

# Figures In Greene's Carpet: *The Power and The Glory to Monsignor Quixote*

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In the patently autobiographical novel *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*, Evelyn Waugh has Mr. Pinfold maintain that “most men harbour the germs of one or two books; all else is professional trickery of which the most daemonic of the masters—Dickens and Balzac even—were flagrantly guilty;” indeed, he envies “painters who are allowed to return to the same theme time and time again, clarifying and enriching until they have done all they can with it.”<sup>1</sup> Graham Greene did not cite Waugh, but he did concede that he might be “a two or three book man.”<sup>2</sup>

The figure in Waugh's carpet—to use the phrase of Henry James, whom both men admired—is obvious even to the casual reader. It is essentially circular in that the hero may learn but is not fundamentally changed.

Greene acknowledged that there might be patterns in his carpet, but he wanted “to

remain unaware of them. Otherwise I think my imagination would dry up.” He did not reread his novels because “I know I would come across all too many repetitions due quite simply to forgetting what I had written before. I've not the slightest wish to have my nose rubbed onto ‘the pattern in the carpet’.”<sup>3</sup>

Since Greene can no longer be bothered by critical meddling, which in any case he regarded as legitimate, I'll discuss the pattern I have found, one drawn from Francis Thompson's “The Hound of Heaven.” I'm thinking not of “the labyrinthian ways,” which furnished the American-imposed title of *The Power and the Glory* that Greene disliked. It is not inapt, but more apropos are these lines, from which I have tried unsuccessfully to remove the theological implications:

Now of that long pursuit  
Comes on at hand the bruit;  
That Voice is round me like a bursting  
sea: “And is thy earth so marred,  
Shattered in shard on shard?”<sup>4</sup>

Many if not most of his novels and entertainments—if Greene's old and intermittently discarded distinction is worth preserving—deal with the theme of pursuit through a marred world, from *The Man Within* through *A Gun for Sale*, *Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory* and its twin *The Confidential Agent* down through *Monsignor Quixote*. Sometimes the pursuit is geographical, across political borders; sometimes it is psychological, as in *The End of the Affair*. In any case, the movement,

1 Waugh, Evelyn. *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1957, 2.

2 Allain, Marie-Françoise. *The Other Man: Conversations with Graham Greene*. Trans. Guido Waldman. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981, 24.

3 Ibid, 23.

4 Thompson, Francis, and Jean Young. *The Hound of Heaven*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1992.,155-159

whether it is eschatological or melodramatic, is linear, toward a definite resolution or conscious irresolution.

Looking at the novels in this way can allow us to deal with the problem that Peter Christensen finds in most criticism of Greene's fiction. It has, he argues, tended to regard novels published after 1973 as "more or less an appendage rather than an integral part of his development."<sup>5</sup> I cannot promise to integrate all of Greene's later novels with his earlier ones, but looking at his 1940 *The Power and the Glory* and the 1982 *Monsignor Quixote* may point the way to a solution. Both are variations of the pursuit/quest pattern. *The Power and the Glory* traces the flight of an unnamed priest, the only one left in the area, through the seedy towns and villages and desolate jungles of southern Mexico as he attempts to function as a dispenser of the sacraments and of God's word, all while avoiding capture and execution by atheistic authorities who regard his actions as treason. A "whisky priest" who has fathered a daughter whom he desperately loves, he has no one to hear his confession even if he could repent the action that produced the child; moreover, and in strict theological terms he commits another mortal sin every time he takes communion at Mass. Twice he almost escapes from the dangerous territory, but both times he is called to minister to someone who is supposedly dying. The second time, he is captured and, just before his execution, feels "like someone who has missed happiness by seconds at an appointed place. He knew now that

