allowing him to do some good and keeping him from being alone: “He wanted someone to say to him, ‘Do this. Do that. Go here. Go there.’ He wanted to be saved [. . .]” (B 38). But salvation and peace of mind are solely spiritual matters; they are not on the political agenda.

“30s authors were always looking out for escape from the current chaos into certainties,” is Valentine Cunningham’s summing up of the situation.⁷⁸ Greene and his characters could understand this desire: “[. . .] it’s good to [. . .] have a centre, a certainty [. . .],” the detective Mather remarks in A Gun for Sale (GFS 84). He believes he has found his own “centre” in the form of Anne, whom he is to marry. But his certainty, his peace, is very precarious; Greene seems suspicious of anything so concrete and definite. Mather is a country boy but Anne is from and of the city; it seems unlikely that they can be compatible in the long term. Even in peacetime England, nothing is certain. In The Confidential Agent, when D. comes to England from his war-torn home country, he is disconcerted by the conflict and evil that reveal themselves in this apparently safe and peaceful country. England is complacent, but it has no reason to be so. D. abandons any hopes he once held for this country:

He gave it up: this wasn’t peace. When he landed in England, he had felt some envy . . . there had been a casualness . . . even a certain sense of trust at the passport control, but there was probably something behind that. He had imagined that the suspicion which was the atmosphere of his own life was due to civil war, but he began to believe that it existed everywhere: it was part of human life. (CA 72)

⁷⁸ Cunningham 79.

Greene suggests a sense of utter exile, not only from a particular geographical area, but even from happiness, contentment and any chance of peace. D., Pinkie, Minty, Andrews et al. are the true exiled children of Eve. Being born in a place does not guarantee that it can be, or remain, a home: since D.'s youth everything has changed in his own unidentified home country, based on Spain, and similarly torn apart by civil war. People who would once have been simply his compatriots are now his enemies, fighting for the same land for different purposes. In the Embassy, D. is faced by the hostility of one of these false countrymen. On the walls are reminders of happier times:

The walls were hung with pre-war pictures. D. said, "That's the place where I was born." A tiny village died out against the mountains. He said, "They hold it now." [. . .] They were very bad pictures, very picturesque, full of thick cloud effects and heavy flowers. There was the university where he used to lecture . . . empty and cloistered and untrue. (CA 112)

His former home exists now only in two-dimensional paper form, and in his hazy memories: it is no longer real, merely a dream. He and his own people have been forced out and replaced by their enemies.

Even in a comparatively tranquil country like England, exile is a common experience. Pinkie and Rose, for instance, are what Pinkie describes as "real Brighton" (BR 274)—born and brought up in the town and well-acquainted with its most obscure areas—and yet they are no longer part of the town. Incomers are taking over, men like Colleoni, who sits in peace and security in the Cosmopolitan Hotel, running the biggest and most efficient of the gangs: "[. . .] he was snug; the huge moneyed hotel lapped him round; he was at home" (BR 76). In contrast, Pinkie, one of Brighton's native children, looks "like an alien" (BR 76) sitting there. So it is that Pinkie and his kind are becoming out-dated, surplus to requirements.

unhomed: Brighton does not need them any longer, but they have nowhere else to go. Perhaps, as Pinkie begins to realise, they could not survive away from the familiar town in any case, as it is simply too much a part of their lives and personalities: “‘I was born here,’ the Boy said. ‘I know Goodwood and Hurst Park. I’ve been to Newmarket. But I’d feel a stranger away from here’” (BR 274). As times change, he becomes a stranger even in Brighton, as do his fellow gang members. Cubitt, coming to the end of his association with Pinkie, and desperate to leave, cuts his ties but has nowhere else to go: he feels “like a man who has destroyed his home without having prepared another” (BR 189). Even those like Pinkie who do not make this clean break are steadily being pushed out as others take their places to leave them homeless, purposeless, isolated.

While Pinkie and his gang feel themselves pushed out of their native Brighton, others of Greene’s characters are driven from England itself. So, in England Made Me, Anthony and Minty share in the restlessness of an age in which, Ronald Blythe comments, “[. . .] nothing could keep the new generation at home for long.”⁷⁹ What indeed was there to keep them “at home” in England, with its dreary grey climate, its lack of prospects or opportunities, its dull and unattractive towns? The best of the towns are those that offer a gateway to foreign places, ports like Liverpool, which promise a chance of escape. And Liverpool has little to offer for its own sake in the 1930s: in his fiction Greene describes a soulless city, where nobody belongs, but only passes through: “Everybody said, ‘I’m a stranger here myself’: it was a city of strangers who caught tugs and trains and got away again as quickly as they could”

⁷⁹ Blythe 18.

(“The Other Side of the Border,” NS 209). Waiting in a Liverpool hotel, about to depart for Africa, Greene finds himself briefly content:

The huge Liverpool hotel had been designed without aesthetic taste but with the right ideas about comfort and a genuine idea of magnificence. It could probably house as many passengers as an Atlantic liner; passengers because no-one goes to Liverpool for pleasure, to the little cramped square and the low sky-signs which can almost be touched with the hand, where all the bars and the cinemas close at ten. But there was a character hidden in this hotel; it wasn't chic, it wasn't bright, it wasn't international; there remained somewhere hidden, along its muffled corridors, beneath the huge cliff-like fall of its walls, the idea of an English inn [. . .]. (JWM 11)

Following in the footsteps of the traditional English inn, this hotel offers the sense of a temporary home-from-home for travellers, the familiar in the midst of the unknown. Greene remarks:

[. . .] in the huge lounge at Liverpool, like the lounge of a country inn fifty times magnified, one was at home on the vast expanse of deep dark carpet [. . .]; at home as one would certainly not have been if the Hollywood imagination had run riot. One was protectively coloured, one was seedy too. (JWM 11-12)

In spite of its massive modern scale and decoration the hotel retains an old world quality. “The natural native seediness of the place had not been lost in the glitter of chromium plate [. . .]” (JWM 11). The atmosphere remains welcomingly old-fashioned and slightly tarnished, hence the seediness that creeps in. Greene is happy to remain in the hotel, at least until his boat arrives to take him away from England, to new places and new versions of this seediness and limited comfort.

Perhaps Greene's affection for this Liverpool hotel—and for the city itself—is related to his enjoyment of the frontier life. The hotel is only a stepping stone to foreign places, and moving on is exciting, fresh, new. Even if departure has its own inherent sadness, it has also a certain optimism (however unjustified): great things might be just around the corner. Greene also seems to feel more at home in this

place where nobody is truly at home; since Liverpool is peopled with travellers, no one can claim more of a right to belong there than he does. Ironically, Greene feels less strange in a city full of strangers, in much the same way that Michael Shelden notes that Greene was later happier during the Blitz when suddenly everyone else in Britain shared the sense of danger and insecurity that he had felt since adolescence. Shelden remarks that Greene “feels better living in a world where everyone—not just Graham Greene—is surrounded by nightmarish torments,”⁸⁰ and that the war simply saved him the trouble of travelling as far as Africa or Mexico to find “suitably realistic patches of hell on earth.”⁸¹ This is partly true; however this is not a malicious preference on Greene’s part—he takes no pleasure in the actual sufferings of other individuals—but he and his characters do feel less isolated and excluded when they no longer have to witness other people’s comfort and security.

Greene was far from unusual in the thirties for his interest in travel, almost a compulsion to be in foreign, unknown places. Much of middle-class England, and writers in particular, were engaged in the same activity at that time, escaping the cold, wet weather, and heading for the sun. They were also leaving behind them seriousness and responsibility, and looking for pleasure and freedom.⁸² But Greene’s travels offer more than simply the chance to escape England or to have fun; he and his characters are not only running from their boredom and misery, but actively searching for something in the new places they visit. There is always the hope that any one of these destinations might prove to offer a home rather than a holiday, a

⁸⁰ Michael Shelden, *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within* (New York: Random House, 1994) 243.

⁸¹ Shelden 244.

⁸² On the wider significance of the travel phenomenon in this period, see Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980).

more inviting home than the England which has been left gladly far behind. For Greene, this was especially true of Africa: arriving there, “[o]ne had the sensation of having come home” (JWM 104). This is not a comfortable home, by any stretch of the imagination, but it is one that has not yet been set on the road to ruin, in the way that America and Europe have managed with their empty “civilization,” which seems somehow more barbaric than the primitive people of unknown Liberia. Again there is a sense of going back into the past, and thus of escaping the flaws of the modern world.

Africa is like therapy for Greene: having been analysed as a teenager, he is able to use the experience of West Africa, and its influences upon him, to the same self-healing and self-revealing end in adulthood. As he travels back on a very personal journey, Africa forces Greene to face his lifelong fears: rats, moths and birds at the simplest level, but also such less concrete things as “the idea of eternal life and damnation” or the supernatural (JWM 109). His journey is not only prompted by a curiosity for the new and the strange, but also by a need to come to terms with the old and the familiar:

The method of psychoanalysis is to bring the patient back to the idea which he is repressing: a long journey backwards without maps, catching a clue here and a clue there [. . .]. This is what you have feared, Africa may be imagined as saying, you can’t avoid it, there it is creeping round the wall, flying in at the door, rustling the grass, you can’t turn your back, you can’t forget it, so you may as well take a long look. (JWM 109-10)

Early in the journey, at Mosambolahun, a break must be made with the relative comfort in which they have travelled so far, and Greene has to steel himself to face the dirt and discomfort of the native huts and communities he now has to expect.

During this last night his apprehensions increase to almost unbearable levels, causing

disturbing dreams and an unwillingness to leave behind all that he understands— every last scrap of civilization—to move into truly alien territory. Greene comments:

The process of psycho-analysis may be salutary, but it is not at first happy. This place was luxury, it was civilized in a way that I was used to and could understand. It was foolish to be dissatisfied, to want to penetrate any further. People had made their home here. (JWM 112)

But this is a denial of all that led Greene to Africa at all; the home-from-home that incomers have made there is not what Greene is looking for. He is looking, not to recreate what he already knows, but for something less safe and less insulating.

If Europe, America and even dear old England are becoming ever more corrupt and diluted versions of home, losing the qualities that once made them powerful and deserving of loyalty, then in contrast, Africa is an Eden from which man has not yet been expelled, and which he has not yet defiled. Greene judges it a virgin land and considers: “There is not so much virginity in the world that one can afford not to love it when one finds it” (JWM 174). Greene’s observations are echoed by his travelling companion in Liberia, his cousin Barbara. She, more than Greene, was aware of the pull of the superficial benefits of the Western civilization they had left behind them. “Elizabeth Arden, my flat, and the Savoy Grill.”⁸³ But even so, sitting sleepily in a jungle village one night, she could realise:

Whatever lay in the future for us, I was quite sure that it was all worthwhile. Without any doubt I would rather be out there than knitting a jumper, or going to some party or dinner in London. Never in Europe could I have found those moments of pure beauty and peace. Loveliness unspoiled.⁸⁴

⁸³ Barbara Greene, Too Late to Turn Back: Barbara and Graham Greene in Liberia (1938; London: Settle Bendall, 1981) 148.

⁸⁴ Barbara Greene 114.

Africa is, to Greene, a continent in which anything might yet happen. in which man need not make the same mistakes as he has made elsewhere. Greene notes: “The need [. . .] has always been felt, to go back and begin again [. . .]” (JWM 311): to return in the case of Africa to man’s first home, to the primitive, the raw material of humanity, and in doing so to begin anew oneself.

Even so, Greene suggests that such new beginnings will always prove ultimately futile; man will defile even his own home in the end. In The Man Within, Andrews is aware that, even if he could cleanse himself of his sins and failings, which cripple his conscience, he would only “soil” himself again and keep falling “back into the slime from which he had emerged” (MW 170). The exile of failure is inherent in human life: men are born to it, just as they are born with the curse of original sin. Experience will bring them knowledge, which will in turn bring alienation. Just as Elizabeth stands for perfection in Andrews’s eyes and thus reminds him of his own imperfection, so Africa for Greene is a reminder of how far civilized man has gone astray from his roots: “[. . .] when one has appreciated such a beginning [. . .] the pity for what we have done with ourselves is driven more forcibly home” (JWM 312).

By the latter stages of his trek through Liberia Greene has found the unsafe and uninsulated life he craves in the remote settlements along the way. Returning to the Coast exhausted, while he feels relief to be once more in the familiar and comfortable surroundings of civilization, the relief is only temporary and superficial, and it is undercut with sadness for what he must leave behind in the jungle. The Coast “is home, in the sense that we have been taught to know home, where we will soon forget the finer taste, the finer pleasure, the finer terror on which we might have

built” (JWM 280-81). This homecoming may offer rest and comfort, but there is no joy to it and no satisfaction; it actually reduces the sense of self that Greene has gained during his travels.

In his fiction of the inter-war period, Greene’s characters try every possibility they can find to make an escape from the pressures and pain of their actual homes in troubled England, and to create for themselves a better home, a Paradise. When all their efforts fail, in the late 1930s, war, destruction, violence and ultimately death beckon. It is death that offers Greene’s disillusioned characters their only permanent rest or peace. For the lucky few, the end of their lives brings them home to God, though the majority find mere oblivion: either way some kind of peace is finally and permanently attained; at the very least an ending to the exile of life is achieved. Death is an escape from a life which has little to offer but endless pain and difficulty: to D. in The Confidential Agent, Else’s murder is not the tragic end of a young life—though the circumstances appal and enrage him—but instead it is the only way that Else could escape the miserable fate which surely awaited her; for her at least “[. . .] the terror was over: she was secure from all the worse things which might have happened to her. The dead were to be envied. It was the living who had to suffer from loneliness and distrust” (CA 246-47). And D. himself is now just waiting for the end of such a life, for the chance to share in Else’s security. As the novel closes he is standing on a ship with his girl, in the best tradition of happy endings and new beginnings, but each of them knows that there are no new beginnings for them and that the end will surely be anything but happy: “His territory was death [. . .]” (CA 152). It is what he has always been accustomed to in a country where death and

violence are simply part of everyday life, and now he is returning to this territory for the last time.

The thirties were a dress-rehearsal for the coming of war and death on a massive scale: young English men and women flocked to Spain during the civil war not only because of their desire to work for a cause, but also, Greene suggests, because of a longing for violence, for action instead of torpid anticipation. Ronald Blythe remarks, in *The Age of Illusion*, that the Spanish war offered the young English the chance for worthwhile action—an offer which England at that time emphatically could not match—“To be there made honest men feel clean again. At home all was bewilderment [. . .].”⁸⁵ In Greene’s opinion, the pull was simpler, and perhaps less noble: the experience of the Spanish Civil War helped to ease the transition between world peace and world war, to “join this life to the other, in the same way that a favourite toy may help a child, by its secret appeal, to adapt himself to a strange home” (“At Home,” *CE* 448-49).

In Greene’s novels of the 1930s, death is the only means by which to resolve problems on a permanent basis; it is the only home from which one can never be evicted. Anthony Farrant’s death is a sudden and brutal one—a murder by drowning—but so futureless a man would know that he would be better off dead than growing old, losing his charm, sliding deeper into poverty. Pinkie dies an agonising death, but could not, surely, have turned back from that dark cliffside place to return to a Brighton which did not want or need him, and which could have offered him nothing but failure and a sham marriage. Lying in the dark with his new, unwanted

⁸⁵ Blythe 220.

wife beside him, it had already become clear to Pinkie that to live through that falsity and misery would not be an option for him:

The truth came home to him with horror that he had got to keep her love for a lifetime; he would never be able to discard her. If he climbed he had to take Nelson Place with him like a visible scar; the registry office marriage was as irrevocable as a sacrament. Only death could ever set him free. (BR 233)

And Raven, of all the central figures, in dying so young and so alone, only achieves his given destiny: in a subverted parallel of Christ's life and death "[. . .] he had been marked from his birth for this end, to be betrayed in turn by everyone until every avenue into life was safely closed [. . .]" (GFS 207). This world is not a place for a man like Raven, it is merely a hurdle to be overcome: "The only problem when you were once born was to get out of life more neatly and expeditiously than you had entered it" (GFS 207).

Death here is a necessary part of life, an inevitability, which must be accepted if one is ever to be happy and settled, but such acceptance is generally lacking in inter-war society. In Orwell's Coming up for Air, George Bowling notices, on returning to his altered hometown, that the new cemetery is at the very limit of the town, keeping the dead as far from the living as possible: "Every new town puts its cemetery on the outskirts. Shove it away—keep it out of sight! Can't bear to be reminded of death."⁸⁶ And Greene notes the same fear and pretence in the modern England he is writing about. Thus when he returns to England from Mexico, his previous hatred for the brutality of the Mexican people and way of life is overshadowed by the realisation that England is worse in its way. It may not be violent, cruel and blatantly corrupt, but its faults are perhaps less honest. The

⁸⁶ Orwell, Coming Up for Air 190.

unreality of this supposedly civilized life strikes him, and Mexico seems suddenly the more authentic home. D. comments in The Confidential Agent: “You have to love your home for something—if only for its pain and violence” (CA 151); Mexico, like D.’s homeland, has plenty of both, but England is so superficially comfortable that it is simply numbing. Sitting in Church on his return, Greene feels that the atmosphere of his homeland manages to lessen the effect even of religious faith:

Mass in Chelsea seemed curiously fictitious; no peon knelt with his arms out in the attitude of the cross, no woman dragged herself up the aisle on her knees. It would have seemed shocking, like the Agony itself. We do not mortify ourselves. Perhaps we are in need of violence. (LR 272)

Violence will soon be part even of English lives, with the advent of a second war. Greene suggests that it cannot come too soon, to save his contemporaries from the living death of unreal modern existence. The outbreak of the “Phoney War” is a disappointment, hopelessly anticlimactic as nothing changes after the initial panic. Sitting in a shelter, Greene waits for death to come to fulfil the expectations of a nation:

The telephones were cut off, the anti-aircraft guns were set up on the common outside, and the trenches were dug. And then nothing happened at all—the great chance of death was delayed. The motor-cars came cruising back along the Spaniards Road and through Hyde Park; poverty and lust called to each other as usual in the wintertime early dark. (LR 272)

Since his understanding of the feeling of being “at home” does not preclude discomfort, even wartime Britain can be comforting and homely, even with the threat of destruction and death at every turn, or perhaps because of that threat. The uncomfortable England of recent times, the decaying remnants of the outdated old England are meeting their doom, clearing the way for a new England where life can be genuinely vital and honest and fresh, uncluttered by the past, and filled with

promise for the future. Once the war is truly under way and the destruction has begun in earnest, Greene concludes:

That, I think, is why one feels at home in London—or in Liverpool or Bristol, or any of the bombed cities—because there life is what it ought to be. If a cracked cup is put in boiling water it breaks, and an old dog-toothed civilization is breaking now. (“At Home,” CE 450)

The temporary homelessness of war will prove worthwhile—Greene seems to suggest—if it enables the construction of a new and vastly improved home afterwards.

Once its effects begin to be felt, to seem real, war should offer more of a home than the previous fictitious peace of England in the twenties and particularly the thirties. The peace in fact is proved to have been merely nothingness, underneath which an invisible war has been fought all along. By October 1940, in the same essay, perversely entitled “At Home,” Greene is able to write of the adaptability of the British people in facing the stresses, demands and dramas of wartime: “One gets used to anything: that is what one hears on many lips these days [. . .]” (“At Home,” CE 333). The people of Britain are virtually living in the air-raid shelters, losing their individual homes and identities, yet happy in this new communal world, where people pull together, instead of competing, and where all have a place. Strangely, the threat of losing their homes at any moment by the whim of fate and the explosion of a single bomb seems to make people feel more “at home.” They can be happy because life is real now: it has shown its true colours, and its true pain; there is no shelter. This, says Greene, is where we belong.

Chapter Two:

Lost in No Man's Land: In Search of a Spiritual Home.

For Greene, the outbreak of World War Two induced a surprising emotion—relief. At last there was some resolution of the ever-increasing anxiety and anticipation that had filled the 1930s. Yet in the first six months of war, as Norman Sherry notes, “[. . .] the home front was comparatively safe and quiet [. . .].”¹ As a result, Greene enjoyed almost a holiday atmosphere, writing from London that “[l]ife here [. . .] is really rather restful; so pleasant to be free from all the crises of 38-9.”² The state of war was no longer something to be dreaded; it had finally arrived, but had not yet made itself painfully felt for the population at home, in Britain; much of the old life still continued unaltered. This left the British people in a sort of limbo, a country certainly not at peace, but not yet evidently at war. This was the period of the “phoney war” (EA 47), a time Evelyn Waugh recalls as “that odd, dead period before the Churchillian renaissance, which people called at the time the Great Bore War.”³

As time went on, the war eventually made itself felt in everyday life; now Greene could enjoy the novelty of wartime, its strangeness, and the sense that this was what he, and indeed all of society whether or not they realised it, had been waiting for, even hoping for—a taste of uncomfortable, even painful, reality in a life that would become “just and poetic” (“At Home,” CE 450). He had no longer any need to go to Africa or Mexico in search of danger and risk: they would instead come

¹ Norman Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 2 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994) 33.

² Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 2, 33.

³ Evelyn Waugh, Put Out More Flags, (1942; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1943) Dedicatory Letter to Major Randolph Churchill.

to him. In his novel of 1943, The Ministry of Fear, Greene's hero, Arthur Rowe, feels himself to be "at home" in the wreckage of bombed London:

Now in the strange torn landscape where London shops were reduced to a stone ground-plan like those of Pompeii he moved with familiarity; he was part of this destruction as he was no longer part of the past—the long weekends in the country, the laughter up lanes in the evening, the swallows gathering on telegraph wires, peace. (MF 38)

Rowe's exile from the now-out-of-date, peaceful English way of life has been forced by his awareness of his guilt as the killer of his own wife: such a man, he feels, must be out of place in peacetime, but not amid the random violence and cruelty of war. He is already an expert in such "arts."

This war and its effects are the constant backdrop to Greene's work in the 1940s; if middle- and upper-class England had been aware of a shift of values, of a decline in society from the First War through into the thirties, now a break with the past became truly inevitable. Life would be changed completely and the British people uprooted from all that had been familiar and comfortable. Evelyn Waugh described the background that helped to shape his own work during the early stages of the war as a "bleak period of present privation and threatening disaster—the period of soy beans and Basic English."⁴ To Waugh the Second World War heralded the death of the old aristocratic, country-house way of life and the coming of a new age, of which he could not approve: the age of Hooper, the distinctly second-rate young officer in Brideshead Revisited. He is "a sallow youth with hair combed back, without parting, from his forehead, and a flat Midland accent [. . .]."⁵ Hooper, unlike the novel's central character, Charles Ryder, has entered the army without any love

⁴ Evelyn Waugh, Preface, Brideshead Revisited (1945; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951) 7.

⁵ Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited 13.

for it, and without any idealistic hopes—“He had come to it reluctantly, under compulsion [. . .]. He accepted it, he said, ‘like the measles’. Hooper was no romantic.”⁶ But this was not to be a “romantic” war, by any standards. There would be no poets like Brooke or Owen this time; the old ideals of heroism had died during the last war. Ryder remarks that “Hooper became a symbol to me of Young England [. . .]”;⁷ it seems to Ryder a lazy, ignorant England, lacking in all that he and generations of English gentlemen have held dear, lacking especially any notion of dignity, duty, national pride or honour. Much has indeed been lost: Harold Nicholson remarks in July 1943 upon the contrast between the attitudes of the younger generation and their elders. These younger men and women, he considers, have

been brought up in an age of denial rather than in an age of affirmation, and they are not exposed, as my generation were exposed, to the pressure of conventional habit. It is not only that they lack leaders; they have no heroes; although they behave heroically they scarcely believe in heroism. They have an instinctive suspicion of all the older patterns of achievement [. . .]. It is customary and right that the younger generation should repudiate the standards and conventions of their predecessors, but the tragedy of our submerged generation is that, as yet, they have evolved no standards of their own. They possess qualities of energy and intelligence greater than any we possessed, yet they float sullen and dispersed upon an ocean of disillusion.⁸

As this younger generation—Hooper and his like—take their places in society they must force others out of their way: now it is men like Waugh and Ryder who must feel uncomfortable and marginalized. Guy Crouchback, hero of Waugh’s Sword of Honour trilogy, views himself as “natural [cannon] fodder. [. . .] ready for immediate

⁶ Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited 14.

⁷ Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited 15.

⁸ Harold Nicholson, “Marginal Comment,” Articles of War: The Spectator Book of World War II, ed. Fiona Glass and Philip Marsden-Smedley (London: Grafton, 1989) 267.

consumption.”⁹ It seems more pragmatic—in Guy’s opinion at least—that men like him should sacrifice their lives than that the young should do so: men like Guy are upper-class and middle-aged with outlooks shaped by an out-of-date past: who needs them now? Elizabeth Bowen too realised that the middle classes of England were no longer secure and focused, but lost and uncertain of their role in society. As Robert Hewison has remarked, Bowen’s wartime short stories “convey an atmosphere of retreat and decay in the genteel middle-classes, out of place since Edwardian times.”¹⁰

Greene has his own version of the “usurping” Hooper-generation, found most easily in the less-reputable sections of society, among those who are keen to make money and succeed even at the expense of others: “the boy from Borstal and the girl from nowhere at all—from the draper’s counter and the semi-detached villa” (“When Greek Meets Greek,” CS 393). But Greene has perhaps more sympathy for these people—unscrupulous as he shows them to be—and less class-prejudice against them than Waugh. The boy and girl in “When Greek Meets Greek” are young, relatively innocent, undamaged as yet by the world. They are fortified in their quest for experience and success by “the knowledge that the world is always open to the young” (CS 393). But they should take care to enjoy their success while it lasts, for the world does not remain open for ever. Many of Greene’s characters from the 1940s onwards are, like Greene himself, no longer young, innocent and free—their worlds are closing in, pinning them down into unchosen, uncomfortable places. For

⁹ Evelyn Waugh, Men at Arms, The Sword of Honour Trilogy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) 20.

¹⁰ Robert Hewison, Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939-45 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977) 91.

Greene himself, firmly (though not necessarily comfortably) settled into the life of the writer, husband and father, the war offered one chance to escape the weight of the everyday for a time, or possibly, since there must be danger involved, for ever.

Though Greene was called before a draft board in the winter of 1939, and left his interview expecting to be called up within the next few months, he did not in the end take up his expected place in the infantry (see WE 89-91), but was instead absorbed first into the Ministry of Information in London and then into MI6 work in Africa: “[. . .] it had not proved so easy to escape in war the many-armed embrace of Intelligence” (WE 91). This war was different from the last, or any other, in that it did not take place only on the distant battlefields of continental Europe, but intruded into and overwhelmed the whole of life, for everyone. Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders judge that the Second—not the First—World War was really “the first people’s war,” because, quite apart from conscription and the huge numbers of deaths on the battlefield which the two wars shared, the second added the novelty of “The Home Front”: now everybody was to be involved in the war effort.¹¹ There was to be no escaping this war, as Greene realised even before it had started. In 1939, just before the outbreak of war, he was invited to take a ride in a bomber, and this experience of one of the weapons of this modern war left him shaken, physically and mentally, as he realised that this time men faced the prospect, not of trenches and human contact, but of “a sitting war from which it is impossible to run”; this was to be impersonal killing from a distance (“Bombing Raid,” Reflections 77). With the use of these aeroplanes, war could take place on a much larger scale, threatening not

¹¹ Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders, “Literature, Politics and Society,” Society and Literature: 1945-1970, ed. Alan Sinfield (London: Methuen, 1983) 13.

only the soldier on the battlefield, but his family left behind at home. Now the front line could be found anywhere, and there was nowhere one could find a truly secure place of refuge. Even those evacuated into the paradoxical “strange homes” in the country were easy targets for the German bombers (WE 87): looking down on the open countryside from his seat in an English bomber, Greene feels “horror at the exposure of a whole quiet landscape to machine-gun fire” (“Bombing Raid,” R 78).

If the countryside was open to the threat of attack from the skies, then London soon suffered under the actuality of bombardment throughout the destruction wrought by the Blitz. Greene, working as an air-raid warden, saw much of this at first hand. In his diary of this period, “The Londoners,” he describes the night of the “Great Blitz” (16 April 1941)—“the worst raid Central London had ever experienced” (WE 107). That night, the raids started early and continued through the night unabated, with bomb after bomb falling, causing ever-greater chaos. As Greene watched from a rooftop during the early stages, the scene had an odd beauty: “[. . .] we saw the flares come slowly floating down, dribbling their flames: they drift like great yellow peonies” (WE 107). But by the early hours of the morning he was caught in the centre of the destruction. A bomb struck without warning and, as the windows blew in around him, “[o]ne really thought that this was the end, but it wasn’t exactly frightening—one had ceased to believe in the possibility of surviving the night. Began an Act of Contrition. Then it was over. Went out again” (WE 110). He remembers most vividly the “purgatorial throng of men and women in dirty torn pyjamas with little blood splashes standing in doorways” (WE 113): London was no longer the comfortable home of old, but a new hellish city where death might

come at any moment. This was “local and domestic war [. . .]” (WE 109), something unimagined and quite unprecedented.

Amid destruction on such a massive scale and so seemingly random a basis, it was no longer possible to retain old attachments; no longer could any one place in this besieged city be regarded as the location of home. So many Londoners would be rendered effectively doubly homeless: first they were driven from their homes by the threat or reality of the bombing, into the air-raid shelters; then one day perhaps they would be forced even from that underground refuge to find yet another place to shelter. Greene himself records, in an essay from October 1940, the loss of his familiar air-raid shelter, when a bomb destroyed the adjacent house as they sat underground: “There wasn’t time to be afraid; only the silence afterwards was a little shocking, and the smell of hot metal. Then the wardens came and drove us out to find refuge in a strange shelter. It was our turn to be strays.”¹² It was all too possible to be left without any place to call one’s own, left wandering bewildered through the constantly altering landscape of London.

This fantastic and nightmarish war seemed quite unreal in England, and is generally portrayed as such in the literature of the period. Now, for Greene and his contemporaries, the unheimlich shifted rapidly from nightmare to reality; the old familiar places became strangely altered even if not destroyed. The very atmosphere of war on the Home Front became unheimlich, as all idea of security was shattered. This sense of strangeness is the most constant quality of Elizabeth Bowen’s novel, The Heat of the Day (1949), which evokes a thoroughly haunted London, in which

¹² Henry Trench (Graham Greene), “The Strays,” Articles of War: The Spectator Book of World War II 141.

the growing multitudes of the dead seem to live on reproachfully in their very absence—“[. . .] they continued to move in shoals through the city day, pervading everything to be seen or heard or felt with their torn-off senses, drawing on this tomorrow they had expected [. . .].”¹³ Meanwhile the living appear equally ghostly, insubstantial and lost: “[. . .] those rendered homeless sat where they had been sent: or, worse, with the obstinacy of animals retraced their steps to look for what was no longer there.”¹⁴ It seems that even the decimated houses of London leave behind a ghostly presence: the physical structure of a home may be shattered in a second, but its emotional significance lingers for those left possessed of nothing but empty space.

Greene depicts his own version of this unreality in Arthur Rowe’s nightmarish London of The Ministry of Fear—“the shattered street[s]” (MF 31, 43) of the city at war are the perfect backdrop to the homeless, hunted, guilty man’s plight—and again in The End of the Affair, in which Bendrix, like Rowe, regains consciousness in his bombed home to find “a changed world” (EA 73). Evelyn Waugh demonstrates that such feelings of strangeness, of incredulity at what one saw happening all around, were not confined to those left behind in England, but also afflicted the soldier, even in the very middle of battle: Waugh depicts Cedric Lyne in Put Out More Flags walking alone across the battleground to take orders to another company, while feeling that this whole situation “was part of a crazy world where he was an interloper. It was nothing to do with him.”¹⁵ Contemplating, but not feeling, the

¹³ Elizabeth Bowen, The Heat of the Day (London: Vintage-Random 1998) 91.

¹⁴ Bowen, The Heat Of the Day 91.

¹⁵ Evelyn Waugh, Put Out More Flags 210.

danger he is in, Cedric thinks: "How very peculiar. I'm not in the least brave, really: it's simply that the whole thing is so damned silly."¹⁶

In actual fact, Greene suggests, this unbelievable war is part of the only reality: the true face of life is one of violence, cruelty, pain, fear, exhilaration and, of course, death. It is England and the too-comfortable English, still attempting to cling to their pre-war certainties, which are unreal, a centuries-old and carefully fabricated fiction, of which the casual observer must conclude that "[. . .] even in war-time it's still peace [. . .]" (MF 206): but this is a negative, sleepy, ignorant peace which refuses to die out in the heart of England's countryside, still largely unshaken by war, distant from the horror of the Blitz as from the battlefields. Greene depicts just such an isolated, anonymous, unremarkable and old-fashioned village in his short story, "The Lieutenant Died Last." This village is Potter, a throwback, on the fringes of Métroland, but untouched by modernity. This place is "off the map" ("The Lieutenant Died Last," LW 46) as far as modern life in general, and the war in particular, are concerned, until its sleepiness is pierced by an invasion by German parachutists. The attack is thwarted single-handedly by a sly local poacher, Old Purves, but, Greene dares to suggest, had this invasion been successful, along with even a handful of others like it, they might have had a beneficial effect upon the complacent English mind: "Their psychological effect might have been incalculable: they would have destroyed the sense of security Englishmen still feel, the security which allows them to grumble" (LW 48). Only the invading German soldiers and their solitary opponent see through the essentially fictitious security of this static rural England. They know that the "quiet, orderly, conventional world," visible on

¹⁶ Evelyn Waugh, Put Out More Flags 211.

the horizon, of “last prams going home, [. . .] the circulating library where the Vicar’s wife was changing her detective story, and [. . .] the little stream of commuters back from town [. . .]” is only a veneer, covering up the less palatable, but more invigorating realities of life and death (LW 53). As the villages and suburbs of England sit down to high tea, these enemies are “united [. . .] in a common spirit of wildness, vindictiveness, adventure” (LW 53).

The war did destroy illusions of security in the bombed cities, if not initially in the sleepier regions of England: in London the Blitz made huge numbers of people literally homeless, their houses suddenly and utterly destroyed by bombs or left standing only precariously, rendered unsafe for habitation. For other Londoners, though the physical structures of their homes still stood firm, they no longer provided their former reassurance. For everyone now the sense of homelessness, of drifting aimlessly and rootlessly through life, seems constantly felt. Elizabeth Bowen’s The Heat of the Day depicts characters who no longer feel any attachment to places, and who have nothing they value enough to call their own. Stella’s flat is a temporary measure, not a home: the flat has been taken furnished, with the result that “[. . .] she had the irritation of being surrounded by somebody else’s irreproachable taste”;¹⁷ in effect it remains their home, not hers. None of her possessions has a rightful place in the rooms, as though she does not intend staying long enough to need to settle in. Elsewhere in London, Louie Lewis lives with another girl in rooms which feel empty and soulless now that her husband is far away fighting: “[. . .] the idea of Chilcombe Street’s being home, which at the best of times had resided in Tom only, had been taken away by him to India. For her part, as things were now, she was glad to get out

¹⁷ Bowen The Heat Of the Day 24.

of it every morning: she neglected the rooms [. . .].”¹⁸ As Louie sits in the park at one of the regular outdoor concerts, she, like the whole congregation of strangers in this most open and public of places, betrays the prevalent need of that time for companionship, and for a sense of community when all other security has been lost.

Hence the popularity of the Underground stations of London during the Blitz as unofficial air-raid shelters for hundreds of people. People try to cheat death in this desperate time by making connections: “[. . .] the wall between the living and the living became less solid as the wall between the living and the dead thinned [. . .] each hoped not to die that night, still more not to die unknown.”¹⁹ This war at home forces people together as never before: all are afraid, all under threat and all in need of reassurance. Greene recalls that under such circumstances the regular group of men and women who sought shelter in the same air-raid shelter “coalesced like a platoon [. . .]. Far more, I think, than bunks and free earplugs does this solidarity help to make life underground bearable—almost pleasant.”²⁰ Companionship is the last-remaining refuge in wartime Britain, and people now simply have far more value than building or houses, even homes, because they are truly irreplaceable.

To lose one’s house was a terrible experience: to be suddenly without all those possessions that had given secret confidence, contributed to one’s identity. Yet for Bowen and for Greene, one feels, such an experience seemed more of an inconvenience than an emotional wrench. There were advantages even to homelessness. Phyllis Lassner remarks: “Although the war setting directs our

¹⁸ Bowen The Heat Of the Day 16-17.

¹⁹ Bowen, The Heat Of the Day 92.

²⁰ Henry Trench, “The Strays” 141.

attention to the tragedy of dispossession and loss, for Stella [in The Heat of the Day]. these are gains. In fact, the state of dislocation becomes her home, compatible with her desire to live in and for the moment.”²¹ Having made this her accepted, or even her preferred, way of life, “[b]eing homeless no longer prefigures tragic determination.”²² Greene demonstrated a similar fortitude when his own house on Clapham Common was destroyed in the bombing; his lack of real distress is perhaps explained by the fact that he was not at that time living there, in the now-evacuated family home, but elsewhere in London, with his mistress. He had not lost anything that really mattered to him, though he felt sympathy for his wife, who had loved and tended the house. While Greene comments: “[. . .] I feel one-armed without my books” (which had been buried in the rubble), the loss of the house itself was not a tragedy for him, but rather a release, from a responsibility that had been lifted suddenly and happily from his shoulders.²³ In a letter at the time to his American publisher Greene wrote: “It’s sad because it was a pretty house, but oddly enough it leaves one very carefree.”²⁴

In a short story from 1954, “The Destructors,” Greene describes the demolition by a gang of boys of a beautiful old house, which echoes the destruction of his Clapham Common house. The story deeply wounded Greene’s wife: “I minded because the writer seemed to hate the house (our home) which had been destroyed in

²¹ Phyllis Lassner, Elizabeth Bowen (London: Macmillan, 1990) 124.

²² Lassner 138.

²³ Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 2, 63.

²⁴ Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 2, 65.

1941 by incendiary.”²⁵ Indeed the story displays a striking lack of sympathy for the owner of the ruined house, Old Misery. Instead Greene concentrates his attention upon the audacity and extremity of the gang’s plan of destruction: the characters and their author seem to delight in the “chaos” of the situation:

The kitchen was a shambles of broken glass and china. The dining-room was stripped of parquet, the skirting was up, the door had been taken off its hinges, and the destroyers had moved up a floor. Streaks of light came in through the closed shutters where they worked with the seriousness of creators—and destruction after all is a form of creation. A kind of imagination had seen this house as it had now become. (“The Destroyers,” CS 336-37)

The boys are determined that the house will be utterly levelled, not merely vandalized: this is a grand project, not simply an act of vindictiveness. As the gang’s new leader, T., insists when they are disturbed only part way through:

“Anybody could do this—” “this” was the shattered hollowed house with nothing left but the walls. Yet walls could be preserved. Façades were valuable. They could build inside again more beautifully than before. This could again be a home. He said angrily, “We’ve got to finish.” (CS 339-40)

By the time they have finished, there is no possibility that this will ever again be a home: “[. . .] the whole landscape had suddenly altered. There was no house [. . .] only a hill of rubble” (CS 346). The suddenness with which the house is finally collapsed is made to appear absurd. As the old man cries for his lost home, the driver whose lorry has finally brought the house down, cannot help but laugh—“[. . .] you got to admit it’s funny” (CS 346). But for Old Misery this is emphatically not a comic situation; it is a personal tragedy. His home is gone for ever, and he has nothing else, not even sympathy. He has been casually and brutally dispossessed of everything, so that for him now “[t]here wasn’t anything left anywhere” (CS 346). While for Greene the war had evidently brought about a chance of release from the

²⁵ Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 2, 66.

weight of domesticity, Sherry notes in contrast that “[f]or Vivien the loss was very real. [. . .] it was to be the last house that she lived in with her husband on a permanent basis.”²⁶ The war could break down marriages and personal lives, not only buildings.

In another short story (of 1940) Greene demonstrates the ease with which the war effort, useful or pointless (the latter in this case) could swallow people up and make claims to them against which home and family could not compete. In “Men at Work,” Richard Skate finds himself, like Greene, absorbed into the Ministry of Information, until it becomes not only his place of work, but his (rather meagre) surrogate home. He has been institutionalised, but willingly so. Skate’s former home has little relevance in the life he lives now; his family has been sent away to a safer place in the countryside, while in London “[. . .] his house was cut off from him by the immeasurable distance of bombed London” so that “[. . .] his whole world was now the Ministry” (“Men at Work,” CS 394). He makes pointless pilgrimages periodically to check that the house still stands, but it has no purpose now in his life. Paradoxically, he is more secure, more carefree, happier than he has ever been in peacetime, because he knows, for the first time, that his job and income are safe. His prospects are assured: “[. . .] his nose was now well above water: he had a permanent job, he was a Civil Servant” (CS 395), and on his own limited terms he is successful at last, thanks to the war, which has also freed him from the troubles and constraints of domestic life. Skate now even sleeps in his workplace, in the basement of the Ministry, hardly ever emerging into the open air and developing as a result “a purblind air as of something that lived underground” (CS 394).

²⁶ Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 2, 64.

Such an underground life is shared, literally or figuratively, by numerous characters in Greene's fiction of this period. Wartime encourages secrecy and forces millions to hide themselves away in search of security. The human home thus takes on even more the characteristics of the animal's den or burrow: safety is the primary concern and is often found most easily underground. In The Ministry of Fear, Arthur Rowe, falsely suspected of murder and on the run from the police, goes literally underground. He hides himself overnight in the anonymity of a crowded air-raid shelter. He wakes to the sound of the All Clear:

One or two people in the shelter sat up for a moment to listen, and then lay down again. Nobody moved to go home: this was their home now. They were quite accustomed to sleeping underground; it had become as much a part of life as the Saturday night film or the Sunday service had ever been. This was the world they knew. (MF 72)

Hilfe, an Austrian refugee, immersed in the language and experience of the hunted, has told Rowe also to go, less literally, "underground"—"It's the fashion of the decade. Communists are always doing it" (MF 65)—but Rowe has no idea how to manage this. He is utterly friendless, deprived of the network of acquaintances that would allow him simply to disappear:

Refugees had always friends; people smuggled letters, arranged passports, bribed officials; in that enormous underground land as wide as a continent there was companionship. In England one hadn't yet learned the technique. (MF 85)

In time, one expects, the war and its aftermath will bring even into England a familiarity with danger, a new way of life; but in the meantime Rowe is left alone and helpless, a stranger and an outsider in his own country. Like the Assistant Commissioner in It's a Battlefield, Rowe has been "away": while the Assistant Commissioner has been working abroad, Rowe has also been far from ordinary life

in England, incarcerated in a mental hospital. Meanwhile, England has carried on without him. Thus when he returns, it is like arriving in a foreign land: he no longer understands this country, its events, or its inhabitants; he is uninvolved. When Rowe ventures out to the fête at the start of the novel, he moves “hesitantly, like an intruder, or an exile who has returned home after many years and is uncertain of his welcome” (MF 4).

This sense of being outside the mainstream of life in England ensures that, in Greene’s novels, the purpose of the war, even when it forms the background to his characters’ lives, is made to seem distant and almost irrelevant to those characters. This is perhaps because Greene’s own experience of the war was, apart from his time in London during the Blitz, somewhat different from other men’s. Greene never actually fought, and was far from eager to do so: he watched and waited in 1938-9, expecting to be “caught up into the army” (WE 87), but showing no more enthusiasm for the soldier’s life than Waugh’s shoddy officer, Hooper. Though Greene’s wartime employment included the writing of propaganda for the British war effort, his fictional output from the 1940s suggests a sense of detachment from world events: as Rowe insists in The Ministry of Fear, “[i]t’s nothing to do with me: it’s their war not mine” (MF 82). Rowe opts out of the wider communal effort and sense of optimistic patriotism, to concentrate upon his own personal struggles. In a later novel, The End of the Affair, when the writer-character Bendrix remarks upon his own indifference to the Second World War, he surely echoes some of Greene’s own memories of that time. Relieved by lameness of the obligation to fight, Bendrix had simply continued with his old working routine: while the world altered around him, still “[m]y own life had altered not at all” (EA 59). For some time, until the

bombing forces him to take notice of external events, Bendrix feels “as though I had signed out of the war” (EA 59). When he remarks that “[. . .] the spring like a corpse was sweet with the smell of doom [. . .]” (EA 59), it is other people’s doom he smells, for he has no energy or attention for anything but his troubled love affair with Sarah Miles.

Taking an outsider’s perspective on the war, Greene seems always to have been able to maintain a detached objectivity, to act as an observer rather than a participant. So this “happy Londoner” (as Sherry describes him) could write, in a letter to Anthony Powell of his opinion that “[. . .] London is extraordinarily pleasant these days with all the new open spaces, and the rather Mexican effect of ruined churches . . .”²⁷ Later, Greene’s intelligence work in far-away Africa clearly increased his sense of detachment and exclusion from the war in Europe. In The Heart of the Matter the English expatriates find that war is only a further inconvenience in lives already blighted, keeping them even more firmly tied to their uncomfortable lives in West Africa. Louise Scobie is stuck miserably in the country her husband loves but which she detests; she is a heavy burden for his constant consideration: “[. . .] she had joined him in the first year of the phoney war and now she couldn’t get away: the danger of submarines had made her as much a fixture as the handcuffs on the nail” in his office at the police station (HOM 7). Michael Shelden has noted the utter self-absorption of these characters far from home and outside the upheaval of war: he remarks of The Heart of the Matter that “[. . .] the novel makes the emotional turmoil in one man’s life the center of attention in a world at war. [. . .] Stuck in an alien land at the margin of an enormous battleground,

²⁷ Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 2, 53.

Scobie is free to pursue his lonely duel with God. The rest of the world can take care of itself.”²⁸ Shelden passes a similar judgement on The Ministry of Fear, insisting that in spite of this novel’s wartime London setting, it is not actually a war novel at all: “Greene is not interested in the rights or wrongs of the world conflict. He wants to know about the suffering endured in one man’s war [. . .].”²⁹ Peter Mudford suggests that both Greene and Waugh stand out from the herd of writers of the forties, because of this distancing of war: “[. . .] the enemy is usually unseen, and seldom mentioned,” the war is included only incidentally, “like noises from a play which is being performed elsewhere.”³⁰ Thus, for men like Scobie and Rowe, personal, emotional and psychological problems take precedence; wider social and political affairs are other people’s business.

Thus, the war is not important for its own sake in Greene’s fiction, but as an appropriately troubled and chaotic background to the personal lives and concerns of his characters. In this respect, even after the battles have all been won and lost, the war makes itself felt through its effects in the development of what W. J. West has described simply as the “dark post-war era.”³¹ The war inevitably wrought great changes in the world and in the attitudes of its inhabitants. In the final volume of his Sword of Honour trilogy, for instance, Waugh’s characters find themselves in an unfamiliar England with no hope of a return to the simple happiness of days long past: Virginia asks, “[d]o you think things will ever be normal again?” and Peregrine

²⁸ Shelden 293.

²⁹ Shelden 284.

³⁰ Peter Mudford, “Quantitative Judgements Don’t Apply,” The Fiction of the 1940s: Stories of Survival, ed. Rod Mengham and N. H. Reeve (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 188.

³¹ W. J. West, The Quest for Graham Greene (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997) 111.

Crouchback responds with absolute certainty—“Oh no [. . .]. Never again.”³² In the ravaged world left at the end of the war, Greene did not know what to do next: “In 1946 I felt myself at a loss,” both as a writer, and also simply as a man. He had not expected to reach this point: “I had always thought that war would bring death as a solution in one form or another [. . .]” (WE 119). But it was not time yet for Greene to escape into the simplicity of death: like his characters he must wander the emptiness of the post-war world. They have yet to find a permanent home.

Home is a concept scarcely fitted to the post-war years, as one of Greene’s film treatments, No Man’s Land (written around 1950), makes apparent.³³ Set in Germany—a Germany broken and divided up among the victors—the useless frontier land of the title reflects the unsettled and vacant lives of the characters in the post-war world: as the narrator remarks, this land has “the sense of an unfathomable emptiness that the propagandists of two worlds have imposed upon our minds” (No Man’s Land, MD 584). At the end of this particular war it seems that all are guilty and all have lost. The no man’s land is one of Greene’s motifs of homelessness taken to an extreme: it has an unforgettable quality—“something strange and sad” (MD 585)—because it is a “place on this earth where nobody can ever build or sleep,” and where the highs and lows of ordinary human life will therefore never be lived (MD 585). It is neglected, unloved land, having no purpose and belonging to nobody. It is simply a buffer-zone keeping people both physically and mentally apart, and a reminder of the impossibility of putting down roots. For, as Starhov, the

³² Evelyn Waugh, Unconditional Surrender, The Sword Of Honour Trilogy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) 499.

³³ For details of the circumstances of the composition of this film treatment see James Sexton, Introduction, No Man’s Land, by Graham Greene (London: Hesperus, 2005) xiii-xxiv.

now-disillusioned romantic Russian officer, miserably tells Brown, his prisoner: “We always move on [. . .]” (MD 601). Greene echoes this complaint in another work, The Tenth Man, in which Europe in the immediate post-war period appears as a place filled with refugees and wanderers of all kinds, all continually moving on. Some of these travellers are making homeward journeys: “All over France men were picking their way home, from prison camps, from hiding places, from foreign parts. If one had possessed a God’s eye view of France, one would have detected a constant movement of tiny grains moving like dust across a floor shaped like a map” (TM 88). The central character himself, Jean-Louis Chavel, makes his way back to the only place he knows, his childhood home in St Jean de Brinac. But he has no claim any longer upon his old house, having given it away in a German prison camp in exchange for his life. He returns disguised, under a false name, arrives “like a stranger” (TM 61), and enters the house only as a servant to the new owner. He no longer has a home in this village, or indeed anywhere. And there are many more like Chavel across France, dispossessed men whose journeys can have no real destination: “The vagrants flowed aimlessly west and south, towards the sun and the sea, as if they believed that on the warm wet margin of France anyone could live. [. . .] There was no stability anywhere [. . .]” (TM 90).

Here, in the Europe of 1940s, is another desolate wasteland, much as T. S. Eliot had found it twenty-five years earlier, after the First War: the cycle of destruction and disinheritance is repeated. Alan Sinfield remarks of Eliot’s Four Quartets, another literary product of the Second War: “Distress at the fracturing of an older, stable social order which is felt to be necessary to civilization stimulates the

move towards renunciation, transcending a world that now seems to offer so little.”³⁴ Greene’s characters too are looking for something worthy of self-sacrifice, and failing to find it in this life. The earthly world once more reveals its emptiness, its apparent Godlessness; and the narrator of No Man’s Land asks, “[w]ho was it who said, ‘The World has been abandoned into the hands of men’?” (MD 586). This new generation of hollow men prove poor caretakers. They live in a world without trust, for war has destroyed that privilege. In No Man’s Land, Brown and Starhov cannot trust anyone and can never settle, because they have learned from experience that nothing good will last. Starhov is suspicious of Clara’s feelings for him: “Perhaps she loves me. Perhaps she loves her house” (MD 611). He is forced to admit that “[. . .] I cannot even trust myself” (MD 611), let alone anybody else, and so he cannot believe in the endurance of their relationship: “[. . .] people do not live together for ever. There is no such thing as ‘Forever’” (MD 611-12). He is proved right when Clara chooses to leave with Brown as he escapes. But Brown too does not trust and cannot imagine the possibility of a “Forever” with her. At the conclusion of the story, the unnamed narrator has apparently persuaded Clara to move on again, to leave Brown as well as Starhov— “[. . .] in my case he [Brown] was right not to trust” (MD 622). But, unusually for Greene, there is no sense of real betrayal in the breakdown of these relationships: Clara is not betraying these men, but only searching for one who will trust in her and in the future and thus make her trustworthy, because “[. . .] after all [. . .] you can’t love and not trust” (MD 622). This crippling suspicion of everyone and everything is shared by Rowe in The Ministry of Fear, but he realises that he must take the risk of trusting if he is to

³⁴ Alan Sinfield, “Varieties of Religion,” Society and Literature 1945-1970, ed. Sinfield 88.

survive his ordeals emotionally rather than only physically. He understands, as Starhov and Brown are learning, that “[. . .] it is impossible to go through life without trust: that is to be imprisoned in the worst cell of all, oneself” (MF 43). Such isolation leads inevitably to the sensation of homelessness, for it is hard, if not impossible, to find a genuine sense of home without other people.

In the post-war world, the image of the no man’s land is appropriate to the mood of the time. Greene’s characters seem often deliberately to scorn the homes that should have been their birthright in the land of their origin, and to choose instead to wander into unfamiliar and unpromising landscapes. Such characters find themselves drifting in the last years of the Empire, in almost forgotten colonies, dreaming of an unobtainable home in an England which perhaps no longer even exists, for so much has changed during the years of their absence. Raymond Williams notes that one of the effects of colonialism was that “[t]here was [. . .] a marked development of the idea of England as ‘home’, in that special sense in which ‘home’ is a memory and an ideal.”³⁵ Williams observes that, while London has its place in these nostalgic yearnings, as the centre of life and activity, much of the romanticizing of England concerns itself with “rural England: its green peace contrasted with the tropical or arid places of actual work; its sense of belonging, of community, idealised by contrast with the tensions of colonial rule and the isolated alien settlement.”³⁶ He suggests that those men who had travelled far from their homeland to work were only waiting for the opportunity to return again: “[. . .] the reward for service, though anticipated more often than it was gained, was a return to

³⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973) 281.

³⁶ Raymond Williams 281.

a rural place within this urban and industrial England: [. . .] the ‘little place in the country.’”³⁷ Thus, in short, “[t]he country, now, was a place to retire to.”³⁸ and England itself was supposedly a refuge regained after a life’s work had been done elsewhere.

The central figures of Greene’s work of this period—Scobie, the whisky-priest, Arthur Rowe—come to realise, however, that a peaceful retirement is not an option. The whisky-priest of The Power and the Glory may be constantly tempted to desert his desolate Mexican parish to find rest and comfort for himself, but he can never quite bring himself to make the break. When the small child arrives as always to fetch him to yet another death-bed, he is almost relieved to be saved from the betrayal which would be inherent in his escape, exhausted as he is by his duties. Rowe too knows that there are truths that must be faced in life: the quiet retirement of the “mental home” is not for him. And retirement is in fact the thing of which Scobie is most terrified in life, since he is appalled by the prospect of losing even the refuge of his work:

The thought of retirement set his nerves twitching and straining: he always prayed that death would come first. He had prepared his life insurance in that hope: it was payable only on death. He thought of a home, a permanent home: the gay artistic curtains, the bookshelves full of Louise’s books, a pretty tiled bathroom, no office anywhere—a home for two until death, no change any more before eternity settled in. (HOM 40-41)

For Scobie, the “green peace” of retirement is inconceivable: a home is worthless to him if it detaches him from real life as he sees it, which for him means further years of responsibility and pity in this African land.

³⁷ Raymond Williams 282.

³⁸ Raymond Williams 282.

Greene's more minor characters, "the Bystanders" of The Power and the Glory and The Heart of the Matter (PG 50), continue to cling to the conventional longing for England: for a distant, currently—and almost certainly permanently—unobtainable home where they may escape the heat, the filth and the sense of claustrophobia of their expatriate communities. Trench the dentist in The Power and the Glory dreams of a better home back in England—"I'll retire. Go home. Live as a gentleman ought to live. This'—he gestured at the bare base room—'I'll forget all this. Oh, it won't be long now. I'm an optimist,' Mr Trench said" (PG 11). But he knows this is false hope; he will never find the financial means to return, and even if he could, there would be no happy homecoming, no home or fond family to return to. The brutal truth for Trench is that "[t]here had never been a home" in the sense of family, love, security; for Trench, in fact, home is merely "four walls behind which one slept" (PG 7), dreaming of a better life. In The Heart of the Matter, Harris sums up the mood of too many of the expatriate English, enslaved abroad by their careers, or by their husbands' careers: "[. . .] when I do get home you'll never see me here again.' He lowered his voice and said with venom over his lemon squash, 'I hate the place. I hate the people.'" (HOM 3).

If it is a hard life for any Englishman or woman in the tropics, it is still harder for those who do not fit in with the crowd. The unpopular Louise Scobie suffers the contempt of her peers: she is not a part of this life of drinks on the verandah, library books doled out, gossip, arguments, and above all, exclusiveness and the clinging to standards which are revealed by such declarations as "I'm not a snob, but in a place like this you've got to draw lines [. . .]. It's not like it is at home" (HOM 23). Louise knows, simply and unalterably, that "[. . .] they don't like me" (HOM 21),

and she begs her husband, her only support in this hostile land, “Oh Ticki. Ticki [. . .] you won’t leave me ever, will you? I haven’t got any friends [. . .]” (HOM 22). The discomfort of this expatriate life is reminiscent of E. M. Forster’s A Passage to India, but with one crucial difference. While the English in Forster’s India are totally out of place, “thousands of miles from any scenery that they understood,”³⁹ they have only to return to England and all will be resolved: they will be at home once more. When Adela Quested complains that “[. . .] one has nothing to do, one belongs nowhere [. . .],” she takes care to qualify her complaint: “I speak only of India. I am not astray in England. I fit in there [. . .].”⁴⁰ Greene’s English characters have no such consolation; they are not at home even in the land of their birth, and so for them even the much-desired cosy retirement back in England would fail to fulfil its promise, for the country they desire is no longer to be found. These are men and women who fail to fit in wherever they go. Such characters are born wanderers, who search everywhere for something which will never be found.

Jung suggests that rootlessness is a very English quality, part of the make-up of the race, as opposed to the settled and secure nature of such peoples as are found in countries like India:

The Indians mean and are meant to live in India. Therefore they have settled down to a degree of domestication which we cannot attain, even with the aid of ideals and frantic moral efforts. Our migrations have not yet come to an end. It was only a short while ago that the Anglo-Saxons immigrated from Northern Germany to their new homeland. [. . .] it is much the same with practically every nation in Europe. Our motto is still: ubi bene, ibi patria. Because of this

³⁹ E. M. Forster, A Passage To India (1924; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989) 188.

⁴⁰ Forster, A Passage To India 260.

truth we are all fervent patriots. Because we still can and will wander, we imagine that we can live more or less anywhere.⁴¹

Greene's characters certainly wander, and they seem able at least to survive almost anywhere. But this survival is not quite the same as really living; the places in which they find themselves will never become home. For men like Tench, the "good" career move abroad backfires, and he and thousands more are left stranded in hostile, alien countries waiting for a miracle or for the release that will come only with death. Greene's English in Africa very much resemble Jung's colonial Englishman in India: "condemned to serve his term there and to make the best of it," outwardly "jolly" but all the time "thinking and dreaming of spring in Sussex."⁴² Anthony Farrant was wrong: one place is not merely as good as another. A man can have only one true home, which will not be found simply in the pursuit of financial or social success; if he ceases even to seek that true home, he must always settle for second best and remain until death, as Maria Couto describes it, "at home nowhere and everywhere [. . .]."⁴³

Greene himself disputed the idea that he was a natural exile, suggesting instead that "I've always managed to feel at home wherever I was," needing no more than "a hut to myself, [. . .] some books [. . .] and some paper on a table [. . .]."⁴⁴ Yet this is a particularly unconvincing claim: if it was so easy for Greene to make himself at home, he must have had an exceptionally low expectation of homeliness. It seems

⁴¹ C. G. Jung, "The Dreamlike World of India," Civilization in Transition, Collected Works of C. G. Jung, trans. R. F. C. Hull, vol. 10 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) 524.

⁴² Jung, Civilization in Transition 524.

⁴³ Maria Couto, Graham Greene: On the Frontier 113.

⁴⁴ Philip French, "Man of Mystery" 442.

that he protests too much: home is too great an obsession for the characters in his work for Greene to have been so very indifferent to it in his own life. His comment really seems to suggest that he was unwilling to settle upon one chosen “home” for fear that it might prove disappointing. In effect, Greene himself looks not for the ultimate (and therefore practically unobtainable) home, but for many “homes from home” which remind him in some detail of his childhood home, or of other especially fondly remembered places or times, but which have no expectations to live up to. This is a dilution of the concept of home: Marie-Françoise Allain remarks that Greene is “a man of attachments,”⁴⁵ and her use of the plural is crucial. There can be no one place that is sufficiently perfect to become his only home.

Scobie is one character in Greene’s fiction who is not a wanderer; he at least has found a place to settle, and has dug himself in deep there. He stands in marked contrast to the other characters in The Heart of the Matter, since he alone feels no longing to return to England and Western civilization. He has spent much of his adult life in Africa and has grown to love it so completely that it has become his only possible home. He explains his attachment quite simply: “[. . .] I’ve been fifteen years in this place. I’d be lost anywhere else [. . .]” (HOM 17). His failure to be promoted in accordance with his age and experience would have sent a prouder, more typical Englishman hurrying away from the place to hide his disappointment, and this is indeed what his wife encourages him to do. But Scobie has no interest outside the territory he has made his own, and he will suffer any indignity to remain there.

⁴⁵ Allain 53.

Scobie's love of Africa mirrors Greene's own feeling for that continent.

Scobie's house is closely modelled on Greene's own distinctive two-storey house in the swampy land outside the European quarter: an undesirable residence, and yet "[. . .] as one year ebbed away the house on the swamp where I lived alone really became home" (WE 96). His journey to West Africa as an MI6 agent during the war was a sort of homecoming for Greene; he was stationed in Freetown, which he had first visited during his journey to Liberia in the thirties. Arriving once more, in the New Year of 1942, Greene records:

It felt odd and poetic and encouraging coming back after so many years, a shape imposing itself on life again after chaos. It was like seeing a place you've dreamed of. Even the sweet hot smell from the land—is it the starved greenery and the red soil, the bougainvillea, the smoke from the huts in Kru town, or the fires in the bush clearing the ground for planting?—was strangely familiar. ("Convoy to West Africa," SC 122-23)

This is indeed a strange, unheimlich homecoming for Greene. He is not a returning native, he doesn't really know this place, but he has been there and connected with its landscape and its people, which have lodged in his memory. His senses respond instinctively to his surroundings: emotionally, therefore, he is very much at home here.

Scobie too feels something special, almost supernatural, tying him to his home in the West African town: he stands in the darkness, looking out at the sea and feels that "[t]he magic of this place never failed him: here he kept his foothold on the very edge of a strange continent" (HOM 33). It is the sense of magic and strangeness that keeps Scobie in Africa, because it takes more than dull, plain reality to make a place truly "home." In Greene's work, one can't love a place simply because, viewed objectively, it is lovely. One loves it for all its flaws, for its atmosphere, and for the

feeling and emotions it never ceases to inspire: its power over us. This is the same “fascination” which Greene had recognised in the thirties during his first travels in Africa, and which he had recorded in Journey Without Maps: a fascination wrought by “the dirt, the disease, the barbarity and the familiarity of Africa” (JWM 248). It is in this way that Scobie loves his Africa, not for its beauty, which is fleeting and incidental, but for its ugliness—or at least its honest imperfection—with the same total acceptance which Greene suggests we show our birthplaces and childhood homes: the places which have moulded and defined us, whatever their actual aesthetic qualities or moral influence may be. Like the middle-aged man who revisits the home of his youth in “The Innocent,” looks around at the unremarkable little town, and observes, in spite of his companion’s dismissive comments, that “[. . .] it wasn’t grim to me” (CS 92), Scobie too can see beyond the trivialities:

Why, he wondered, [. . .] do I love this place so much? Is it because here human nature hasn’t had time to disguise itself. [. . .] Here you could love human beings nearly as God loved them, knowing the worst. (HOM 31)

To love in the way that God loves is to love with compassion; it is not to judge but to pity the poor flawed country and its inhabitants. As a policeman whose instinct is to defend the victims rather than to punish the villains, Scobie feels a desire to protect this place and everything in it. Every one of his relationships is shaped by his need to pity and to protect. With his wife and his mistress, it is when they seem to him most ugly and flawed and helpless that he loves them most truly. He is pulled to the young widow, Helen Rolt, by her immature vulnerability, and her physical unattractiveness draws rather than repels him: “The ugliness was like handcuffs on the wrists” (HOM 183). Helen soon begins to understand the peculiar nature of Scobie’s affections, and she remarks: “[. . .] I think he only likes the sick”

(HOM 223). Scobie's relationship with his wife is strained, but he continues to feel for her in her misery, her unpopularity, her failure to thrive in Africa. Returning home one day he finds her asleep and unwell; looking down on the bed he sees that

[h]er face had the ivory tinge of atabrine: her hair which had once been the colour of bottled honey was dark and stringy with sweat. These were the times of ugliness when he loved her, when pity and responsibility reached the intensity of a passion. (HOM 14).

All is altered by the novel's closing stages: when Scobie finally gets his overdue promotion and Louise regains her status and confidence, he feels "momentary hatred" as she sits "so smugly" making plans for their future (HOM 298). She is no longer a part of Scobie's poor unsuccessful Africa; she has regained fully her Englishness, and is becoming one of the snobbish women she so lately detested. She no longer depends on her husband, scarcely needs or notices him at all, and he cannot love a woman who lives in so different a world from his own: "He thought: it was the hysterical woman who felt the world laughing behind her back that I loved. I love failure: I can't love success. And how successful she looks, sitting there, one of the saved [. . .]" (HOM 299). By this stage, Scobie believes that he has damned himself, having received Communion in a state of mortal sin, and feeling unable to repent and save himself because this would necessarily entail hurting either Louise or Helen, or both. It seems that he and Louise must occupy different worlds not only in this earthly life, but for eternity. He has given up his chance of Heaven, and peace, for ever.

The longing for peace remained overwhelmingly strong in Greene's work of the 1940s, even after the war had ended. In The End of the Affair the post-war peace is only a military and political fact, not a felt reality for the characters; Bendrix

complains that he found it difficult to write in that period, because it was a time of such great change, not only with the war ending, but with Sarah having ended their relationship: “‘It was a struggle to write at all just then—Peace coming. . .’ And I might just as well have said peace going” (EA 30). Sarah too finds no happiness in the peace: she tells her husband on VE day: “I don’t like the peace” (EA 108), because it doesn’t feel like peace to her; it is only quietness, emptiness and loneliness. Greene himself felt much the same: the absence of war was not sufficient to create the peace he desired; instead it left only a vacuum, so that by 1945, Norman Sherry writes, Greene was afraid of “the immense boredom peace would bring.”⁴⁶ He was not looking for a quiet and uneventful life, for too much calm irked him, as he explained in a letter to Catherine Walston in 1947:

The day was peaceful, but I don’t use the word peaceful in the same way as peace. Peaceful is negative—means no scenes and no positive unhappiness. But peace is positive, and all sorts of unpeaceful things like being in love and making love can be part of it. I think even a sikh massacre could be part of it.⁴⁷

Greene’s fictional characters meet with trouble when they fail to make this distinction. A merely peaceful life will never be satisfactory; one can only make a home in genuine, invigorating, inspiring peace.

In Greene’s fiction of the 1940s, it is to God, and specifically to the Catholic Church, that the characters turn, albeit tentatively, when they feel the need for peace. Not only does the Church offer the route to Heaven—an eternal home—but also here on earth it can be a retreat, another escape from the pains of life. As John Atkins notes, “[t]here is a suggestion that the Catholic faith provided him [i.e. Greene] with

⁴⁶ Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 2, 209.

⁴⁷ Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 2, 237.

a refuge from tawdry, Protestant if not agnostic, England towards which his feelings were markedly ambivalent.”⁴⁸ Greene’s Catholicism is indeed another reason why he was never really comfortably “at home” in England in adulthood, because he could not subscribe to all of his country’s general beliefs. He was, spiritually, an outsider in his own homeland, following rules that were alien and incomprehensible to most of his countrymen. Waugh too emphasised the absolute separation of English Catholics from the mainstream: in Brideshead Revisited Sebastian Flyte explains to his friend Ryder that “[i]t’s not just that they’re a clique [. . .] but they’ve got an entirely different outlook on life; everything they think important is different from other people.”⁴⁹

Thus Greene was different from other Englishmen; but, as a convert, he was also different from other Catholics (and he was less easily and less completely absorbed into Catholic orthodoxy than his fellow-convert, Waugh). Greene had not been born into this religion, but had chosen to turn to it. Atkins takes the view that this choice was part of his search for security, for a home:

Despite his intellectual pretences, Greene’s attachment to his religion is almost entirely emotional, the nostalgic longing of an adult for the simple, intimately known home where it was always warm and each day was a week long.⁵⁰

But, since the Catholic Church was not Greene’s childhood home, he was trying to “return” to an unknown place: a conversion to Catholicism must, for an Englishman, be rather like leaving home. Greene’s roots were not in the Catholic faith and so, as Atkins remarks, “[i]n a new sense, his childhood was truly lost for it did not assist

⁴⁸ Atkins, Graham Greene 69.

⁴⁹ Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited 87.

⁵⁰ Atkins, Graham Greene 69.

him in his later spiritual struggles.”⁵¹ In this respect Greene is like Scobie in The Heart of the Matter: both men have been drawn to Catholicism in the first instance by the desire to marry a Catholic; it takes time for a genuine emotional involvement in their faith to develop, and perhaps they can never be truly comfortable as converts. In a sense they are both lost in their belief: it is perplexing, not instinctive. Peace may be promised, but for them it proves hard to find: they have not yet reached home.

In the post-war Europe of No Man's Land even the atheist Brown feels the desire for the rest and the certainty which only emotional and spiritual peace can bring. Brought repeatedly into contact with Clara, as he feels, by something more significant than mere chance, Brown sees himself for the first (and only) time as part of a larger plan, and enjoys the sensation: “To feel oneself, however momentarily, part of a design is like peace. It was the nearest he had ever come to belief” (MD 602). But this feeling is fleeting: peace proves ever more elusive and indeed illusory. In Waugh's Brideshead Revisited, Charles Ryder has always felt Brideshead to be more than only a house and an estate: to him it is the bringer of peace, and unique in this respect. He sees the house standing alone: “the rest of the world abandoned and forgotten; a world of its own of peace and love and beauty.”⁵² During Ryder's youth, it is this house and the extraordinary Catholic family it houses that draw him subtly towards the Church that is so alien to him. This house, in which he is a stranger, becomes his spiritual home, his roots, much as alien Africa becomes a familiar home to Scobie in The Heart of the Matter. Yet as Ryder grows older and grows apart

⁵¹ Atkins, Graham Greene 207.

⁵² Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited 306.

from the Flyte family, and visits no more, he realises that this haven of peace was a creation of his own adolescent mind, a “vision” or a “dream” to satisfy his own need for a home, since his own father’s masculine, very English, godless, unwelcoming house could never be a home for him. Though more welcoming, Brideshead and Catholicism are ultimately no easier to live with: they are not always happy homes, which is why their inhabitants—Sebastian, Julia, Lord Marchmain—so often try to run away, though they can never fully escape.

A Catholic life is seldom peaceful in Greene’s fiction either: it is far too complex and demanding for that. Louise Scobie envies Helen Rolt the fact that her life is uncomplicated by religious scruples: “[. . .] she’s not a Catholic. She’s lucky. She’s free [. . .] (HOM 254). Yet Catholicism can offer a home more compelling than any other, in spite of—or perhaps actually because of—its difficulties, as Greene’s whisky-priest discovers in The Power and the Glory when he tries, and fails, to leave his priestly life behind. He may have longed to escape the restless fear of his own land, where the practice of his religion has made him an outlaw, but, once across the border, walking through the streets in safety, no longer a hunted man, he finds the sudden contrast of this apparent “peace” and safety unconvincing: “[. . .] the whole scene was like peace” (PG 192), but only like peace; it is superficial rather than genuine. Like Greene’s definition of “peacefulness,” life here is calm in a very negative way. Tempted as he is to remain in safety, a respected man once again, the priest experiences the uneasy suspicion that “[h]e didn’t [. . .] belong to this deep tranquility” (PG 205).

To be there is a betrayal of the people he has left behind to deal with their pain alone, and “[s]uddenly, without warning, with an odd sense of homesickness, he

thought of the hostages in the prison yard, waiting at the water-tap, not looking at him—the suffering and the endurance which went on everywhere the other side of the mountains” (PG 206, my emphasis). Life here is irritatingly trivial in comparison with his former life on the run; his new parishioners have nothing important to confess to him, and they don’t really need his help: “He thought that in some ways it was better over there, across the border. Fear and death were not the worst things. It was sometimes a mistake for life to go on” (PG 202). All that remains for him now is to abandon the idea of saving himself, to return instead across the mountains to his own people and his true vocation. When the mestizo arrives to ask him to go back to offer confession and absolution to the dying outlaw, the priest’s spirits actually rise, although he expects a trap: “[. . .] he felt quite cheerful; he had never really believed in this peace” (PG 216). In this respect he somewhat resembles Harris in The Heart of the Matter, who sits nostalgically reading the magazine of the school where he was so miserable, feeling “the loyalty we feel to unhappiness—the sense that that is where we really belong” (HOM 192). Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan describes the priest’s stay with the child-like Protestant Lehrs as a “paralysing confinement in safety and respectability,”⁵³ and it is indeed total paralysis the priest feels there: he is temporarily suspended, helplessly, in somebody else’s security, somebody else’s life, somebody else’s home. One might expect that the sense of safety would bring with it a sense of freedom—no need any more to run or hide—but in fact the priest feels suffocated by his safety, controlled by it, tempted back into laziness, drunkenness

⁵³ Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, Graham Greene’s Childless Fathers (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) 39.

and ignorance. In returning to face death he is saving himself from the danger of settling down once more into comfort and sin.

There is a tired, middle-aged aridity about many of Greene's characters in this period. They have become too settled, too firmly rooted, and their domesticity has brought them no happiness, nor even contentment. They are not so much "at home" as imprisoned. The whisky-priest shakes himself free from this disabling lethargy by returning to his homeland to die, but his unfortunate fellow-priest Padre José can never escape. José conformed to the government's demand that priests should marry, and now lives with "his harsh house-keeper—his wife" and has "nothing to do at all but to sit and eat [. . .]" (PG 30). He is a local joke, tormented as he sits and waits for his damnation. When Greene's characters were younger, like Andrews in The Man Within or Anthony Farrant in England Made Me, they had no ties; they could simply run away. The homes they left behind were not theirs to care for; they were their parents' responsibility. But in Greene's fiction of the 1940s, the central characters are themselves parents, or at least husbands and wives. Running away has become suddenly much harder, because of the repercussions. They can run away and save themselves if they choose, but they will still be tormented by the pain of those left behind, abandoned. Ultimately return and self-sacrifice are the only options; eventually one must face facts and accept one's responsibilities: as the whisky-priest remarks at the point of his capture, with which he had effectively co-operated, "I've had enough of escaping [. . .]" (PG 228). This change of heart is not unique to Greene's work: Geoff Ward notes the change of mood in the forties generally:

The literary 1930s had been all about borders, [. . .] narratives of crossings-over and trouble at the frontier [. . .]. In the 1940s the paradigm would change from linear movement to homecoming and return. To a certain extent this is

presaged by the tendency of 1930s writing to depict movement forward as a prelude to ultimate entrapment.⁵⁴

So in Greene's work the prodigal son of the 1930s makes way for the worried husband and father (or priestly father-figure) of the 1940s. They may rebel against their duties, but eventually give up this resistance, abandoning selfishness for the sake of others' happiness.

The overwhelming urge of Greene's characters in this period to take responsibility, and thus take on a paternalistic role towards those around them, has been widely noted, and it is upon the character of Scobie that most attention has focused. John Spurling remarks that "[a]lthough Scobie's child is dead before The Heart of the Matter opens, [. . .] he is pre-eminently a father-figure."⁵⁵ Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan's book, Graham Greene's Childless Fathers, considers the motivations for this paternalism and the effects upon the characters' lives. Of Scobie she comments that "[h]e is always in the role of a father to the others, including his own wife. But Scobie does not feel that he, too, has a Father to whom he can shift his own burden. This is, in my opinion, the source of that unbearable loneliness, that sense of exile which haunts him."⁵⁶ And she judges that by the time he reaches his crisis-point, and fixes upon suicide,

God has become a suffering child for him, a child who has to be protected. Scobie is, spiritually, an orphan. He is a father on earth without a Father figure in heaven to support him. [. . .] Scobie's spiritual autonomy turns him into an

⁵⁴ Geoff Ward, "The Wibberlee Wobberlee Walk: Lowry, Hamilton, Kavan and the Addictions of 1940s Fiction," Fiction of the 1940s, ed. Mengham and Reeve 26.

⁵⁵ John Spurling, Graham Greene (London: Methuen, 1983) 40.

⁵⁶ Erdinast-Vulcan 46-47.

exile, and paradoxically leads him back to the truest Christian ideal of altruistic love in defiance of the official dogma of its Church.⁵⁷

In spite of Erdinast-Vulcan's apparent implication that the Church has somehow deserted Scobie rather than vice versa, his independence is surely the result only of his own character failing—the inability to trust in, or rely upon, anyone else, even God. There is no “Christian ideal” which suggests one ought to commit suicide under any circumstances, let alone with such muddled motivations as Scobie's. One can understand Greene's insistence that Scobie was “intended to show that pity can be the expression of an almost monstrous pride” (*WE* 120), since, however good Scobie's intentions, he effectively attempts to take over God's own role, in trying to be a “father” not only to other people, but even to Christ Himself, surely the height of blasphemous egotism. He never waits to be asked for help, but assumes that other people need him. Scobie's dutiful assistance of others is far from selfless: he needs to help as much as, or more than, they need to be helped. He imagines he would be happier alone and free, but once his wife has left for South Africa he realises his mistake. As Kai Laitinen notes, “[i]n departing, Louise has left emptiness [. . .],” with the result that Scobie “misses the presence of a person close to him for whom he might sacrifice himself. He does not know how to live without shouldering responsibility. But the gap is filled.”⁵⁸ Scobie soon finds other surrogate children, among the survivors of a wartime shipwreck: first the young boy, to whom he reads a story in an attempt to do anything to reduce his own feelings of inadequacy and

⁵⁷ Erdinast-Vulcan 53.

⁵⁸ Kai Laitinen, “The Heart of the Novel,” *Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations*, ed. Robert O. Evans (Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1967) 171.

helplessness; next the dying girl who reminds him of his own dead daughter; and finally Helen Rolt, the young widow with whom he begins an affair.

Fatherhood is a compulsion rather than a desire for these characters: Greene's father-figures feel imprisoned by their duties; like Scobie they long to be able simply to think of themselves. Greene's fictional priests feel perhaps most constrained by their duties, since they can never abandon them without also abandoning their vows. The result is that they frequently feel resentment for the people they serve: in The Power and the Glory, the whisky-priest feels hopelessly constrained—"He had tried to escape but he was [. . .] the slave of his people [. . .]" (PG 17). Similarly Father Callifer in The Potting Shed feels that he has no identity of his own, but rather that he exists only for the sake of others: "I mustn't be a man. I must be a priest" (The Potting Shed, CP 120). He complains to his housekeeper of the endlessness of his responsibility to his parishioners as their spiritual father:

Father! I hate the word. [. . .] A father belongs to his children until they grow up and he's free of them. But these people will never grow up. They die children and leave children behind them. I'm condemned to being a Father for life. (CP 120)

To him, having lost his faith years earlier, this is not a vocation; it is mere "slave-labour" (CP 120).

Greene wrote several plays in the 1950s, which have, in fact, more in common, in terms of theme and atmosphere, with his 1940s fiction. The Living Room (1953), The Potting Shed (1958), and The Complaisant Lover (1959) demonstrate the inescapable dullness, and the unbearable pressures, of everyday domestic life, whether as parent and spouse in the family home, or as priest in the wider home of the Church. Family life is destructive, not nurturing, in these plays. So Rose

commits suicide as the only possible escape from the sterile and oppressive family life of The Living Room: her elderly relatives not only fail to support her, but pressurize her to end her affair with Michael, another of Greene's unhappily married men. Helen Browne in particular takes a judgmental, ultra-orthodox Catholic view in her treatment of her niece, at the expense of Christian charity and family love. This family has nothing to offer Rose but demands, so she deceives them all and goes on seeing her lover in secrecy. James tells Helen that this situation is their fault, not Rose's or Michael's: "Do you think, if she had come into a house where there was love, she wouldn't have hesitated, thought twice, talked to us . . ." (The Living Room, CP 46). But she was unable to do so, "[b]ecause there was fear, not love, in this house. If we had asked her for a sacrifice, what would we have offered? Pious platitudes" (CP 46). James Browne alone understands the potential danger of family ties: he tells Michael not to marry Rose: "It would be better to live with her. She'd be less bound to you then" (CP 27).

In The Potting Shed, James Callifer refuses to make any such ties: he has distanced himself from his parents, his brother and their home, "Wild Grove"; when he returns as his father lies dying, he is an unwanted intruder, "a stranger in his parents' house" (The Potting Shed, CP 85). He attempted suicide as a boy, and now has simply run away to live quite alone, while those left behind in the family home are afraid even to communicate. In The Complaisant Lover Greene suggests that it is the natural state of any domestic arrangement to be unfulfilling: Victor, the husband in this peculiar triangular relationship, tells his wife that "[t]he trouble about marriage is, it's a damned boring condition even with a lover" (The Complaisant Lover, CP 191). However much one might love one's wife or husband, the marriage

will still become stale, because “[i]t’s the way of life that’s boring, not you” (CP 191). Interestingly, Jung suggests that this inability to maintain a harmonious family life is another English or European trait; once again he compares the English with the Indians. The latter, he explains, have learnt restraint, caution and tolerance through living in close proximity to so many family members—the wisest response—but “[t]he crowding together in families has the contrary effect with us. It makes people nervous, irritable, rough, and even violent.”⁵⁹ In Greene’s work, this violence is always against oneself: his characters are driven to self-destruction by the pressures of family life.

In fact, Greene’s characters seem often to be trapped in a way of life to which they are totally unsuited: men like Scobie are perhaps born bachelors, able to be happy only in the independence of single life, when responsible only for themselves. He was certainly more contented in the days when he was first in Africa, alone, with only a photograph to remind him of his wife. Greene suggests a very similar longing to be left alone, to his own devices, in the figure of Captain Fellows in The Power and the Glory: travelling along the river through the jungle, he is “completely alone” and filled with “boyish joy” at his solitude (PG 31). In this mood he can be “at home anywhere” (PG 32), but when he returns again to his actual family home, the excessive demands of adulthood envelope him once more: “He remembered with self-pity and nostalgia his happiness on the river, doing a man’s job without thinking of other people. If I had never married. . . .” (PG 39). Such thoughts were far from alien to Greene himself: Norman Sherry explains that “Greene was always happy away from civilisation; too much comfort appalled him. The absence of domestic

⁵⁹ Jung, Civilization in Transition 523.

pleasures pleased him, and ‘Massa go on trek’ meant a return to an isolation which he loved.”⁶⁰ Greene himself admitted in a letter to Vivien in 1948 that he had simply “a character profoundly antagonistic to ordinary domestic life”;⁶¹ he felt stifled by his life as husband and father in the 1940s, though in fact he was largely absent from his family during the war years, living in London and in Africa.

Eventually Greene’s affairs, restlessness and desire for freedom led to a separation from his wife. But, oddly, rather than indulging in trivial affairs, Greene—like Scobie—tended to find himself in other lasting relationships, with more people to feel responsible for. W. J. West notes that Greene’s relationships were always “liable to engulf him.”⁶² Thus, by the end of the war, Greene was not only seeking release from his marriage, but also from his lengthy affair with Dorothy Glover, with whom he had been living in London. Greene found commitment, love and ties alarming, but he also needed them, and indeed felt defined by them. In 1950 he wrote to Catherine Walston (with whom he began another of his major relationships in 1946) of his feelings on realising that neither she nor Vivien was now willing to have him as a husband:

Do you remember what David [Crompton] said about ‘home’ requiring an illusion of being indispensable to somebody. I feel particularly useless and so homeless. Paris, Goa, Malaya, London—there’s no point beyond myself in being anywhere. I have ceased being of use to anybody.⁶³

Catherine Walston herself is the “home” that Greene really wants: he tells her in his letters that “[y]ou give me back all the peace that other people take away” (written in

⁶⁰ Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 2, 120.

⁶¹ Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 2, 285.

⁶² W. J. West, *The Quest for Graham Greene* 123.

⁶³ Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 2, 335.

November 1949),⁶⁴ and that “[y]ou’re my human Africa” (December 1948).⁶⁵ Sherry judges that the affair “changed his life,”⁶⁶ and Sherry sums up the nature of this relationship when he describes Catherine as Greene’s “anchor”:⁶⁷ she was the central focus and support of his life in this period, but one which he was always afraid of losing. Greene tells her, in another letter (dated 19 December 1949): “My dear, my dear. I used to like being alone, but now it’s a horror. [. . .] I so long for your company.”⁶⁸

Greene’s fictional characters often make their homes in similar dependence upon another person, not only in this period, but throughout Greene’s writing career. Thus we see, for example, Millie Drover in *It’s a Battlefield* lost in her empty home now that her husband has been imprisoned, Andrews in *The Man Within* idealizing Elizabeth as the only woman who could encourage him to settle, or, much later in Greene’s writing career, the middle-aged Alfred Jones in *Doctor Fischer of Geneva* taking his last, brief chance of happiness with Anna-Luise, before she dies, leaving him alone and mentally homeless. In the 1940s, it is Maurice Bendrix and Sarah Miles, the lovers in *The End of the Affair*, who make a home in their shared love. This is a home far more fragile than any building, for without one another each feels they have nothing, that life will be nothing more than a desert, one of the key images of this novel. Sarah wonders: “What do we do in the desert if we lose each other?”

⁶⁴ Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 2, 318.