at the end there was only one thing that counted—to be a saint."<sup>6</sup>

It could be said that the whisky priest moves from experience, if not to innocence, then to sanctity. In contrast, Greene's monsignor seems to move from innocence, or a holy simplicity, to experience. But on the surface, *Monsignor Quixote* seems to have little in common with the claustrophobic intensity of *The Power and the Glory*. The contrast is largely due to a very different background—the fictional *Don Quixote* and the actual pleasant and leisurely journeys around Spain that Greene took with Father Leopoldo Durán. Created a monsignor on a traveling bishop's whim, Fr. Quixote is enjoined "to go forth like your ancestor Don Quixote on the high roads of the world" and tilt at windmills since that is the way "that Don Quixote found the truth on his deathbed."<sup>7</sup> A character being evicted from his comfortable life sounds like a Waugh novel, and for a time the travels of the Monsignor and his friend the Communist ex-mayor called Sancho, seem to be a series of farcical incidents interspersed by debates about the merits of Communist and Catholic doctrine. But at the end of the novel Monsignor Quixote dons his battle regalia—a purple pechera rather than a barber's basin—and like his fictional ancestor attempts to rescue the Blessed Virgin from the simoniac extortions of village priests. Pursued and injured, he dies after saying a version of the Mass that his pharisaical bishop has forbidden him to perform.

Despite differences in inspiration and tone, the two novels have obvious similarities in pattern and theme, both physical

<sup>5</sup> Christensen, Peter. "The Art of Self-Preservation: Monsignor Quixote's Resistance to Don Quixote," *Essays in Graham Greene: An Annual Review*, 3 (1992), 25-42, 41.

<sup>6</sup> *The Power and the Glory: Text, Background, and Criticism* (hereafter *P&G*), ed. R.W.B. Lewis and Peter J. Conn. New York: Viking, 1972.,284

<sup>7</sup> *Monsignor Quixote* (hereafter *MQ*). New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982, 25. .

and psychological. One can look at the parallels in fairly basic terms by describing what they are—a fairly simple though not unrewarding task—and by attempting to account for the differences between the two and by looking at what had happened to Greene, the Catholic Church, and the world in the more than four decades that elapsed between the writing of the novels.

Most simply, and most obviously, the Monsignor expresses humorous concern about becoming “a whisky priest,” a direct allusion to the earlier novel, although unlike the unnamed fugitive in *The Power and the Glory*, he has no trouble procuring alcohol, including wine, none of which he uses to say Mass. There are a number of less blatant parallels, incidental and structural. The Spanish Monsignor goes to a blue film, deceptively titled “A Maiden’s Prayer,” and finds it funny rather than shocking. The Mexican priest, spending the night in a crowded prison cell, overhears the sounds of sexual pleasure, at first with horror, then with the realization that “*That is beautiful in that corner—to them.*”<sup>8</sup> He is forced to endure the stench from a slop-bucket and asked by an intolerably pious woman to hear her confession. He tells her to “Say an act of contrition . . . and trust God . . . to make allowances.”<sup>9</sup> The Monsignor, after fearing that a mysterious man in a bar, perhaps a secret policeman, is going to execute him, is forced to hear his confession in the lavatory—“a lavatory, a church. What’s the difference?”<sup>10</sup> The man is an undertaker who, like all of his colleagues, removes handles from caskets and reuses them. The Monsignor says, “Do you think God cares

so much about a thing like that? . . . don’t feel so important. Say that you are sorry for your pride and go home.”<sup>11</sup>

Both priests encounter bank robbers. The Mexican’s is real—a murderer—and when the priest returns across the border to administer last rites, he is captured and jailed to await execution. Monsignor Quixote’s robber, whom he helps to escape and who, like the galley slaves freed by Don Quixote, steals some of his clothing, turns out merely to have robbed a convenience store. But his bishop, fearing scandal that would affect the Church’s reputation, has Quixote imprisoned in his room on the grounds that he is, like his literary ancestor, mentally deranged.

Both priests are aware of the distinctions between priests who are self-satisfied and those who are self-sacrificing, and both condemn, the Mexican in himself and the Spaniard in others, pious extortion for religious services that seem to promise salvation. Both encounter conventionally good people who, to adopt Greene’s distinction in *Brighton Rock*, operate in the economy of right and wrong rather than one of good and evil. Both, after their deaths, are replaced, literally or symbolically, by a priest who, in the case of *The Power and the Glory*, carries on the mission of maintaining, against nearly impossible odds, the presence of God in a godless place and, in *Monsignor Quixote*, a monk who came through doubt and Descartes to a Trappist monastery where he upholds the spirit of the law against the letter and the belief in mystery rather than physical proof—perhaps a milder form of what, in *The Power*

8 *P&G*, 176.

9 *Ibid*, 175.

10 *MQ*, 119

11 *Ibid*, 118.

and the Glory, Greene calls "the dark and magical heart of the faith."<sup>12</sup>

On deeper and more complex levels, the most obvious parallel between the two novels can be seen in characters who represent clashing ideologies, the priest and the lieutenant—Greene's "two protagonists," whom he invented for what he called "the only novel I have written to a thesis."<sup>13</sup> And in a 1957 interview with Philip Toynbee<sup>14</sup>, he said, in response to Toynbee's comment that *The Power and the Glory* dealt with "the conflict between church and state in Mexico," that "I see that only as a background of the book. It is really an attempt to understand a permanent religious situation: the function of the priesthood. I was much more interested in the theological point of view than in the political one."<sup>15</sup>

In *The Power and the Glory*, the priest believes that religion offers the hope of peace and plenitude in a harsh and often loveless world, that "pain is part of joy."<sup>16</sup> His nemesis, the Lieutenant of police, has been scarred by his early experience of the Church's disregard for the poor and wants to sweep away all superstitious hope in the hereafter and to hunt down and kill the last priest in the state. Ironically, the two men have much in common. Midway through the novel, the Lieutenant releases the priest, whom he does not recognize, and gives him five pesos. The priest realizes that he has been given "the price of a Mass," and

calls the Lieutenant "a good man."<sup>17</sup> Later, temporarily flush with fees for baptisms and knowing that he is going to betrayal and certain death, the priest gives most of his money to a socialist schoolmaster to buy food and clothing for destitute peons.

As Greene had done in *Brighton Rock*, he implies a contrast between characters with a sense of right and wrong and those with a sense of good and evil. The Lieutenant has the look of a priest or "a theologian going back over the errors of the past to destroy them again"<sup>18</sup> or "a mystic" who "had experienced . . . vacancy—a complete certainty in the existence of a dying, cooling world, of human beings who had evolved from animals for no purpose at all."<sup>19</sup> He is ascetic, with no desire for drink, women, and money, feeling "no sympathy at all with the weakness of the flesh."<sup>20</sup> In the slovenly decrepitude which engulfs all of the other characters, he alone is clean, with a highly polished holster. When surrounded by children admiring his automatic pistol, he knows that he is fighting "to eliminate from their childhood everything which had made him miserable, all that was poor, superstitious, and corrupt . . . . He was quite prepared to make a massacre for their sakes—first the Church and then the foreigner and then the politician—even his own chief would one day have to go. He wanted to begin the world again with them, in a desert."<sup>21</sup> In an odd way he resembles

12 P&G, 208.

13 Greene, Graham. *Ways of Escape: An Autobiography*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980, 87-88.

14 Philip Toynbee interviews Graham Greene on "The Job of the Writer." *The Observer*, 15 September, 1957.

15 P&G, 498.

16 P&G, 94.

17 Ibid, 189.

18 Ibid, 32.

19 Ibid, 33.

20 Ibid, 34.

21 Ibid, 77.

Bendrix in *The End of the Affair*, who, Sarah says, “thinks he hates, and loves, loves all the time—even his enemies,”<sup>22</sup> and as the priest tells him, God’s love “might even look like hate.”<sup>23</sup> The Lieutenant won’t go that far, but he is charitable, even sympathetic, toward the destitute man whom, as already stated, he does not recognize as a priest. And the night before the priest’s execution, he practices one of the corporal works of mercy by giving drink to the thirsty, in this case bootleg brandy—and tries to practice a spiritual work of mercy in comforting the sorrowful by seeking a confessor.