⁶⁵ Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 2, 310.

⁶⁶ Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 2, 215.

⁶⁷ Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 2, 317.

⁶⁸ Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 2, 320.

How does one go on living after that?" (EA 94). For Sarah, the answer is simple: one doesn't. Life without Bendrix is too painful to feel like any life at all. And then she becomes ill and dies, hoping for some consolation in Heaven. Bendrix is left behind in the desert of her absence, in angry loneliness, complaining to his dead lover: "[. . .] I'm alone. I want to be alone. If I can't have you, I'll be alone always" (EA 199).

With Sarah gone, both Bendrix and her husband, Henry, live amid a sense of rootlessness—they have lost their only anchor. Henry invites Bendrix to share his house, and so he leaves his own bachelor's rooms on the other side of the common. He moves into "the guest-room" (EA 186), illustrating the impossibility of his ever putting down roots now that Sarah is gone. He is just waiting to move on again, if only into death. But in the meantime, sharing the house with Henry, Bendrix becomes his protector, trying to "save" Henry from the peril of religious faith as he could not save Sarah. As more and more uncomfortable incidents come to light—Parkis's son being "healed" by a borrowed book and a vision of Sarah, Smythe's face being apparently similarly cured after he has slept on a lock of Sarah's hair—Bendrix makes every effort to shield Henry from the idea of Sarah's sanctity, from the idea that she is not simply dead now, but with God in Heaven. If Sarah were to be a saint, she would become public property, and Bendrix stands firm against the very idea, because he would truly have lost her then. The house becomes his shelter from painful possibilities, from other people, and from God; but its defences are too easily broken through: "The two of us had tried to build a makeshift house together, and even that was being broken up" (EA 209).

Bendrix is homeless now, as in truth he has always been. He has ended up living in somebody else's home, a strange guest. Before that he had Sarah as the focus to his life, but they never had the chance to make a physical home together. And he himself has had no better home than the rooms he used to rent from his formidable landlady, the rooms he used to smuggle Sarah into, the rooms where their affair came to so sudden an end with the falling of one bomb and Sarah's hasty vow to give up her lover if God would spare his life. Thus the meagre, depressing digs of the young characters in Greene's 1930s novels linger on into the 1940s and into some characters' adult years. It seems that such miserable "homes" are the only suitable habitat for Greene's single, lonely, middle-aged people. Bendrix remarks, after Sarah's death has left him truly alone: "[. . .] if one is lonely one prefers discomfort. There was too much comfort even in the bed sitting room I had at the wrong—the south—side of the Common, in the relics of other people's furniture" (EA 2). Men like Bendrix seek out such places—they choose them not simply because they cannot afford better, but because such rooms are suitably "homeless" and impersonal. Poole in The Ministry of Fear, for instance, inhabits a room "as comfortless as a transit camp; the owner might have been someone who was just passing on and couldn't be bothered to change so much as a stain on the wall" (MF 157). Wilson and Harris in The Heart of the Matter stay in rooms in a dismal hotel overrun with cockroaches while they wait to be allocated something more permanent though scarcely more "homely." These surroundings are startlingly miserable: visiting Harris's room, "[i]t shocked Wilson once again to realise that a room could be a degree more cheerless than his own" (HOM 74). When they do move on, it is to share a house (really only a tiny partitioned hut), which becomes their own little

refuge from the world. Even well into adulthood some of Greene's overgrown children are finding it impossible to succeed, to make a real home—a place of value, a place that will endure, and a place where they need not feel alone.

These are not homes: they are retreats from life and from human contact. In The Potting Shed, James Callifer remarks with sham levity that he is living in “[d]igs—the word sounds like an animal’s home, doesn’t it?” (CP 103). His uncle, Father Callifer, lives in rooms that possess, as Greene’s stage directions note, a quality of “homelessness that reminds us of James Callifer’s lodgings in Nottingham” (CP 117). Both men are living “underground” lives, out of sight of the rest of the world, hiding away their respective failures. Father Callifer explains that, after James’ apparent resurrection and his own issuing loss of faith, “[. . .] I went away to bury myself in rooms like this” (CP 125): now he is living in a makeshift grave, spiritually if not yet physically dead, and forgotten by the world. These retreats are an essential protection for such characters: when Arthur Rowe’s lodgings have been bombed in The Ministry of Fear, finding himself suddenly on the run, he feels exposed, simply because “[. . .] he had no longer what he called a home—somewhere to shelter from people who might know him” (MF 95-96). Helen Rolt has much the same conception of “home”: when she tells Scobie that she had wanted earlier in the day just to go home, he misunderstands her, and assumes that she means England, not her African hut. But she is content to call this tiny house a home because it is a good place to hide, somewhere “where I can shut the door and not answer when they knock” (HOM 180).

So Greene continues to look into the places his characters call home, and to use these places as a concrete representation of their social, financial and personal

failures. But there is also a new element in Greene's work of the 1940s: the meagreness of these places is intensified by a new kind of failure, by spiritual emptiness or loss of faith. In The Potting Shed, James Callifer speaks of the hopelessness that is palpable in "a room from which faith has gone." His theory runs thus:

A room without faith—oh that can be pretty and full of flowers, you can fill it with Regency furniture and the best modern pictures. But a room from which faith has gone is quite different. Like a marriage from which love has gone, and all that's left are habits and pet names and sentimental objects, picked up on beaches and in foreign towns that don't mean anything any more. And patience, patience everywhere like a fog. (CP 132)

This is the kind of room that his uncle inhabits: a room characterized above all by the sense of loss. Greene's characters—Wilson, Harris, Rowe and others—have all lost something: Wilson loses his youthful illusions after his arrival in Africa, and like Harris he also feels the sense of exclusion which has been with them since their school-days; Rowe has lost his wife, his friends, his family and with them his connection with ordinary life and people. Now he has even lost his only "home."

The worst loss of all in this period is the loss of God, which is suffered by Father Callifer, by James Callifer, by Scobie, and also by Morin (in Greene's short story, "A Visit to Morin," first published in 1957), who tells his uninvited Christmas visitor: "I [. . .] cut myself off for twenty years from grace and my belief withered as the priests said it would" ("A Visit To Morin," CS 255). Now Morin is afraid to return to the Church after so many years, in case his belief in the teachings of the Church should not return with the receiving of the Sacrament. He fears that this eventuality would leave him without even the remnants of faith in God, with nothing left to do but die, since he considers that "[. . .] a man without faith [. . .] had better

hide himself quickly in the grave so as not to discourage others” (CS 255). So men like Morin bury themselves in lonely houses, lodgings and bedsits, and such bare places suit their moods.

Without God these characters cannot feel “at home” in the world: they need more in their lives than the everyday, the mundane and the rational. James Callifer could not bring himself to have children because “I didn’t want to create new convicts for a prison” (CP 106): the purely earthly, secular way of life propounded by his father suffocated him. He needs more; he needs belief, and so he would not repeat his father’s mistakes: “If I had a child, I wouldn’t forbid it fairy stories. They might develop the sense of hope. If a pumpkin can turn into a coach, even this dreary room, that tablecloth, those awful ornaments, could be a palace, with limitless corridors” (CP 106). His unbelieving family has trapped him in a tiny, dull, limited world; who would want to be at home in it? So instead he is at home nowhere, fitted for nothing and nowhere better than these empty digs.

To settle down, in the way that so few of Greene’s characters can, involves gathering possessions with which to fill—and thus construct—a “home.” Greene suggests that this is a feminine trait based upon a keen sense of status, a trait that Scobie notices in his own wife in particular: “Women depended so much on pride, pride in themselves, their husbands, their surroundings. They were seldom proud, it seemed to him, of the invisible” (HOM 13). Louise Scobie fills her house with a mass of objects and books, which mark the place out as her domain, not her husband’s. Rather like Rose in Brighton Rock, cleaning and altering Pinkie’s room to suit her own taste, so Louise has moved into her husband’s territory and gradually excluded him, though again not intentionally. Returning to what is effectively only

his wife's home now, Scobie feels himself to be "in foreign territory" (HOM 14). He stands in the bedroom doorway looking around him, noticing how "[t]he dressing table was crammed with pots and photographs [. . .]. It was as if she were accumulating evidence that she had friends like other people" (HOM 14). But in fact she doesn't have friends. Her possessions are more than mere feminine clutter: they are a response to her extreme insecurity in Africa, and an attempt to create an illusion of popularity and involvement, to delude herself as much as anybody else. The house is now crammed with Louise's belongings:

In the living-room there was a bookcase full of her books, rugs on the floor, a native mask from Nigeria, more photographs. The books had to be wiped daily to remove the damp, and she had not succeeded very well in disguising with flowery curtains the food safe which stood with each foot in a little enamel basin of water to keep the ants out. (HOM 15)

This is a hopeless attempt to create the attractive feminine comfort of an English home—the pretty fabrics, the ornaments and the careful arrangement fail to hide the heat, dirt and genuine ugliness of African life. An English home is impractical in Africa, creating more nuisance than comfort.

Greene sums up: "Home to her was accumulation" (HOM 14), and Louise is not alone in this. In The Heart of the Matter, home is not a place—certainly not an African place for anyone but Scobie—but is instead found in the things people carry around with them as they travel from place to place. Home is found in memories of the past, and in any object that acts as a reminder. So, for Helen Rolt, home resides in the stamp album given to her by her father; it was to this she clung as she fought for life after being rescued from the lifeboat of a bombed ship. It stands for her childhood in England—the only settled home she has yet known. Other than this album, she has—and perhaps for the moment wants—nothing. Scobie looks around

the hut allocated to her and furnished for her with only the barest essentials; the contrast between this place and Louise's home is total: "His eyes wandered: there was nothing personal anywhere: no photographs, no books, no trinkets of any kind, but then he remembered that she had brought nothing out of the sea except herself and a stamp-album" (HOM 154). Perhaps one day she too will settle down like Louise Scobie and the other wives, but for the moment she is too immature and unready: she is still exploring an unfamiliar world.

Scobie in turn has abandoned gladly the burden of possessions, and lives a pared-down existence. But his is a permanent choice; there will never be a conventional home to suit Scobie. Since his house is not to his taste, he has made an alternative "home" in his office in the police station, removing all superfluous items, until there is almost nothing left to trouble him: "[. . .] to a stranger it would have appeared a bare uncomfortable room but to Scobie it was home," a home "built [. . .] by a process of reduction" (HOM 6). His office has become his one escape from domesticity, from the wife with whom he is basically incompatible. At home, only the bathroom can begin to approach the peace attainable in his tiny, featureless office, for this is one room that Louise has failed to transform. It is a room devoid of feminine fuss; it is merely functional. Scobie sits on the edge of the bath savouring a moment alone:

Just as in his own office the sense of home surrounded him. Louise's ingenuity had been able to do little with this room: the bath of scratched enamel [. . .]: the tin bucket under the lavatory seat [. . .]: the fixed basin [. . .]: bare floorboards: drab green black-out curtains. The only improvements Louise had been able to impose were the cork mat by the bath, the bright white medicine cabinet.

The rest of the room was all his own. It was like a relic of his youth carried from house to house. It had been like this years ago in his first house before he married. This was the room in which he had always been alone.

(HOM 37)

In here, Louise is absent, unable to make demands; he is left alone: “[. . .] he was happy here, sitting [. . .] in his own world” (HOM 38).

Scobie’s discomfort within his home and his marriage surely stems from the loss of his only daughter: there is no need of a “family” home now, because there is no family, only an ageing childless couple. Possessions mean nothing to him: his daughter was the only possession he really valued, and he was unable to keep her. At a dinner party, Fellowes suggests that hell does not worry him if it is only, as Scobie describes it, “a permanent sense of loss”; but Scobie rebukes him for his flippancy—“Perhaps you’ve never lost anything of any importance [. . .]” (HOM 226). Scobie feels as though he has lost everything in losing his daughter: Louise remarks that “[y]ou’ve never loved anyone since Catherine died”; all he has left in place of love now is “conscience” and “duty” (HOM 60). He lives only for other people’s sake, not for his own, but keeps himself apart from them emotionally. He and Louise have been living separate lives in the same house, kept apart by the gap left by their absent child.

Such a lifestyle is unsustainable: eventually this painful domestic arrangement must collapse, and it does so with Louise’s departure for South Africa. Her departure seems more than temporary, more like a divorce than a holiday. The Scobies’ relationship and their shared home seem to crumble: as Ali takes out Louise’s belongings it seems “as if the house were tumbling down around them” (HOM 109). Though they are each getting what they had wanted—Scobie gets peace and solitude and Louise gets to escape at last the hated place, people and climate—neither one feels content as the break is made. As the couple watch Louise’s ship arrive they feel “a sinking of the heart—happiness is never really so

welcome as changelessness—hand in hand they watched their separation anchor in the bay” (HOM 109). Left behind, Scobie now has no certainty in his life at all; he cannot even be sure of keeping the house because “[t]hey may turn me out for a married couple” (HOM 112). Yet, oddly, he feels more genuinely secure now than ever, now that the pain of separation is over. In “the empty house” there is a new “quality of security and impregnability in the silence” (HOM 115). Without human company his life is vastly simplified—“[. . .] there was nothing to listen for” (HOM 115)—and at long last he can relax and allow contentment to wash over him. For the moment at least this is his home once more.

Living with Louise, Scobie had essentially been dispossessed by emotional loss and by constant duty. Home was no longer a joy to him, but only a burden. Now she is gone, his greatest happiness lies in the feeling of freedom, which had previously been conditional on Louise’s contentment. He needs nothing; he is happy and unburdened. In The Tenth Man (written in 1944) Jean-Louis Chavel comes to a similar realisation of the insignificance of possessions and of the whole concept of ownership. Having given up his home and all of his possessions during the war, in exchange for his life, Chavel finds a peculiar sensation of release on returning to the house that is theoretically no longer his home: he learns that there is more to being “at home” than mere legal ownership of a place. He comes to understand that “[i]f a man loves a place enough he doesn’t need to possess it: it’s enough for him to know that it is safe [. . .]” (TM 86). At the close of the novel, he dies in the house, once again renouncing his legal right of ownership. It is enough simply to spend his last moments on earth in this familiar place, all problems finally resolved: “[. . .] it was oddly satisfactory to die in his own home alone” (TM 158). He began his life there

and now ends it in the same place—it seems he belongs to the house, rather than vice versa. As he dies he feels total tranquillity and freedom: as the vital blood flows from his body he feels himself dying as if engulfed by “a tide of peace” (TM 158). Many of Greene’s characters never learn Chavel’s lesson: the young man who exchanged his life in return for the Chavel’s property, and for the opportunity to leave something behind for his family, failed to understand that people are more valuable than possessions or places. As such, Greene’s characters generally feel an even greater need to possess people than places. When an imposter arrives at the house pretending to be Chavel, it is not the house but the young woman who now lives there that Chavel fears losing to him, or to any other man; he feels “sickness and despair” at the idea (TM 121).

The urge to possess a loved one is strong, and it is this which virtually destroys Maurice Bendrix in The End of the Affair and which made Greene’s own relationship with Catherine Walston so difficult. Bendrix’s jealousy is his defining characteristic: without the reassurance of possession, he feels hopelessly insecure within his relationship with Sarah. But, as a lover, he has none of the rights or status of her husband; she cannot belong to him: “Insecurity is the worst sense that lovers feel: sometimes the most humdrum desireless marriage seems better. Insecurity twists meanings and poisons trust” (EA 56-57). In the end, Bendrix must inevitably lose Sarah, not only to her husband, but also to God: after her death, Bendrix tells God (but does not really believe it, or he would not need to say the words): “You didn’t own her all those year: I owned her” (EA 180). Sarah belongs ultimately only to God; even her husband is not secure, because she is not the kind of woman who can ever truly be possessed or constrained by another person. Bendrix even feels

sorry for his former lover's husband, because "[h]e was living in a terrible insecurity. To that extent his plight was worse than mine. I had the security of possessing nothing" and therefore of having nothing to lose (EA 41). It is only after Sarah's death that Henry can finally feel secure in the knowledge that he can never again be the cuckolded husband, for now "[t]here's nowhere for her to be but at home" (EA 185). Yet Bendrix rightly questions where her home actually is. She may never have left her husband for Bendrix, but emotionally she had left both of them for God, and He became her only chance of a home.

Relationships and families offer little hope of stability to Greene's characters: to find peace, security and happiness they must live alone, untroubled by the difficulties of love. Sarah Miles, Scobie, the whisky priest—all end their lives in emotional isolation, not in the centre of a loving family. They need detachment from earthly relationships in order to feel closer to God. Jung compares the Indian family-oriented way of life with Western Christianity's admiration of isolation as a means to spiritual purity: "[. . .] India takes the family seriously. [. . .] It is understood to be the indispensable form of life, inescapable, necessary, and self-evident. It needs a religion to break this law and to make 'homelessness' the first step to saintliness."⁶⁹ In Greene's work this admiration for belief-inspired homelessness is explained in simplistic form by the priest in The End of the Affair who expresses a wish that people should realise at least that "[. . .] this world's not everything" (EA 192). And in contrast to the stifling responsibilities and the pain of ordinary domestic life, the Christian ideal of pure and saintly homelessness now appears strangely desirable even to Greene's poor sinners. In The Heart of the Matter, Wilson sits in the

⁶⁹ Jung, Civilization in Transition 523.

Scobies' living room watching the unhappily married couple—“[. . .] for the first time he realized the pain inevitable in any human relationship—pain suffered and pain inflicted. How foolish one was to be afraid of loneliness” (HOM 88). Scobie learned this lesson long ago—his happiest memory will be of solitude, walking the deserted African streets in the black-out and the pouring rain as though he is their only inhabitant:

Except for the sound of the rain, on the road, on the roofs, on the umbrella, there was absolute silence: only the dying moan of the sirens continued for a moment or two to vibrate within the ear. It seemed to Scobie later that this was the ultimate border he had reached in happiness: being in the darkness, alone, with the rain falling, without love or pity. (HOM 153)

Human companionship cannot rival this pure contentment, self-sufficient and tranquil. Leaving Helen's hut later—having gone there simply to tell her that a light was showing through her black-out, but leaving with yet another human connection and responsibility—he is for the present time happy in their new friendship: “He walked away, feeling an extraordinary happiness, but this he would not remember as happiness, as he would remember setting out in the darkness, in the rain, alone” (HOM 159).

The danger in Greene's work is that his characters may escape too far from human companionship (without necessarily replacing it with closeness to God) and go beyond freedom into exile. This is what Scobie does: he only wants to escape from his responsibility to other people, but somehow finds himself leaving God behind too; his life and his actions slide out of his control. He calms Helen's fear of losing him when Louise returns by telling her that the only home he wants is with her, not with his wife. But this is not true: the words are merely forced out of him by his desire to keep her happy and free from pain: “He had the sense that he was

embarking now on a longer journey than he had ever intended” (HOM 227). His affair with Helen prevents him from confessing, from receiving absolution, and thus from receiving Communion, from even hoping for salvation. At Mass, Scobie kneels watching others go up to the altar as he cannot, and “[. . .] suddenly Scobie was aware of the sense of exile. Over there, where all these people knelt, was a country to which he would never return. The sense of love stirred in him, the love one always feels for what one has lost [. . .]” (HOM 249). Realising that he can never bring himself to confess and return to God, “[. . .] it seemed to Scobie that for the first time his footsteps had taken him out of sight of hope. [. . .] It seemed to him that he had only left for his exploration the territory of despair” (HOM 260). He no longer belongs to the Church—he is an enemy, a fraud, an infiltrator—and going to the altar to receive Communion in a state of mortal sin he feels “like a spy in a foreign land” (HOM 264). He cannot maintain his composure long under such strain, and decides upon death as the only possible release, facing Hell instead of Heaven for all eternity in order to save Louise, Helen, and even God, from himself: “[. . .] I’m going away from all of you for ever [. . .]” (HOM 308). His homesickness for salvation is immense but hopeless; he has left everything and everyone behind.

Scobie is the extreme example of exile in Greene’s work: he goes too far. Others seek detachment more successfully, and in Greene’s work during the forties it is still the loneliest men and women who seem ultimately to come closest to God: human relationships only get in the way. In The Power and the Glory, Greene’s priest is far from the conventional image of the holy man (when he is introduced into the novel he is desperate to escape his responsibilities, tempted to do as the other priests have done and simply abandon his spiritual children in order to save his own

life). And yet his solitary, hunted wanderings through remotest Mexico do ultimately produce in him a genuine closeness to God, which was formerly absent: he may briefly feel the temptation of a comfortable home life at the centre of a community across the border, but his duty and his conscience urge him back, however reluctantly and fearfully, into the more authentic, and lonely, Christian existence of effort, danger and death. It takes a long spiritual journey before the whisky-priest feels comfortable in his own religious belief; only with time and experience does he come to regard his priestly functions as anything other than an irksome duty. Francis L. Kunkel judges that in Greene's novels

Not only are the Catholic characters greater sinners [than non-Catholics], but they are frequently less happy in the state of grace than they are in the state of sin. Sarah Miles, for instance, is a carefree relaxed sinner before her conversion and life of virtue plunge her into woe. The nearer she approaches to God, the less joy she takes from the created world and human love. Pascal describes the wretchedness of man without God; Greene describes the wretchedness of man with God.⁷⁰

While it is fair comment to suggest that faith does not tend to bring Greene's characters earthly happiness, Kunkel goes too far in suggesting that they are more likely to find happiness in sin. For Greene, human existence tends to involve unhappiness, whether one is sinful or virtuous—"wretchedness" is the natural condition of men on earth. But through virtue and faith one can at least aim for Heaven and a better life after death. Sarah Miles was no happy sinner, or she would never have been drawn as she was to God and the Catholic Church. Her human relationships were merely failed attempts to find the love that only God could offer, very much as Charles Ryder discovers (in Waugh's Brideshead Revisited) that, just

⁷⁰ Francis L. Kunkel, "The Theme of Sin and Grace in Graham Greene," Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations, ed. Robert O. Evans 52.

as his love for Sebastian was the “forerunner” for his love for Julia, so the relationship with Julia only paved the way for his relationship with God.⁷¹

John Atkins has written that “[a]t times there is a suspicion that Greene hates his religion as a prisoner hates his cell,”⁷² and this is true, to a degree. Greene and his characters would very much like to escape the pain and constriction of the troubles that faith can bring, but they have no desire to escape God. Greene’s whisky-priest, while sharing this intense longing to escape the weight of belief and the demands of a good Christian life, eventually comes to view his “prison” in a quite different light: the “cell” becomes home. This attitude is demonstrated, almost literally, in the incident of his night in the communal prison cell after he has been caught with illicit alcohol. In this filthy, suffocating, overpopulated cell, he feels strangely more at home and at peace than at any other time. Grahame Smith finds that “[t]he cell is at once an image of ‘the world: overcrowded with lust and crime and unhappy love, it stank to heaven;’ a home for the Christ-like acceptance of the lowest depths of human degradation; and a circle in the Dantesque vision of hell.”⁷³ Here, Smith comments, the priest “can fall no further”:⁷⁴ he has at least that security, and this brings a perverse sensation of release. Here is his true home: with his fellow sinners, in a world that is painfully real. When he eventually arrives at the end of his journey, in the safety of the next state, the priest finds a vastly different and scarcely credible “home.” He collapses exhausted against the walls of a church: “[. . .] he fell

⁷¹ Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited 288.

⁷² Atkins, Graham Greene 208.

⁷³ Grahame Smith 80.

⁷⁴ Grahame Smith 80.

asleep, with home behind his shoulder-blades” (PG 191). But his home is not in the trappings of the Church, its buildings, vestments and artefacts. His home is in a world where the outward signs of faith have been outlawed and stripped away, where nothing remains of religious life but faith itself. “Life didn’t contain churches,” the priest feels (PG 218), but only the limitlessness of the Church and of God.

Though the priest is not a brave man, he comes to understand that death and pain are necessary parts of earthly life, and that earthly life is only an imperfect stage on the way to the perfection of Heaven. The most important thing in life, if one is strong enough, is therefore to prepare for the life to come. Waugh, writing from a similar Catholic perspective, remarks (in Robbery Under Law): “I believe that man is, by nature, an exile and will never be self-sufficient or complete on this earth [. . .].”⁷⁵ His conviction echoes words found in the Bible: “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”⁷⁶ The simple Biblical fact for Christians is that “[. . .] whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord”:⁷⁷ the body provides a home for the human soul, but it is a home which can only be temporary and which is always imperfect—corrupted by the inescapable taint of original sin. Greene has a similarly gloomy view of the human condition on earth: he writes, in 1947, that “[g]oodness has only once found a perfect incarnation in the human body and never will again, but evil can always find a home there” (“The Lost

⁷⁵ Quoted in Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh: A Biography (London: Collins, 1975) 185.

⁷⁶ The Holy Bible (King James Version), 2 Corinthians 5.1.

⁷⁷ The Holy Bible, 2 Corinthians 5.6.

Childhood,” CE 17). The human body is yet another prison for Greene’s characters: they are trapped by its ugliness and by the sins it encourages. Kunkel argues that

[. . .] Greene does not exaggerate the results of original sin. He never portrays man as so mired in sin as to be beyond the power of redemption. Those of his characters who are most strongly committed to sin always retain their freedom to renounce it, to respond to the tug of divine grace.⁷⁸

This divine tug certainly appears also in Waugh’s fiction: in Brideshead Revisited he describes the “twitch upon the thread”⁷⁹ (which not only pulls Ryder back to Brideshead and the Flytes, but also pulls Catholics, however lapsed, back to the Church in some degree: “God won’t let them go for long”⁸⁰). But in Greene this thread seems to lead inevitably to death; death is perhaps the only lasting means of purification. For Greene there can be no exaggeration of the power of original sin—its power is total. Flesh is weak: to be secure from further temptation and sin one must die and leave it all behind, like Sarah Miles, the whisky-priest, Scobie et al. When life is so difficult, and sin so hard to avoid, even with the best intentions, it is hardly surprising that they are keen for death. And they certainly are, as David Lodge has remarked: “In a period when the most influential school of criticism in England has proclaimed the duty of the novelist to be ‘on the side of life,’ Greene has spoken eloquently on the side of death.”⁸¹

Death is the means to an end in Greene’s fiction, in the 1940s as it had been in the 1930s. In The Power and the Glory, when the Lieutenant complains that the hostages he has killed in his search for the fugitive priest “were my own people. I

⁷⁸ Kunkel, “The Theme of Sin and Grace in Graham Greene” 53.

⁷⁹ Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited 214.

⁸⁰ Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited 212.

⁸¹ David Lodge, Graham Greene (New York: Columbia UP, 1966) 4.

wanted to give them the whole world,” the priest responds: “Well, who knows. Perhaps that’s what you did” (PG 238). The priest may not believe in his own salvation, but he certainly believes that heaven waits for others. In another incident, when he attempts to persuade the dying American outlaw to make a last confession, the priest tells him “[y]ou have murdered men—children perhaps [. . .]. But that need not be so important. It only belongs to this life, a few years—it’s over already. You can drop it all here, in this hut, and go on for ever . . .” (PG 227). But the American, like so many of Greene’s unbelieving characters, finds it impossible to see (or even imagine) anything beyond this inferior world, to take his chance of an eternal home. As long as they still live, so many of Greene’s characters find it practically impossible to centre their sights upon anything but their earthly life, good or bad. In *The End of the Affair*, Bendrix, like the American, refuses to take a chance, to believe, to look beyond his lonely earthly life. All he can see is that God appears to have stolen from him his one chance of a home, with Sarah: “[. . .] I wanted Sarah for a lifetime and You took her away. With Your great schemes You ruin our happiness like a harvester ruins a mouse’s nest [. . .] (EA 210). Earthly homes seem to be of no account to God: they must be sacrificed in order that we may enter our eternal home in Heaven. But however great the sacrifice that must be made, Greene’s Catholics, at least ultimately, cannot lightly reject the promise of Heaven. Even many of his non-believers feel the gap left in their lives by the absence of God and of hope for their eternal future. Brown declares, in *No Man’s Land*: “I wish I believed in anything,” even in what he calls the “rubbish” of Christian belief (MD 622). There can be no more dismal certainty, for Greene’s

would-be believers, than Brown's assertion that "[. . .] the world is controlled by uranium, not by God" (MD 595).

In the end, many of Greene's characters in this period, like Julia Flyte in Waugh's Brideshead Revisited, realise that "[. . .] the worse I am, the more I need God. I can't shut myself out from his mercy."⁸² Like Julia, Sarah Miles leaves her lover in order that she may be with God. Even Scobie's suicide is an ambiguous act of self-exile: he has not rejected God, but has simply decided in his human pride and confusion, that God, like everyone else, needs to be protected from the world and from Scobie himself. Greene makes it hard to believe that Scobie is damned as he expects to be. Greene's central characters in his fiction in the forties are far from conventionally pious or saintly figures, but they understand the hopelessness of permanent exile from God and Heaven. Sarah Miles's fear of "abandonment" and of the "desert" of human earthly existence without her lover is calmed only by her steadily growing faith in God. She wonders, "[i]f one could believe in God, would he fill the desert?" (EA 95). In this novel the answer is a qualified no; He cannot, but He can offer a reason to endure that desert a little longer. As Sarah sits in a church with Bendrix, struggling to decide her future, he tells her to go home, but "[i]t isn't home, Maurice," she said. 'I don't want to go away from here'" (EA 139). She has unwittingly come home instead to the faith she was secretly baptized into, but never knew as a child. Her widower ponders the strangeness of her life's journey: "Baptized at two years old, and then beginning to go back to what you can't even remember . . . It's like an infection." (EA 205). In the end it becomes apparent that her earliest and truest home has never relinquished its hold.

⁸² Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited 324.

Chapter Three:

“It is not good to be too free”¹—Greene in the 1950s and 1960s

The 1950s brought for Greene a change of mood, of subject matter, and, perhaps most obviously, of scenery. He explains in his autobiography: “The fifties were for me a period of great unrest (WE 139). With his marriage to Vivien effectively over, and his relationship with Catherine Walston foundering as she refused to leave her family, Greene had few claims remaining upon him in England. He was free (even if not happily so) to respond to his sense of unrest, to travel in search of danger and adventure, leaving far behind him all the difficulties of his personal life: “I was in that mood for escape which comes, I suppose to most men in middle life, [. . .] escape from boredom, escape from depression” (WE 139). In essence, he was running away from home again. His tracks criss-crossed the world, taking him in the course of the fifties and sixties to Malaya, Kenya, Poland, Indo-China, Haiti, the Belgian Congo: places where death was constantly and tantalisingly close, and where everyday experience reminded one, because of the ever-present danger, that one really was alive. Greene comments: “[. . .] it became a habit with me to visit troubled places, not to seek material for novels but to regain the sense of insecurity which I had enjoyed in the three blitzes on London [. . .] (WE 140). Greene’s travels at this time were therefore often a negation—or at least an evasion—of the search for home undertaken by so many of his characters in the thirties and forties.

¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, rev. ed., trans. and intro. A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995) 15.

In this period it was not difficult to find such troubled places: one of Greene's characters in The Comedians comments upon "the wild world we live in now" (C 312), meaning the whole world and not only the tumultuous smaller world of Haiti, where the novel is set. Greene notes in Ways of Escape that he was often asked why he chose to write thrillers, but could not understand such a question, because, to him, the state of the world all around him—even in England—made it virtually impossible to write anything else, since "[o]ur whole planet since the war has swung into the fog-belt of melodrama [. . .]" (WE 221). Only by closing one's eyes to the obvious truth could this realisation be avoided, and Greene was not willing to blind himself to reality only for the sake of the comfort that often looked more like boredom to him.

Certainly during the fifties the mood of world affairs was darkening: victory for the allies in the Second World War had not brought peace and stability. Instead came a period in which dictatorships, rebellions and civil wars flourished in the distant countries visited by Greene. In Malaya, Greene experienced the odd juxtaposition of everyday life and war when he visited the rubber planters who lived each day with the threat of sudden violent death at the hands of guerillas, holing themselves up at home within a "prison of wire" (WE 143) which was nonetheless no guarantee of safety from the "slow approach of inevitable violence" (WE 142). Later, in Haiti, he observed the "stifling nightmare city" of Port au Prince under the terrible rule of Papa Doc (WE 268). Greene found that the horrors of this place simply could not be exaggerated: "Haiti really was the bad dream of the newspaper headlines [. . .]" (WE 269). Closer to home, the Cold War had brought the dread of total destruction into every home and every mind. This was the terrifyingly impersonal age of the atomic bomb: America and the Soviet Union competed to

develop the most devastating weapons ever, and in Britain ordinary people marched and demonstrated against this massive threat to the whole of humanity.

In Greene's work, the repercussions of this anxiety and insecurity are clear: there can be little point in concerning oneself with making a personal home when the world itself might cease to exist at any given moment with the mere touch of a button. So, in Our Man in Havana, the hero, Wormold is rebuked for his concern to save money and secure a future for himself and for his daughter Millie, perhaps to return to England from Cuba and make a settled home there. His more cynical friend Dr Hasselbacher tells him, as they sit talking over their customary morning drinks in the Wonder Bar: "We none of us have a great expectation of life nowadays, so why worry?" (MH 3). Hasselbacher dismisses Wormold's "long-term worry," insisting: "Then it's not worth calling a worry. We live in an atomic age, Mr Wormold. Push a button—piff bang—where are we?" (MH 3). Resignation seems to be the only sensible recourse in an uncontrollable world: one must stop struggling, live for the moment, have another drink. As Hasselbacher leaves his friend he offers some advice: "You should dream more, Mr Wormold. Reality in our century is not something to be faced" (MH 5). The world has changed, and with it the life one must lead to stay sane. Expectations must decrease if one is not to be disappointed. But Greene's characters are very often disappointed, as they find it hard, even impossible, to adapt to a world in which they feel at a loss, out of touch, emphatically not at home.

The potential for disaster threatened by the race to develop atomic weaponry, in conjunction with the unrest between East and West, could hardly fail to attract the attention of writers in this period, and few could share Hasselbacher's resignation.

The outraged disbelief felt by the thinking man who must merely watch as the world falls apart before his eyes is powerfully conveyed by the permanently incensed Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's play, Look Back in Anger (1956). Jimmy sees that the majority of the population now merely watches while a few men decide its fate; nobody seems to be involved in life any more: "Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no convictions and no enthusiasm."² He is as angry with himself as with anybody else, as he realises the futility of even hoping to do anything, and the probability that the world, and mankind with it, are doomed. He famously complains that "[t]here aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned, grand design. It'll just be for the Brave-New-nothing-very-much-thank-you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus."³ For all its scientific and technological progress, the modern world has been devalued in human terms: as mankind's capabilities have expanded, so the significance of the individual has been diminished. The western world might have become more prosperous, but too many of its values seem to have been sacrificed along the way. A war now—a war that would quite possibly conclude with the destruction of the earth—would be merely a battle to head the global hierarchy; it would not be an heroic struggle for principles, as in former times.

Older writers, including those of Greene's own generation, certainly wondered in this period where in the modern world there might be found anything of value. Betjeman continued to decry the modern age, much as he had been doing since the thirties. In "The Dear Old Village," a poem from his 1954 collection, Betjeman

² John Osborne, Look Back in Anger (1957; London: Faber, 1996) 10.

³ Osborne, Look Back in Anger 89.

suggests that such quintessentially English settlements are not merely threatened but no longer exist untainted by the features of this “age of progress,” an age in which it may be claimed:

Nature is out of date and God is too;
Think what atomic energy can do!⁴

And later, in “Inexpensive Progress,” part of a collection from 1966, he writes of an “age without a soul,” desecrating nature and a once-beautiful country.⁵ This is the death of life as he has known and approved it: he imagines a country filled to the brim with such unsightly innovations as power stations, chain stores, roundabouts, cars and street-lamps; and when all this is complete, Betjeman predicts, “[w]e’ll know that we are dead.”⁶ Admittedly, Betjeman had been saying similar things throughout his career, but he had not been proved wrong; this, for him, was the end of an ugly road, the culmination of the decline which had been noted first in the thirties, but which was never reversed, or even controlled.

Another of Greene’s contemporaries, Evelyn Waugh, also grew more alarmed in the fifties by the direction of modern “progress,” and became ever less flexible about accepting or adapting to any of it as the years went by. By 1957, in The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold, Waugh writes of his central character, based upon himself: “His strongest tastes were negative. He abhorred plastics, Picasso, sunbathing, and jazz—everything in fact that had happened in his own lifetime.”⁷ Pinfold rejects the outside world, choosing instead to live within the bubble of his own home, with only

⁴ John Betjeman, “The Dear Old Village,” Collected Poems 187.

⁵ John Betjeman, “Inexpensive Progress,” Collected Poems 286.

⁶ Betjeman, “Inexpensive Progress,” Collected Poems 287.

⁷ Evelyn Waugh, The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold (1957; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962) 14.

his wife and a few friends allowed close to him. His rejection of the world, his tiredness with it, and his need to escape from it result in a temporary period of insanity, bringing total detachment and introspection. Even when Pinfold finally recovers, he remains apart: he hurries home to record his mental experiences, safe once more in his personal haven, “content to sit over the fire and, like a warrior returned from a hard fought victory, relive his trials, endurances and achievements.”⁸ He can be secure in the knowledge that he has stood firm against the maddening modern world.

Such responses echo Greene’s own concerns about modern society, and make him in fact appear rather moderate. He has not grown, like Waugh, old and inflexible; he is not opposed on principle to change or innovation, but he demonstrates a keen eye in his work for the changes which are unnecessary or damaging to society and which threaten the future security of humankind. Greene is realistic; he knows that the world, and mankind, cannot remain static: there must be evolution, but with such development comes the risk that humanity might choose to take the wrong direction, as indeed it seems to be doing in this period of the twentieth century. It is a rather Darwinian question of survival of the fittest. In A Burnt-Out Case, Dr Colin tells Querry:

I want to be on the side of change [. . .]. If I had been born an amoeba who could think, I would have dreamed of the day of the primates. I would have wanted anything I did to contribute to that day. Evolution, as far as we can tell, has lodged itself firmly in the brains of man. The ant, the fish, even the ape has gone as far as it can go, but in our brain evolution is moving—my God—at what a speed! (BOC 143)

⁸ Evelyn Waugh, The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold 154-55.

For Colin, it is not a question of making oneself comfortable on the earth, but of preparing the way so that future generations may feel more truly at home in a better world, peopled by better men. He has hope, if not for himself, then for those who will come after him. Humankind, according to the doctor, need not destroy this planet, however much in peril it seems currently to be:

The nineteenth century wasn't as far wrong as we like to believe. We have become cynical about progress because of the terrible things we have seen men do during the last forty years. All the same through trial and error the amoeba did become the ape. There were blind starts and wrong turnings even then, I suppose. Evolution today can produce Hitlers as well as St John of the Cross. I have a small hope, that's all, a very small hope [. . .]. I want to be on the side of the progress which survives. I'm no friend of the pterodactyls. (BOC 144)

The simple truth demonstrated by Colin is that one must face facts and move onwards as the world does so; one cannot live indefinitely, or successfully, in a vacuum. When Querry wonders: "Is change so good?" the doctor merely replies that "[w]e can't avoid it" (BOC 143).

The danger, of course, is that man himself might be the modern-day pterodactyl, like the doomed species of early people in William Golding's 1955 novel, The Inheritors.⁹ In the novel it is our own species that displaces the Neanderthals, but the question that issues from Golding's depiction of the situation is: why should we not in turn become extinct ourselves? And in Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four (published in 1949), it seems mankind has indeed developed in such a fashion that it has met with a kind of living death, in which the individual is absorbed totally into the larger communal existence; the concept even of privacy is eradicated with the ever-present telescreens and microphones watching and listening to any word or any action at any moment. The individual cannot survive under such

⁹ William Golding, The Inheritors (1955; London: Faber, 1961).

conditions: Winston Smith's interrogator/teacher, O'Brien tells him: "If you are a man, Winston, you are the last man. Your kind is extinct; we are the inheritors. Do you understand that you are alone? You are outside history, you are non-existent."¹⁰ The world belongs to the majority; for the individual who chooses not to be part of the herd there remains only the sense of hopeless alienation. This is not his world—he has no world.

A different but similarly alarming future is suggested in Evelyn Waugh's short story of 1953, "Love Among the Ruins." Here Waugh depicts life amid the ruins of "our" civilization, a hollow society where there is no God and the customary greeting is "State be with you,"¹¹ where criminals are not punished but analysed and regarded as "phenomena," where euthanasia is the choice of thousands of physically healthy, emotionally dead citizens, and where science and medicine have found ever more fantastic new ways to subvert nature. In short, the common fears of the modern age are taken to their extreme. The central figure is called, appropriately, Miles Plastic: he is the creation of his environment, worked upon throughout his life until he is brought to a bizarre "perfection": "The State had made him."¹² Miles is to be the showpiece of the government, their sole supposedly reformed criminal; he is to travel the country advertising a planned centre for rehabilitation (to replace the one that he himself has burnt to the ground). He is told that he will take with him a model of this centre, but, as it has not yet been produced, for the moment a plain packing case

¹⁰ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989) 282-83.

¹¹ Evelyn Waugh, "Love Among the Ruins," *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* 222.

¹² Evelyn Waugh, "Love Among the Ruins" 182.

takes its place. Miles is oddly entranced by this box; it suits the mood of the state-made man, trained to appreciate only the second-rate:

It fitted. It fell into place precisely in the void of his mind, satisfying all the needs for which his education had prepared him. The conditioned personality recognized its proper preordained environment. All else was insubstantial; the gardens at Mountjoy, Clara's cracked Crown Derby and the enveloping beard were trophies of a fading dream.

The Modern Man was home.¹³

An empty home suits an empty modern man.

Greene's own fears for the future are less dramatic, but run along the same lines. Though atomic war is the great popular fear of the era, Greene sees that ruin might lie in a different direction. No apocalypse is necessary to seal man's fate; instead, Greene explains:

My obsessive nightmare is that the junior civil servant should come to rule the world. Compared with that the hydrogen bomb is a minor danger. After all we don't have to continue living after an explosion, but the bureaucrats will offer us health services, pensions, and perhaps one day an almost indefinite prolongation of life. Our existence is important to them so that they can remain in full employment. They need us—so let us make sure they know that we don't need them. ("Getting to Know America," YE 89).

The bureaucrats can offer nothing more important, inspiring or enlivening than bureaucracy itself; they provide only a dull safety-net, into which Greene has no intention of falling. The home-life that they may offer is not life as he recognises it, and he does not want their unexciting, altered world.

Yet for Britain and the British the world, it seemed, had already altered beyond recognition. The days of "Great" Britain were over, the Empire was fast becoming a memory, and Britain's influence in the world was dwindling steadily. Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders remark that the Suez crisis of 1956 was "Britain's final

¹³ Evelyn Waugh, "Love Among The Ruins" 221-22.

fling as an imperial power,”¹⁴ a fling which ended not with victory but with humiliation and the realization that “[. . .] Britain was no longer a world power, and control of events was now held by the Americans and Russians.”¹⁵ This change in the global pecking-order inevitably created in the British people a quite new sensation of uncertainty and of insecurity about their national “home,” as their formerly vital country declined from its position as a world power. The Entertainer, by John Osborne, used the particular case of the death of the music hall to mirror the more general death of the old British way of life, the life that had flourished before two world wars altered so much. Osborne remarks, in his note to the play, that “[s]ome of the heart of England has gone; something that once belonged to everyone.”¹⁶ There was something warm and homely about the past as the elderly Billy Rice remembers it. He tells his granddaughter, Jean: “I feel sorry for you people. [. . .] You haven’t lived, most of you. [. . .] You don’t know what life can be like.”¹⁷ Once, Billy and millions of Britons had the comfort of inclusion in an ordered society: “We knew what the rules were, and even if we spent half our time making people laugh at ’em we never seriously suggested that anyone should break them.”¹⁸ For the young people of Britain in the fifties, not only are there no firm rules, but there is nothing to laugh at either. For Jean, life has been exposed as ultimately meaningless and empty:

¹⁴ Davies and Saunders, “Literature, Politics and Society” 27.

¹⁵ Davies and Saunders, “Literature, Politics and Society” 28.

¹⁶ John Osborne, Author’s Note, The Entertainer, John Osborne: Plays, vol. 2 (London: Faber, 1998) np.

¹⁷ Osborne, The Entertainer 18.

¹⁸ Osborne, The Entertainer 75-76.

Here we are, we're alone in the universe, there's no God, it just seems that it all began by something as simple as sunlight striking on a piece of rock. And here we are. We've only got ourselves. Somehow we've just got to make a go of it. We've only got ourselves.¹⁹

The sense of Britain as a community, which had seemed to be revived by the coming of the Second War, has trickled away once more. Instead, as Archie Rice's song suggests, "[w]e're all out for good old number one [. . .]."²⁰ Britain seemed to have become fragmented and lacking in any united purpose: Arthur Marwick describes the 1950s as the "decade of detachment."²¹ The secure sense of family and of home had been destroyed, and John Montgomery notes that for the young in particular now, the newly defined teenagers, and the Teddy boys, "[h]ome was not where you lived, only the place where your bed was."²² The young were defined by other things: by how they looked and how they acted, rather than where they came from. One of the more negative consequences of this tendency towards greater social and geographical mobility was the rise of people living alone, and of the loneliness, isolation and suicides the bed-sit life could induce. As Montgomery details, "[t]wice as many people were living alone in big cities compared with the twenties, and they posed a growing problem. Family ties had lessened, personal isolation in the midst of technical advancement had grown."²³ Greene's unattached characters have been living such lives since the thirties, but now they are scarcely unusual; their miserable seediness is shared by thousands.

¹⁹ Osborne, The Entertainer 79-80.

²⁰ Osborne, The Entertainer 27.

²¹ Arthur Marwick, The Explosion of British Society 1914-1970 (London: Methuen, 1971) 155.

²² John Montgomery, The Fifties (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965) 165.

²³ Montgomery 292.

It was not only in Britain that such social isolation was increasing: much of Europe shared the same trend. Heidegger writes of the essential homelessness of many nations in post-war life, and takes the example of Germany, many of whose inhabitants, he says, have “lost their homeland,” been forced to leave their “native soil,” while others have simply “wandered off” into the “wastelands of industrial districts. They are strangers now to their former homeland.”²⁴ Furthermore, he complains that even those who have remained in their birthplaces have suffered the estranging effects of modern society and are frequently

more homeless than those who have been driven from their homeland. Hourly and daily they are chained to radio and television. Week after week the movies carry them off into uncommon, but often merely common, realms of the imagination, and give the illusion of a world that is no world.²⁵

The simple end result is that “the rootedness, the autochthony, of man is threatened today at its core!”²⁶ Amid the growing globalisation of the modern way of life there is often no room for the individuality and parochialism of a home, of roots. Simone Weil’s The Need for Roots shares such concerns. She insists that “[t]o be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul”;²⁷ yet she also notes that man currently seems incapable of realizing this fact: “[f]or several centuries now, men of the white race have everywhere destroyed the past, stupidly, blindly, both at home and abroad.”²⁸ And along with their past they destroy all of

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” Discourse on Thinking, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) 48.

²⁵ Heidegger, Discourse on Thinking 48.

²⁶ Heidegger, Discourse on Thinking 48-49.

²⁷ Simone Weil, The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties towards Mankind, trans. Arthur Wills (1952; London: Routledge, 2002) 43.

²⁸ Weil, The Need for Roots 51.

their rootedness, their ability to be at home even where they ought naturally to belong.

The decline of Britain's (and Europe's) power and the final death of colonial rule offered the chance for a young and unwearied nation to step into the vacant position of world dominance, and America did so unhesitatingly in the 1950s. It would be the American junior civil servant, if any, who would rule the world. And the innocence or ignorance of Americans worried Greene now as it had always done, his unease growing in direct proportion to America's increasing power and influence. Simone Weil shares Greene's concern at America's growing role in the world, judging that "[. . .] since its population has for several centuries been founded above all on immigration, the dominating influence which it will probably exercise greatly increases the danger."²⁹ America is simply too young as a nation, and has too few roots and too much power. In The Quiet American, Greene argues that the American people simply hasn't the experience necessary to be a major world power. The English reporter Fowler finds himself constantly playing nursemaid to the young American named Pyle who is meddling in political affairs beyond his comprehension in Vietnam.

Whereas in the 1940s Greene's characters felt a compulsion to protect those around them (as Scobie protected Louise and Helen and the whisky-priest longed to protect his child, his parishioners and God Himself), by the 1950s the burden of responsibility has become too much, too wearing. So characters only very reluctantly accept responsibility for others—as Fowler resents Pyle's naivety and the burden of protection it places upon him—and more usually they reject all contact that

²⁹ Weil, The Need for Roots 50.

might lead to other people's reliance upon them. It is no surprise that Fowler is separated from his wife, or that Querry in A Burnt-Out Case has broken the hearts of numerous discarded lovers. But even when family and friends have been pushed away to a convenient distance, strangers may still appear, to make new demands, as in the case of Pyle and Fowler. Pyle's reckless innocence both demands protection for this young man and also ensures that others need to be protected from him. And while Fowler eventually loses patience and sympathy for Pyle when he puts innocent people's lives at risk, he never loses a peculiar fatherly affection for the young man, even after Fowler has conspired in Pyle's murder. Fowler wishes that Pyle had simply stayed in America where he belonged, and where he could do no harm, surrounded by people and events he could understand: "I was his friend. I'd have liked to see him reading the Sunday supplements at home and following the baseball. I'd have liked to see him safe with a standardized American girl who subscribed to the Book Club" (QA 27). People like Pyle are not equipped to cope with real life as Fowler has known it in Vietnam. Standing in the mortuary, looking down at Pyle's corpse, Fowler considers: "He looked more than ever out of place: he should have stayed at home. [. . .] He belonged to the skyscraper and the express elevator, the ice-cream and the dry Martini, milk at lunch, and chicken sandwiches on the Merchant Limited" (QA 13). Pyle and his fellow Americans are unusual in Greene's work in that they have a clearly defined home in their native country—it suits them and they suit it—and yet they choose to stray from their sanitized, protective American bubble into the dirty and dangerous real world. The real world (with Fowler's assistance) kills Pyle; Vietnam was not a suitable environment for him.

The standardization of the American people is a running theme: Fowler watches two young American girls in a milk bar, with identical healthy bodies, identical bags, clones from the American brave new world: “[. . .] they were charming and I wanted to send them home, too” (QA 178). Fowler watches them as he might watch a totally alien species: they seem not to have anything in common with him at all. If he is at home in Vietnam, then surely they never can be. They seem so uncomplicated, dull, sterile even, in spite of their physical attractiveness (which seems no deeper to Fowler than the attraction of pretty puppies). They seem hardly alive at all:

It was impossible to conceive either of them a prey to untidy passion: they did not belong to rumpled sheets and the sweat of sex. Did they take deodorants to bed with them? I found myself for a moment envying them their sterilized world, so different from the world I inhabited [. . .]. (QA 179)

But his envy can last only a moment. America is the antithesis of Greene’s ideas of home: he could never settle there, and indeed in a letter to the Times in 1967 Greene made this absolutely clear: “If I had to choose between life in the Soviet Union and life in the United States of America, I would certainly choose the Soviet Union [. . .]” (“The Writers Engage in Battle,” YE 136).

This is the start of Greene’s more obviously political period as a writer; yet he rarely involved himself in party politics, or even in national politics with any consistency. For Greene there were always more important loyalties. No set political philosophy could prove sufficient to provide guidance in every human situation. Greene explains in an interview: “[. . .] I’m a committed person. I’m bound by certain ideas, though not by any clear political line. I’ve often felt a strong pull towards the Communist Party [. . .]. I shouldn’t be a good recruit, though, for

my loyalty would change with circumstances [. . .].”³⁰ In contrast, in The Quiet American, Pyle is blinded by his political convictions; he has read York Harding’s The Rôle of the West and it is his bible. In Vietnam he can see only political problems, not actual people. For Fowler the picture is very different; he has no theories and has learnt from experience, not from books. He sees Vietnam from the inside (at least, as much as any foreigner can), while Pyle stands on the outside looking in and understanding nothing. Fowler tells the young American that “[. . .] if you live in a place for long enough you cease to read about it” (QA 17). Fowler may write for a newspaper but he only reports what he sees and knows: he makes no sweeping judgements, and he certainly doesn’t make judgements based on other writers’ work. Vietnam has become his adopted homeland: it is intimately known, loved for the detail that visitors like Pyle and his fellow Americans never notice. Greene himself enjoyed the same sense of belonging in the places he visited, however briefly, as does Fowler. His travels were made worthwhile by the knowledge that he had experienced places first hand, becoming a part of them, and they a part of him:

Sometimes one wonders why one bothers to travel, to come eight thousand miles to find only Vientiane at the end of the road, and yet there is a curious satisfaction later, when one reads in England the war communiqués and the familiar names start from the page—Nam Dinh, Vientiane, Luang Prabang—looking so important temporarily on a newspaper page as though part of history, to remember them in terms of mauve rice cakes, the rat crossing the restaurant floor [. . .]. Places in history, one learns, are not so important.
(WE 171)

The details are more valuable to Greene than the bigger picture—they are real life, while political theorizing is only a fantasy. It is the Vietnam that is, always has been,

³⁰ Allain 19-20.

and always will be home to the Vietnamese people in which Greene is interested, not in the Vietnam that for a few years will make the pages of foreign newspapers.

Speaking of his involvement in the affairs of such unsettled countries, Greene remarks in an interview: “I’ve often been asked what draws me to these places and the only answer I can think of is that politics out there are not an alternation of political parties but a matter of life and death. I am interested in such politics and I write about such politics.”³¹ Greene is interested only in politics as they affect the individual—that is, on a practical not a theoretical level—and this stance is shared by many of his characters. In *Our Man In Havana*, Wormold’s secretary and friend Beatrice tells him: “I can’t believe in anything bigger than a home, or anything vaguer than a human being” (MH 240). These two characters’ involvement with the Secret Service has left them unconvinced by ideas of national loyalty and duty and keen to be outside the system, free to live as they—not some mysterious figure back in the MI6 building in England—may choose. Wormold rebels against his role as “spy,” declaring: “If I love or if I hate, let me love or hate as an individual. I will not be 59200/5 in anyone’s global war” (MH 206). Wormold is in this sense a forerunner of Maurice Castle in *The Human Factor*, but Wormold is more fortunate than Castle: he has never believed in his duties, has never carried them out honestly, and is able to make the break. He realises that a spy’s family and home life must always come second to his work, and this is a sacrifice he is unwilling to make.

Personal loyalties in this novel are deeper and stronger than national loyalty could ever be. Beatrice insists that even while Wormold was deceiving his MI6 employers he remained a loyal man in the only sense that matters:

³¹ Couto, *Graham Greene: On the Frontier* 217.

I don't care a damn about men who are loyal to the people who pay them, to organisations . . . I don't think even my country means all that much. There are many countries in our blood, aren't there, but only one person. Would the world be in the mess it is if we were loyal to love and not to countries?
(MH 209)

Philip Stratford suggests that Greene and such characters as Wormold and Beatrice demand

freedom for the individual, not the partisan freedom of being free to belong to a certain party, sect, country, class or race, but the more challenging freedom to prefer the independent, the prodigal, and the onerous duty of free choice; to prefer compassion to commitment [. . .]; to prefer the Christian characteristics of "the divided mind, the uneasy conscience and the sense of personal failure" to any facile creed.³²

Such facile creeds provide those undemanding enough to accept them a sense—however illusory—of being "at home," protected, certain. In contrast, Greene's characters, in rejecting such simplistic principles, make life more difficult and less settled for themselves. They deny themselves the false comfort of a meaningless home, and search, often fruitlessly, for a home that is personal, real, valuable. Greene's characters may seem deliberately to deny themselves the chance of a home, but actually they have no real choice: the honest man can never feel at home in a life that is false.

Politics are a natural, if imperfect, choice for men looking for a system to believe in, a cause, a place to belong. After more than a decade of work overwhelmingly shaped by his Catholicism, Greene was seemingly keen for a change in his literary inspiration: at the time of beginning The Quiet American he built upon his frustrating experience of anti-Communism in the USA (having been denied an entry visa because of his brief membership of the Communist Party many years

³² Stratford 325.

earlier, while he was an undergraduate at Oxford). Christopher Sykes quotes Greene telling Evelyn Waugh about this incident: “Anyway it’s given me an idea for a political novel. It will be fun to write about politics for a change, and not always about God”; Waugh’s response was unequivocal: “[. . .] I wouldn’t give up writing about God at this stage if I was you. It would be like P. G. Wodehouse dropping Jeeves half-way through the Wooster series.”³³ In fact, though Greene’s novels now become more overtly political than any since It’s a Battlefield, they do not lack a spiritual dimension, if only because the characters are so painfully aware of their own lack of any religious faith. God is so absent in these novels that He—or at any rate the need for Him—becomes present. Politics are only a replacement for lost faith. In any case, as John Atkins notes, Greene

is always writing about the same things. What we call religious issues are always with us but we react to them in a variety of ways. [. . .] Take away the theological discussion and you are left with exactly the same as you started with: let’s be sensibly vague and call it man’s condition.³⁴

In the context of this thesis, this means that the Church is now only one of the places in which Greene and his characters seek a home. If they lose religious belief, they do not end their search, and they are still searching for the same thing only in a different form. In general they try, however ineffectively, to follow the advice given to Brown by Dr Magiot in The Comedians: “[. . .] if you have abandoned one faith, do not abandon all faith. There is always an alternative to the faith we lose. Or is it the same faith under another mask?” (C 312). Indeed, Grahame Smith remarks upon The Comedians: “The novel’s positive characters—Martha, the Smiths, Dr Magiot—

³³ Sykes, Evelyn Waugh 357.

³⁴ Atkins, Graham Greene 241.

draw moral sustenance from a belief in something outside themselves, although it is worth noting that in no case does this come from religion.”³⁵

In a modern, materialistic, science- and technology-driven society, spiritual concerns, which had been waning since at least the turn of the century, seemed finally to be made worthless, cast aside. For Greene and his characters, loss of faith is a crucial, life-shaping concern at this time. Faith, being emotional rather than rational, loses out to political beliefs, or to no beliefs at all. Experience of life leads to cynicism, which leads in turn to loss of faith; this is why Wormold in Our Man in Havana is so desperately anxious that his daughter should never learn from experience: “God doesn’t learn from experience, does He, or how could He hope anything of man? It’s the scientists who add the digits and make the same sum who cause the trouble. [. . .] Don’t ever learn from experience, Milly. It ruins our peace and our lives” (MH 31). He wants her to continue to believe unquestioningly, so that she need never enter the cruel adult world where he is so uncomfortable. But belief has become more elusive now than ever.

Greene’s novels of the 1940s had depicted the experiences of characters as they discovered and developed their religious faith, were enriched by it, struggled with it, were even destroyed by it. Whatever their personal experiences, their lives revolved around the knowledge of God and His Church and they possessed a genuine chance of making a home within their faith and afterwards eternally in Heaven. This stage of Greene’s career had reached its peak with The End of the Affair and Sarah Miles’s growth into not only belief but apparent sanctity. Yet only a handful of years later, with such novels as The Quiet American and Our Man in Havana, Greene writes of a

³⁵ Grahame Smith 154.

very different experience of life: the characters from this point onwards are not seen to discover religious faith; indeed, if they ever had it, it seems lost to them now. Their world is a secular one, and it is the bleaker for it. The sense of the apparently irresistible pull of God, as felt by Sarah Miles, and even by such a hardened non-believer as Maurice Bendrix, is utterly lost.

This change may well have been rooted in Greene's own changing sense of faith and doubt. Since he had met Catherine Walston, Greene had for many years felt her to be a crucial part of his belief in God. Norman Sherry notes that "[n]o one touched Greene as deeply as Catherine Walston, even at a religious level. Although Greene became a convert to win Vivien he felt a truer Catholic with Catherine"; Sherry also quotes from a letter from Greene to Catherine in 1947 in which he remarked: "It's odd how little I get out of Mass except when you're around. I'm a much better Catholic in mortal sin! or at least I'm more aware of it."³⁶ As Greene's relationship with Catherine struggled on through the fifties and finally petered out, it would seem hardly surprising that, in losing his lover, Greene also lost the intensity of his faith, the passion in one love reflecting that in the other. She had made God seem real to him; without her he could perhaps simply not maintain his enthusiasm. Accordingly, the atmosphere of Greene's novels alters, and with faith no longer seeming accessible, the characters of Greene's fiction now have one less place in which to seek to make a home.

This is not to say that Greene has ceased to be concerned with religious matters, but now he approaches them from a different perspective: that of the man who has little or no faith himself, though he may wish that he had. Greene tried out

³⁶ Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 2, 257.

new territory in the fifties for a Catholic writer (or even only a writer who happens to be a Catholic), and he considered himself justified in moving on in this way: “[. . .] as a Catholic I considered myself able to treat loss of faith just as freely as discovery of faith [. . .]” (WE 254). Even the most disaffected of his believers in earlier novels (Minty in England Made Me, for example, or The Heart of the Matter’s Henry Scobie) have never been quite such outsiders in matters of faith. Such men as Fowler in The Quiet American or Brown in The Comedians seek not to be involved in the affairs of this world, or the next; they might be considered to have no spiritual life at all. Yet they feel the lack of it: they are fully aware that there is a world out there in which they are unable to take any part. This exclusion is painfully felt by Wormold in Our Man in Havana, who has no faith himself, but has brought his daughter up within the Church out of a sense of duty to the wife who left him many years before; he is constantly aware that this difference between father and daughter divides them unalterably: “He thought sadly, [. . .] I am a stranger. He was unable to follow her into her strange world of candles and lace and holy water and genuflections” (MH 14).

The crucial factor here is this awareness of the spiritual dimension that is lacking in the characters’ lives. In the fifties and sixties Greene depicts people who are not simply jolly pagans like Ida Arnold had been in Brighton Rock: they are not wholly immune to belief; it is not that God, the Church, Heaven, faith mean nothing to the characters at all, but that these things do not belong to them. Many of Greene’s significant characters in this period have lost what was formerly a strong belief in God, and a void remains in them where faith once was. Greene’s lapsed Catholics cannot forget their happier past: in A Burnt-Out Case, Doctor Colin (the

nearest Greene comes to the depiction of a truly likeable, credible atheist) tells Query, who has travelled to remotest part of the earth in an attempt to escape his feeling of deadness: “You’re too troubled by your lack of faith, Query. You keep fingering it like a sore you want to get rid of” (BOC 228). And in The Comedians, the central figure, Brown, was, as a child, expected by the Jesuits at his school to have a vocation himself. Now, empty of faith in God or anything else, something of his past, of his loss still shows though, so that his lover, Martha, suggests that he might be a “prêtre manqué” (C 245). Such men as Query and Brown were at least once at home within the Church, and their faith must have been central to their lives, because now, with it gone apparently irretrievably, they seem unable to feel fully at home anywhere, with anyone, even with themselves.

This mood of spiritual and emotional barrenness and insecurity betrays an influence from Pascal’s work—in this period Greene’s characters regularly refer to his Pensées, which seem to suit their mood of uncertainty.³⁷ Greene demonstrates that no amount of desire to believe is enough if it is not accompanied by the ability to make the crucial leap of faith; thus Doctor Colin merely contents himself with an appreciation of the “myth” of Christ (BOC 228), while Wormold is pleased that his

³⁷ The references to Pascal are most pronounced in The Quiet American and A Burnt-Out Case, and the idea of the Pascalian wager occurs in both novels. In A Burnt-Out Case, Doctor Colin argues for the need for faith in something: “One has to gamble on one’s superstitions. Like Pascal gambled on his” (BOC 144). In The Quiet American, the French officer, Vigot, argues with Fowler over the necessity or otherwise of making such wagers in life; Fowler favours detachment: “The true course is not to wager at all,” but Vigot remains convinced that “[. . .] you must wager. It is not optional” (QA 152). These are certainly not the discussions of happy men, but Vigot refers to Pascal again to suggest that happiness is not the greatest gift of human life: “[. . .] I’ve nothing to complain about. ‘A ruined house is not miserable.’ [. . .] It’s an argument for being proud of misery. ‘A tree is not miserable’” (QA 154).

At the close of BOC, the superior of the leper village suggests that Query may have had more success than one might assume in his life’s quest for meaning and purpose: “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’ve already found it” (BOC 236).

daughter can still believe in what he considers the “fairy stories” of the virgin birth, and weeping Madonnas (MH 78). Pascal wrote of the necessity of taking a chance on God’s existence—to ignore one’s rational uncertainties and simply jump into faith, leaving doubts behind—

[. . .] you must wager. There is no choice, you are already committed. Which will you choose then? [. . .] Let us weigh up the gain and the loss involved in calling heads that God exists. Let us assess the two cases: if you win you win everything, if you lose you lose nothing. Do not hesitate then; wager that he does exist.³⁸

This is a rather cold-blooded assessment of the alternatives, but Pascal suggests that the heart will soon follow the head into belief: if one lives as though one believes, genuine belief will follow. Greene’s characters, being unable to live as though they believe, unable to gamble on God, can never win.

Belief seems to be the one thing on which the characters cannot bring themselves to take a risk. Greene is fascinated in this period by gambling and risk-taking—the most obvious example being the story Loser Takes All (1955), in which a newly married couple see their relationship nearly collapse during their honeymoon in Monte Carlo. The husband, Bertram, wins a fortune in the Casino, but not by luck, only by what seems the less honourable method of mathematical plotting and hard, patient work. In succeeding in his money-making plan, he subverts his rightful destiny—man’s rightful destiny—to fail. In this story to lose is really to win, for success removes a man from reality and from life itself. “I’ve lost you,” the wife, Cary, complains:

When I return home and go into the bar of the Volunteer, you won’t be there. When I’m waiting at the 19 bus stop you won’t be there either. You won’t be anywhere where I can find you. You’ll be driving down to your place in

³⁸ Pascal, Pensées 123.

Hampshire [. . .]. Darling, you've been very lucky and you've won a lot of money, but I don't like you any more. (LTA 200)

This is the side of gambling that Greene's characters, perversely, dislike: the chance of winning. They may not live in the squalor known by some of Greene's earlier creations, but they cannot feel at home in wealth or success either. The same applies to faith; Greene admitted that he had chosen not to speak with Padre Pio because he was afraid of the effect of the meeting, of the possibility that he might experience a second, more total conversion, which would tear him from his own world and force him to begin again elsewhere: "Pio invited Greene to meet him privately, but although he longed to do so, he refused: 'I didn't want to change my life by meeting a saint. I felt that there was a good chance that he was one.'"³⁹ So, in a sense, Greene and his characters don't ultimately want to find faith (again), because they feel they have exhausted the energy and commitment required, and instead they play "safe," never passing the margins of belief.

Middle-aged men like Fowler, Querry and Brown have lost, with the loss of God, any sense of meaning in life. They are alive without purpose: as Querry notes in his diary at the beginning of A Burnt-Out Case, "I feel discomfort, therefore I am alive [. . .]" (BOC 1). Life has nothing more to offer him than physical or mental discomfort: he feels no joy nor even any pain. The meaninglessness of life for such characters reveals the degree of influence upon Greene of existentialist thought. These characters have no God; like Jean in The Entertainer, they have only themselves. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan suggests that Greene had been influenced by such secular existentialist figures as Sartre and Camus, particularly in The Quiet

³⁹ Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 2, 274.

American; she cites Greene's repeated use of the term "engagé" as a specific example of this influence. But she notes also that "[. . .] Greene has a quarrel with secular existentialism and uses its concepts and terms in order to prove them inadequate";⁴⁰ indeed for Greene any purely secular mode of life must always prove inadequate: he is not convinced that man can create his own meaning and morality without the external approval or censure of a God.

Thus it is to religious existentialists that Greene is more closely allied: one may cope with the pain of God's absence, but one cannot thrive entirely alone and one cannot replace Him. Ultimately Greene's characters are unable to relinquish the possibility of religious faith, however great their doubts. Alan Sinfield remarks upon Query's final words before death in A Burnt-Out Case:

His last words—"this is absurd or else . . ."—recognise the power of the absurdist view but also correct it, for it is Query's humility that prevents him declaring that his life and death are part of a divine purpose. Religion seems to force its way through secularism: despair bespeaks God's goodness, and scepticism and corruption witness to spiritual truth.⁴¹

Essentially this is proved to be an ambiguous world, just as Query is recognised as "an ambiguous man" (BOC 233), and in such a world faith may not feel like faith at all, and may not necessarily eliminate doubt or bring peace of mind. The Superior of the leprosérie reminds the doctor after Query's funeral: "You remember what Pascal said, that a man who starts looking for God has already found him" (BOC 236). Find faith in this way, and one will feel for the rest of one's life as though one still seeks it.

⁴⁰ Erdinast-Vulcan 56.

⁴¹ Sinfield, "Varieties of Religion," Society and Literature 104.

Greene leaves behind any attempt at religious orthodoxy after The End of the Affair: if any of his later characters do have faith it is in a similarly ambiguous fashion to Querry. They are outside the Church if not outside God's reach, and they have none of the comforts of conformity. They stand alone, like the titular outsider of Colin Wilson's book, which received widespread acclaim when it was published in 1956, presumably because it caught part of the mood of an era in which it was easier than ever to feel outside the central stream of an altered and altering world. The epigraph to The Outsider is a quotation from George Bernard Shaw's John Bull's Other Island, which briefly sums up the predicament not only of Wilson's literary heroes, but also of those who people Greene's fiction in this period:

Broadbent: . . . I find the world quite good enough for me—rather a jolly place, in fact.

Keegan (looking at him with quiet wonder): You are satisfied?

Broadbent: As a reasonable man, yes. I see no evils in the world—except of course, natural evils—that cannot be remedied by freedom, self-government and English institutions. I think so, not because I am an Englishman, but as a matter of common sense.

Keegan: You feel at home in the world then?

Broadbent: Of course. Don't you?

Keegan (from the very depths of his nature): No.⁴²

The situation is much the same as this for Greene's characters now: even if they have found themselves a place, like Querry before his journey into the Congo, "which for want of a better name he called his home" (BOC 21), still they are unable to feel at home in the vastness of a world which seems alien, whose rules and motivations are quite incompatible with the characters' own codes of thought and behaviour.

Wilson's outsider figure is the man who habitually, characteristically, does not feel at home, "a man who cannot live in the comfortable, insulated world of the

⁴² Colin Wilson, Epigraph, viii.

bourgeois, accepting what he sees and touches as reality. 'He sees too deep and too much,' and what he sees is essentially chaos.'⁴³ The outsider's primary quest—and that of Greene's protagonists—is to live life as fully as humanly possible, and this quest supersedes any desire to feel at home, to fit neatly into society. Wilson judges that

Compared to his [the outsider's] own appetite for a purpose and a direction, the way most men live is not living at all; it is drifting. This is the Outsider's wretchedness, for all men have a herd instinct that leads them to believe that what the majority does must be right.⁴⁴

But the outsider lacks the true herd instinct; in order to be true to his own life's purpose he must stand alone, however hard or miserable that stance proves. The major difficulty is to discover what that life's purpose may be: "The Outsider is not sure who he is. [. . .] His main business is to find his way back to himself."⁴⁵

Perhaps man may even be his own home, if he ever manages to attain sufficient self-knowledge.

The outsider's life is a lonely one, and there is always tension in Greene's fiction in the fifties and sixties between the incompatible desires for involvement and independence. Greene's characters recognize that involvement is the superior human condition, but they fear it, and often seek refuge in detachment, which is safe, easy and generally painless, if also unfulfilling. "If you live at all you become involved": so Greene asserts in an interview with Maria Couto towards the end of his life.⁴⁶ This desire for involvement is part of Greene's own quest to live truly to the

⁴³ Colin Wilson 13.

⁴⁴ Colin Wilson 155.

⁴⁵ Colin Wilson 160.

⁴⁶ Couto, Graham Greene: On the Frontier 219.

utmost—a desire which had been fundamental to Greene’s life, and writing, since the thirties—but for his characters this desire is tempered by the fear of the complications and the pain that such involvement will inevitably bring. In A Burnt-Out Case, Doctor Colin tells Query: “You have been trying an impossible experiment. A man can’t live with nothing but himself” (BOC 55), but Query reserves the right to continue the experiment, insisting that “[h]uman beings are not my country” (BOC 53). Query is looking for a wasteland in which to bury and lose himself. The desert no longer terrifies him as it did Sarah and Maurice in The End of the Affair. For Query it is the alternative to the desert which terrifies: the throngs of people with whom one must interact, like it or not. He has experienced all the pitfalls of success and fame: the misinterpretations of fans, the weight of impossible expectation. In comparison with this harassment “an empty place” seems very appealing (BOC 47); and if it can be found anywhere it will be in the forest of the Congo, unhumanized and vast. Query insists that he has left involvement firmly behind him—“I have retired [. . .]” (BOC 26)—a choice which would have been unthinkable for Scobie in The Heart of the Matter only a decade earlier in Greene’s writing career. Query has travelled all the way to this remote leper colony in the jungle, stopping there only because the boat goes no further; it is hard to see how he could have made greater efforts to seek seclusion and freedom.

Yet Query’s story demonstrates that one can never really retire from the world: one will always somehow be tempted eventually into connections and attachments. When the journalist, Parkinson, arrives by boat so unexpectedly, Query, the hunted man, is cornered in his own earth. Colin remarks that “[t]he great world comes to us” (BOC 107): try to leave it behind and it will follow you and seek

you out. There can be no escape. Colin Wilson asserts that “[. . .] the Outsider’s chief desire is to cease to be an Outsider,”⁴⁷ but this does not fully apply to Greene’s outsiders. While they might wish to be able to enjoy the peace and simplicity that they see in the lives of other people around them, they are aware that they are unable to live like other people. This being so, they choose to increase their isolation, to preserve their detachment as though it were a virtue. This is particularly true of Fowler in The Quiet American, who insists again and again upon his non-involvement in Vietnamese politics, in his friend Pyle’s murder, and in life itself:

“You can rule me out,” I said. “I’m not involved. Not involved,” I repeated. It had been an article of my creed. The human condition being what it was, let them fight, let them love, let them murder, I would not be involved. [. . .] I took no action [. . .]” (QA 22).

But Fowler—the neutral English reporter—is consistently warned by Frenchmen in Vietnam—who are only too involved, even to the point of death—that “[o]ne day something will happen. You will take a side” (QA 169). Captain Trouin explains that “[i]t’s not a matter of reason or justice. We all get involved in a moment of emotion and then we cannot get out” (QA 170). This is exactly what happens to Fowler: in the end he can no longer stand by and watch; he is tempted to share in the emotion, the pain, and to involve himself inextricably. For Fowler there can be no escaping his complicity in Pyle’s death, or his sense of guilt; but at least his involvement has proved that he is really alive, a part of life rather than a spectator.

Greene himself was less reluctant to become involved, to take sides: in this period he roamed the world looking for interest, and for causes to support, in places like Vietnam, or like Papa Doc’s Haiti, where, Greene noted at the time, “[a]nything

⁴⁷ Colin Wilson 114.

may happen, anytime, anywhere” (“Nightmare Republic,” R 223). Many of his fictional characters, too, look to escape from mundanity into something—undefined but nonetheless desired—more invigorating and fulfilling. In A Burnt-Out Case, Query sits in the remote leper colony thinking of an architectural student he once knew, and imagines him now “building in some suburb his bourgeois villas—machines for living in” (BOC 136). Query himself may have failed in many ways in life, but he has at least escaped that bourgeois fate (and of course Query never designed houses himself in his career as an architect, concentrating upon churches instead—God’s house, not mere man’s). Query, unlike his student, has arrived somewhere, though he is not yet sure that it is the right place.

Query has made his escape from life in the modern, civilized, Western world. He has put a physical distance between himself and that world, but others of Greene’s characters choose to distance themselves from the mid-twentieth century world mentally instead. There is a fascination in Greene’s work of the fifties and sixties with the certainties of the lost Victorian world. The charm of this age was noted by Greene as early as the 1930s, when Queen Victoria’s England was a recent memory, and when one might even hope to return to some of its standards and aspirations. Men like Anthony Farrant and Minty in England Made Me would have been less out of place in Victorian or Edwardian society and keep this past alive in their words and manners. But twenty or thirty years later, and after another war, the order of the Victorian age is far more remote: it has become unreal, a dream, and it can never be regained, though thoughts of it may offer comfort amid the modern madness.

Greene's characters read Victorian literature avidly now, none more so than Henry Pulling in Travels with my Aunt. Henry has never quite connected with the modern world, and for him, Tennyson and Browning offer a beautiful escape from the ugly reality. Henry's bookshelves are conspicuously empty of modern fiction: its engagement with contemporary reality is not what he requires. He has inherited his father's books, and has schooled himself into similar tastes—Walter Scott, Marion Crawford, nineteenth century poets. He refers constantly, for comfort or guidance, to Palgrave's Golden Treasury. Even when he finds himself in distant Paraguay, his taste for such literature endures. It is a shared love of Tennyson and Browning which unites Henry and the young girl he is ultimately to marry (Maria, the daughter of the chief customs officer in Asunción) in spite of their vastly different ages and nationalities. Maria is drawn to these poets by their mood; she tells Henry on their first meeting, at his aunt's "housewarming" party, "I like very much sad things" (TA 313). In fact they both have a preference for the sad but unthreatening things in life, for quiet melancholy rather than drama. As Henry walks through the gardens in the darkness, alone after the party, he feels secure in this new world; he knows that he will never return to England, but is unconcerned, since Asunción and his aunt's big house have suddenly become a home to him: all the pieces of his life have slipped unobtrusively into place. He considers: "It was as though I were safely back in the Victorian world where I had been taught by my father's books to feel more at home than in our modern day" (TA 316). Henry has taken that world with him, and will share it with his young bride as they build a peaceful home together in a distinctly unquiet country. The novel closes with Henry quoting from Browning's "Pippa Passes": "God's in his heaven— / All's right with the world!" at least for Henry in

his little oasis of Victorian tranquillity (see TA 319). In Browning's poetry Henry can find the certainties that enable him to survive in this uncertain South American world.

While it is hardly astonishing that Henry Pulling, a self-confessed homebody, unadventurous and peace-loving, should have a partiality for Victorian writers, he is not alone in his taste. More unexpectedly, the wandering adventurer Brown in The Comedians shares Henry's tendency to view the world through a Victorian mist. He is drawn to people and places that remind him of days long past, and to Dr Magiot and his home in particular. Magiot seems like a man living outside his proper age—he has all the calm rational thought of the great Victorian thinkers. Brown notes the furnishings of Magiot's sitting room: “[. . .] the scarlet curtains, [. . .] the occasional tables [. . .], the china objects on the chimney-piece [. . .], the portraits of the doctor's parents [. . .], the pleated screen in the unnecessary fireplace, spoke of another age [. . .],” while “[. . .] the only modern object in the room, where we sat after dinner, was the telephone. It was like an oversight in a museum-arrangement” (C 84). With the Smiths too—two more gentle, idealistic people, out of place in a cruel and irrational world—Brown has the sensation of being transported back in time. He invites the Smiths and Magiot to have dinner with him at his hotel; Magiot arrives as Joseph is lighting the oil lamps, such modern innovations as electricity having deserted them. As his guests greet one another “with old-fashioned courtesy,” Brown feels as though “[. . .] we were back in the nineteenth century, when oil lamps shone softer than electric-globes, and our passions—or so one believed—were gentler too” (C 190). Brown wonders at the contrast between the modern world and

the Victorian version—he feels faintly nostalgic for a world in which perhaps he could have made a home as he has consistently failed to do in his own lifetime:

I wondered whether the world would ever again sail with such serenity through space as it seemed to do a hundred years ago. Then the Victorians kept skeletons in cupboards—but who cares about a mere skeleton now? Haiti was not an exception in a sane world: it was a small slice of everyday taken at random. Baron Samedi walked in all our graveyards. (C 141)

Greene's characters would be happy to make a home in such a peaceful, protective world, but no such world exists for them. They must be content merely to make a place of their own, a retreat, where problems, and the world, can be pushed away for a time. The only actual "homes" the characters can now hope to make as they struggle on through life are very simple and even austere. They no longer aim for the mythical idyll of a happy family life—men like Fowler and Query have escaped from just such a life, as indeed had Greene himself. In the nineteen thirties and forties, the characters could convince themselves that their bare little miserable rooms were temporary measures until something better came along. Now it seems that temporary measures are all that one can expect. Greene's characters from the fifties onwards would be satisfied simply to have a few rooms to call their home, as long as they had some company to fill the emptiness.

Fowler has made just such a home with his young Vietnamese mistress, Phuong, in The Quiet American, on the rue Catinat in Saigon. The rooms are nothing special, he is not particularly attached to them for their own sake, but because it is here that he and Phuong, have been able to live peacefully, side by side. He does not love her romantically, and has no illusions that she loves him in such a fashion either; and yet she has become indispensable to him in her way. He explains to Pyle that Vietnamese women "love you in return for kindness, security, the

presents you give them—they hate you for a blow or an injustice. They don't know what it's like—just walking into a room and loving a stranger. For an ageing man, Pyle, it's very secure—she won't run away from home so long as the home is happy" (QA 111). Phuong and her match-making sister take a pragmatic approach to marriage and home-making: as for Fowler, love is not a major concern, though prospects and security are.

Love, for Greene's ageing characters in this period, has grown uncomplicated: passion has had its day, and the obsessive love-hate of Bendrix for Sarah Miles, or even of Greene himself for Catherine Walston, has passed. The taste for simplicity is related to Greene's own experiences around this time and perhaps particularly to his relationship with Yvonne Cloetta, whom he first met in 1959. Michael Shelden notes:

Yvonne was to remain a companion for the rest of Greene's life, although she never left her husband. It was the kind of affair he preferred, but, with Yvonne and her husband, there would be no repeat of the conflicts that had marked his relationship with Catherine and Harry. In his odd way, Greene was finally trying to settle down.⁴⁸

And Norman Sherry quotes A. S. Frere's judgment of the relationship: "Yvonne's [. . .] so good for him . . . makes absolutely no demands on him at all. Insofar as he's happy being comfortable—she makes him comfortable. There were some considerable periods in Graham's life when he was only happy when he was being unhappy."⁴⁹ With Yvonne there was no unhappiness, no pain, no difficulty. As

⁴⁸ Shelden 373.

⁴⁹ Norman Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 3 (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004) 433.

William Cash sums it up, Yvonne enabled Greene to be “at peace with himself for extended periods of time for perhaps the first time in his life.”⁵⁰

Like Greene, Fowler is happy and settled in the rue Catinat with Phuong; her absence, when she leaves him for Pyle, disturbs his life at least as much as the need to put an end to Pyle’s questionable political actions. Once she returns to him after Pyle’s death, slotting easily and unquestioningly back into place, he is content once more in the bare and dingy rooms. Such details do not matter; the rooms are home as long as she is there. Fowler explains: “I’ve reached the age when sex isn’t the problem so much as old age and death. [. . .] I just don’t want to be alone in my last decade, that’s all. I wouldn’t know what to think about all day long. I’d sooner have a woman in the same room—even one I didn’t love” (QA 112). These sentiments are echoed in one of Greene’s plays of the period, *Carving a Statue*, in which the sculptor’s unhappy, neglected son complains of the disorder of their house, which has become a man’s domain, a work place for the struggling artist, rather than a home for father and son. His constant refrain is that “[. . .] we need a woman in the house” (*Carving a Statue*, CP 217). A void has been left by the death of his mother; he recalls vaguely that, at school, “[t]he boys with mothers were always a step ahead of the rest of us” (CP 219). He tries, unsuccessfully, to fill his mother’s place with a succession of unattainable girls, but in the end he is left to make his way alone and disappointed in the world.

The son in *Carving a Statue* has had to abandon his hopes and illusions very early, even for one of Greene’s heroes. He reflects Greene’s own mood and

⁵⁰ William Cash, *The Third Woman: The Secret Passion That Inspired The End of The Affair* (London: Little, Brown, 2000) 298.

experiences, rather than those one would expect of such a young man. Just like Jones and Brown in The Comedians, the boy had imagined his perfect home for the future—he had pictured himself as a sailor landing, after years at sea, in the port of Valparaiso, where he would find a girl to love—but, like the older men, he learns that dreams do not come true, that there is no perfect home for any one of us, and no perfect person to share it with. He hopes to marry a girl he has recently met, and he has secured a job and a room for them both at a local garage. He has found real love, not a fantasy, and has downgraded his expectations accordingly. He tells his father: “I wanted to be a sailor once. You’ve seen how good I am at knots. I had dreams of ports like Valparaiso. But all I want now is a borrowed bed and a room over the petrol pumps” (CP 258). But the girl dies and with her his hopes of home. The contrast between him and another young man much earlier in Greene’s career, Andrews in The Man Within, is absolute. Andrews pictured a fairy tale cottage where he would find the Gretel to his Hansel. With Elizabeth, his dream becomes, however briefly, a reality; he is not utterly disappointed. But the characters in the fifties and sixties have no such luck. For them, the dream home is a fantasy that will never become reality.