As Greene has admitted, the Lieutenant is constructed as a foil to the priest who defined a vocation as a way to become “rich and proud,”<sup>24</sup> who spoke empty words to pious societies and wished to rise in the hierarchy, who, as “the only priest left in the state . . . thought himself the devil of a fellow carrying God around at the risk of his life; one day there would be a reward . . .” [Ellipsis is Greene’s.]<sup>25</sup> But this pride led him to disregard his duties to fast, pray, and say Mass and instead to succumb to drink and fornication.

The priest thinks that “if there’s ever been a single man in this state damned, then I’m damned too,” adding, “I just want justice.”<sup>26</sup> Earlier he thinks that his first duty is to save his own soul, but for one thing: he cannot repent his sin of fornication because he cannot disavow its result, his daughter,

whom he loves, as he comes to see, as he should love the whole world. Lacking a confessor “to draw his mind slowly down the drab passages which led to horror, grief, and repentance,”<sup>27</sup> he cannot move his self-condemnation for his acknowledged sins “from formula to the fact.”<sup>28</sup>

In later years, Greene said that he had never believed in Hell,<sup>29</sup> but it is obvious that in his Catholic novels his characters needed to in order to reach the paradoxical endings most obvious in *The Power and the Glory* and *The Heart of the Matter*, endings in which the chance of salvation is forced on the reader, victim of a card trick like the whisky priest’s “Fly Away Jack.” In *Brighton Rock*, the priest says that Pinkie has a chance to receive God’s mercy, but Pinkie makes it a much tougher uphill battle for his large-C creator if not for the lower-case one. In *The Power and the Glory*, the chance of salvation is first suggested early in the novel as “The simple ideas of heaven and hell moved in his brain: life without books, without contact with educated men, had peeled away from his memory everything but the simplest outline of the mystery.”<sup>30</sup>

That mystery includes his powers as a priest. As he tells the Lieutenant, it would make no difference if all priests were like him, for he and others “can put God into a man’s mouth” and “can give him God’s pardon.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, he goes to almost

22 Greene, Graham. *The End of the Affair*. Penguin, 1975, 124.

23 Ibid, 269.

24 Ibid, 92. 25 Ibid, 129.

26 Ibid, 269.

27 Ibid, 173.

28 Ibid, 281.

29 Greene, Graham. *Articles of Faith: The Collected Tablet Journalism of Graham Greene*. Ed. Ian Thompson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 128.

30 Ibid, 89.

31 Ibid, 263.

certain death to give that pardon to the dying American bank robber—his double as wanted man. And, though Greene does not use the line from the Gospel of John, his favorite, the relevance is perhaps too obvious for him to quote “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”<sup>32</sup>

Greene contrasts the priest's torturous path toward death and implied sanctity with the treachery piety of the story of Father Juan, perfect from boyhood through the moment of his execution, shouting “Vive El Cristo Rey.” Although the real priest can mumble only something that sounds like “Excuse” (him? his executioners, in imitation of Christ?), in death he becomes part of the succession of martyrs and converts the boy who listened to the story, impatient for the shooting to begin, from admiration for the Lieutenant to a dream of the funeral at which “the dead priest winked at him”<sup>33</sup> to welcoming the new priest and potential next martyr.

The Lieutenant is left with the boy's spittle on his holster, a sense that his life has lost purpose, and a dream of which he can remember nothing “except laughter, laughter all the time, and a long passage in which he could find no door.”<sup>34</sup> Unlike the General who executes the last Pope in Greene's much later story, “The Last Word,” the Lieutenant does not wonder if what the dead man believed was true, but clearly the last word in *The Power and the Glory* belongs to the priest.