In The Comedians, the irrepressible Jones believes that Haiti is a country where he may finally have the opportunity to succeed in one of his projects, and to make his dream home a reality. When he is rich, he thinks, he will find himself a desert island and build on it. He tells Brown:

Old man, I’ve one particular spot in mind not far from here: a coral-reef and white sand, real white sand that you could build castles with, and behind are green slopes as smooth as real turf and God-made natural hazards—a perfect spot for a golf-course. I’ll build a club-house, bungalow-suites, with showers,

it will be more exclusive than any other golf-club in the Caribbean. Do you know what I mean to call it? . . . Sahib House. (C 216)

This is his happy colonial dream: a reminder of the good old days, which he has never really known. As Maria Couto points out, Jones is

a child of colonialism and its culture [. . .]. Born in India, the son of a tea-planter who abandoned his wife and child, Jones hustles his way to his dream. The material dream of colonials shorn of all values has been handed down to him, and he seeks his heritage denied him by the disappearance of his father: sahib house and golf.⁵¹

It is significant that, like Brown, Jones has a dream that is not of a small private home, just for himself and perhaps a family of his own. Both men are happiest in hotels, where they need never be alone and face their own loneliness and isolation. If it is their own hotel, so much the better, since they can gain some level of security and reassurance from the fact of owning property. They can have a house, if not a home. Greene's characters now cling to what is theirs—possessions make the man—and a home is perhaps the ultimate possession. Brown needs his hotel because it gives him roots of sorts, and compels him to remain in one place. As long as he has his hotel he is established in Haiti, one of what Jones defines as the “toffs,” the men with “a stake somewhere” (C 26). Without the hotel, Brown is just another drifter like Jones, a “tart,” living on his wits, always moving on eventually; and, as Jones remarks, “[w]e tarts—we sometimes go too fast for our own good” (C 27).

The fight to retain one's possessions and one's territory is constant, and it seems ultimately a hopeless fight. In a country like Haiti especially, life itself is precarious, and possessions more so. In one scene in the novel, Madame Philipot pleads with the Tontons Macoute to allow her to bury her husband in peace, but they

⁵¹ Couto, Graham Greene: On the Frontier 181.

ignore her, smash the windows of the hearse, and remove the coffin. Brown notes that “[. . .] in a dictatorship one owns nothing, not even a dead husband” (C 135): a little later he too comes close to losing his only possessions—his hotel and his life—to the Tontons. Captain Concasseur is utterly in control as he stands in Brown’s home making threats, and Brown notes that “[. . .] he looked as though he owned the place. Perhaps that was his intention” (C 202). In comparison, Brown feels helplessly afraid, totally insecure in his own home. He is lucky this time: he survives and keeps his hotel for the moment at least, but his victory is undoubtedly only temporary. One must keep on fighting, or eventually admit defeat. In The Quiet American, Fowler adopts a similarly defensive attitude towards the newcomer, Pyle, who seems to threaten not only his relationship with Phuong, but his entire sense of belonging in Vietnam, just as the Americans threaten the French position in the country. When Pyle and his dog, Duke, visit Fowler at home, Fowler feels pushed out just as Brown does, as though he is “an intruder” in his own room (QA 77). The dog does not like Fowler and growls at him; he responds, with a touch of hysteria: “Tell your damned Duke to be quiet. This is my home, not his” (QA 80).

This fear of losing one’s only place in the world, and with it the sense of one’s own identity, is interestingly mirrored in Harold Pinter’s work around the same period. In his 1957 play, The Room, two characters, Rose and Bert rent a single room in a large house. Rose is unwilling to leave its apparent safety: the world outside seems too dangerous and unpredictable, so she would rather simply stay indoors: “[. . .] this room’s all right for me. I mean, you know where you are.”⁵² and “[. . .] I’m quite happy where I am. We’re quiet, we’re all right. [. . .] And nobody

⁵² Harold Pinter, The Room, Plays One (London: Faber, 1991) 86.

bothers us.”⁵³ But that assertion proves to be untrue: another couple arrives, having apparently been told that Rose and Bert’s room is vacant. Rose’s delicate sense of security is shattered; she can only insist: “This room is occupied.”⁵⁴ Next, another intrusive visitor arrives, a blind man who addresses Rose by another name and implores her to return “home,” wherever that may be. Bert returns to their room at this moment and attacks the man: all idea of a safe, secure, cosy home is lost in violence and menace. Alan Sinfield notes that in Pinter’s work:

People, like animals, fight for “territory” [. . .]. The difference, according to ethologists, is that animals use signals so that the weaker withdraws unhurt, whereas people fight to the death, physically or psychologically. In Pinter’s plays the defeated character is destroyed: in his view the human investment in territory is not just for material support, it involves consciousness, the self.⁵⁵

A similar battle in The Quiet American ends with Fowler’s betrayal of Pyle, and his part in the young man’s murder. Fowler’s motivation, as he is well aware, is not purely to sacrifice one life to save many others: he is primarily defending himself, not only to retain Phuong’s affections and presence in his home, but also, in an abstract sense, to retain a home at all. His sense of unassuageable guilt in the aftermath of Pyle’s death proves that he has not been completely successful: in this case the victor loses, as well as the victim.

In any case, the ultimate dream of home in Greene’s work of this period goes far beyond ideas of material possessions, however simple, or even geographical locations. In A Burnt-Out Case, this dream-place haunts Querry’s imagination, and it is called “Pendélé.” Querry hears the word spoken by his servant, Deo Gratias,

⁵³ Pinter, The Room 87.

⁵⁴ Pinter, The Room 102.

⁵⁵ Sinfield, “Varieties of Religion,” Society and Literature 98-99.

who is one of the cured lepers at the colony and who disappears one night alone. Query finds him in the forest, fallen and unable to move, and stays with him until sunrise. During this time, Deo Gratias mentions this place, Pendélé; perhaps this is where he was heading in the middle of the night, or perhaps he did not know where he was going, but anyway the word sticks in Query's head and comes to stand for a place that is all good things. It represents freedom, peace, exhilaration, beauty, simplicity, and a release from all drudgery, constraint and pain. When Query asks Deo Gratias, who seems actually to have visited a place called Pendélé long ago, as a child, what he did there, the leper's response is vague: "Nous étions heureux [. . .]" (BOC 86). It is not what happens there, nor even the specific place itself, which matters, but the mood connected with that place. Query comes to realise that there is a personal Pendélé for everyone: for Marie Rycker, for instance, a young woman trapped in a lonely, miserable marriage and dreaming of happier times back in her convent school, it might mean nothing more complex than "a dance at a friend's house, a young man with a shiny face, going to Mass on Sunday with the family, falling asleep in a single bed perhaps" (BOC 84). The Superior of the leprosérie considers that the pursuit of such comforts would be mere escapism—"People have to grow up" (BOC 84)—but Query disagrees, believing that "[w]e've grown up rather badly" (BOC 84); he thinks we—the human race—have all taken a wrong turning, made things more difficult and unpleasant for ourselves than they need ever have been. For Query himself, Pendélé is not about nostalgia for his childhood: he has no wish to escape into his past, but into an alternative present and future. He wants a chance to start afresh, far from Europe and his former existence: "If there

were a place called Pendélé, he thought, I would never bother to find my way back” (BOC 203): all former homes would be abandoned as hollow imitations.

But with the realism of maturity, Querry accepts that there can be no Pendélé for him at least, no ideal place: he has gone too far in the wrong direction. He realises that he must be content to make an imperfect home instead; the remote leprosérie will suffice. Here Querry’s room goes beyond the monastic in its simplicity: even the Fathers have made more of an impression upon their own spaces, if only through “an individual choice of crucifix and a differing degree of untidiness” (BOC 81). Querry’s room is unique to him in its emptiness: “It was the only room in the place completely bare of symbols, bare indeed of almost everything. No photographs of a community or a parent. The room struck the Superior even in the heat of the day as cold and hard, like a grave without a cross” (BOC 81). This room is even more impersonal than Fowler’s in The Quiet American, “that dingy room with the communal closet and the old women squatting on the landing” (QA 41). Fowler at least has his books and his typewriter, as well as Phuong’s clothes and cosmetics; and the dinginess of the place seems to make it more, not less, homely, in contrast to the brand new flat in which Pyle lives, or indeed the starkness of Querry’s room. In The Comedians, Brown makes himself even less at home: he hopes that the hotel might one day feel truly like home, but he has no space within it to call his own— even his bedroom was his mother’s room, and he makes so little mark upon it that, sitting on the bed on his last night in his hotel, “I almost expected, even after all the intervening years, to find a thread on the pillows of that impossibly Titian hair” (C 275). The room still belongs to the dead woman, though Brown has borrowed it for a time.

In such simple “homes” Greene’s characters await their longest and truest home, the grave. There seems almost no point in unpacking when death will soon be coming along to move them on again: these are not really homes, but waiting rooms. Though the characters now—in contrast to Greene’s characters of the forties—have little or no belief in any afterlife, and certainly do not expect to earn a place in heaven, they look forward at least to the permanent and unchanging state of death. For these unbelievers, death may no longer offer a home, as such, but it will bring an end to the sensation of being homeless, to any sensation at all. “Death stays with you” (QA 113), Fowler judges: it is the one reliable thing, and life cannot compete on that basis. If they can’t have everlasting life, then Greene’s characters will settle for everlasting death. Like Greene on his travels, Fowler has chosen his destination carefully, settling upon a country where sudden death is a genuine possibility. No earthly happiness is pure or complete enough to rid him of his death wish:

A chance of death? Why should I want to die when Phuong slept beside me every night? But I knew the answer to that question. From childhood I had never believed in permanence, and yet I had longed for it. Always I was afraid of losing happiness. This month, next year, Phuong would leave me. If not next year, in three years. Death was the only absolute value in my world. Lose life and one would lose nothing again for ever. (QA 42)

Roger Sharrock judges that The Quiet American is “largely about the fear of death” and that “Fowler is the new Greene character of secular despair who [. . .] welcomes death as a retreat from the boredom and betrayals of life; he is of the same tribe as Querry and Brown [. . .].”⁵⁶ It is true that these three men share much the same dispassionate attitude to death, but this very calmness contradicts Sharrock’s assertion that The Quiet American is about fear of death. Fowler admits that the

⁵⁶ Sharrock 205.

moment of death scares him—“Even though my reason wanted the state of death, I was afraid like a virgin of the act” (QA 51)—but this is a fear of pain, of the last part of life. The death that will follow is merely nothingness, and so has no such terror.

Fowler is so impatient for death’s vacancy that he tries to achieve it in his life: hence his attachment to the habit of smoking opium. The drug takes him outside everyday concerns, outside time even, able simply to lie back and enjoy “one of those short deep opium sleeps, ten minutes long, that seem a whole night’s rest” (QA 15). Philip Stratford finds the habit of opium entirely suited to Fowler’s character and mood: “[. . .] being away, the acceptance of the home that is homeless, go naturally together with indulgence in a practice of oblivion; the oblivion of opium is an ersatz for that personal peace which the hero in Greene is always seeking.”⁵⁷ Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan agrees that in choosing his reliance upon the opium pipe, “Fowler chooses a form of escape which brings him closer to non-being, to death.”⁵⁸ The temporary oblivion of opium, or the promise of the permanent rest of death, are the only reliable means for the homeless, restless man to retain his sanity: through opium he can take a break from his irritation, his dissatisfaction, from the realisation of his failures and of the imperfection of the home he has tried to make for himself. And eventually death will make his escape eternal.

The grave, not heaven, is the only lasting home for men like Fowler, and Greene has a fascination from the fifties onwards with graves and graveyards. Their stony solidity is reassuring as much as frightening. Conditions generally seem to be better for the dead than for the living: in The Comedians the cemeteries are better

⁵⁷ Stratford 217.

⁵⁸ Erdinast-Vulcan 60.

cared for than the houses, and Brown notes that “[. . .] the family-tombs looked more solid than the family-huts. The dead were allotted mansions of a better class than the living [. . .]” (C 281). Haiti, with its Voodoo heritage, is a country that places great importance in the dead, who must not be forgotten or neglected. In Haiti, death is part of life, and Brown’s hotel is filled with reminders of death. His mother dies there almost as soon as he arrives; her lover hangs himself soon afterwards in her old room; Dr Philipot seeks refuge there from the murderous Tontons Macoute and then, fearing discovery, slits his own throat and wrists in the empty pool; Brown himself very nearly meets his death in his own bar at the hands of Captain Concasseur. There are no places of safety in Haiti: when Philipot fled to the hotel in desperation he was seeking refuge in an illusion. Doctor Magiot comments: “I suppose he believed in your English phrase, ‘An Englishman’s home is his castle’. He had so little hope he sought safety in a catchword” (C 103). But there is no escape from death here.

Even for the living, images of death recur: Brown and Martha lie together in the gardens “in a shallow declivity under the palms like bodies given a common burial” (C 176). Brown is drawn to death, or perhaps death is drawn to him: it is his proper environment. As A. A. DeVitis suggests, Brown’s final profession as an undertaker is appropriate to him: “He belongs to the world of the dead and not to that of the living.”⁵⁹ For Greene there is no escape from the constant fact of death, even back in the relative safety of England: in a short story, Greene describes a man returning home in a taxi: “They entered the large whitewashed Bayswater square. The houses resembled the above-ground tombs you find in continental cemeteries,

⁵⁹ A. A. DeVitis, “Graham Greene’s The Comedians: Hollow Men,” Renascence 18 (1966): 13.

except that, unlike the tombs, they were divided into flatlets and there were rows and rows of bell-pushes to wake the inmates” (“The Over-night Bag,” CS 299). Here the living seem more hopelessly trapped than the dead, in houses which are also tombs.

But death is a welcome release only for those who are tired of life, and who can see the years stretching endlessly before them as they get older and more exhausted by personal failure. Not all of Greene’s characters share this attitude: for some, mostly older men and women, death is closing in; the years no longer stretch on indefinitely. For these people, the certainty of death is its most terrifying aspect. By the mid-1960s Greene was in his own sixties and aware of the likelihood that life would not last more than another decade, or maybe two. Death looks different when it is closing in on him and not vice versa. It is no longer the exciting death of warfare and adventure, but the death of old age, which no amount of cunning can avoid. In another short story from the sixties, “Cheap in August,” Greene’s central figure, Mary, an ageing married woman, goes on a Caribbean holiday alone in search of an adventure, a love affair. She reacts to the approach of death by trying to experience more of life. The affair she finally has is not what she expects—it offers less passion and more genuine companionship and comfort. The elderly American man she meets, Henry Hickslaughter, draws her to him with his loneliness, his fear, his air of failure. He tells her that his greatest fear is of his own inevitable death, of “dying, with nobody around, in the dark” (“Cheap In August,” CS 106). It is the lack of any alternative, any escape, which terrifies him: “I’m not afraid of death. Not sudden death. Believe me, I’ve looked for it here and there. It’s the certain-sure business, closing in on you, like tax inspectors . . .” (CS 107-08). At his age, the fear is constant:

“I’m over seventy. The Bible age. It could happen any day now.”
 “You’ll live to a hundred,” she said with an odd conviction.
 “Then I’ll have to live with my fear the hell of a long time.” (CS 106-07)

In the meantime both Mary and Henry are motivated by “[. . .] the universal desire to see a little bit further before one surrendered to old age and the blank certitude of death” (CS 86).

One way to attempt to escape the approach of death is to travel, either actually—like Mary and Henry—or imaginatively. Marie-Françoise Allain notes in Greene’s work a recurrence of “flights into the fantastic,” and Greene comments:

Perhaps you’re right: I’m escaping. For example, if one can remember an entire dream, the result is a sense of entertainment sufficiently marked to give one the illusion of being catapulted into a different world. One finds oneself remote from one’s conscious pre-occupations.⁶⁰

None of Greene’s works is more fantastic than a story he wrote in the sixties, called “Under the Garden.” In the story, a sick, middle-aged man, William Wilditch, returns to the family home to remember the summers he spent there, and in particular to remember a childhood incident which he cannot pin down either as dream or bizarre reality. He recalls exploring the grounds as a boy and finding a tunnel, which took him down under the garden into a strange and separate world where he met two peculiar characters, Javitt and Maria, who kept him a semi-compliant prisoner there, until eventually he escaped and returned to the world above ground. While under the garden, William learned of Javitt’s daughter who had gone away from their underground world. William determined to find her, however far he might have to travel around the globe, and his adult life reflects that childhood determination: fantasy travel becomes actual travel. There are few countries he hasn’t visited, this

⁶⁰ Allain 128.

“restless man, never long in one place, no wife, no children” (“Under The Garden,” CS 172). As in the case of Greene, restlessness is William’s nature: when he meets the old gardener who had worked at the house when William was a child, the gardener recalls: “You was always running away,” and he judges that William’s adult life has proved no different:

You was hunting for something. That’s what I said to the folk round here when you were away in those savage parts [. . .]. “You take my word,” I said to them, “he hasn’t changed, he’s off hunting for something, like he always did, though I doubt if he knows what he’s after [. . .].” (CS 232)

Sit at home and one is an easy target for death; a moving target is harder to hit, and in getting away from home one is able to connect far more fully with life. In Travels with My Aunt, Henry Pulling has spent his whole working life within the limited world of a bank, and has retired to a life of bridge, the Conservative club, and his cherished dahlias. He admits: “I’ve always been rather stay-at-home. It’s quite an adventure for me coming as far as Brighton” (TA 49). Though it is only with reluctance that Henry can be extracted from this quiet existence, as his travels with his energetic Aunt Augusta progress, Henry begins to come alive in a way that he could never do at home. Amid the “confusion [. . .] and running about” Henry happens upon life (TA 50) and, released from the restrictions of his suburban existence, he finds freedom. Sitting with his Aunt Augusta in her newly acquired house in Paraguay, Henry discards his English past: “‘I have been happy,’ I said, ‘but I have been so bored for so long.’” (TA 308). He suggests that, in leaving England, he has “escaped from an open-prison” (TA 244), and he recalls the words of Wordsworth’s Immortality Ode, and the image of the “prison-house” whose shadows

close in on us all as we enter adulthood.⁶¹ Henry feels that he has allowed himself entirely to forget what Wordsworth called “the glories he hath known, / And that imperial palace whence he came,”⁶² whereas his Aunt Augusta, he feels, still lives among those glories. Having learned to follow his aunt’s example, Henry now shares the sentiments expressed in another of Wordsworth’s works, feeling himself to be “escaped / From the vast city, where I long had pined / A discontented sojourner: now free / Free as a bird to settle where I will,” to experience new places and see with new eyes.⁶³

The single, constant aim is to keep moving; for Aunt Augusta, travelling is absolutely a way of life. When Henry complains to her that it seems odd to travel all the way to Istanbul to stay only twenty-four hours, she replies that “[t]he point is the journey [. . .]. I enjoy the travelling not the sitting still” (TA 76). Augusta does not merely like to travel, she needs it. Travel is her addiction, her disease: “The Pullings have all been great travellers. I think I must have caught the infection through your father” (TA 65). Old age and infirmity are pushed away in her determination to keep on moving. In this she is like another of Henry’s relatives, Uncle Jo, whose story she tells to Henry: Jo was a man who so loved to travel that, at the very end of his life, incapacitated by ill-health, he insisted upon buying a house with fifty-two rooms—one for each week of the year—and travelled between them, moving to a new one at the end of each week, dying just as he dragged himself along the corridor towards the

⁶¹ William Wordsworth, “Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1936) 460.

⁶² Wordsworth, “Intimations of Immortality” 461.

⁶³ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, *Poetical Works* 495.

last. Thus “[h]e died on his travels [. . .]. As he would have wished” (TA 73). His home could have become his prison in the final days of his life, but instead he made it his whole world.

Yet in spite of all the travelling, the more stay-at-home aspects of Greene’s work and characters should not be neglected. Even men like Brown and Query are not content simply to be wanderers—they seek a home, even if they never find it. And the one character who breaks the mould of Greene’s wandering heroes, Henry Pulling, was perfectly content in his suburban haven in Southwood—“my familiar world—the little local world of ageing people [. . .] where one read of danger only in the newspapers” (TA 201)—until his Aunt Augusta broke into his life and effectively uprooted him. He was never aware of his English home, or his job at the bank, as imprisoning him, until his aunt encouraged him to escape them. Augusta leads and Henry merely follows. He reflects on Southwood: “[. . .] in my way I had been happy here [. . .]” (TA 201); it seems unlikely that he will be markedly happier in Paraguay, though Augusta has certainly revealed to him the possibility of finding vastly different and rather more adventurous ways to be happy. He still has family of sorts, acquaintances, financial work, and his Victorian books to bolster the illusions he still retains. Lars Hartveit takes an extreme view of Henry’s situation at the end of the novel: “The quotation from ‘Pippa Passes’ is like the key being turned in the door of Henry’s prison: he is trapped more firmly in the web of illusion than he ever was in Southwood.”⁶⁴ While it may be excessive to suggest that Henry is more trapped at the end of the novel than at its beginning, it would be fair to say that he

⁶⁴ Lars Hartveit, “The Author as Picaro in *Travels with My Aunt*,” *Essays in Graham Greene*, vol. 2, ed. Peter Wolfe (Greenwood, FL: Penkevill, 1990) 81.

has not made great advances, and he certainly would not have made any of them on his own, without Augusta's influence. Crucially, the house in Paraguay is not Henry's home, but Augusta's and Visconti's. Henry may feel more at home and more fulfilled here than in Southwood—his surroundings are indeed an improvement—but he hasn't yet found his own home. It is as though he is trapped in a permanent state of childhood, still living with his "parents," imitating them. What he needs to do is to set out alone, but that seems beyond him. One wonders: what happens when the elderly Augusta and Visconti finally die and Henry is left alone, independent as he has never truly been? This will be his first test as an individual, rather than as an accomplice.

Henry shares his first name with Greene himself ("Graham" was Greene's second name), and to a certain extent he shares his roots. Greene was never a homeless figure, except by his own making. Grahame Smith comments on another novel, *The Comedians*, that "[n]othing establishes the fact that Brown is not Greene more clearly than the former's complete rootlessness as a 'citizen of Monaco.' Greene is utterly rooted in Berkhamsted, even to the sly faces of its inhabitants [. . .]."⁶⁵ Smith's comment is only partly true: certainly Greene's childhood roots were pure Berkhamsted—while Brown has no such childhood home to build upon—but in adulthood Greene could not be held by one small English town when the whole world was out there to be seen. Like Brown, he became a wanderer, though unlike Brown he never forgot where he came from. Physically, Greene left Berkhamsted far behind him, but mentally, his roots stayed with him permanently.

⁶⁵ Grahame Smith 155.

However many alternative homes he found on his travels, Greene was aware that his childhood home was something matchless.

Berkhamsted was Greene's first home, and in early childhood he was happy there; but so small and suburban a town would inevitably have stifled the restless adult he became, and so he moved on, and on. But after all the movement come a desire for rest again; what Greene and his characters now look for is a last home, the end of the road. The characters' travels are either quests for such a home, or only a second-rate alternative to the home that is desperately desired but just beyond their reach. In *Travels with My Aunt*, Augusta remarks of her new Paraguayan home: "This is my journey's end [. . .]. Perhaps travel for me was always a substitute. I never wanted to travel as long as Mr Visconti was there" (TA 307). Even the veteran wanderer must settle when the right home presents itself; in Paraguay, Augusta finds everything she wants, has always wanted. She has her son with her at last (though he does not yet know that she is in fact his natural mother), she is reunited with the most favoured of her former lovers, and she has a suitably grand and spacious home, in a country whose dangers and difficulties fulfil her need for adventure. Having all this, she has no need to wander further:

She said, "I am so happy, Henry, that you are here and Mr Visconti is safely returned. Perhaps I am getting a little old, for I shall be quite content with a spell of family life. You and me and Mr Visconti working together . . ."
(TA 289).

For most of Greene's ageing characters, however, the right home will never present itself; in its absence, it seems far more rewarding to travel than to sit still—to enjoy the ride and to learn from these travels as much as possible. In this Greene is in tune with the age in spite of being decades older than those other writers with

whom he shares a fascination with travel and movement. In such characters as Fowler, Brown and Jones—men who seem incapable of settling down, who travel energetically and determinedly to distant, and hopefully inspiring, places—Greene unexpectedly mirrors the writings of the Beat generation. His own wanderings too echo their mood: coming from different countries, generations and directions Greene and the Beats happen upon the same truths. This is surprisingly and strikingly the case when Greene's ideas are compared to those of Jack Kerouac's On the Road (1957), in which the narrator figure, Sal Paradise, documents "the whole mad swirl of everything,"⁶⁶ as he and his friends perform "the one and noble function of the time, move."⁶⁷ Like Henry Pulling, Sal is not a central figure in the action of the novel, but is drawn to it: the madly energetic Dean Moriarty is Kerouac's version of Aunt Augusta. For such young men, movement is a compulsion, an irresistible and unconsidered impulse; they escape the city for "the purity of the road,"⁶⁸ aiming to experience as much of life as possible across their vast country: as they travel west towards San Francisco, "[. . .] the whole country was like an oyster for us to open; and the pearl was there."⁶⁹

There is certainly energy to all these travels—it drives the friends ever onwards across the American continent and through life—but there is also melancholy in their inability to settle. Sal is one of the few characters who has any real home to return to, a settled base in which to concentrate upon his writing while waiting for the urge

⁶⁶ Jack Kerouac, On the Road (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 8.

⁶⁷ Kerouac 133.

⁶⁸ Kerouac 134.

⁶⁹ Kerouac 138.

to travel to take him away again. In contrast, men like Elmer Hassel are eternal wanderers, mysterious and fascinating figures to the young restless men, who see him “crossing and recrossing the country every year [. . .] only because he had no place he could stay in without getting tired of it and because there was nowhere to go but everywhere [. . .].”⁷⁰ Such men have nothing, and so their travels become everything to them. Like Greene’s Brown and Querry they “travel light”:⁷¹ they are absolutely free, but also absolutely alone.

Such journeys seem to have no end and no beginning—they last as long as life itself. To live is to travel, and to travel is to live, as in Thom Gunn’s collection of poems, The Sense of Movement (1957). One of these poems, “On the Move,” describes young men on motorcycles “[a]float on movement [. . .] / [. . .] in a valueless world.”⁷² Like Henry’s Aunt Augusta, these boys subvert the usual purpose of travel: to reach one’s destination. They have no fixed object; instead they move “always toward, toward” some unknown, unreachable goal.⁷³ These are people “who have come to go.”⁷⁴ Little seems to issue from such travels: as Gunn writes in “A Plan of Self-Subjection,” “I end my circle where I had begun.”⁷⁵ The sole aim of the journey is self-discovery: these young men cannot settle until they know themselves. Ann Charters quotes Kerouac’s friend John Clellon Holmes on the Beat generation in her introduction to On the Road:

⁷⁰ Kerouac 28.

⁷¹ See Jones, The Comedians 263; Querry & Marie Rycker, A Burnt-Out Case 172.

⁷² Thom Gunn, “On the Move,” The Sense of Movement (London: Faber, 1957) 12.

⁷³ Gunn, “On the Move” 12.

⁷⁴ Gunn, “On the Move” 12.

⁷⁵ Thom Gunn, “A Plan of Self-Subjection,” The Sense of Movement 20.

[. . .] the object of their quest was spiritual. Though they rushed back and forth across the country [. . .] their real journey was inward; and if they seemed to trespass most boundaries, legal and moral, it was only in the hope of finding a belief on the other side.⁷⁶

Similarly, for Greene, travel equals discovery, eternal progress. He cannot imagine reaching—and does not wish to reach—an end, even after death. He is not even particularly concerned by the thought of facing Purgatory, because there “[. . .] one would have a sense of movement. I can’t believe in a Heaven which is just passive bliss. If there’s such a thing as Heaven, it will contain movement and change”:⁷⁷ these are conditions in which Greene really feels far more “at home” than he ever could in what seems to him the stagnation of security.

During the sixties, however, the mood of Greene’s fiction changes: instead of existential wanderings in search of meaning in a meaningless world, we see more youthful and less profound, though no less constant or energetic, travels. In Travels With My Aunt, Henry Pulling befriends an American girl named Tooley, whom he meets during his journey on the Orient Express. Through her, the ageing suburban Englishman sees into another world, another generation, that of the 1960s backpacker. She is travelling to Istanbul and then onwards to who knows where with a crowd of like-minded young people: “There were moments when she gave the impression that all the world was travelling” (TA 121). Indeed in this novel, this does seem to be the case. The world is in a state of flux; people like Tooley, and many more besides, have nothing to do but keep moving on:

“Haven’t you anywhere you call home?” I asked her.

⁷⁶ Ann Charters, introduction, On the Road, by Jack Kerouac (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) xxx.

⁷⁷ Christopher Burstall, “Graham Greene Takes the Orient Express,” Listener 21 Nov. 1968: 677.

“Julian and me felt like home [. . .]” (TA 121).

Tooley’s generation can find security only in people, not in places; and even people prove generally unreliable. Tooley has come adrift: from her boyfriend, her parents, her home country. This seems very much like a return to the mood of the thirties, when all the youth of England, of Europe, seemed to be travelling too, and in no particular direction. Then they travelled in response to the past—to get away from memories of the Great War—and now they seem to be avoiding the future, opting out, living in the moment.

Ceaseless travel, though, has its drawbacks: it leaves its mark upon people, and not only upon Greene’s characters but on Greene himself, whose wanderings in this period were making it ever harder for him to find a lasting home. Norman Sherry sums up Greene’s situation by around 1955 (when Greene’s relationship with Catherine Walston was finally breaking down for good, leaving him with no real ties any longer either to people or to places):

There never seemed to be peace in his life, and sometimes when it came he turned away from it. Since his house at 14 North Side had been destroyed in the blitz, he had not had a permanent home. In the years of travel (and no man travelled more, as his diaries show) in the Far East, Greene had lost his sense of home.⁷⁸

Looking onwards into the late fifties and the sixties, Sherry sees Greene still seeking out “the dangerous or the lost and forgotten places of the world. He was to have thirty-six more years wheeling obsessively round the world, compelled it would seem to wander the earth until death. Unending traveller, unending writer [. . .].”⁷⁹ For Greene at this point, “home” was something that was part of his past, and

⁷⁸ Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 2, 507.

⁷⁹ Sherry, The Life of Graham Greene, vol. 2, 508.

perhaps part also of some distant future; but in the present moment he was wonderfully, and horribly, free.

Greene's characters in the 1950s and 1960s seem indeed to have come from nowhere and nothing. In A Burnt-Out Case, Querry's origins are left undefined—even his nationality is questionable. When Querry introduces himself to Doctor Colin he does so in “an accent which Colin could not quite place as French or Flemish any more than he could immediately identify the nationality of the name” (BOC 14). In The Quiet American, Fowler is English but no longer feels any affinity with the land of his birth, “[. . .] my home had shifted its ground eight thousand miles” (QA 19). Brown in The Comedians is the most rootless of them all. He was born in Monaco (which is “almost the same as being a citizen of nowhere” (C 254)) and educated by the Jesuits until his expulsion from the College of the Visitation (could there be a more appropriate name for Brown's school—a man who only visits, never settles, wherever he goes?). He never knew his father, nor anything about him, and he was left to his own devices by his wayward mother. By middle age, when a postcard from his mother calls him to Haiti, Brown has still put down no roots: “[. . .] no region of the earth had taken the place of home” (C 242). He has drifted into and out of places, jobs, relationships, and he continues to let chance guide him, for want of a better guide: “I take things as they come” (C 255). He knows no other way to live: “[. . .] transience was my pigmentation, my roots would never go deep enough anywhere to make me a home or make me secure with love” (C 243). His hotel is the nearest he has come to making a home, but it is still not a home. It is a business venture, a last chance of security, and once Papa Doc is in power and the tourist trade has died out, he has little reason to stay. Brown is pragmatic in attempting to sell the

hotel: “[. . .] I valued my life more highly than an empty bar and a corridor full of empty bedrooms and a future empty of promise” (C 15). And yet he feels the tug of sentiment, even for an empty building: “I had grown to love the place, and I was glad in a way that I had found no purchaser. I believed that if I could own it for a few more years I would feel at home. Time was needed for a home as time was needed to turn a mistress into a wife” (C 52). But Brown will never have the time to make this place, or in all likelihood any other, a home. He agrees to smuggle the fugitive Jones out of the capital although he knows he himself may never be able to return if all should not go as planned. Brown gives up his one great chance of stability, perhaps because he realises that he can never make it work.

Brown accepts his inability to stick to any place: he moves on and starts again in another country, another line of work. And, as Maria Couto remarks, this is common in Greene’s novels: the characters “live in homes whose chief characteristic is impermanence and change. Professionals such as Scobie [. . .], Mr Pineda [. . .], and Fowler [. . .] change homes as often as their jobs demand it.”⁸⁰ Pineda’s wife remarks to Brown, towards the end of their time together in Haiti, upon the fact that “[o]ne always moves on” (C 265): an echo of the regretful words of the Russian officer, Starhov, in Greene’s post-war film treatment, “No Man’s Land.” Evidently insecurity and constant change were not, as they had first appeared, simply features of the immediate post-war period; the Second World War seems now to have had a permanently unsettling effect. Those who move on repeatedly find that it is not too difficult to make the new place much like the old, to settle anywhere within reason. In A Burnt-Out Case, Greene writes that “[i]n an unfamiliar region it is always

⁸⁰ Couto, Graham Greene: On the Frontier 138.

necessary for the stranger to begin at once to construct the familiar, with a photograph perhaps or a row of books if they are all that he has brought with him from the past” (BOC 21). A little effort is all that is required; those who make no such effort are the truly homeless, like Querry, who has left everything behind him, or like O’Toole in Travels With My Aunt, the absolute bareness of whose cabin on the boat to Paraguay strikes Henry Pulling: “He had made no attempt, as I had made the first day, to make it a temporary home” (TA 248). O’Toole is one of Greene’s most forlorn figures, described as looking “like a man who has lost his way” (TA 229). He is a displaced person, constantly travelling the world, without anywhere to return to. Henry advises him to make contact with his daughter, Tooley: “I think you ought to bring her home [. . .],” but O’Toole merely responds with a question: ““Where’s home?” he said and I looked around the cabin and wondered too” (TA 251).

It is interesting that Greene’s characters no longer seek to make a home in the most obvious place of all—the country of their birth, their supposed homeland. Brown makes his almost-home in Haiti by chance, not choice. He inherits the hotel from his mother, and is advised to sell it immediately, since Haiti is no place for outsiders to survive, still less thrive. But Brown stubbornly stays on, and Haiti becomes his surrogate homeland, displacing in his affections his childhood home of Monaco: “[. . .] I could feel no link at all with the hundred or so square kilometres around the gardens and boulevards of Monte Carlo, a city of transients. I felt a greater tie here, in the shabby land of terror, chosen for me by chance” (C 242-43). Similarly, Fowler clings to Vietnam in spite of the fact that his promotion at work will inevitably take him back to a desk job in England. His promotion brings no

happiness, nor even satisfaction; instead, “I envied the most homesick officer condemned to the chance of death. [. . .] Oh, they could have home—I only wanted my room in the rue Catinat” (QA 69). He still refers to England as “home,” but without any longing or even attachment. He tells Phuong that “I have been ordered home” (QA 84), but it is a strange home to which a man has to be ordered to return. England is merely “the scene of my failure”: the place where his marriage and subsequent relationships collapsed, and so it offers no dream of stability and no enticement to return.

Stratford notes that Vietnam, for Fowler, is “a home elsewhere, [. . .] away from England and away from the conventional pattern of English society” [my emphasis].⁸¹ And this does seem crucial for Greene’s characters: one can never get too far from that first home. To get away is to be free, to be able (just possibly) to make a home that is more personal, suitable, nurturing. So it is that Greene’s characters travel relentlessly in search of a home. There must be no going back, only onwards. Even with Phuong as his wife at last, Fowler’s return to England can hardly be a joyful one. Having failed to make a home there once, return seems hopeless. But Fowler has no choice: his destination has been ordained for him by his employers. Those who have the choice never return.

In A Burnt-Out Case, having chosen to travel to the most remote location he could find on the airport departure board, and then still further off the beaten track, into the jungle of the Congo, Querry shows a reluctance even to end his travels in the leper colony: “If the boat had gone any farther, I would not have landed here” (BOC 25). But this is the end of the line; one could hardly get further even on foot. Querry

⁸¹ Stratford 217.

appears to have found his dead end, and insists that he will never leave it: “This is where I’m going to end my days. I can’t go back to where I came from [. . .]. I don’t belong there any more” (BOC 209). In the end, however, even the leper colony proves only a temporary camp in the course of Querry’s journey. The scandal of his supposed affair with Marie Rycker is about to force him to leave—and go where?—when he is shot and killed by her husband, and thus leaves the colony in quite another manner. The Superior considers Querry’s death no tragedy, only the peculiar fulfilment of this restless man’s own wishes: “[. . .] it’s really quite a happy ending. isn’t it? [. . .] Surely he always wanted to go a bit further” (BOC 235).

In the 1960s, Greene himself went that bit further and made a final break with his homeland, leaving England behind him to live on a permanent basis in France. His travels had worked him loose from his roots in England; he might remain undeniably an Englishman, but he would always now be an Englishman abroad. Towards the end of the decade, financial—and particularly taxation—troubles forced Greene to make the break he had for so long contemplated. It would seem that Greene did not necessarily anticipate at the time that the move would be permanent: to Catherine Walston he wrote that he hoped “to return after 18 months or so of exile, with everything straightened up.”⁸² To Yvonne Cloetta he wrote of the number of arrangements to be made before “I leave England ‘forever’”:⁸³ to place the word in inverted commas suggests an inability, or unwillingness, to believe in this “forever.” But forever it proved to be: in 1966, Greene “burned a number of boats” (WE 287), and there would be no going back for him. Whatever the short-term difficulties or

⁸² Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 3, 418.

⁸³ Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 3, 419.

upheavals of this move, in the long-term he apparently made the adjustment successfully: in a newspaper article a decade later Greene is quoted as saying: “I speak French very badly [. . .], but I feel perfectly at home here. The only things I miss are English sausages and English beer.”⁸⁴

In various places, fixed upon to varying degrees by choice and by fate, with death approaching—maybe slowly, but all the same undeniably—Greene’s characters are, like Greene himself, now offered a last chance to make a genuine, lasting home. Querry’s last chance is in the leper colony and he makes the most of it, because he knows he has exhausted his alternatives: “I’ve come a long way. There’s nowhere else for me to go if I leave here” (BOC 157). For Brown and Jones in The Comedians it may be Haiti: Brown quickly acknowledges the similarities between them and considers: “Perhaps he’s like me and he hasn’t anywhere else to go” (C 22). Haiti becomes their “home” by default, for they are running out of places to try. Cornered in Pineda’s Embassy, Jones make the most of this unplanned “house-party” situation. His stay with Luis and Martha, their son Angel, and their dog Midge, allows his sociability to flourish, in the family setting he has never previously experienced. When Brown visits them all there it seems “as though Jones had brought into the house with him a kind of domesticity. Midge sat down at his feet as though he were the master [. . .]” (C 260). After Jones and Brown have left Port-au-Prince for the final time, Jones recalls his former happy haven: “‘It was good,’ he said, ‘it was like being in a family’” (C 291). He manages to slip out of one warm, supportive “family” environment into another: when he escapes to join the Haitian

⁸⁴ Louise Dennys, “The Greene Factor,” Graham Greene: Man of Paradox, ed. A. F. Cassis (Chicago: Loyola UP, 1994) 273.

rebels, he makes himself at home once more, even in the inhospitable landscape of the Haitian hills. He becomes indispensable to the rebels, loved by “his” men, even though he cannot speak their language. He needs this sense of belonging and other people are keen to provide it: he makes them laugh, raises their spirits, and in return they warm to him, accept him as one of their own. Jones dies without leaving Haiti: the other rebels manage to escape, but when Jones’s flat feet let him down he is forced to stop in a “good place” to hold off the enemy for as long as possible (C 307); he is never seen again. After his death, Philipot and Brown discuss Jones’s attachment to the country:

“He told me once that there was no room for him outside of Haiti.”

“I wonder what he meant.”

“He meant that his heart was there.” (C 307)

In Haiti Jones had found a place where, in spite of his habitual lies and deceptions, he could be himself as never before.

The last chance gives Greene’s characters an opportunity to leave all their failed homes behind them. One of his short stories published in the 1960s, “Mortmain,” depicts a middle-aged man, Carter, who is recently and happily married to Julia, his own personal last chance. The domestic bliss of the new couple is contrasted with Carter’s previous difficult and painful relationship with another woman, Josephine. He feels secure at last with Julia: “Here was home—nothing else had been other than a caravan” (CS 77), and he explains to Julia that he never married before because his relationship with Josephine simply did not feel permanent. Julia asks him: “Are we going to be permanent?” His reply, “[i]f we aren’t, nothing will ever be,” is typical Greene (CS 71). At the start of the marriage, the comment suggests total confidence; nothing can compare with the happiness

Carter and Julia share. A little later, as the relationship begins to crumble, the emphasis is on the words “nothing will ever be.” Greene leaves us wondering whether anything in life is permanent, whether last chances can be taken, whether any home will ever satisfy.

If anything, men like Fowler, Wormold, Brown, and Querry seem more homeless even than Greene’s earlier heroes. They have left their roots far behind them, are unwilling or unable simply to return, and have not yet found any real replacement. In fact they have so little sense of security that they seem not even at home in themselves, absolutely unsure of their own characters or destinies. It is The Comedians which best illustrates this fact. The term “comedian” has two meanings here: obviously it refers to a characters of comic rather than tragic significance, but equally it denotes a man or woman who is playing a part, acting his or her way through life for want of any real motivations or emotions. Brown seems to have inherited this trait from his mother—a woman he describes as “an accomplished comedian” (C 82). And she can recognise the quality in him: from her death bed she comments with amusement: “You really are a son of mine [. . .]. What part are you playing now?” (C 79). He is undoubtedly such a comedian—he has spent his adult life deceiving people to scrape a living. But his mother perhaps was more genuine than he realised. Even when she acted a part it was perhaps in the hope of being absorbed into that role, of happening upon truth. Brown finds a letter she had written to her young lover, which suggests that she was sincere even in her insincerity:

“Marcel, I know I’m an old woman and as you say a bit of an actress. But please go on pretending. As long as we pretend we escape. Pretend that I love you like a mistress. Pretend that you love me like a lover. Pretend that I would die for you and that you would die for me.” I read the message again now; I

thought it movingly phrased . . . And he had died for her, so perhaps he was no comédien after all. Death is a proof of sincerity. (C 276)

The pretences of his mother and of Marcel are attempts to get closer to life, to love, to other people and places, whereas Brown's are designed to do just the opposite: to keep him apart, inscrutable, free. Until he can be himself, rather than acting somebody else's part, Brown can never settle. He is not at home in his own character, still less in Haiti and his relationships with other people. Brown compares his own strained relationship with Martha with the love his mother and Marcel shared. Marcel's suicide after the loss of his lover is an incomprehensible act to Brown; he cannot imagine that either he or Martha would ever take such a path:

Neither of us would ever die for love. We would grieve and separate and find another. We belonged to the world of comedy and not of tragedy. The fireflies moved among the trees and lit intermittently a world in which we had no part. We—the uncoloured—were all of us too far away from home. (C 176).

Brown experiences only fleeting sensations of belonging or involvement; he has only a "semi-attached life" with Martha (C 308). After he has left Haiti and Martha far behind him, he remembers an afternoon when there had seemed to be the possibility of something more, when he and Martha did not, for once, argue, when they found peace with one another: "When I look back on that afternoon it seems to me we had been granted the distant sight of a promised land—we had come to the edge of a desert: the milk and honey awaited us [. . .]" (C 204). But this tantalizing hope never materializes and the sense of peace is lost; for Brown there is no promised land. He stands alone and apart, an eternal outsider, by nature and by choice. He knows that he is fated to be one of "the rootless":

Perhaps there is an advantage in being born in a city like Monte Carlo, without roots, for one accepts more easily what comes. The rootless have experienced, like all the others, the temptation of sharing the security of a religious creed or

a political faith, and for some reason we have turned the temptation down. We are the faithless; we admire the dedicated, the Doctor Magiots and the Mr Smiths for their courage and their integrity, for their fidelity to a cause, but through timidity, or through lack of sufficient zest, we find ourselves the only ones truly committed—committed to the whole world of evil and of good, to the wise and to the foolish, to the indifferent and to the mistaken. We have chosen nothing except to go on living, “rolled round on Earth’s diurnal course, With rocks and stones and trees.” (C 304).

There is a hopelessness and a resignation to Brown’s opinion of himself and his likely future. Only the exceptional characters in Greene’s novels of this period (in Travels With My Aunt it is Aunt Augusta, in The Comedians, Brown’s mother and even poor Jones) have the determination and the vigour to insist upon their right to make a home. They are the few who keep believing that they can and will one day make a home. For the rest—for Brown, for Querry, for Fowler—home is an impossibility: they have had their chances and each time they have let them slip away.

Chapter Four:

“To play at home with paper [. . .]”:¹ Greene’s later years

The 1970s and 80s were, for Greene, an unexpected period of extra time, both as a man and as a writer. He had hoped for no greater allowance than the “biblical age” of three score years and ten,² and yet he passed that point in 1974, living on into the last decade of the twentieth century, and dying in 1991 at the age of 86. At sixty he had written an essay (prematurely) entitled “The Last Decade,”³ and his novel, Travels with My Aunt (published in 1968), had been a comical summary of his whole career to that point, a kind of Greenland revisited. Having seemingly already tied up his loose ends, having brought Henry Pulling “home” to Aunt Augusta’s house and a new life in Paraguay, where would Greene go from here? The answer is: in a host of directions.

Greene was very conscious of the possibility that each novel might be his last, or indeed might never be completed.⁴ And, perhaps as a result of this, the works of this period have no immediately obvious focus or development as a whole (in the way that the novels of other stages of his career have). This is not his “religious” period, nor his “political” period. Indeed no single label applies; instead there is a distinctive diversity of subject matter, theme and form: The Honorary Consul is a political/religious novel; The Human Factor deals with the conflict of personal and

¹ Robert Louis Stevenson, Underwoods, Collected Poems 144.

² John Heilpern, “On the Dangerous Edge,” Observer 7 December 1975: 17.

³ Graham Greene, “The Last Decade” 46-48.

⁴ See, for example, Ways of Escape 300; John Vinocur, “The Soul Searching Continues for Graham Greene,” New York Times Magazine 3 March 1985: 39.

public interests, and the old theme of disloyalty, with a backdrop of espionage; Monsignor Quixote is a tale of love and friendship and hope; Doctor Fischer of Geneva is a dark fairy story of love, hate, greed and disillusionment; finally, The Captain and the Enemy is a classic Greene adventure story with the familiar lonely heroes. In addition, Greene also wrote a number of stories on various themes and a handful of vaguely experimental plays. It would seem that towards the end of his life Greene was carefully avoiding becoming stuck in a single niche, reserving the right to experiment, to write precisely what and as he chose.

Greene commented in an interview upon the relative simplicity and calm of old age: "I suppose, as you grow old, life becomes easier. Less unhappiness, less despair, fervour and manic moods." His interviewer, John Mortimer, remarked in turn that "[. . .] he had achieved what I hadn't expected to find, a kind of happiness."⁵ Indeed the final years of Greene's life were perhaps his most contented and his most settled. While he never lost his innate restlessness, which kept him still travelling (especially to Spain and South America), nonetheless in the 1970s and 80s Greene became, emotionally at least, firmly settled in his French life and home. Though old age and increasing infirmity must surely have played their parts in encouraging him to settle down as he had never done before, they are insufficient to explain the "mellowing" of Greene. More significantly, he had at long last found a home: in Antibes with Yvonne Cloetta, Greene's last mistress and companion of over thirty years. This was a home from which he would not feel the need to escape, a home that sheltered and welcomed but did not stifle him. The town of Antibes seemed to suit Greene very well: he told Bernard Violet that Antibes offered "a spirit of

⁵ John Mortimer, "The Master is Still Learning," Sunday Times 16 March 1980: 39.

friendship which I appreciate.”⁶ It is a typically Greeneian irony that the home that proved most peaceful, most inspiring, and of course most enduring, should have been not in England, the land of his birth, but in a foreign country. Having made the break finally in 1967, Greene was living on a permanent basis in France: the last two decades of his life would be spent outside England.

It would seem, therefore, that Greene had found himself a haven in which to live out a serene old age in relative anonymity. He had made his way to his own version of Kipling’s “just Republics”:

God bless the thoughtful islands,
Where never warrants come;
God bless the just Republics
That give a man a home [. . .].⁷

Greene quotes and requotes this particular verse in works of this period: in The Captain and the Enemy and in Ways of Escape (CAE 66; WE 139). Paul Theroux calls it “a sort of Greenland anthem.”⁸ Such “thoughtful islands” offer the prospect of a home away from home: a quiet refuge from one’s original homeland. Essentially Greene had finally made his own escape, if to a less remote spot than Kipling’s verse suggests (or indeed than would be favoured by most of Greene’s fictional characters). England may have made him, but it could not keep him for ever.

By the 1970s, Greene was an exile of sorts—an expatriate at least—living in a country that was not his own by birth, by heritage, or even by longstanding residence. Thus he no longer had a national home or identity in the same way as

⁶ Bernard Violet, “A Rare Occasion: Graham Greene on TV,” Graham Greene: Man of Paradox, ed. A. F. Cassis 344.

⁷ Rudyard Kipling, “The Broken Men,” The Complete Verse 80.

⁸ Paul Theroux, “What the Hell is Going On?” Literary Review September 1988: 5.

previously: having abandoned England for France, he would return only as a visitor. Greene himself, however, saw no reason why the move should make him any less than fully British, as Norman Lebrecht noted after a meeting: “He is irritated by any suggestion that his Englishness or familiarity with England may have been impaired by self-exile.”⁹ Yet Greene’s irritation itself is indicative that this may have been a sensitive subject, and Penelope Gilliat writes that Greene had revealed to her that

[. . .] he missed England partly because of getting the details wrong. In a recent book, he said, he had had the traffic going both ways in St. James’s, whereas it has been going only one way for years. He recovers his sense of the England where he is so firmly rooted by reading writers like Trollope.¹⁰

There is, of course, rather more to Englishness than knowing which way the traffic flows in any given part of London, but Greene would nonetheless have to work harder now that he was away from his homeland, and while Trollope’s novels would hardly keep him up to date they could at least remind him of some essence of England; Greene’s own version of England had in any case never been the most current.

The significance to Greene of Trollope’s novels becomes apparent in The Human Factor (1978), in which the characters attempt to use them as a means of escape from the reality of their twentieth-century lives. One character, Sir John Hargreaves, developed his attachment to Trollope during years spent working in Africa: “At moments of irritation, he had found The Warden and Barchester Towers reassuring books, they reinforced the patience which Africa required” (HF 240). And similarly, back in England, the novels he reads at weekends in the country help

⁹ Norman Lebrecht, “Commitment to Central America and a Passion for Religion,” Graham Greene: Man of Paradox, ed. A. F. Cassis 390.

¹⁰ Penelope Gilliat, “Profiles: The Dangerous Edge,” New Yorker 26 March 1979: 47.

him to find a brief spell of contentment amid the trials of his Secret Service work in London: “So all that afternoon he felt for a while the same smooth pleasure he always received from Trollope—the sense of a calm Victorian world, where good was good and bad was bad and one could distinguish easily between them” (HF 240). But now Hargreaves is reading The Way We Live Now, the same book that is recommended to one of his employees, Maurice Castle, on the grounds that it has “[a] good title, sir. Always contemporary” (HF 117). The Way We Live Now proves more disconcerting than reassuring: there are too many parallels between the developments and uncertainties of the late-Victorian era and the end of the twentieth century. It is a modern novel about a world which is “being changed very fast,”¹¹ so that no longer is it a simple task to tell the good from the bad. As such, this novel offers no escape either for Hargreaves or for Castle: “He found it was not a book which could distract him from the way he lived now” (HF 286). The Way We Live Now compels its reader to face the new and unpalatable truths of its age, as indeed does The Human Factor. Miriam Allott judges of The Human Factor, as also generally of Greene’s fiction of this period, that the “sense of the precarious, together with the ominous public and political events which have helped to foster it, suggest that [. . .] ‘The way we live now’ might be as good a title as any for a discussion of the sad austerities of ‘late Greene.’”¹²

While Greene sat in France reading Trollope, England was rapidly changing without him. Through the eventful years of the late twentieth century, Greene’s main

¹¹ Anthony Trollope, The Way We Live Now (1875; London: Penguin, 1994) 328.

¹² Miriam Allott, “Graham Greene and the Way We Live Now,” Critical Quarterly 20.3 (Autumn 1978) 20.

point of contact was through the British newspapers, which he continued to read and to which he still wrote letters on a host of diverse matters.¹³ But all of the events of the 1970s and 80s in Britain—trade union disputes, the Winter of Discontent, the Conservative return to power along with the first female Prime Minister, the miners' strikes, ever-increasing consumerization of society—were viewed by Greene from a distance, not experienced at first hand. If Greene had always elected to take a relatively detached stance to British current affairs and political matters, now his detachment was unavoidable.

When Greene moved from England to France his perspective with regard to his homeland was permanently altered. England became a place where he had once lived, an historical location. Salman Rushdie considers this peculiar perspective in his essay, "Imaginary Homelands." Rushdie has shared with Greene the experience of removal and distance from his homeland, and Rushdie considers India, and especially Bombay, in much the same way that Greene thought of England and Berkhamsted. Rushdie refutes the opening sentence of L. P. Hartley's The Go-Between—"The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there"—and turns the idea upon its head to assert that actually "[. . .] it's my present that is foreign, and [. . .] the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time."¹⁴ Looking back at India, revisiting the place that once was home, Rushdie is

¹³ See Norman Lebrecht, "The Greene Factor," Sunday Times Review 1 April 1984: 33. The published selection of Greene's letters shows that, from the 1970s onwards, Greene wrote to English newspapers on the subjects of, among others, relations between England and the U.S., atomic bombs, a scheme to bankrupt the Post Office, Vietnam, the educational backgrounds of Thatcher's cabinet, Cuba, Belize and President Reagan; see Yours Etc.: Letters to the Press, ed. Christopher Hawtree (London: Reinhardt, 1989).

¹⁴ Salman Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991 (London: Granta, 1991) 9.

aware that his position is now that of an outsider, with (perhaps unreliable) memories of a place which has moved on in his absence:

[. . .] our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.¹⁵

This is exactly what Greene is doing when he revisits Berkhamsted and London in his own fiction in the 1970s and 1980s: creating an England of the mind, the imaginary England of an exile.

It was surely inevitable that Greene's self-imposed exile from the land of his birth would have an effect upon his fiction in the last two decades of his life. Clive James suggests (in a review of The Human Factor) that Greene began to view, and record, England in a quite different fashion following the move to France, so that "[y]ou feel that he is seeing it as a foreign country." James picks up on the immense care that seems to have been taken in the novel to

get the details right about England. The protagonist has been a long time away and the narrator who writes about him has been away even longer—so long that the return is like a fresh beginning. There is a tight focus on such minor items of local colour as Maltesers and Smarties. [. . .] The topography is so neurotically accurate that it might have been seen by the self-exiled writer somewhere along one of his lawless roads, on the journey without maps.¹⁶

Another reviewer suggested on the publication of The Human Factor that Greene's connection with England was in fact growing strained, and that he was having to try rather harder than previously to draw his English scenes convincingly: "Graham Greene returns to an English setting [. . .], but he seems occasionally to be proving

¹⁵ Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands 10.

¹⁶ Clive James, "Birthmarks, Chess Games and Wise Policemen," New Statesman 17 March 1978: 359.

that he still knows his way around, rather than assisting us, as he once did, to observe and know the world more clearly ourselves.”¹⁷ Whether or not one agrees that Greene was losing touch with his homeland in such small matters of detail, on a larger scale there was an undeniable distance between Greene and England now, not only physically but mentally, and the result is that his interests and those of Britain and the British necessarily part company more and more frequently.

The sense of Englishness as a definition of self in the novels becomes less meaningful and ever more fragile in this period. The English connection now is a connection to the past rather than the present (and certainly not the future). The Human Factor is the only novel written in this stage of Greene’s career in which the action is virtually entirely set within England (excepting the brief depiction of the central character’s miserable and lonely exile in Moscow at the novel’s close). Though the novel was published in 1978, Greene had begun working on it as early as 1967¹⁸—the year of his move to France—and it forms a kind of farewell to England. Greene’s final fictional works focus instead upon South America, Spain, Switzerland, and even while the action of The Human Factor is based in Britain almost none of the characters is comfortable there. The wife of the main character, Sarah Castle, is South African and is only in Britain to be with her husband—once he is exiled she is left alone and adrift; Castle’s chief, Hargreaves, is nostalgic for his old beloved Africa; Castle’s colleague, Davis, is the most restless of them all and complains: “I’m tired to death of this damned old country, [. . .] electricity cuts, strikes, inflation. [. . .] I joined this outfit hoping to get abroad [. . .]” (HF 59). This

¹⁷ Frederic Raphael, “The Man Who Gave Hostages to Treason,” Sunday Times 19 March 1978.

¹⁸ See Ways of Escape 298-99; also Shelden 400.

is a tired old England, constrictive and depressing (“Change and decay in all around I see,” quotes Castle in a similarly gloomy tone (HF 159)). It is a Britain whose day is finally past: not a homeland, but rather a place to leave behind in search of a better home. The only other novel to use England as a setting is Greene’s very last, The Captain and the Enemy (1988), in which the young hero grows up in a neglected suburban terrace; but, as in The Human Factor, the action concludes thousands of miles away, this time in Panama, in which distant land all the most vital of the events occur. For Greene and his characters, England might be the place of one’s birth but it was emphatically not the place to end one’s life.

England as “home” is a particularly insubstantial concept in the first of Greene’s works published in this period, The Honorary Consul (1973). The novel is set in an insignificant city in Argentina. More importantly, the setting is South American: “a continent of exiles” (HC 10). Not one of the central characters is a native of this remote city; few are even Argentinians. The main figure, Eduardo Plarr was born in Paraguay, but fled as a child with his mother to the relative safety of Argentina, while his English father stayed behind, never to be seen again. Similarly Plarr’s friends and acquaintances tend to be exiles of one sort or another: Charley Fortnum, the Honorary Consul of the title, is an Englishman, as is Plarr’s friend and chess opponent, Dr Humphries; but neither has even the hope of returning to England, which is so distant in every way that it might as well be a fictional place. Plarr, Fortnum and Humphries are the only three “Englishmen” in the city: Englishness here is merely a convenient label of difference, a badge of cool respectability. When Plarr is suspected of involvement in Fortnum’s disappearance, Colonel Perez speculates that it might be a crime of passion, resulting from Plarr’s

affair with Fortnum's wife; Plarr's response is incredulity: "Passion?" the doctor smiled. "I am an Englishman" (HC 110).

But Plarr's Englishness is not, at bottom, genuine. He is merely perceived by others in the city—by friends and strangers alike—to be an Englishman. He alone is aware of his divided nature, of the battle within him between his South American and English heritage, and the difficulty of ever feeling truly connected to either land. Englishness is the role which he has been allotted in life by others, a persona which he has accepted in adulthood for the sake of simplicity (though as a child he "had considered himself [. . .] quite as Spanish as his mother" (HC 10)). What inclination he has now, in his thirties, towards England is less a true attachment to a country he has never even seen (except in his imagination) than a desire to be close to his absent father, who was really English, at least in the sense of having been born there (though he too left his homeland in childhood, and, as his son admits, "probably retained few genuine memories of the land he had left at the age of ten" (HC 10)).

Eduardo Plarr's only point of contact with England is this vanished father and, again, memories of the English novels they once shared. To Plarr, England is "the legendary island of snow and fog, the country of Dickens and of Conan Doyle" (HC 10), no more than a fabulous background to tales that never really happened. South America is the land he knows, even if he does not feel at home there; in contrast, looking at a traditional English hunting print which hangs in Fortnum's home, Plarr realises that England is to him

an unfamiliar foreign countryside. He thought with a sense of surprise: I have never seen a little stream like that. In this continent even the smallest tributaries of the great rivers were wider than the Thames in his father's picture book. He tried the word "stream" again on his tongue: a stream must have a strange poetic charm. You couldn't call a stream the shallow inlet where he

sometime went to fish and where you couldn't bathe for fear of stingrays. A stream had to be peaceful, gently running, shaded by willows, without danger. This land, he thought, is really too vast for human beings. (HC 84)

It is impossible for Plarr to feel at home in South America; essentially his English dreams are the inventions of a man desperate for a home he can understand as he has never understood Argentina. He too would like to be—and indeed would have to be—the author of his own home.

In Argentina, or South America generally, Plarr is uncomfortable. He is aware of his divided inheritance, which seems to ensure that he can never be truly South American, while those all around him seem to be effortlessly part of their surroundings. Even Plarr's habits mark him out as different, in particular his penchant for reading out of doors, which attracts attention in a city where the public spaces are for socializing, not sitting apart:

People when they first saw him sitting on a bench with an open book had looked at him with keen curiosity. Perhaps they thought it was a custom peculiar to foreign doctors. It was not exactly unmanly, but it was certainly foreign. The men here preferred to stand at street corners and talk, or sit drinking cups of coffee and talk, or lean out of a window and talk. And all the time, while they talked, they touched each other to emphasize a point or just from friendship. In public Doctor Plarr touched nobody, only his book. It was sign, like his English passport, that he would always remain a stranger: he would never be properly assimilated. (HC 16)

Plarr has nothing in common with South American men in general and he cannot share their easy sociability. Nor does he possess "machismo": "the sense of masculine pride—[. . .] the Spanish equivalent of virtus. It had little to do with English courage or a stiff upper lip" (HC 11). Unable to conform, he stands apart, both literally and figuratively.

Yet if Plarr is forced to reject the idea of himself as fully South American, neither is he fully English. On one occasion Plarr admits to the dubiousness of his

Englishness, since he is “only half-English and that half is in prison or dead” (HC 61). Fortnum in turn argues, with feeling, “[. . .] you are as English as I am” (HC 61), but one wonders exactly how English that is, for Fortnum too is not all that he might seem. He was educated at “the best English school in Buenos Aires,” not at a school in England itself, and ultimately South America has just as much claim upon him as England. Fortnum has no plans either to bring his own unborn child up as an Englishman of any kind—in his captivity he writes to his wife, Clara: “[. . .] don’t send him on to that grand English school in B. A. where I went. I was never happy there. Let him be a real Argentinian like you are—not a half and half like me” (HC 255). In the end, Englishness is only a veneer: beneath the surface its attraction is weak, and its limp gentility cannot compete with the powerful emotions and actions of South America.

Plarr, of course, has another complication which limits still further his sense of belonging: his two alternative homes are Argentina and England, but neither one is his first home, the place of his birth. That was Paraguay, the dangerous place from which he and his mother escaped, and to which he can never return. Eduardo Plarr stands sometimes on the banks of the massive Paraná river just looking from the Argentinian side towards the Paraguayan side; even from the window of his flat he can keep the same watch, looking toward the land where his long-lost father is either in prison or dead: “He felt sometimes like a watchman waiting for a signal” (HC 12-13). One need not travel thousands of miles to be a world away, for return to be practically impossible, and certainly unimaginable.

In his next-published novel, The Human Factor, Greene creates another character who is, like the exiled Plarr, pulled continuously in opposing directions:

Maurice Castle. Castle works for MI6 and has been operating for years as a double agent: ostensibly a safe and reliable member of the British Secret Service, but actually relaying information to his Russian Communist contacts. Castle clings to his home life, in a suburban semi-detached house with his South African wife and son. This is the only stability in his uncertain life, and his greatest fear is that he will lose even this comforting refuge. As a double agent, another of Greene's classically divided men, Castle is constantly tugged in opposing directions by the tensions within his personality and by his circumstances: vacillating between belief and doubt, home and work, England and Africa, Communism and the rejection of all political ideals. Amid this uncertainty, Castle's dearest dream is "that he might find a permanent home, in a city where he could be accepted as a citizen, as a citizen without any pledge of faith, not the City of God or Marx, but the city called Peace of Mind" (HF 135). All the time, he is aware of the vanity of this hope; every day he expects the final knock at the door, which will mean his treachery has been uncovered.

Home for Castle, then, is a threatened place, a place under siege from the outside world: it is a place to be appreciated every moment and to be guarded jealously. His wife is afraid of burglars, but Castle's own fears are less specific and more deep-rooted. He fears the loss of home, of his happy suburban house and his family—the loss of a way of life. He tries to reassure his wife of their security, but his words are unconvincing, since he does not believe them himself, and the phrase "safe as houses" (HF 223) simply doesn't apply here: no house is safe, no defences are guaranteed to be strong enough to stand indefinitely. Castle's home does not protect him, but rather he must try to protect it. In this he is rather like the failed

priest—León Rivas—in The Honorary Consul, who remarks: “I married when I lost faith. A man must have something to guard” (HC 128). A religion, a God, a wife, a child, a home: all these give meaning to the daily struggle.

Castle is simply waiting for the day when he will lose everything, when his home life will fall apart around him:

He had always, since they came, felt certain that one day a doom would catch up with them, and he knew that when that happened [. . .] he must leave quickly, without an attempt to pick up any broken piece of their life together. “Those that are in Judea must take refuge in the mountains . . .” (HF 21)

This would indeed be the end of his world. Castle’s is ultimately a profoundly lonely existence, in spite of his home life. The spy’s work is not just another job: it takes over one’s life. The life of a man like Castle is thus based on secrecy, on being careful never to speak inappropriately even to one’s family, and this pressure leads inevitably to isolation. In Greene’s novel, secret agents do not have any of the consolations of the “James Bond” school of spies: no drama, no glamour, no womanizing, only endless days of paperwork, steeped in caution, fear and loneliness.

Greene’s intention with The Human Factor was to break the mould of spy fiction, thus bringing the genre back from fantasy into reality. He remarked:

My ambition after the war was to write a novel of espionage free from the conventional violence, which has not, in spite of James Bond, been a feature of the British Secret Service. I wanted to present the Service unromantically as a way of life, men going daily to their office to earn their pensions, the background much like that of any other profession—whether the bank clerk or the business director—an undangerous routine, and within each character the more important private life. (WE 296)

He seems to have succeeded: Castle’s is a very ordinary life with an extraordinary twist. John Spurling judges Castle to be “colourless, outwardly conventional, homo

suburbanus” and issues the final verdict: “There is nothing romantic about Castle.”¹⁹

The characters in the novel frequently complain of the dullness of their routine:

Castle tells the bored and disgruntled Davis: “We’ve never been very James Bond minded here” (HF 54). Davis in turn grumbles about his hopeless lack of a personal life beyond his boring job, and in particular his failure to win the affections of his secretary, Cynthia: “James Bond would have had Cynthia a long while ago. On a sandy beach under a hot sun” (HF 55). “Real life,” even for Greene’s fictional characters, tends not to live up to the expectations raised by other fictions, and dullness reigns. Ultimately, however, the routine of The Human Factor could hardly be described by Greene’s term, “undangerous”: any man who even appears to put a foot out of line is liable to be eliminated by the cold-blooded Doctor Percival in the interests of avoiding scandal at all cost. But men like Castle and his colleagues are nonetheless anti-Bond figures, merely living out their unromantic, largely unrewarding existence at the office and at home: such is the native habitat of the spy, the spy in his own home, such as it is.

John le Carré (whose life and writing displays a number of parallels with Greene’s own: the public school, the work for the MI6, the writing of thrillers and bleak spy stories which comment uncompromisingly on the state of England, the English and the modern world as a whole) is quoted as suggesting that Greene had chosen an ideal form in the spy story: “He’s used it by instinct because he’s a natural exile, an outsider. He’s a man who feels that he’s tracking the crowd but not part of it.”²⁰ Le Carré himself had, some years earlier, virtually reinvented the spy genre in

¹⁹ Spurling 67.

²⁰ Philip French, “Man of Mystery” 442.

a realistic and downbeat form, as opposed to the glamour of Fleming's Bond novels in particular. Le Carré came to prominence with his third novel, The Spy Who Came in From the Cold (1963), which Greene declared to be "the best spy story I have ever read."²¹ The central character of the novel, Leamas, asks his younger, less world-weary lover:

What do you think spies are: priests, saints and martyrs? They're a squalid procession of vain fools, traitors too, yes; pansies, sadists and drunkards, people who play cowboys and Indians to brighten their rotten lives. Do you think they sit like monks in London balancing the rights and wrongs?²²

Le Carré's characters, much like Greene's, are men excluded from the simplicities of ordinary everyday life, obsessed by the idea of home because of their own insurmountable homelessness, their inability to settle anywhere. In a later novel, The Secret Pilgrim (1991), le Carré's central character, Ned, is a lifelong spy who has never had the perfect family or home he so desires and so has thrown himself into his work. He is one of a type that he describes: "the crossbred Englishman who adopts the Service as his country and endows it with a bunch of qualities it hasn't really got."²³ The Secret Service is not a home, only a machine. There may be hordes of men and women all working for the same aims, but they are not working together. This is no family business, even if the young recruits hope that it will prove to be so. Greene sees this too: Castle, at the end of his career and in exile, realises his mistake: "It seemed to him that all his life after he joined the Service in his twenties he had

²¹ Greene is quoted on the rear cover of le Carré, The Spy Who Came in from the Cold (1963; London: Sceptre-Hodder and Stoughton, 1999).

²² John le Carré, The Spy Who Came in from the Cold 220.

²³ John le Carré, The Secret Pilgrim (London: Coronet-Hodder and Stoughton, 1991) 218.

been unable to speak. Like a Trappist he had chosen the profession of silence and now he recognised too late that it had been a mistaken vocation” (HF 332).

Organizations, institutions and nations may demand loyalty, but they rarely elicit it. In le Carré’s A Perfect Spy, Magnus Pym is a perfect spy because he was born for espionage, born to reinvent himself only too convincingly for any occasion. But he is also a most imperfect spy, because he is desperate to give his loyalty, though unwilling to restrict this loyalty to only one side, one country, one person. So le Carré makes explicit what Greene has always hinted at, when Mary, Pym’s wife, reads the notes her husband has written in preparation for a book he plans to write about his life:

We betray to be loyal. Betrayal is like imagining when the reality isn’t good enough. He wrote that. Betrayal as hope and compensation. As the making of a better land. Betrayal as love. As a tribute to our un-lived lives. On and on, these ponderous aphorisms about betrayal. Betrayal as escape. As a constructive act. As a statement of ideals. Worship. As an adventure of the soul. Betrayal as travel: how can we discover new places if we never leave home?²⁴

Pym went looking for a “promised land” amid (and by means of) all the lies and treachery. Betrayal can, therefore, actually be the means not only to the unfortunate exile experienced by Pym and by Castle in The Human Factor, but also paradoxically to a homecoming of sorts: it is only by daring to leave behind the existing (imperfect) home that one may have even the chance of finding that elusive goal, the ideal home. That at least is the aim of the man who betrays: “We betray to be loyal,” and sacrifice one friendship to find another, leave one home behind in order to arrive at a better.

²⁴ John le Carré, A Perfect Spy (1986; London: Coronet-Hodder and Stoughton, 2000) 163.

Greene's attitude to betrayal was of course similarly unconventional: for him, loyalty could function on a host of levels, while disloyalty could be a virtue rather than a vice, given the right motives. There are undeniable parallels between Maurice Castle's situation and that of the real-life defector Kim Philby, and Greene had chosen to abandon the The Human Factor around the time of the publication of Philby's memoirs, in order to avoid such comparisons being drawn.²⁵ But Philby was nonetheless Greene's friend and colleague, and Greene defended his friend's actions repeatedly, on very much the same grounds which make it difficult to condemn Castle's behaviour in the novel: in an essay of 1968 (which was also the introduction to Philby's autobiography) Greene deliberately counters the standard patriotic argument against Philby—

“He betrayed his country”. Yes, perhaps he did, but who among us has not committed treason to something or someone more important than a country. In Philby's own eyes he was working for a shape of things to come from which his country would benefit. (“The Spy,” CE 311)

This of course has echoes of E. M. Forster's statement that, given the choice between betraying his friend or his country, he would hope to have the courage to betray his country:²⁶ in such a situation, with honourable and deep-seated motivations, treachery becomes akin to heroism. In a later interview, Greene reiterated his belief in the genuine nature of Philby's intentions:

Asked last week whether he could forgive his old friend for having lived such a lie, Graham Greene replied: “Yes. Because if you're fighting for a cause you believe in . . . He wasn't doing it for the money. And as for living a lie, how

²⁵ Greene explained: “My double agent Maurice Castle bore no resemblance in character or motive to Philby [. . .], but I disliked the idea of the novel being taken as a roman à clef” (WE 298).

²⁶ E. M. Forster, “What I Believe,” Two Cheers for Democracy, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (1951; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) 82.

many lies is Reagan living? Who doesn't live a lie when it comes to politics?"²⁷

If people were surprised by Greene's staunch defence of Philby, they should not have been, since Greene's unconventional attitude to such treachery had been demonstrated previously, as in one of his short stories, "Under the Garden" (published 1963), in which, of all of the old man Javitt's advice to the young Wilditch, the piece which has most effect is this:

Be disloyal. It's your duty to the human race. The human race needs to survive and it's the loyal man who dies first from anxiety or a bullet or overwork. If you have to earn a living, boy, and the price they make you pay is loyalty, be a double agent—and never let either of the two sides know your real name. The same applies to women and God. They both respect a man they don't own, and they'll go on raising the price they are willing to offer. Didn't Christ say that very thing? Was the prodigal son loyal or the lost shilling or the strayed sheep? The obedient flock didn't give the shepherd any satisfaction or the loyal son interest his father. (CS 215-16).

Clearly, disloyalty has value: if nothing else it is a useful bargaining tool, putting a man just out of reach, and thus giving him the control, the choices. Furthermore, in an essay, "The Virtue of Disloyalty" (1969), Greene goes even further, and advocates disloyalty as an act of bravery, a declaration of independence. Loyalty, Greene warns, is all too often a merely automatic response, a "complacent" response ("The Virtue of Disloyalty," R 268), while disloyalty suggests independent thought and a desire to remain true, above all, to one's own principles. Greene suggests that disloyalty is particularly necessary for writers:

[. . .] the writer should always be ready to change sides at the drop of a hat. He stands for the victims, and the victims change. Loyalty confines you to accepted opinions: loyalty forbids you to comprehend sympathetically your dissident fellows; but disloyalty encourages you to roam through any human mind: it gives the novelist an extra dimension of understanding. (R 269)

²⁷ Anne-Elisabeth Moutet and James MacManus, "Graham Greene and Philby in Secret Moscow Meetings," Sunday Telegraph 10 May 1987: 1.

To Greene, therefore, it was inadequate simply to label Philby a traitor: he had betrayed only his homeland's ideals, while remaining, most crucially, true to his own.

Greene's description of Philby's abandoned and unkempt—even perhaps unloved—home might have been plucked straight from one of Greene's novels, so perfectly does it fit with the pattern of shabby, temporary homes in which he has always placed so many of his characters:

There was no sign of any tending in the overgrown garden and no answer to the bell when we rang. We looked through the windows of the ugly sprawling Edwardian house, on the borders of the Ashdown forest, in this poor man's Surrey. The post hadn't been collected for a long time—the floor under the door was littered with advertising brochures. In the kitchen there were some empty milk bottles, and a single dirty cup and saucer in the sink. It was more like an abandoned gypsy encampment than the dwelling of man with a wife and children. We didn't know it, but he had already left for Beirut—the last stage of his journey to Moscow, the home he had never seen. After thirty years in the underground surely he had earned his right to a rest.

("The Spy," CE 315)

This surely is a perfect example of what so many critics have identified as "Greeneland"—life imitating fiction, or perhaps a justification of Greene's impatient insistence that the people and places he depicted were indeed taken from real life, and not from his own imaginary "seedy" locales. And like so many of Greene's invented characters, Philby has also left the land of his birth, his first "home," for Russia, "the home he had never seen." Greene uses this phrase in his fiction too: in Monsignor Quixote, it is the Marxist ex-Mayor of El Toboso, who speaks wistfully of this unseen home, his ideological home as a Communist (but never his actual home, for he knows it is too far for an ageing man to expect to go) (See e.g. MQ 96). Similarly another Communist character, Halliday in The Human Factor, regards

Moscow as the home he has never attained, never known. He compares his situation to that of the characters in Chekhov's Three Sisters:

“I saw it only once, but I always remember what one of them said and I say it to myself when I can't sleep at night—‘To sell the house, to make an end of everything here, and off to Moscow . . .’”

“You'd find a rather different Moscow to Chekhov's.”

“There's another thing one of those sisters said, ‘Happy people don't notice if it's winter or summer. If I lived in Moscow I wouldn't mind what the weather was like.’ Oh well, I tell myself when I'm feeling low, Marx never knew Moscow either [. . .].” (HF 281)

Even without the slightest hope of achieving his wish, Moscow still remains Halliday's true home, his ultimate destination. These unseen places are yet more imaginary homes, possessing a magical power to raise the spirits, to combat the temptation to despair provoked by the flawed “homes” that they currently endure.

Even in the latest stages of Greene's writing career, the assorted “homes” of Greene's characters are scarcely more welcoming than Philby's English house. In The Human Factor, Maurice Castle is almost unique in the happiness and comfort of his suburban family home, and yet this home too is vulnerable and even he ends up in a solitary and uncomfortable flat, having been compelled to flee to Moscow. On the whole, Greene's cast of characters is still living alone and still enduring deeply unsatisfactory versions of home. One need look no further than Castle's colleagues to find plentiful examples: Arthur Davis, for instance, shares a flat with two other men who seem never to be at home. His is a squalid, masculine existence of unmade beds and unwashed dishes. Davis has no one to care for him, and no one to care for, nothing in fact beyond his unrequited love for his secretary and a vain dream of a more exciting life far away from England, in Lourenço Marques. He imagines that he might be able to reinvent himself there, live another life entirely: “I'd be a

different man if I could get to Lourenço Marques” (HF 166). Castle stays with him in the London flat after an evening out and notes the air of disintegration and neglect:

There was a yellow lino worn into holes like a gruyère cheese on the steep stairs up to Davis’s flat. With W1 on the notepaper no one bothered about small details like that. The kitchen door was open, and Castle saw a stack of dirty dishes in the sink. Davis opened a cupboard door; the shelves were stacked with almost empty bottles [. . .]. (HF 79-80)

Davis has at least the excuse that he is still young, and has not had the time to find or make his perfect home, but a more senior colleague, Daintry—the security officer who is brought in to investigate the leak in Castle’s section—has only taken a longer route to the same environment. Daintry is divorced from his wife, distanced from his only daughter, and lives alone and virtually forgotten in two rooms in St James’s Street: “It was a very discreet flat and not unsuitable for a lonely man” (HF 104). His flat is above a restaurant, with the result that he can hear the sound of other people’s amusement but not participate in it. He does not cook: “[. . .] he usually economized for one meal by buying cold chipolatas at Fortnum’s” (HF 104). His life is less squalid, certainly, than the young man’s, but no less empty or lonely.

In The Honorary Consul, too, one’s current home is rarely a place to long for. Doctor Plarr himself lives in an apartment that is far from grand, in a building that is “one of the eyesores of the old colonial city” (HC 28), though he does not complain. His “home” surroundings are not really of importance to him at this stage of his life, since he has no wife, is not even convinced of his ability to love, and his flat is thus simply a base from which to conduct his work and his affairs. It is not decorated to reflect his tastes or temperament: “There were no sentimental relics in his apartment—not even a photograph. It was as bare and truthful—almost—as a police station cell” (HC 139). Greene’s words here recall the similarly stark

accommodation of Scobie in The Heart of the Matter, though in Scobie's case it was a police station office, and not a cell: Scobie at least had found himself on the "right" side of the prison bars, as policeman rather than prisoner.

Plarr's acquaintances fare even worse than Plarr himself: at the bottom of the pile is Dr Humphries, who does not even have a home of his own, but only a "little over-lived-in room in the Hotel Bolivar" (HC 25). Humphries pastes pictures on the walls to hide the damp patches, keeps his bed "pulled together rather than made" (HC 20), and has to endure the constant dripping of the leaky shower. All in all "[. . .] it was not the kind of surroundings in which any one with free will [. . .] would have chosen to await death" (HC 20), but of course for Greene free will is a rather limited commodity, and men like Humphries seem fated to endure such miserable lives and living spaces. Another of Plarr's acquaintances is the novelist Jorge Julio Saavedra: when Plarr visits him at home he is surprised to find that the writer's home does not reflect the carefully-dressed man in the clothes which are "dignified and out of fashion" (HC 200). His home is not the "old colonial house with barred windows looking out on a shady street" that Plarr expects (HC 200); rather it is part of "a block even more modern and shabby than his own in a quarter close by the prison wall. The grey modern apartment houses stood in squares as though they formed an extension of the prison" (HC 201). And yet Saavedra, though he may feel embarrassed to receive guests in his humble home, does feel "at home" there: he does not desire to find a "better" place. In his novels he writes of the poor, and so he is content to live among them, as he explains to Plarr: "You know a novelist does not pay visits like a doctor. He has to live with his subject. I could not live comfortably

in a bourgeois setting because I write about the people” (HC 201). He is in effect living “within” his novels, within their settings, atmospheres and morals.

What all of these characters lack is space: men like Daintry and Davis live in flats, not houses; Humphries has only one room, in which there is “hardly space for a bed, a dressing table, two chairs, a basin and the douche. You had to fight your way between them as though they were passengers in a crowded subway” (HC 19). And Saavedra tells Plarr that he is “a little cramped for room, but I want the smallest possible space around me when I write. Space distracts. [. . .] This is the womb of my characters, doctor, and there is room for little else” (HC 202). Space distracts: here perhaps Greene himself is in agreement with Saavedra, who describes his own home as “the heart of what my critics call the world of Saavedra” (HC 201), not so very different a world from Greenland perhaps. But as far as the flat is concerned, “It was indeed a very small world” (HC 201); and this is what so many visitors to Greene’s home in Antibes observed, the general consensus being that Greene’s home was surprisingly small, modern and simple. It was, as John Vinocur describes it, “a mediocre apartment building on a mediocre street.”²⁸ And inside, as John Cornwell, for instance, remarks:

The apartment is tiny, modest; his living room floodlit with Mediterranean sun from the sliding balcony window. There is just room for a cane sofa with cushions, and a matching armchair; a table covered with a simple cloth serves as a desk. There are bookshelves with rows of Nelson and Oxford Classics, and other books, well-worn, but meticulously displayed. It might be the temporary lodging of a celibate schoolmaster, or a priest.²⁹

²⁸ John Vinocur, “The Soul-Searching Continues for Graham Greene” 37.

²⁹ John Cornwell, “The Confessions of Graham Greene,” *Observer* 24 September 1989: 33.

This is a functional place, rather than a spacious and relaxing home. As a writer, Greene's living space, like Saavedra's, must double as his workplace; V. S. Pritchett notes that Greene's sitting room is "as simple as an office."³⁰ And as Anthony Burgess notes, "[t]he days of authorial seclusion, Maugham and the Villa Mauresque, are long over. Writers live in small flats and hope to have a daily help."³¹ Amid the business of writing, the possibility of a conventional home is abandoned, and with very little regret. The most important thing, above family, friends and physical comfort, is simply to keep writing; in 1985, enduring a period in which he was not at work on a novel, Greene remarked: "I'm afraid of living too long away from writing."³² To lose his work would apparently be the worst homelessness of all.

Greene (like Saavedra) was fortunate that small spaces apparently suited him, but for many of his characters lack of space is less a matter of choice and more an annoying symptom of modern life. Their small spaces are claustrophobia-inducing, like Daintry's ex-wife's flat in The Human Factor, in which one can hardly move without dislodging some ornament or other from the over-filled surfaces; or like the "Omni-Studio" which is the setting for Greene's play of 1983, For Whom the Bell Chimes. This is "a very clean, very neat one room apartment where everything has its place, though as we shall see before long the places are sometimes hidden places" ("For Whom the Bell Chimes," CP 373). The flat has a pop-out kitchenette, a bed

³⁰ V. S. Pritchett, "The Human Factor in Graham Greene," New York Times Magazine 26 Feb 1978: 33.

³¹ Anthony Burgess, "God and Literature and So Forth . . .," Graham Greene: Man of Paradox, ed. A. F. Cassis 31.

³² Vinocur, "The Soul-Searching Continues for Graham Greene" 39.

that folds away into the wall, and a bath concealed under the table; there are buttons everywhere for one mysterious purpose or another. It is an ingenious use of space, but as a “home” it is entirely soulless: this is the reduction of “home” to the smallest possible dimensions. It seems absurdly tiny when compared with the memory of such spacious residences as Greene’s own roomy childhood home and rambling gardens: he recalls crossing the croquet lawn there and remarks: “[. . .] what a vast estate the whole place seems to me now, when I live, like most of my contemporaries, an apartment life between bedroom and sitting-room” (SL 34). The ingenious facilities and appliances of the modern world cannot truly compensate for man’s shrinking world. It is a point made by an admirer of Greene, David Lodge, in his novel of 1984, Small World, through his depiction of the lifestyle of the Japanese academic, Sakazaki, who lives in a flat so small that he cannot even stand up in it. This apartment block imitates the popular capsule hotels in which businessmen sleep in little stacked-up “pods” with no room to do anything other than lie down. But there is a difference between sleeping in one of these “pods” for a night and living on a permanent basis in a flat that is hardly any larger. Lodge describes it thus:

About four metres long, three metres wide and one and a half metres high [. . .]. The window cannot be opened. The room is air-conditioned, temperature-controlled and soundproof. Four hundred identical cells are stacked and interlocked in this building, like a tower of eggboxes.³³

Sakazaki is genuinely living in a box, a concept familiar to Greene and his characters. But, crucially, Sakazaki is happy in his box, content to be living an economical life, both in terms of money—the flat is cheap—and in terms of time: “How much time people waste in walking from one room to another—especially in

³³ David Lodge, Small World (1984; London: Penguin, 1985) 103.

the West! Space is time.”³⁴ In contrast, Lodge’s English characters and almost all of Greene’s characters (with the notable exception in this period of Saavedra in The Honorary Consul) find themselves allotted far less space than they would like and unable to adopt Sakazaki’s purely practical viewpoint: they never become acclimatised to the shrinking modern world.

Such places seem, in Greene’s work, to be emblematic of a wider sense of unease. Greene describes the “closed-in life” (WE 297) of the Secret Service, being unable to speak of one’s work even to one’s nearest family and friends, working closely with only a handful of men, and all the while aware of being watched by one’s superiors, never trusted. This sense of claustrophobia is apparent in the atmosphere of The Human Factor, in which novel Greene repeatedly uses the image of the box, of people trapped and imprisoned in tiny, lonely spaces, both physically and mentally. Doctor Percival enjoys the image: “We all live in boxes—you know—boxes,” he tells Daintry (HF 45). The Service offices are like a beehive, with each man working away in his own little chamber, his own box, unaware of any other man’s actions, or even of the consequences of his own actions. The crucial point is that no man chooses his own box, or whether to remain in it: “We live in boxes and it’s they who choose the box,” Castle’s Russian contact tells him, “they” being those in overall control, the unfeeling powers that be (HF 149). To compartmentalize life in this way is essential for security within the Service, but damaging to individual human existence. One of the end results of this is the death of poor innocent, suspected Davis, of whom Castle remarks bitterly: “Well, Davis is in a box all right now” (HF 265). The use of the box image recalls It’s a Battlefield and its characters

³⁴ Lodge, Small World 104.

trapped in their own “cages” and glass cases. Once again in The Human Factor the characters are all fighting their own individual wars against an uncaring outside world, with no hope of either victory or escape. After forty years, Greene’s characters still endure the same inescapable miseries, and the same sense of hopeless imprisonment for life; indeed, the loneliness in life that Greene diagnosed in the 1930s seems only to have become more universal.

The key to the misery of the personal prisons—actual or metaphorical—endured by Greene’s characters is not so much the experience of imprisonment itself, but the loneliness of that experience: this is solitary confinement. In The Honorary Consul, Aquino describes the situation for those, like Aquino himself and Plarr’s father, who are kept prisoners in police stations across Paraguay:

[. . .] you decay there more quickly than in a prison. The General knows there is comradeship in a prison. And so he plants his victims out in separate pots with insufficient earth, and they wither with despair. (HC 230-31)

The worst suffering of all is isolation, whether in a prison cell or a lonely one-room flat. The loneliest man in The Honorary Consul is Eduardo Plarr, who has never seen the inside of a prison, but has always been trapped within himself by his inability to reach out and love. He feels that there is nothing in life for him, that he has “come to the end” of himself:

He thought of his mother among the porcelain parrots in Buenos Aires or eating eclairs in the Calle Florida, of Margarita fallen asleep in the carefully shaded room while he lay awake watching her unloved face, of Clara, and the child, and the long impossible future beside the Paraná. It seemed to him he was already his father’s age, that he had spent as long in prison as his father had, and that it was his father who had escaped. (HC 312)

For Plarr it seems that his ordinary domestic life is the longest, loneliest and cruellest prison of all. Reaching this premature old age of disillusionment, he has no hope for

the future, no hope of a home. All that was good has been lost: the happier days of childhood in his homeland when his father was still alive and free and his mother beautiful and good-tempered; when León was his friend and life seemed less threatening and less inevitably destructive.

In the face of such unsatisfactory present lives, the constantly recurring urge for Greene's characters in this period is the impulse to go back, to return to places formerly abandoned, places from the past: to revisit past successes and failures (mostly failures). Going back is now one of Greene's central themes, since the time has come when the happier past beckons nostalgically while the miseries of the past must be acknowledged and accepted rather than escaped. This tendency to look backwards applies as much to Greene himself as to his characters; hence he produced two autobiographical works in this period: A Sort of Life (1971) and Ways of Escape (1980). The first volume is perhaps the most personal and revealing, since it deals with Greene's childhood and youth and was begun as an attempted cure for a period of depression, a kind of self-psychoanalysis. Its epigraph is taken from Kierkegaard—"Only robbers and gypsies say that one must never return where one has once been"—and, as Penelope Gilliat remarks, Greene is certainly unafraid to go back repeatedly in A Sort of Life as he "crosses and recrosses the paths of his experience; trying to get a compass bearing."³⁵ In writing his memoirs Greene was motivated by "a desire to reduce the chaos of experience to some sort of order, and a hungry curiosity. We cannot love others, so the theologians teach, unless in some degree we can love ourselves, and curiosity too begins at home" (SL 9). Old age, for Greene, brought the chance, or indeed the necessity, after a lifetime of observing

³⁵ Gilliat, "Profiles: The Dangerous Edge" 50.

other people and places, to “come home” to himself, to look inwards rather than outwards.

Hermione Lee’s comment in a review of one novel, The Human Factor, could in fact stand for the whole period: “The sense of summing up is strong.”³⁶ Greene was revisiting and revising old experiences, and indeed old work. His literary output diminished as he got older, resulting in fewer and shorter novels, but though he was not producing as much original work he was certainly recycling previous efforts. Even The Human Factor had been begun as early as 1967, but was then abandoned while Greene concentrated instead upon The Honorary Consul. Later he returned to his spy story and completed it for publication at the end of the seventies. Greene was returning to much older works as well: The Tenth Man was published in 1985, but had been written in 1944;³⁷ similarly, The Great Jowett was a radio play published by Greene in 1981, but written decades earlier and first performed in 1939.³⁸ Last of all there was Greene’s final collection of short stories, The Last Word and Other Stories (1990). This was a mixture of uncollected stories on various themes from across the decades. Several of the stories, including the title story, were written close to the time of publication, but the earliest, “The New House,” dated from 1923, when Greene was not yet twenty years old.

³⁶ Hermione Lee, “The Traitor Within,” New Review 4:48 (1978): 59.

³⁷ The manuscript of The Tenth Man was apparently lost, and indeed forgotten, by Greene for decades after he had written it, then rediscovered in the 1980s and published essentially unrevised. See Theo Stemmler, “Literary Amnesia: Graham Greene’s Novel and Somerset Maugham’s Play The Tenth Man,” Essays in Graham Greene, vol. 3, ed. Peter Wolfe (St Louis, MO: Lucas Hall, 1992) 55-57; also Norman Lebrecht, “Found: Graham Greene’s Lost Novel,” Sunday Times 1 April 1984.

³⁸ See Germaine Goetz, “Greene the Dramatist,” vol. 1, Essays in Graham Greene, ed. Peter Wolfe. (Greenwood, FL: Penkevill, 1987) 140.

Even his totally new work in this period sometimes takes Greene back into his earliest past: one play, The Return of A. J. Raffles, published in 1975, is described by Greene (in its lengthy explanatory subtitle) as “an Edwardian Comedy,” though it was, of course, written with the advantage of a late-twentieth-century perspective. Greene revives a favourite character, E. W. Hornung’s Raffles, for one last adventure; the poignancy here is that the characters seem to share Greene’s awareness that their way of life is coming to an end. The Prince/Mr Portland tells Raffles/Jones that they are connected by the era in which they have shared:

You and I, Jones, belong to a very special moment of time. La Fin de Siècle the papers call it, don’t they? But it’s more than just the end of any century. I have an awful fear that my nephew Willy, with his talk of Huns and Attila and inspiring fear, represents that future. I prefer my old mother . . . and senseless honourable Spion Kop. (“The Return of A. J. Raffles,” CP 300)

Writing towards the end of the next century, Greene raises the question, was the Prince not right to fear? The twentieth century is “the jet age” (HF 53), but it is also “the age of terrorism” (HF 54), the century that produced two world wars, Hitler, Stalin and the threat of total destruction. It proved to be a century of revised expectations, yielding a lesser world without room for ideals. As Doctor Percival tells Hargreaves in The Human Factor: “You and I are not really in a position to talk about causes. We aren’t Crusaders—we are in the wrong century” (HF 206).

Having gone back to the era of his birth in this play, Greene next goes back, in Doctor Fischer of Geneva (1980), to the period of the Blitz, when he was in his early maturity. The Blitz was perhaps Greene’s most vital moment—the first time certainly that he had had the chance to experience life more fully through the ever present danger of death—and in Doctor Fischer of Geneva when the narrator figure, Jones, is describing his own Blitz experience (the loss of his hand and his parents in

one night of enemy bombing) these passages really live amidst an otherwise rather fantastic novel. Jones talks of that past to the young woman who will be his wife:

I told her of the blitz night in the City of London and how the flames had lit the sky as far away as the West End, so that one could read a book at one in the morning. My station was off the Tottenham Court Road and we were not summoned to help in the east until the early hours. 'More than thirty years ago,' I said, 'but it still seems only a few months away.' (DF 14)

The Blitz may be long in the past, but it still lives on for Jones, and for Greene too. If one can be at home in a time as much as in a place, then the Blitz surely was that time for Jones and for Greene. How hollow and insubstantial the apparently peaceful world that followed was for them in comparison.

In revisiting so much of his past, in both a personal and a literary sense, Greene seems to be following in the footsteps of T. S. Eliot, who in later life felt that "[i]n my beginning is my end"³⁹ and wrote:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.⁴⁰

The urge to return takes Greene back to his own childhood home and longstanding obsession, Berkhamsted. This occurs, strikingly and revealingly, not only in his autobiographies, but also in his fiction in this period: most notably in The Human Factor, in which the central character lives in the town, but also a decade later in The Captain and the Enemy, in which the young boy, Victor (soon to be renamed Jim) is plucked from his unhappy schooldays in Berkhamsted by the sudden arrival of the Captain. Greene's return to this setting (and the town was not just a backdrop for

³⁹ T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," Four Quartets, The Complete Poems and Plays 177.

⁴⁰ T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," Four Quartets, The Complete Poems and Plays 197.

him, but a subject in its own right) indicates that, for him, life—and the search for a home—had not been simply a linear progression, but a cycle, whose beginning might well also prove to be its end. John Spurling remarks, with reference to The Human Factor, on “both the distance travelled from Greene’s first novel to this late one, and the circularity of the journey.”⁴¹ And Grahame Smith makes a similar comment, noting that “[. . .] there is something deeply satisfying in Greene bringing his life’s work full circle as he does in The Human Factor, back to a world where violence lurks just below the surface of middle class respectability.”⁴² Indeed, with The Human Factor, Greene was returning not just to familiar geographical territory, but to a fictional world and atmosphere of which he had been writing as early as the 1930s. This is the very same world of hidden menace as was brought to life in It’s A Battlefield or A Confidential Agent. In the intervening half-century, Greene demonstrates, life had changed indescribably and yet not changed at all.

Greene had always included references to Berkhamsted in his fiction, so many of his characters over the years, particularly in the short fiction, share his own background in this small and ancient English town.⁴³ But now the references are less

⁴¹ Spurling 67.

⁴² Grahame Smith 190.

⁴³ There are of course large numbers of references to the experience of public schools which bear varying degrees of resemblance to Berkhamsted School (e.g. in The Heart of the Matter, both Wilson and Harris are old boys of “Downham,” though neither enjoyed his schooldays. Harris reads a short story in the school magazine—“The Tick of the Clock”—which was in fact written by the young Greene (see HOM 192; SL 108). Similarly, in England Made Me, Anthony Farrant—like Greene—ran away from his own painful experiences of another minor public school (see EMM 17). There are also references to the town itself, or to towns imagined in its image: “The Innocent” has a central character returning to a hometown whose details recall Greene’s descriptions of Berkhamsted. Similarly, in “The Other Side of the Border,” Hands’s hometown, “Denton,” borrows from the detail of Berkhamsted: “[. . .] there remained in the long High Street, between the estate agents, the cafés and the two super-cinemas, dwindling signs of the old market town—there was a crusader’s helmet in the church” (NS 204). Essentially, the hometowns and schools of Greene’s characters from the very

casual and less oblique: for the first time, in The Human Factor, no key is needed to unlock the secret of the location of the action; this time Greene is explicit and names Berkhamsted as Castle's hometown within the first few pages of the novel: he carries in his briefcase his local paper, the Berkhamsted Gazette (see HF 16). In The Human Factor, both Greene and his central character have come home: Castle has been away as far as Africa but has now returned to the town of his birth, hopefully for good; and Greene, writing in France, relishes the chance to describe in detail his own birthplace. He covers the daily routine of Castle's return from his London office to the little station at Berkhamsted, "punctually at seven twelve," and the bicycle ride home:

[. . .] he rode the longer way home, for the sake of exercise—across the canal bridge, past the Tudor school, into the High Street, past the grey flint parish church which contained the helmet of a crusader, then up the slope of the Chilterns towards his small semi-detached house in King's Road. (HF 19)

Castle has had his fill of danger during his time in Africa, and now he wants only peace, security and the comfort of a routine, the very things which a town like Berkhamsted seems most able to provide: "In a bizarre profession anything which belongs to an everyday routine gains great value—perhaps that was one reason why, when he came back from South Africa, he chose to return to his birthplace [. . .]" (HF 19). Castle is more than ready to settle down for life, if he is allowed to.

Berkhamsted seems now to have lost for Greene the more unpleasant associations of his schooldays and youth: it is no longer a place to escape from, but rather a refuge from a too-difficult and dangerous outside world. For Castle the town embodies safety: "Living thus with the long familiar he felt the security that an old

earliest fictions are minor and easily overlooked places, without great beauty or merit, and encroached upon ever more by Metroland and the modern world.

lag feels when he goes back to the prison he knows" (HF 20). The small town is evidently no less restrictive than before, but the restrictions are now more comforting and reassuring than annoying. A prison wall can keep things out as well as in, and Castle's name, far from accidental, suggests to what extent he needs this protection for himself, and for his family. His home is his fortress: he may have no more than a Yale lock and a hopelessly friendly guard dog to keep the world out, but mentally he is shielded by this domestic bubble. And Castle's wife, Sarah, shares his sense of the importance of having somewhere safe, reliable and unchanging to return to: she wants their son, Sam, to have the lasting home which she, as the child of an orphanage, never enjoyed: "I'd like Sam to stay put in one place so that when he goes away he'll be able to come back. To something he knew in childhood. Like you came back. To something old. Something secure" (HF 72).

The change in Greene's attitude towards Berkhamsted has not gone unnoticed by critics. W. J. West has linked the tremendously detailed descriptions of Berkhamsted at the start of the novel with Greene's own distance from that town and from England by that time: such description "aches with an exile's nostalgia," West believes.⁴⁴ This is perhaps a little too romantic a view: Greene has undeniably become more thoroughly reconciled to his first home than would ever have seemed probable, but that does not necessarily indicate a thwarted desire to return in person. Perhaps in fact it was Greene's distance from Berkhamsted that allowed him to look more kindly upon the town: being free, why hold a grudge? What Greene does now is to build upon his past, to acknowledge his debt to the little town that made him. As John Davison suggests: "Berkhamsted perhaps provided the grain of sand lodged

⁴⁴ W. J. West, The Quest for Graham Greene 236. See also Shelden 401.

immovably inside the oyster's shell that would in time become a pearl":⁴⁵ Greene denies neither the happiness of his infancy there, nor the misery of his adolescence at the school, but admits his lifelong debt to both experiences.

Childhood and the childhood family home are worked into Greene's later fiction with surprising regularity, considering that all his characters are now without exception mature adults—the youngest is Eduardo Plarr in The Honorary Consul, and he has a weariness beyond his years—and most are deep in middle- to old-age. The years seem not to have brought separation from the first home and all the memories attached to it, but instead to bring it ever more often to mind. As the characters, like Greene himself, grow older, childhood comes to be more, not less, important and relevant to the present life. Castle is not the only character in The Human Factor whose childhood still looms large in his adult life: Colonel Daintry is still more obsessed with those early years which seem now so hopelessly distant from his present solitary, purposeless life. In his circumstances, his nostalgia is hardly surprising: carrying the remnants of his meagre lunch into his tiny kitchenette he recalls in contrast (echoing Greene's own memories of his childhood family home) "the vast spaces of the basement kitchen in that obscure rectory in Suffolk where his father had been washed up after the Battle of Jutland" (HF 215). With no possible escape from his loneliness, Daintry "wanted to be back in the Suffolk rectory. He wanted to walk up the long weedy path lined with laurels that never flowered and enter the front door" (HF 215-16). He imagines asking his parents' advice: should he stick with the career he loathes, or face an empty retirement? But

⁴⁵ John Davison, "Graham Greene and the Berkhamsted Connection," Occasional Paper Number One (Berkhamsted: Graham Greene Birthplace Trust, 1998) 4.

of course he has nobody to ask: he is quite lost. Daintry's greatest desire is to be able to go home to those early days in the rectory with his father and his mother "who was much loved in the village" (HF 215): he wants to be part of something once more, however slightly. He feels cast adrift in much the same way as does Jim in Greene's very last novel, The Captain and the Enemy, who, while enjoying the freedom of life with the Captain, nonetheless misses his schooldays, in spite of their misery, simply because then "I had known my exact position in life. I knew who my enemies were and I knew how to avoid the worst at their hands. But now . . ." (CAE 36). Jim's substitute parents, Liza and the Captain, are never really a mother and father to him; Jim never feels that he belongs with them, just as Daintry always feels uncomfortably out of place with his Secret Service colleagues: nothing will (or can) replace the loss of a genuine family unit and a genuine sense of belonging.

Parents, or the lack of them, haunt Greene's work in the seventies and eighties. In the characters' imaginations parents should offer a stable base to life, something to fall back on in times of difficulty. But the reality is less happy, less satisfying. Most parents in Greene's work now are either dead or have managed to make themselves otherwise unobtainable. Castle's father is long dead, and his mother lives unapproachably alone in the home of her retirement. She is not a welcoming figure, and seems devoid of maternal feeling. Castle and his family visit only out of a sense of duty, without enjoyment, and indeed "[. . .] Castle doubted whether even his mother enjoyed it [. . .]" (HF 136). Her house itself is uninviting: "Gloom was apt to descend on all of them as soon as the taxi entered the deep shade of the laurel drive which led to the high-gabled Edwardian house that his father had bought for his retirement [. . .]" (HF 137). It is the home of his parents' old age, a cold and sterile

place. Castle himself feels no bond with “the house of his mother which had never been his home” (HF 283). In moving to this new place, his parents had detached themselves from the family’s history, from Castle’s childhood memories; they had made a new (unhomely) home in which Castle had no place.

Though much younger than Castle, Eduardo Plarr in The Honorary Consul has likewise lost a father and become distanced from his mother, who has been soured by age and the loss of her husband. Plarr in fact left Buenos Aires for the small backwater city where he now lives partly in order to escape his mother. Her flat in the capital, like Mrs Castle’s house, is not a home. It is a suffocating place (both physically and emotionally), which she keeps

almost as airless as the dome over the wax flowers she had bought at an antique shop near Harrods. He [Plarr] always had the impression in her flat that there were secrets from him lying about everywhere, on shelves and on tables, even pushed away under the sofa, secrets she didn’t want him to see—perhaps only tiny extravagances [. . .]. (HC 173)

This is her life, and he is not welcome in it, even though it is he who maintains her financially, providing for her extravagances and, in the process, ensuring that he has insufficient money remaining to find himself a house, rather than his inferior apartment.

But if such mothers are unsatisfactory, it is the lack of a father that most wounds Greene’s characters in this period, as it had in his earlier work. Now the characters’ sense of dissatisfaction reaches a peak, and Greene’s obsession with fathers becomes so noticeable that even the characters themselves remark upon it: an exasperated Plarr wonders, much as a reader of The Honorary Consul might, “[. . .] are we never going to finish with fathers?” (HC 293). It would seem that in his novels Greene is still attempting to come to terms with the loss of his own father.

years before during the Second World War, and with the difficulties of their relationship. In an interview in this period, Greene recalls that his father had always seemed “fully occupied” in his position as headmaster and housemaster,⁴⁶ with the result that he became a rather distant figure, a teacher rather than purely a father, and a man who simply “embodied Authority too much.”⁴⁷ Greene summed up his (lack of a) relationship with his father with the declaration that he had—as a child—simply “no feelings” for his father, only becoming to any degree of “fond” of him (still a rather half-hearted word to choose) in adulthood.⁴⁸ It seems that for Greene the need for a father and the need for a home are one and the same issue: a problem that will persist well into adulthood if it is not resolved in youth. Both homes and fathers should offer a sense of personal identity, a desirably reassuring and moulding inheritance; when this is not the case, the void that is left cannot be filled by any other reference point. Erdinast-Vulcan contends, in her study of Greene’s treatment of fatherhood, that in his fiction fatherly qualities may be found in almost anyone but a biological father.⁴⁹ This must have negative implications for the influence that the relationship between Graham and Charles Greene had upon the son’s idea of fatherhood. Virtually all of the characters in The Honorary Consul share in this deep-rooted lack of—and intense need for—a father figure. Plarr’s father sacrificed his family life for his political ideals: thus he has become a distant heroic icon for Eduardo, admired and even emulated at times—as in the doctor’s work in the poorest

⁴⁶ Allain 32.

⁴⁷ Allain 32-33.

⁴⁸ Allain 32, 33.

⁴⁹ See e.g. Erdinast-Vulcan 3.

quarters of the city—but never really known. There was insufficient time for father and son to develop a relationship before they were parted for ever, and now Plarr is very much aware that he is “a man without a father” (HC 90).

Charley Fortnum’s dead father similarly figures constantly in his son’s imagination, though Fortnum has less than happy memories of him: the father was a drunk and a bully and even at his own advanced age Fortnum can neither forget nor forgive. He has grown to realise, however, that his attitude towards his father is far from only simple dislike: “I used to be angry with my father. He didn’t understand me, I thought, or care a nickel about me. I hated him. All the same I was bloody lonely when he died. And now [. . .] I even imitate him” (HC 143). León Rivas too lives with the memory of his father whose success as a businessman was balanced by his failure as a human being. Now he lies dead “[u]nder a marble monument in Asunción almost as big as this hut” (HC 272). The house the father provided for his family was almost as cold an edifice: León remembers well “the great portico and the white columns and the marble bathrooms” (HC 272), but he regards all this as mere bourgeois show. There was no life in the house, and no warmth: “Friends of mine were never allowed inside the house—there were so many things they might break or soil. We had six servants. I liked them much better than my parents” (HC 272), León recalls. But these failed or lost parents are never forgotten: “We all of us seem to live with dead fathers, don’t we?” Plarr observes (HC 272). What the characters need now, it would seem, is to achieve some kind of reconciliation with these dead fathers who have taken over their lives: the loss of the father or family contributes to the loss of self, of any sense of identity. Rivas refuses to tell Fortnum his surname, because: “None of us here have families, [. . .] so we are nameless” (HC 133).

The negative associations of the father figure in this period have been noted by critics. Roger Sharrock remarks of the Argentinian background of The Honorary Consul: “In a masculine culture like this the authority of the father is a dominant force; fear of the father’s anger and disapproval is the spur towards daring action, whether making love to women or risking death with other men.”⁵⁰ Grahame Smith extends this idea to include not only biological fathers but also “fathers in the wider, social and political sense,” so that “[t]he general who governs the nearby state [. . .] is father to his people only in the sense that he wields total, arbitrary power over them. As when a child is maltreated, this father towers over his country in cruel omnipotence.”⁵¹ The paternal role is one of power, and such “fathers” abuse that power, becoming dictators, whether over a nation or only a single family. The greatest depiction of this comes in the form of the title character of Doctor Fischer of Geneva. Here is a father whose cruelties are never accidental, who spends his whole life relishing the power his wealth has brought him to hurt and humiliate others. His only daughter, Anna-Luise, believes that his cruelty effectively killed her mother; Anna-Luise herself wishes only to extricate herself from his bizarre and twisted world. Fischer’s apparent omnipotence is repeatedly referred to by his daughter, whose new husband, Alfred Jones, remarks: “You make him sound like Our Father in Heaven—his will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” (DF 23). But if Fischer is God Almighty within his own little universe, he is a cruel God, at times an almost Satanic figure of whom Anna-Luise remarks, “He’s hell [. . .]” (DF 18). A man like

⁵⁰ Sharrock 244.

⁵¹ Grahame Smith 185.

the Doctor is a little God, unsuited to his role, lacking all sense of justice or benevolence.

With blood connections proving so unsatisfactory, the characters now take matters of family into their own hands, and look beyond fathers, mothers, all biological family ties: in fact, they manufacture their own family units. Anna-Luise sums up this choice best when she tells Jones: “You’re my lover and my father, my child and my mother, you’re the whole family—the only family I want [. . .]” (DF 17). And certainly Jones is old enough to be her father, a fact that made it all the more astonishing to him when she agreed to be his wife. Equally, having cast aside her wholly unsatisfactory biological father, Anna-Luise is left without a natural family: her mother is dead, she is an only child, and no other relatives are mentioned. She is in the perfect position to start afresh, it would seem: to create her own ideal family. But Anna-Luise is not the first of Greene’s characters to demand the right to choose a better family, to construct a family from scratch and from the most unlikely components. In The Human Factor, Castle too has manufactured a family to suit his needs. It is an unconventional family: his South African wife is young and black, and Sam is not Castle’s natural son, but all of this pleases Castle. He does not want Sarah to fit in in England, to become an “honorary white”; rather he feels that his marriage has made him an “honorary black” (HF 202). And he is also glad rather than sorry that Sam is not his child; he tells his wife: “I love Sam because he’s yours. Because he’s not mine. Because I don’t have to see anything of myself there when I look at him. I see only something of you. I don’t want to go on and on for ever. I want the buck to stop here” (HF 29). There are parallels between Castle’s situation and Greene’s own: in making a relationship with Yvonne Cloetta, Greene had also

made a bond with her family, with her daughter Martine. (It was to aid Martine in her battle with her estranged husband Daniel Guy that Greene wrote his pamphlet, J'Accuse: The Dark Side of Nice,⁵² which was, perhaps, a paternal attempt to protect those he loved.) Such constructed families seem to offer all the comforts of any other family, without the overwhelming sense of obligation and guilt that seems to emanate from blood ties. In Castle's case, any responsibilities he has to his family, he has chosen to take on; they have not been forced upon him by a mere biological fact. And such unconventional fictional families now—old men with young wives or lovers, and adopted children, if any—are the happiest of Greene's depictions of domestic life and love, offering a sharp contrast to the anguish of relationships in earlier novels. When these later relationships break down it is because of hostile outside forces, not inherent flaws.

Greene's characters are never able to overcome these external threats to their present peace. Insecurity is a fact of life: one may make a home, but one cannot expect to keep it. Spurling suggests that all of Greene's doomed characters, his "innocent bystanders," share a "fatal capacity to hope. Any Greene character who builds even a modest castle in Spain [. . .] is certain, sooner rather than later, to be kicked in the teeth."⁵³ In Greene's 1982 novel, Monsignor Quixote, the priest of the title—and one could find no more innocent a bystander than this man—is driven from the small Spanish town of El Toboso which has been his parish and his home for decades. The hostile external force in his case is his bishop, who continually finds fault with Father Quixote's work and with his faith itself. When the priest is

⁵² Graham Greene, J'Accuse: The Dark Side of Nice (London: Bodley Head, 1982).

⁵³ Spurling 69.

elevated to the status of “Monsignor” through a chance encounter with a travelling Italian bishop, his elevation proves more a curse than a blessing, since it provides Quixote’s own bishop with the excuse that the parish is too small a concern for a priest of his status. Father Quixote cannot fight his removal, of course; he has a duty to accept his bishop’s orders. And so the priest leaves his home town for good, “driven away by the bishop” (MQ 27), and sets out on a series of bizarre journeys across Spain with the most unlikely of companions, the local Communist Mayor, who has just lost his own position too, and who declares: “I wash my hands of El Toboso [. . .]” (MQ 27). Separated for the first time from his duties as priest, from the daily Mass and the needs of his parishioners—the extended or surrogate family to whom he is Father—Father Quixote feels utterly lost. The small town and his priesthood have been his identity for the whole of his adult life; separated from them, he finds that “I don’t feel myself at all [. . .]” (MQ 140). In leaving his home, he has lost himself.

Travelling across the country, the two men are quite rootless: they cannot return to El Toboso, but they have nowhere else to go, nowhere even in mind. The priest’s elderly car is their only home, and that is an unreliable refuge. Neither man has a family and their greatest consolation is their developing friendship: if they cannot find a home, they do at least feel “at home” together. On their second journey, the priest tells the mayor:

I’m glad you came, Sancho. I feel safe here with you and with Rocinante, safer than back there with Father Herrera. El Toboso is no longer home to me and I have no other, except here on this spot of ground with you.” (MQ 182)

Though Father Quixote knows that he needs to find himself another home of some kind, he is unwilling to settle down again. He tells his companion: “I don’t want our

travels to end. Not before death, Sancho. My ancestor died in his bed. Perhaps he would have lived longer if he had stayed on the road. I'm not ready for death yet, Sancho" (MQ 182). Like Aunt Augusta (in Travels with my Aunt) before him, the priest too has discovered the life-giving force of movement.

Even so, Father Quixote eventually acknowledges his need for a home of some kind, "[s]omewhere quiet where [. . .] I can rest for a while" (MQ 182). Even Augusta had a base to which she could return between her travels. To have nothing at all, is to leave oneself without a safety net in life. In Monsignor Quixote, the ex-Mayor is also hoping for a simplified life, in which he can take a comfortable rest, untroubled by his earlier religious or political beliefs and doubts. He admires the constancy of both Stalinists and Trappists, while dismissing the Jesuits, who

turn with the wind. [. . .] When you come to the end of the longest road of all you have to lie down and take a rest—a rest from arguments and theories and fashions. You can say, "I don't believe but I accept," and you fall into silence like the Trappists do. The Trappists are the Stalinists of the Church.

(MQ 184)

Both the Mayor and Father Quixote are approaching the end of that "longest road" by this point. It is time for them to find their rest, their simplest and last home.

What is sought in old age (both Greene's and most of his characters'), in contrast to the home of the past—that which is remembered, the childhood home—is the home that will be the final resting place, the home of the future. Ultimately home will be the place where one ends one's life. This is a very modern definition of home, created by a society in which change is the norm and stability is all too rare.

Greene's characters seek a home that they can shape to suit them, rather than a home to which they must mould themselves. Thus they seek a peaceful old age after the challenges of earlier life.

The final home found by Father Quixote is certainly a peaceful one. The monastery at Osera is literally peaceful because the Trappist monks there are a silent order, and it is also a place of peace for the fugitive visitors because it stands apart from the world at large. It exists almost as an oasis in the empty countryside, with its small group of permanent inhabitants and a flow of guests: "A visitor has the impression of an abandoned island which has been colonized only recently by a small group of adventurers, who are now trying to make a home in the ruins of a past civilization" (MQ 202). This ancient place is an ideal haven for Quixote, who is out of date even within the conservative Catholic Church; and he is outdated chiefly because he is a romantic rather than a cynic: though he has his doubts, he retains a core of true faith against all odds.

With Monsignor Quixote, Greene takes Cervantes's famous work of romance, Don Quixote, and rewrites it for the twentieth century. Like Cervantes's Don, Greene's priest is a man out of step with the world around him, a man on a quest that is incomprehensible to other people. The novel follows Cervantes in its basic structure and many of its details: it has, for instance, its own versions of the tilting at windmills scene and the freeing of the galley slaves, but Greene made it clear that his interest lay in the character of Quixote the man, rather than in the book itself, by which he declared himself to be more bored than inspired.⁵⁴ Greene's Monsignor, like Cervantes's Don, is a romantic figure in his struggles against the world beyond his parish, a wider contemporary world in which he is never truly at home.

Romance has never been entirely absent from Greene's work—in spite of the cynicism and even the despair of some of his fictions—prompting W. J. Weatherby

⁵⁴ See Bernard Violet, "A Rare Occasion: Graham Greene on TV" 344.

to ask: “Is the master of seedy realism a romantic at heart?” and to conclude: “Mr Greene, you are not a realist at all, but one of the great imaginative writers—just as much as your distant relative, Robert Louis Stevenson, was in the last century.”⁵⁵

This period heralds Greene’s return to the romantic genre of fiction with which he began his literary career, in The Man Within (1929) and then in his two suppressed novels, The Name of Action (1930) and Rumour at Nightfall (1931). By the 1980s he is immersed in romance once again, though this time older and wiser. With Travels with my Aunt, in 1969, came a change of heart and tone in his writing: a light-heartedness even in the face—and the midst—of tragedy; this heralded his return to romance, to an adventure-filled, plot-driven mode of narrative, in which realism was no longer of primary concern. Brian Thomas suggests that from 1973 onwards (that is, from The Honorary Consul onwards) Greene’s is a personalised, modified form of romance, into which absurdity is admitted, and which tends, therefore, to “parody the romance patterns that it invokes.”⁵⁶ Unlike Greene’s first excursions into the form in the thirties, this is romance which does not take itself too seriously, but it is still romance. The characters are still on journeys which are essentially quests, Father Quixote most of all. Greene’s conception of romance is broad, and although Monsignor Quixote certainly echoes the ancient romance forms which the original Don Quixote read in his books of chivalry—with their strict moral codes, their earnest quests and their noble, perfect knights—Greene also has another understanding of the romantic, based upon books written centuries later, and indeed

⁵⁵ W. J. Weatherby, “Greenland Uncovered,” Guardian 29 September 1979: 11.

⁵⁶ Brian Thomas, An Underground Fate: The Idiom of Romance in the Later Novels of Graham Greene (Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 1988) xv.

by men like Stevenson. This is the romance of the adventure story, which has its own quests, and its own heroes.

Greene is not out of step with the times in his use of the romance forms most clearly employed and modified in Monsignor Quixote, but also echoed in the machismo advocated by Saavedra in The Honorary Consul⁵⁷ and finally in the physical and emotional journeying of The Captain and the Enemy. Around the same time as Greene published Monsignor Quixote, David Lodge published Small World (1984), a novel whose characters engage similarly in quests: for love, success or at any rate something more from life, and for an escape from the dull reality of everyday routine. One of Lodge's characters, Philip Swallow, a British academic, attempts to explain why he now spends so much of his time travelling the world, attending endless conferences:

Who knows? It's hard to put into words. What are we all looking for? Happiness? One knows that doesn't last. Distraction, perhaps—distraction from the ugly facts: that there is death, there is disease, there is impotence and senility ahead.⁵⁸

He finally draws the conclusion that “[i]ntensity of experience is what we're looking for, I think. We know we won't find it at home any more, but there's always the hope that we'll find it abroad.”⁵⁹ It is not home in general, as a concept, which so disappoints, but the specific home with which the middle-aged protagonist is faced in suburban Rummidge, where nothing of interest or importance is ever likely to

⁵⁷ The character, Jorge Julio Saavedra, offers one of many links between Greene's fiction and the romance form, this time via Cervantes, since Cervantes's full name was in fact Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. Perhaps Saavedra actually has less in common with the writer, Cervantes, and rather more with his creation, Don Quixote: both Quixote and Saavedra are hopelessly devoted to their own out of date ideals, and machismo may surely be seen as a latter day version of chivalry.

⁵⁸ Lodge, Small World 66.

⁵⁹ Lodge, Small World 66.

happen. In his travels, much like so many of Greene's characters, Swallow is looking for alternative, invigorating homes, even though they are not permanent homes. He is looking for the life he knows is out there. The place where one enjoys "intensity of experience" is one's emotional or spiritual home: this is what Swallow thinks he has missed along the way.

Small World, like Monsignor Quixote, is a novel that recreates the centuries-old form of romance for the twentieth century. Lodge places his characters, however playfully, within an ancient tradition: always, with the coming of spring. Lodge notes, "[. . .] as the poet Geoffrey Chaucer observed many years ago, folk long to go on pilgrimages. Only, these days, professional people call them conferences."⁶⁰ And another of the many restless academics in the novel, Morris Zapp, remarks that "[s]cholars these days are like the errant knights of old, wandering the ways of the world in search of adventure and glory."⁶¹ And, of course, Greene's Father Quixote wanders the roads of Spain finding, if not always seeking, his own adventure and glory: as his companion tells him, he is "a monsignor errant" (MQ 38). The nature of the quests may have changed over the centuries, but the need for them remains.

The romance forms utilised in the novels of both Greene and Lodge can be seen as part of a wider current in late-twentieth-century literature. Romance is above all a highly imaginative, even fantastic, mode of fiction, which draws attention to its own artifices. In the seventies and eighties, writers such as Lodge played upon the inherent artifice and duplicity of works of fiction, which claim to be "real" even though they emanate only from the mind of their creators. Fiction and criticism

⁶⁰ Lodge, Small World, Prologue.

⁶¹ Lodge, Small World 63.

engaging with such questions were widespread in this period: Patricia Waugh charts the rise of “metafiction,” or

fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In provoking a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.⁶²

Writers like David Lodge play games with the very idea of authorship as previously commonly accepted, deliberately breaking through the veneer of realism and admitting the falsity inherent in the writing of fiction. Greene too participated in this trend, though perhaps more tentatively than many of the younger writers. In Monsignor Quixote, Father Leopoldo, one of the Trappist monks at Osera, questions our ability to distinguish at all between the real and the imaginary: “Fact or fiction—in the end you can’t distinguish between them—you just have to choose” (MQ 206). Similarly, the Italian bishop encountered by Father Quixote at the outset of the novel ponders the problem of the priest’s ancestry—can he really be descended from Don Quixote, a “fictional” character?—and considers: “Perhaps we are all fictions, father, in the mind of God” (MQ 22).

The prime example of fiction that revels in its own fictionality, playing with the line between reality and fiction, is John Fowles’s French Lieutenant’s Woman, which was enormously successful, both critically and commercially, after its publication in 1969. The multiple endings proposed by Fowles demonstrate just how arbitrary are the outcomes of all fictional works, decided by the author’s whim, or perhaps even a character’s whim, if the author is admitted to be at times less than

⁶² Patricia Waugh, Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction (London: Routledge, 1984) 2.

omnipotent even in the novel in which he is commonly supposed to be a little god.

The characters, we are told, take on an existence independent of their author from the very moment that the author invents the world they inhabit. For Fowles this is why novelists write in the first place—not simply to enjoy a control that is impossible in “real” life, but rather:

[. . .] one same reason is shared by all of us: we wish to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is. Or was. This is why we cannot plan. [. . .] We [. . .] know that a genuinely created world must be independent of its creator; a planned world (a world that fully reveals its planning) is a dead world. It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live. When Charles left Sarah on her cliff-edge, I ordered him to walk straight back to Lyme Regis. But he did not: he gratuitously turned and went down to the Dairy.⁶³

Having demolished the myth of total authorial control, Fowles is, in a sense, creating another myth: that of total independence on the part of his characters and the world they inhabit.

David Lodge takes another approach: in How Far Can You Go? (1980), for instance, he runs the risk perhaps of inventing the “dead world” of which Fowles writes, for Lodge is unafraid to reveal the true extent of his control and thought-processes as author of the novel. He breaks down any remaining illusions of realism from the outset, referring to his previous novels, and thus drawing attention to the fact that this too is only another fiction. Having introduced his characters, he informs the reader that “[. . .] they are not going to pair off with each other, that would be too neat, too implausible [. . .],”⁶⁴ and yet these very words make the whole situation deliberately implausible, since the author has just pointed out that any

⁶³ John Fowles, The French Lieutenant’s Woman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969) 98.

⁶⁴ David Lodge, How Far Can You Go? (1980; London: Penguin, 1981) 14.

plausibility in any novel is simply a clever illusion. Lodge makes a show of naming his characters as he goes along: “Let her be called Violet, no, Veronica, no Violet”, and then ensures that each character is fixed in the reader’s mind before proceeding: “Let’s just take a role call.”⁶⁵ There is a distinction in particular between Lodge’s work and Greene’s: Greene is never so interested in exposing the secrets of the novelist’s methods; instead his games with the ideas of fiction and reality seek to use the novel to shed light on “real” life, to demonstrate that reality can never be trusted, and fiction may prove most real, or most truthful, after all. Fiction may offer a refuge to writers, as the real world cannot; for as Philippa Tristram judges:

The novel is invincibly domestic, partly because it functions like the house as a little world we think we can control.⁶⁶

In this respect, the writing of fictions fulfils the basic human need for a sense of control: over ourselves, over others, over our surroundings. If the real world proves difficult to mould satisfactorily, invent another. And, as Fowles suggests, it is not only the writer who invents or reinvents the world, or even himself: “We are all in flight from the real reality. That is a basic definition of *Homo sapiens*.”⁶⁷ It is natural that writers of fiction should feel more at home in fantasy than in reality—Greene certainly seemed to—but perhaps that is the condition of humankind as a whole. We invent and reinvent ourselves, and in the process “home” too becomes yet another fiction.

Reality, in the novels of latter stages of the twentieth century, becomes entirely subjective. So Greene’s Quixote, following in his ancestor’s footsteps, should not.

⁶⁵ Lodge, How Far Can You Go? 15.

⁶⁶ Philippa Tristram, Living Space in Fact and Fiction (London: Routledge, 1989) 268.

⁶⁷ Fowles, The French Lieutenant’s Woman 99.

like his ancestor, be judged a madman for his whims and follies. The Monsignor is only following the spirit of his age, and both Quixotes follow the spirit of their country too; for as Father Leopoldo notes, “[a]ll Spaniards are romantic, so that sometimes we take windmills for giants” (MQ 205). Greene’s romantic bent in his last novels bears a strong connection to his obvious interest in the same period in Spanish people and places. Like his fictional Monsignor Quixote and Sancho, Greene holidayed on several occasions in Spain with his friend, Father Leopoldo Durán. These holidays, typically for Greene, were never based statically in a single town or village resort but kept him daily on the move to the next overnight stop, seeing as much of Spain as was possible in the time; Durán comments in his book on their friendship and their travels together: “Graham, like St Augustine, is a ‘restless flame’. Two days in the same place are enough to make him feel almost intolerably bored.”⁶⁸

Greene also travelled widely in other Spanish-speaking nations, in South and Central America, and he evidently absorbed much from his repeated visits to these countries. Latin-America was indeed Greene’s area of primary interest and involvement during the seventies and eighties, certainly in political and idealistic terms. Here was yet another land of unrest and upheaval, offering further chances of adventure and danger. Yet this was not perhaps Greene’s real motivation in visiting and revisiting these parts: this South America was no longer an exotic, distant land to which Greene came only as an observer (as when he had visited, and detested, Mexico in the thirties: a visit which provided the material for The Power and the

⁶⁸ Leopoldo Durán, Graham Greene: An Intimate Portrait by His Closest Friend and Confidant, trans. Euan Cameron (1994; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995) 156.

Glory). Instead it became familiar to him—a home from home—as Greene records in his memoir of his friendship with General Omar Torrijos, Getting to Know the General (1984). There is a marked sense of homecoming about his first arrival in the country: “‘I’ve done it at last,’ I thought at that moment, ‘I really am here in Panama’” (GKG 20); Greene observes that, even on this very first visit, “[. . .] I already felt oddly at home in this small remote country of my dreams, as I had never felt in any country of Latin America before” (GKG 20). This is a country of which Greene had read avidly as a boy, with its connections with Drake and adventure and explorations (see GKG 19-20); to go there is to fulfil a lifelong ambition, to make the dreams a reality, as well as to make yet another return to childhood. And as time and further visits pass, Greene grows to feel ever more absorbed into Panamanian life: for example, at “an oddly juvenile party for a guerrilla leader [. . .] the faces were nearly all as familiar to me now as family faces [. . .]” (GKG 137). Greene had seemingly found a distant land where he need not remain a foreigner, where he could be—or at least feel—fully assimilated.

One of the most crucial points in Greene’s attachment to Latin America is the fact that these countries seemed to offer the possibility that politics and religion might at last find common ground: Communism and Catholicism might co-operate rather than compete, and thus the possibility might exist of reconciling the material and the spiritual in a non-Capitalist, non-American environment. Greene made a speech in Moscow in February 1987 to this effect:

[. . .] for over a hundred years there had been a certain suspicion, an enmity even, between the Roman Catholic Church and Communism. [. . .] For the last fifteen years or so, I have been spending a great deal of time in Latin America, and there, I am happy to say, that suspicion is dead and buried [. . .]. It no

longer exists. We are fighting—Roman Catholics are fighting—together with the Communists. (“The Meeting in the Kremlin,” R 316)

This co-operation is mirrored on the smallest, but perhaps also the most important, personal scale in Monsignor Quixote in the two travelling companions, one a Catholic priest, the other a Marxist politician. One might call it liberation theology—particularly in the case of the priest turned freedom fighter, León Rivas in The Honorary Consul—but for Greene himself it is simply a case of joining the best of his two loyalties. Greene’s expectations of both the Church and Communism had been modulated by time and experience: he was no naïve idealist in old age, but neither was he too hardened a cynic. He realised that doubt and faith marry well, as he demonstrates in Monsignor Quixote. He pinpoints a vital difference between Cervantes’s Quixote and his own version: the Monsignor has doubt even in his own quest, whereas the Don has none.

The world of Father Quixote is indeed a world of doubt, and it is none the worse for that fact. The Monsignor would not have felt comfortable in his ancestor’s role: the Don’s certainty is alien and horrifying to the priest. Indeed, Father Quixote has a dream that deals with the subject of doubt and certainty, a dream that affects him greatly even in his waking hours:

He had a dream that Christ had been saved from the Cross by the legion of angels to which on an earlier occasion the Devil had told Him that He could appeal. So there was no final agony, no heavy stone which had to be rolled away, no discovery of an empty tomb. Father Quixote stood there watching on Golgotha as Christ stepped down from the Cross triumphant and acclaimed. The Roman soldiers, even the Centurion, knelt in His honour, and the people of Jerusalem poured up the hill to worship Him. The disciples clustered happily around. His mother smiled through her tears of joy. There was no ambiguity, no room for doubt and no room for faith at all. The whole world would know with certainty that Christ was the Son of God. (MQ 67)

To Father Quixote this is a nightmare scenario of a world which is “a kind of Saharan desert without doubt or faith” and he prays, “[. . .] God save me from such a belief” (MQ 67). For Greene too, doubt is an essential part of faith: as a result he did not feel “at home” in the Church under Pope John Paul because “I don’t think he has doubt. I don’t think he doubts his own infallibility. He reminds me a bit of Reagan [. . .].”⁶⁹ Cornwell countered this statement with the comment: “John Paul lacks doubt you say, and yet you pray to believe”; but Greene did not pray only to believe: “In a curious way, I’ve always believed that doubt was a more important thing for human beings. It’s human to doubt.”⁷⁰ If Greene was never truly orthodox in his approach to Catholicism, he is clearly less so than ever now: humanity comes before belief in Greene’s list of priorities.

It must, however, be conceded that Monsignor Quixote is by no means representative of Greene’s usual religious attitudes over the course of his writing career generally, and in his later years in particular. The Monsignor is not troubled by the secular temptations with which Greene’s characters (from Andrews through Scobie to Sarah Miles) commonly wrestle or succumb, and in fact he is troubled instead by his very lack of response to such temptations. Quixote is a man who wants above all to retain his faith, and who cannot imagine life without God or without his precious books of spiritual comfort. Perhaps in any case the greater than usual (for Greene) spiritual optimism of the novel owes much to the degree to which it was influenced by real life people and events: the Monsignor surely bears a substantial resemblance to Greene’s friend Father Durán (certainly some of Durán’s

⁶⁹ Cornwell, “The Confessions of Graham Greene” 34.

⁷⁰ Cornwell “The Confessions of Graham Greene” 34.

own views and comments from their travels together are later put into the mouth of Quixote).

More truly typical of Greene's longstanding spiritual views and of their development in this period is The Honorary Consul (or even Doctor Fischer of Geneva). To the characters of these novels God is not love, or at least never only love). Doctor Fischer's attitude is the most extreme: if he believes at all, it is only in a greedy God, greedy not for love, but "greedy for our humiliation [. . .]. The world grows more and more miserable while he twists the endless screw [. . .]" (DF 61). In The Honorary Consul, the failed priest, León Rivas, offers a view of God only slightly more moderate. To León, God is both love and hate, both good and evil; he asks: "How could I love God if he were not like me? Divided like me. Tempted like me" (HC 284). And he explains further: "The God I believe in must be responsible for all the evil as well as for all the saints. He has to be a God made in our image with a night-side as well as a day-side" (HC 285). What León hopes for is an evolutionary process in which both God and man can escape their night-side, their inherent evil, but in the present day the evil remains dominant. Worse still, some characters in the novel have lost all belief and suggest that there is no longer any evidence of a God at all; so Charley Fortnum remarks to León: "Sorry, Father, but I don't see any sign of him around, do you?" (HC 257). One critic makes similar comment upon The Honorary Consul as a whole: "Religion is everywhere in the novel; but God is not."⁷¹ Years earlier, in The Power and the Glory, the people of the troubled Mexican state had complained of their abandonment, but they at least

⁷¹ "The Cost of Caring," TLS 14 September 1973: 1055.

felt themselves abandoned only by priests, whereas in The Honorary Consul it seems it is God who has fled, leaving the earth an emptier and ever less homely place.

Many of the religious doubts which plague Greene's characters in this later fiction are the doubts of maturity or old age: once upon a time these characters could believe, but now they cannot. Thus Castle, in The Human Factor, lives a virtually entirely secular life: only on one occasion in the novel, after his son's recovery from an attack of measles, does Castle feel the pull of faith. He finds himself drawn inexplicably into his local church to observe the final stages of a Sunday service: "[. . .] he felt a sudden desire to give a kind of thanks, if it was only to a myth, that Sam was safe [. . .]" (HF 67). For a moment only, the "God of his childhood" (HF 67) almost becomes the God of his adulthood, but not quite; Castle considers himself instead "born to be a half-believer" (HF 134), always an observer rather than a participant, always on the margins, unseen at the back of the church. This half-belief is something Greene himself shared: by this stage he considered himself a "Catholic agnostic,"⁷² still a Catholic but no longer able to practise his faith. He was unable to receive Communion, of course, because of his long-standing extra-marital relationship with Yvonne, and he explained to Marie-Françoise Allain: "I still often go to Sunday Mass, but I no longer feel at home [. . .]."⁷³

Greene understood perfectly how time and failure and circumstance could erode good intentions so that "[. . .] many of us abandon Confession and Communion to join the Foreign Legion of the Church and fight for a city of which we are no

⁷² See John Cornwell, "Why I am still a Catholic," Graham Greene: Man of Paradox, ed. A. F. Cassis 458.

⁷³ Allain 172.

longer full citizens.”⁷⁴ Yet Catholicism proves hard to relinquish entirely: the Church is a homeland that can never fully be left behind, never be forgotten. Even disbelief is insufficient to remove an individual from the Church which has shaped him, as León Rivas realises in The Honorary Consul, asking: “How can I leave the Church? The Church is the world. The Church is this barrio, this room. There is only one way any of us can leave the Church and that is to die. [. . .] Not even then, if what we sometimes believe is true” (HC 250-51). It remains his world at any rate, and he adds: “Mine is only a separation, [. . .] a separation by mutual consent, not a divorce. I shall never belong wholly to anyone else” (HC 274). Rivas believes that our possession by God goes beyond mere personal experience or choice, and forms our most basic inheritance as human beings: “We have Jehovah in our blood. We can’t help it. After all these centuries Jehovah lives in our darkness like a worm in the intestines” (HC 273). This God is therefore inescapable, a part of us all, in life as in the death which is soon to come for Rivas and his fellow rebels.

Strangely, death on the whole seems less significant in the fiction of this last stage of Greene’s life than ever before. The individual deaths are still there: his fiction has always had an unusually large number of deaths—accidental, suicidal, murderous—but they bring less sense of dread now than ever before. Rivas may still believe, at least partly, in his God and the afterlife for which one ought to make preparation, but he is unusual in this respect. More typical of Greene’s characters’ attitudes is that of Rivas’s fellow rebel, Aquino, who is not a believer and whose poetry is filled with casual references to death. “Death is a common weed: requires no rain.” runs one of his lines (HC 151), and Aquino explains to Fortnum: “[. . .] I

⁷⁴ V. S. Pritchett, “The Human Factor in Graham Greene” 40.

cannot understand why you are so afraid of death. Death will come in any case, and there is a long afterwards if the priests are right and nothing to fear if they are wrong” (HC 152). Instead of anticipation, there is only a sense of inevitable completion without hope and without fear. Even for poor Alfred Jones in Doctor Fischer of Geneva this eventually proves the case: he makes a single desperate attempt at suicide after his wife Anna-Luise’s death, but no further attempt on his own life follows. He believes in no afterlife, and so he cannot reasonably expect to rejoin his wife after death in either heaven or hell; so he merely continues to live, to preserve her memory: “Death was no longer an answer—it was an irrelevance” (DF 140).

There are more important concerns in life than death, as one of Greene’s late short stories demonstrates. In “The Moment of Truth” (1988), the central character, Arthur Burton has a secret to share: he has cancer and is potentially facing death. He works as a waiter in a French restaurant in Kensington and his life contains little beyond his work; he is “alone in life” (“The Moment of Truth,” LW 33), “a very lonely man” (LW 35). When he meets a new customer, Dolly Hogminster, she seems to offer him a “smile of real friendship” (LW 33), and he hopes that she may be the one person to whom he can tell his secret. He admits to her that he has to go into hospital for tests and imagines that she sees the significance that remains unspoken. But his “moment of truth” is when he reads her parting note (enclosing a tip), which makes no reference to his plight, but only thanks him in general terms for his help: he has been only a waiter, not a friend, to her all along. This realisation is far more painful to him than the knowledge that he has little time left to live. Death is only “that universal fate” (LW 37)—it cannot be avoided—but to face death alone

is dreadful. Mrs Hogminster's banal note tells Arthur that he must die alone, without human contact or comfort, or even sympathy. Like the characters in The Honorary Consul, his fate is solitary confinement, and he will die as he lives: isolated in his home, "if a bed-sitting-room with a shared shower could be called a home" (LW 33). Death by cancer is the least awful part of his fate.

Above all, death is no longer to be craved as an escape: it will provide no home now; heaven's gates do not beckon. Approaching the end of his career, Greene seems suspicious of any such concrete endings, of certainties. His characters have always been restless, drifting their ways onwards through life, and it is hard to imagine them simply reaching an end, finishing once and for all. There is always something more of the story to come, even after the novel's close. In The Honorary Consul, for instance, when Plarr is shot down and dies, he leaves behind him those who have known and loved him and are still living—Clara and Fortnum—and thus it is not simply as though he had never existed. He leaves also an unborn child, whose own story has not even begun, and in whom he may in a sense be reborn. Even the characters who face their ends in old age are yet unsure of their final destinations. So at the close of Monsignor Quixote the Monsignor is dead—one character of whom one might judge with reasonable certainty that he did make his way home to heaven and God at the last—but his friend the Mayor is still alive and still faced with uncertainty. The Monsignor lives on in the Mayor's memory, and still encourages him, even guides him, in directions he does not yet understand, so that

[. . .] love, the love which he had begun to feel for Father Quixote, seemed now to live and grow in spite of the final separation and the final silence—for how long, he wondered with a kind of fear, was it possible for that love of his to continue? And to what end? (MQ 221).

To what end indeed?—such characters may still not know where they are heading, but they are more open to possibilities than ever before. If there should prove to be a home for them somewhere, perhaps finally they will accept it.

The last stage of Greene's career brings with it an unavoidable optimism after all the comedy, tragedy and absurdity that went before. Indeed, A. A. DeVitis judges that Greene "seems to be saying in Monsignor Quixote, as does Shakespeare in The Tempest, 'Look, I have come through.'"⁷⁵ As in Shakespeare, romance is perhaps the final stage, suggestive of survival in the face of countless obstacles: the Mayor tells Father Quixote: "We are survivors, you and I [. . .]" (MQ 177). Certainly this is a reasonable conclusion to draw from any reading of Monsignor Quixote, but—inconvenient to the last—Greene did not end his writing career with that novel: this was not his final word on the matter. After a gap of six years he published what would be his final novel, The Captain and the Enemy (1988). In this work all the old problems come to life once again: nothing has been resolved and hope seems to trickle away. In comparison with Monsignor Quixote, The Captain and the Enemy might therefore seem like a step backwards from the serenity of the previous novel. Alternatively, The Captain and the Enemy may be viewed as one last panoramic view of the entire span of Greene's career. It has certain parallels in this respect with Travels with my Aunt, but the similarities between the two novels go further—Jim admires and follows in the footsteps of the Captain much as Henry was guided through his later life by his Aunt Augusta, with a similar number of adventures and tricks along the way. However, the tone (like the ending) of The Captain and the Enemy is far bleaker. Jim is never brought into life by the Captain in the way that

⁷⁵ A. A. DeVitis, "The Later Greene," Essays in Graham Greene, ed. Peter Wolfe, vol. 1, 81.

Henry is revitalized by Augusta. And while Henry undoubtedly forms a close bond with the woman he finally discovers to be his real mother, Jim is never truly able to regard the Captain as a father, as family. He feels no love for the man who simply arrived one day in his childhood and spirited him away into a new world and a new surrogate family; he feels only an annoyed sense of “dependence” from which he would dearly like to free himself (CAE 150).

Jim stands alone throughout the novel, partly because his position as narrator-figure sets him apart from the other characters: this is his tale, his perspective, even his self-defence, not theirs. But mostly, Jim is set apart simply by his personality: he is a born loner. In school he was one of a set of undesirables known as “Amalekites,” after the Old Testament tribe of people shunned and feared by all others.⁷⁶ An outsider, he had been ostracised and bullied until the Captain appeared one day, seemingly to rescue him, to allow him to start afresh: “I was no longer an Amalekite. I was freed from fear and I felt prepared for anything [. . .]” (CAE 27). But it becomes apparent that one cannot so easily start over: Jim’s personality remains his own, though the circumstances of his life are utterly changed. He may live with the Captain and Liza, but he is a spy in their midst, never part of their family, and eventually he will betray them almost without guilt, because he is not one of them. Years after the first meeting with his surrogate parents, Jim reads a letter from the Captain to Liza and is “seized with a furious sense of inferiority. I was shut out, an Amalekite again” (CAE 168), and, as Jim always knew, “An Amalekite [. . .] was always a loner” (CAE 25).

⁷⁶ For references to the Amalekites see, for example, Holy Bible, King James Version: Nu 13:29, 14:25; 1 Sa 15:17, 27:8.

Paul Theroux sees Jim's isolation as extending to all the characters in the novel: "[. . .] there are no real relationships at all—everyone is arbitrarily paired-up; everyone is alone,"⁷⁷ and with the possible exception of the Captain and Liza this is so: Greene does not depict any other relationships, happy or otherwise. Jim has a few girlfriends, but he is extraordinarily uninterested in any of them: as Salman Rushdie remarks, "[. . .] it is Jim's tragedy to be unable to love any human being."⁷⁸ To Jim, love is just a "meaningless word" (CAE 45), and he is detached from his own emotions, unable and unwilling to respond to the "mysterious demands" of love (CAE 45). Above all, he is perplexed, unable to share or even to comprehend the bonds he sees between other human beings, and between the Captain and Liza in particular. As he writes and reviews his life with them Jim wonders:

Had I grown to love the Captain, this putative father who was now as distant from me as my real parent. Did I love Liza who looked after me, gave me the right food, dispatched me at the correct hour to school and welcomed me back with an impatient kiss? Did I love anyone? Did I even know what love was? Do I know it now years later or is love something which I have read about in books? (CAE 77-78)

Jim is perhaps the most isolated of all of Greene's characters, because he is not only totally detached at the outset of the tale but remains so at the novel's end: he is apparently incapable even of growing into involvement.

Jim never puts down roots: in his childhood this is hardly surprising since his father is absent, his mother dead, and he has been sent as a result to his hated boarding school, with no home to return to even in the holidays other than an aunt's unwelcoming flat. For Jim, and in the novel generally, homes are never more than

⁷⁷ Theroux, "What the Hell is Going On?" 6.

⁷⁸ Salman Rushdie, "Old Devil Rides Again," Observer 11 September 1988: 42.

provisional, never to be relied upon. When the Captain takes him to live with Liza, he seems to have, for the first time, the chance of a “permanent” home: Liza is to be his new “mother” and he will share with her the house where she is caretaker. But even this is a peculiar residence, in

a street where some of the houses had been repainted and others were in the course of demolition [. . .]. The houses, as I know now, were Victorian, with steps that led down to basements, and attic windows four floors up. [. . .] It was as if the street, which was called Alma Terrace, had not made up its mind whether it was going up in the world or down. We stopped at a house marked 12A because I suppose nobody would have cared to live in number 13.

(CAE 25-26)

The house itself is huge, but Liza’s quarters are only in the basement; the rest stands empty. This is, literally and figuratively, an underground life: Liza’s basement recalls the servants’ quarters in The Basement Room, decades earlier, which were the only warm, living part of the great house. The Captain too is described as “an Underground type” (CAE 102), and Jim is drawn to his air of adventurous illegality, just as Philip had been drawn to the servant Baines’s tales of a “real” man’s life in Africa. To Liza, the basement is, if not a real home, still a hiding place from the hostile world into which she rarely ventures: “[. . .] every morning she brought herself to go just as far as the corner to buy a newspaper and then she would come scampering back like a mouse to her hole” (CAE 39).

In Liza’s basement dwelling there are echoes of another of Greene’s fictions, also from his very earliest work, in the 1930s: the nearly empty, decaying house in It’s A Battlefield in which the Drover family are the last remaining tenants. Liza and Jim, and the occasionally visiting Captain are likewise the only inhabitants of the empty, doomed building in Alma Terrace: all of the former lodgers have long departed, and the owners are seeking permission to demolish the building.

Ironically, therefore, Liza is there to take care of a building that is only to be destroyed in the end: it is a home under constant threat. The Captain is aware of the undesirability of the house, and of “that dreary basement” (CAE 128); it is his life’s mission to find Liza somewhere better to live, to “give her a proper home” (CAE 136). But he never succeeds in this aim, since Liza dies before he has managed to secure enough money. In any case, as Jim is perceptive enough to point out, Liza never really wanted the kind of home that money could buy and was not dissatisfied with her basement quarters: “She was happy there. In her own way. Waiting for you to return,” Jim tells the Captain (CAE 128). Liza’s “proper” home was wherever the Captain would be able to find her: he was her only home, as she might have been his, if he could only have overcome his restlessness and his eternal sense of duty towards her, and his need to provide, which always meant going away.

While the Captain and Liza at least had each other, and their oddly cautious love, Jim has nobody and nothing. We are told very little of the “homes” of Jim’s adult life after he has moved out of Liza’s basement, but we do know that he has two: Jim refers briefly to “the two-roomed flat for which I had exchanged my bed-sitting room in Soho” (CAE 89). These are places to which he clearly feels no attachment: he leaves them for Panama without a backward glance, much as he had left Liza alone in the empty basement. At the end of the novel he makes the final break and turns traitor: he fails to tell the Captain that Liza is dead, he pockets the money that was meant for her, and he makes alliances with men like Quigly who ultimately prove to be the Captain’s enemies. Jim believes that in doing all this he is asserting his individuality, his independence from the Captain, and from the world in which he has been caught up—but never felt at home—since childhood. He finishes

writing the manuscript of his autobiography, and symbolically finishes his involvement with the Captain at the same time:

I write a line under all this scroll before I throw the whole thing into the same waste-paper basket, where anyone who chooses can find it. The line means Finis. I'm on my own now and I am following my own mules to find my own future. (CAE 180)

The problem here is that Jim is deluding himself: the Captain may not be his biological father, but he is nonetheless the “one who had perhaps in a sense fathered me” (CAE 140). He is the closest thing Jim has to a family.

After the Captain's semi-suicidal death in a plane crash, Jim decides to set off on a journey of his own, and buys an aeroplane ticket to Valparaiso, a place of which he—like the son in *Carving a Statue* before him—has always dreamed. This might be his perfect home, except that he never reaches Valparaiso: he too dies on his journey. Jim's dreams of Valparaiso had begun when he was a schoolboy longing to escape to a happier and more thrilling place. When the Captain collects Jim (then still unhappily named Victor) from school, he takes him first to the nearest public house and leaves him waiting outside while he drinks his customary gin and tonics. As he waits, Jim allows his imagination to wander: “I wondered whether it would be possible to build a raft out of the planks in the yard and float it down towards the sea” (CAE 14). Later, when the Captain takes him on to the local hotel, The Swan, for lunch, Jim/Victor revels in his first experience of a public bar and all the social activity that goes with it. This is a new, adult, enthralling world:

[. . .] I was fascinated. Everyone standing there had so much to say and everyone seemed to be in a good humour. I thought of the raft and the long voyage I had planned, and it seemed to me that I had arrived at the other end of the world, in the romantic city of Valparaiso [. . .]. (CAE 15)

Yet even this dream is not Jim's alone: the Captain stands at the heart of the picture. For—and this is why Jim admires him from the very beginning—“[. . .] he was completely at home in a place like this, he was at ease in Valparaiso” (CAE 16).

If Jim's mythical version of “Valparaiso” is the natural environment of any character, it is in fact the Captain and not Jim: Jim dreams of it, but the Captain lives it. Hence the Captain's obsessions with Drake and Morgan, “pirates, [. . .] sailing the Seven Seas in search of gold” (CAE 65). It is this romantic daydream that leads the Captain to follow Drake to Panama in search of his own mule trains laden with gold. In theory, the aim is to find the “gold” that will make Liza and himself “rich and snug and safe” (CAE 66), but in practice it is not the riches but the quest itself—the excitement along the way—which drives the Captain. Jim is brought up on these dreams of gold and adventure, and so in adulthood he cannot help but follow where the Captain leads, going similarly in search of thrilling risk. Flying out to Panama, Jim considers his aim: “It was certainly not towards a father that I was flying now—it was towards a team of mules laden with gold riding along a rough track from the Pacific, it was towards adventure [. . .]” (CAE 110). But adventure and the Captain are indistinguishable, inseparable in Jim's limited experience. He has known adventure only vicariously, through the Captain's own escapades, and he is following his role model's example, as always. In this sense, however vehement Jim's denials, the Captain remains Jim's true father. It is not so easy to escape the Captain's inheritance; and as the Panamanian General remarks, by the novel's close, “[t]he son has followed the father” (CAE 189), as sons tend helplessly to do in Greene's fiction.

There are, again, intriguing similarities between The Captain and the Enemy and le Carré's A Perfect Spy, especially in the relationships between the central

characters and their respective father-figures. Both Jim and Magnus grow up as only children, isolated from the world, and excessively influenced by these flamboyant father-figures, having lost their mothers. Both Rick Pym and the Captain are unreliable, and perhaps simply unsuitable, fathers: both are constantly on the move in order to keep one step ahead of the law. The end result is that neither Magnus nor Jim is capable of an independent existence: having been so dominated by Rick and the Captain in childhood, they find it impossible to break free in adulthood, to create their own existences, their own homes. Rick Pym tells Magnus: “Where your old man is, that’s home,”⁷⁹ but this is ultimately true only in a negative sense. Magnus is captivated by Rick, just as Jim is by the Captain; this is a “home” which can never be escaped, and proves destructive to those it imprisons. The similarities in background and experience between Jim and Magnus are overwhelming, but the same is not true of le Carré and Greene: while le Carré was in many ways writing his own autobiography as the unsettled son of an unreliable, law-breaking father, Greene’s family background could not have been more secure. Jim’s story in The Captain and the Enemy is emphatically not Greene’s, but might well be seen as a reaction to his own life-long confinement within a quite different world, an expression of his own need to break free from his safe, upper-middle-class family life and create his own independent identity and personal home.

Jim Baxter, of course, never does break free to make his own home, largely because he simply does not know how: he barely understands the concept of “home,” and certainly cannot apply it to himself. As a child, he has difficulty even using the word. He records in his journals taking a walk with the Captain and suggesting at

⁷⁹ le Carré, A Perfect Spy 337.

some stage that they might go “home”: “I had begun to use the word ‘home’ consciously for the first time—I had never thought of my aunt’s flat as home” (CAE 40). But his designation of Liza’s basement flat as “home” remains only too conscious, and it never becomes automatic to him. Liza’s flat remains “the place they so wanted me to call home” (CAE 46), but Jim ultimately will not, and cannot, comply. At the end of the novel is one simple fact: homelessness is triumphant. At the close of the action, the Captain and Liza are dead, and Jim is alone and still rootless in South America. He has no reason or desire to return to England; and judges: “‘I haven’t got a home’. It was not in self-pity that I used the phrase, it was a cold statement of fact. I was like a man without a passport, only a card of residence” (CAE 176). He finishes writing his life story, throws it away as though it had never happened, or at least never mattered, and moves on yet again. He ends his life still in transit, finding his only home in the travelling itself.

The places people end their lives can be simultaneously unexpected and inevitable. Greene himself spent his last days in Switzerland, an end that might seem ironic, as it is hardly a place one would expect that Greene would have chosen. Indeed it is almost as surprising as if he had elected to spend his last days in America, since, if Switzerland was not exactly enemy territory, it was hardly home ground either. A description in his Swiss novel, Doctor Fischer of Geneva of Swiss girls—“their faces pretty and fresh, all butter and cream, and their eyes blank with an invulnerable lack of experience” (DF 14)—mirrors Fowler’s depiction in The Quiet American of American girls who are young and fresh, yet emotionally sterile and empty. In Travels with my Aunt, Henry Pulling looks out from a train upon the Swiss countryside and compares it with the bland peace and safety of the suburban

England he has just left. This is hardly Browning's "dangerous edge"; yet the surprise and irony of this final resting place are balanced by the fact that Greene was not alone in this strange land. He was in Switzerland with his family since his own daughter lived there, as did Yvonne and her family, who had become a second family for Greene after decades of association. As for Jones and Anna-Luise in Doctor Fischer of Geneva, or for The Human Factor's Castle and Sarah (who tells her husband: "We have our own country. You and I and Sam" (HF 238)), the outside world is rather irrelevant to Greene and his own family at this point, since they are at home together, wherever they are.

Greene always did look inwards in his search for home—as so many of his characters have looked inside themselves to find love of friends, family, God, and have tried (though often also failed) to make a home in that love. Greene himself looked even further inwards: in his writing, and more generally in his imagination, he could build a home. At the end of his life, in his last illness Greene's reading matter of choice was The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941. This might be seen as another form of going back: Michael Shelden interprets the choice as meaning that "[a]t the end of his life Greene was going back to the early days of his career, when Pound was one of his heroes."⁸⁰ This is fair comment, but there is more to the choice of Pound: it is not just a matter of nostalgic hankering for lost days; the choice was a very personal one. Robert McCrum remarks of Greene's taste for Pound (as also of his taste for Henry James's work) that it was "as if he felt at home in their presence," and that: "In his mind, Pound's writing was connected with what he sometimes referred to as his 'secret garden', an area of the self that he revealed to no one— not

⁸⁰ Shelden 405.

even his closest companions.”⁸¹ As a writer, and a reader, Greene had a whole world inside his mind.

At his own request, one more book was published after his death: the book was A World of My Own: A Dream Diary (1992). The dreams recorded in this collection had been selected by Greene himself, and cover the years 1965-1989: the last stage of his life. They are the dreams of an ageing man, often looking back as much as responding to the present: he dreams, for example, of his late parents and his former home in Berkhamsted. But these dreams are much more than mere reflections of the real world and actual experiences, for in his dream world Greene can go happily far beyond the limits of reality. Greene chose the title of the collection himself, from Heraclitus of Ephesus, as the epigraph demonstrates:

The waking have one world in common,
but the sleeping turn aside each
into a world of his own. (WMO, Epigraph)

This dream world was indeed for Greene absolutely and satisfyingly his own territory; in his introduction he writes:

It can be a comfort sometimes to know that there is a world which is purely one's own—the experience in that world, of travel, danger, happiness, is shared with no one else. There are no witnesses. No libel actions. The characters I meet there have no memory of meeting me, no journalist or would-be biographer can check my account with another's. I can hardly be prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act for any incident connected with the security services. I have spoken with Khrushchev at a dinner party, I have been sent by the Secret Service to murder Goebbels. I am not lying—and yet, of all the witnesses who share these scenes with me, there is not one who can claim from his personal knowledge that what I decide is untrue. (WMO, introduction xvii)

⁸¹ Robert McCrum, “A Life in the Margins,” Guardian Weekend 7 May 1994: 26.

Greene is liberated by his total unaccountability to anybody else in this dream world: it is his world alone, no other person may intrude; the only interpretation with any significance is his own.

His dreams may stem from the realm of his private unconscious, his imagination at its most unrestrained, and even unreal, but they are nonetheless true to him, just as the dream world itself is not unreal or fictitious to the dreamer. The manner in which Greene records his dreams may at times be confusing for the reader: he does not begin his recollections with the prefatory phrase: "I dreamed that this or that happened . . ."; instead he writes simply "This or that happened" As a result, it is occasionally difficult to discern the "real-life" detail from the dream-world detail. But this is because, to Greene, no simple distinction ought to be made—one was not real and the other unreal, for both were valid, though different, realities. Greene does however make some distinction between the two worlds: the real-life world he calls either "the Common world" (WMO 74) (an interesting term, since it would seem to suggest both "common" in the sense of "shared" and "common" in the more derogatory sense of vulgar or everyday) or "the World which was not My Own" (WMO 74). This latter term has a desolate ring to it, suggestive of disappointment and exclusion. In contrast, the "World of My Own" is a welcoming place, a refuge: Yvonne Cloetta suggested that this world was another of Greene's escapes, both from the outside world and from himself, since "[d]reaming was like taking a holiday from himself" (WMO, foreword viii), or perhaps at least from his public self, the self he was compelled to share with other people. In his dream world he could be utterly self-sufficient: for Greene, to dream or to write, was

to enter a private place, into which he could not be followed and in which he could not be controlled: the most personal and perfect home of all.

Conclusion

Greene's fascination with the idea of home endured throughout his writing career: his fictional characters are pilgrims in search of that imagined idyll, desperate above all to find their "place in the world" (B 159), a place where they may indisputably belong. The home they desire is more than a location; it is also, and more fundamentally, a state of being. Marilyn Chandler has written of "the enduring idea that a man's home represents his self,"¹ and Greene's characters seek just such a home: a place for the individual, a home for the mind and soul as much as for the body.

For Greene's characters, home in the form of the domestic is undeniably alluring: they desire a perfect home, the "cottage in a fairy-story" dreamed of by Andrews in The Man Within, where Hansel would at last find rest and happiness with his own Gretel (MW 23). Greene was very much aware that the attractions of domestic security could pull characters back from the brink of a very different—and potentially more adventurous or exciting—life: in his short story, "A Drive in the Country," the female protagonist is drawn back from danger by just such a temptation. She leaves her suicidal boyfriend to die alone in the dark, empty countryside while she returns to her suburban family home, realizing that she at least had never looked for this violent end:

He had always wanted this: the dark field, the weapon in his pocket, the escape and the gamble; but she less honestly had wanted a little of both worlds: irresponsibility and a safe love, danger and a secure heart.

("A Drive in the Country," CS 88)

¹ Marilyn Chandler, Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction, (Oxford: U of California P, 1991) 2.

The girl re-enters the safety of her parents' home and locks the door behind her.

She is, however, exceptionally fortunate to have such a home to which to return; the young men in the story, and in Greene's fiction generally, have instead nothing but a profound sense of exclusion: their distress at their own lack of a place to call home is compounded by the awareness that all around them are other seemingly lucky people who do have just such a place. Greene's protagonists find themselves all too often on the outside looking in. In their youth, and in the earlier years of Greene's career, they may look in with some degree of optimism, as, in The Man Within, Andrews peers through the tiny window of Elizabeth's small cottage and hopes to gain admittance, shelter, even a welcome. But it becomes clear that such hopes are generally vain: fifty years later, in The Human Factor, Greene's double agent Castle finds his world falling apart and has nowhere to go, nobody to turn to. He stands alone in a street and what he sees underlines his own isolation:

At a house across the road he could see through the uncurtained window a family sitting down to a high tea or an early dinner: a father and two teenage children, a boy and a girl, took their seats, the mother entered carrying a dish, and the father seemed to be saying grace, for the children bowed their heads. [. . .] The father made a joke and the mother smiled her approval and the girl winked at the boy, as much as to say 'The old boy's at it again.' Castle went on down the road towards the station—nobody followed him, no one looked at him through a window as he went by, nobody passed him. He felt invisible, set down in a strange world where there were no other human beings to recognize him as one of themselves. (HF 182)

While others can still enjoy the warmth of the stable family home, Castle stands outside, both literally and figuratively. Such happiness for him could not last; the end is in loneliness.

Many of Greene's fictional characters are the genuinely dispossessed, who long to find a home, to gain the rest and security they have barely, if ever, known.

Home in this perfect form, nostalgically reminiscent for Greene of childhood happiness and security, is a refuge from the unhappy realities of the outside world. It is representative of peace, the sense of a united self at rest, “safety, [. . .] an absence of thought” (B 186); it tantalizes the characters with the prospect of being, at long last, invulnerable to the threats of the world at large. They dream of an end to the miseries of their impoverished and troubled lives: “Dona nobis pacem.” Pinkie prays in Brighton Rock (BR 284); but it seems peace is not for people like him. Nor is it available to Raven in A Gun for Sale, perhaps Greene’s ultimate homeless figure: in “the kind of home he’d known, the cold stone stairs, the cracked commanding bell, the tiny punishment cells,” there was no peace, no love and no comfort (GFS 149). Greene himself may well have been, as John Spurling judges, “a rebel against the world that sheltered him,”² but for these characters there is no shelter. Unlike Greene, who, we should remember, had his roots in the British Establishment, Raven and Pinkie have never enjoyed either material or emotional comfort; never having experienced a happy family home, they have no such place even to remember. For these characters, as Harvey Curtis Webster notes: “The novels are never cosy. They all emphasise the loneliness of human beings [. . .].”³ But whereas one might reasonably judge that cosiness is indeed a desirable state and loneliness a condition to be avoided, Greene tends to reverse these judgements, finding genuine loneliness and hardship far more valuable a condition in the pursuit of an authentic existence than mere cosiness. To be sheltered and protected by one’s home may be a false

² Spurling 72.

³ Harvey Curtis Webster, “The World of Graham Greene.” Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations, ed. Robert O. Evans 24.

blessing, because it offers escape from the blows and tests of life that, though painful, are nonetheless a necessary experience.

The longing for a safe and easy home might therefore be taken as a sign of weakness in the individual: a weakness that should be overcome, and a home that should be cast aside. It is all very well wishing for a comfortable, conventional family home, for a life of ease and simplicity, but there is always an awareness in Greene that the very thing that is longed for may not be good for the person who desires it. Even if this family home is ever attained, it may not only fail to satisfy, but it may indeed entrap, constrict, oppress. "It is a routine that makes home," Greene finds (SC 48): the day to day habits of home support the individual, providing a reassuring framework to life, but eventually the sense of reassurance is replaced by a feeling of frustration and boredom with the sameness of life, an overwhelming need to be freed from the very routine which once comforted. Thus the home that is desired is also dreaded. This conflict and contradiction is at the heart of Greene's attitude towards home, and indeed of the general modern estimation of the very concept of home; as Rosemary Marangoly George judges, in modern times, "[h]ome is a place to escape to and a place to escape from."⁴ This is the paradox of home in Greene's fiction: the characters long for domestic bliss, but, attaining it, find it less than truly blissful after all. The domestic setting is not the kind of home that will offer them genuine personal fulfilment.

Such ambivalent attitudes towards home are closely related in Greene's fiction to the sense that the individual himself is fundamentally divided. Men like Andrews in The Man Within, and perhaps also Greene himself, are divided men, two men in

⁴ George 9.

one body: both the stay-at-home and the wandering adventurer, the weak man and the strong, the failure and the success. The two sides are engaged in a constant battle for dominance; the individual can scarcely hope to be at peace as long as this struggle continues. Andrews know himself to be made up of “two persons, the sentimental, bullying, desiring child and another more stern critic” (MW 16). It is the “stern critic” who reminds him that there is more to life than comfort and pleasure, that he must prove his own worth—to himself above all—if he is ever to find true peace. The conflicts between the two opposing halves of the personality could never be resolved in a comfortable home, where he might be warm and well-fed but still mentally starved, still craving something else. The trappings of cosy middle-class domesticity are not, ultimately, enough to satisfy Greene’s characters for a lifetime. They need more. Almost all realise, in time, that the most comfortable and well-appointed house is not automatically a home, even if it contains a wife or husband, children, all that has ever been desired. These are the details of home, not its essence; they sound pleasing in theory, but in practice Greene’s men and women are looking for something else.

Greene’s characters therefore need to seek a home that is less conventional in its form. They need to find their own “area of infinite possibility,” as described by Greene in his autobiography (WE 79). Greene recalls being taken as a young child to see his very first film:

a silent one of course, and the story captured me for ever: Sophie of Kravonia, Anthony Hope’s tale of a kitchenmaid who became a queen. When the kitchenmaid rode with her army through the mountains to attack the rebel general who had tried to wrest the throne from her dying husband, her march was accompanied by one old lady on a piano, but the tock-tock-tock of the untuned wires stayed in my memory when other melodies faded, and so has the grey riding habit of the young queen. The Balkans since then have always

been to me Kravonia—the area of infinite possibility—and it was through the mountains of Kravonia that I drove many summers later and not through the Carpathians of my atlas. That was the kind of book I always wanted to write: the high romantic tale capturing us in youth with hopes that prove illusions, to which we return again in age in order to escape the sad reality. (WE 79)

In his life and his writing Greene sought places and atmospheres in which truly anything might happen; it was often irrelevant even whether what happened was of positive or negative consequence. The important thing was that something was happening, that real life—with all its joys and horrors—was close enough to touch, to participate in.

Such experiences themselves might be short-lived, but their effect on the individual is lasting; what is found in such places is fulfilment, the sense of being truly alive and truly oneself. In comparison, more conventional domestic situations are not only less inspirational, but also no more likely to endure: all security, Greene suggests, is finite and vulnerable. So Henry Pulling is plucked from his quiet suburban existence by his Aunt Augusta for a new (and more stimulating) life abroad, and so, less happily, men like Castle in The Human Factor and Jones in Doctor Fischer of Geneva both lose their happy home lives. Greene reminds us that it is unrealistic, and perhaps even wrong, to expect one home to last a lifetime. His characters are kept moving, in directions they do not necessarily either choose or enjoy. In this his fiction is unfailingly realistic: real life does not treat people gently and does not always respect their right to a settled home; neither, therefore, does Greene. He ensures that the characters, and we, look beyond the traditional images of home, to see that there are other ways of living, both better and worse. Both Greene and his fictional characters seem to believe that life ought to be harder, more challenging, if it is to be worthwhile or meaningful, and that struggle and suffering

are necessary in order to achieve authenticity of self. Home need not, therefore, be a comfortable place: for Greene, home can—and often does—mean discomfort or pain.

“Home” can be found almost anywhere in Greene’s fiction, in the most unexpected times and places, even in an atmosphere or a mood: it is often most likely to be found in particular relationships (even if marriage and children and the suburban house are never part of the equation) wherever those relationships may find their setting: in a house, a bedsit, on the streets . . . Wherever the relationship occurs, that place will be transformed into a home. This is made clear in one of Greene’s earliest novels, Rumour at Nightfall (1931), when two characters, Eulelia Monti and Michael Crane, stand in the street talking, reluctant to part, but with nowhere to go. Eulelia is unwilling to return to her family home: “No, no. This is not my home. My home is with you,” and Crane mocks her statement: “Here. In this street. In the cold” (RN 210). He tells her: “‘There are more comfortable homes.’ She shook her head: ‘This is all I want’” (RN 211). Greene wrote that “[p]eople are made by places [. . .]” (LR 5), but equally, in some sense, places are made by people. It is the inhabitants of any house, any place at all, who make it a home, because a home is not a museum to comfort or fashion or good taste, but a living place. It is the occupants’ vitality that fills the space between the four walls of a mere house; it is their hopes, dreams, fears and disappointments that bring life into a home. To find satisfaction in any home they must first, therefore, look to themselves.

But when exactly can Greene’s characters expect to attain their authentic, personal home, their place of peace? Not too soon, it would seem. Very often in Greene’s work home is a goal, a goal that should not be achieved too hastily. A

home, like a death, is an ending, a resolution to the long-standing dilemmas of life; both home and death are states that are often anticipated both eagerly and fearfully in Greene's fiction. They are not—and should not be—available in the present moment: their time will come. So many of Greene's novels end with a death, and this may be the greatest sense of homecoming that many of the characters will ever experience. While life goes on, there can, of course, be no death, and often no lasting home either. This seemed to be true of Greene's own life, as Norman Sherry writes, recalling Greene's funeral:

I stood in the crowd, as Greene lay in his coffin before our eyes, closed in and boarded down in the dark wood of the casket, and his aloneness struck me. He'd found his final destination, free from despair and doubt—he who had always seemed content without a home, now at home, in what Sir Walter Scott called 'that dark inn, the grave.'⁵

Shirley Hazzard offers a similar viewpoint, remarking of Greene's lifelong, and far from straightforward, obsession with peace: "Anyone who knew him—and he knew himself best of all—was aware that peace was the last thing he desired. It was literally the last thing, synonymous—as often in his fiction—with death."⁶ Thus Greene's life was a continual deferral of peace and rest: like St. Augustine, he said "not yet"—"not yet" to peace, and "not yet" to home. But eventually the deferrals ceased (a deferral, after all, is not the same thing as a rejection) and both Greene and the majority of his characters found, if not the expected home, then at least some form of peace with themselves, a resolution to the difficulties and searches of their lives, a personal homecoming.

⁵ Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. 3, 797.

⁶ Shirley Hazzard, *Greene on Capri: A Memoir* (London: Virago, 2000) 14.

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