*The Power and the Glory* is about faith in God as a key motivation, about the spiritual power of Catholicism against materialist forces, and about the struggle for sanctity against various thorns in the flesh. *Monsignor Quixote*, published 42 years later, presents doubt as more nourishing than certainty; the collusion between ecclesiastical and secular power; and what the American critic Patrick Henry calls “the progressive convergence of the self and the other.”<sup>35</sup> But here the other is not God but another human being—who is, like the Lieutenant, an atheistic materialist, in fact a Communist, and the self is a simple parish priest with no sexual temptations who finds much good in Karl Marx.

While in *The Power and the Glory*, as John Desmond puts it, in the best discussion of the theology of *Monsignor Quixote* I have seen, “the opposition between materialist and redemptive visions is unmeliorated,”<sup>36</sup> the Monsignor “affirms the spirituality of matter.”<sup>37</sup> And Mark Bosco, S.J., who thinks it a “great novel,” sees it as “more a new development—stylistically and thematically—than a mere coda to Greene's celebrated Catholic cycle.”<sup>38</sup>

As these critics have shown, *Monsignor Quixote* is one of Greene's theologically most complex novels, rivaling *The End of the Affair*. However, I share Greene's taste for simplicity over complexity and will focus on his treatment of the spirit versus the letter. As I said earlier, Greene often referred to books in various genres to

32 John 15:13 33 *Articles of Faith*, 300.

34 *Ibid*, 280.

35 Henry, Patrick. “Cervantes, Unamuno, and Graham Greene's *Monsignor Quixote*,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, 23:1 (Spring 1986), 12-23, 13.

36 *Ibid*, 62-63.

37 Desmond, John. “The Heart of (the) Matter: The Mystery of the Real in *Monsignor Quixote*,” *Religion and Literature*, 22:1 (Spring 1990), 59-78, 70.

38 Bosco, Mark. *Graham Greene's Catholic Imagination*. Oxford University Press, 2005, 138, 139.

show the difference between received opinion and the texture of lived experience. In *Monsignor Quixote*, the most rigid example of the letter is Fr. Heribert Jone's *Moral Theology*. Unlike some books cited in other Greene novels, this one is real, described on the Family Life Center International website as "a handbook that condenses moral theology to its conclusions" in "a crystal clear treatment of every conceivable aspect of morality . . . . Jone shows what is a sin and what is not; what is a venial sin and what is a mortal sin . . . . This book's thoroughness and completeness will boggle the mind."<sup>39</sup>

Jone's book certainly boggled the mind of Monsignor Quixote, who likens it to "a book of military regulations,"<sup>40</sup> remarks that most secular priests are "too busy to be moral theologians"<sup>41</sup> and later adds, "moral theology is not the Church."<sup>42</sup> Greene opposes to Jone the Monsignor's "books of chivalry . . . Saint John of the Cross, Saint Teresa, Saint Francis de Sales,"<sup>43</sup> which are to him "all the faith I have and all the hope."<sup>44</sup> St. Francis wrote 800 pages about God's love and never mentioned mortal sin.

The Monsignor's nemesis Fr. Herrera—as clean and precise as the Lieutenant in *The Power and the Glory*—is Jone's chief disciple in the novel. Herrera concedes dismissively that "one accepts the gospels, naturally,"<sup>45</sup> and he prefers Matthew, who mentions Hell fifteen times.

Calling Matthew "the Gospel of fear,"<sup>46</sup> the Monsignor, like Greene, prefers John, who does not mention Hell at all, and although the opening of John's Gospel—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"—had along with Latin been banished from the Mass, the Monsignor still recites it privately.

As the Monsignor travels with his friend Sancho—who like the Lieutenant is mistaken for a priest, and, as the Monsignor says, "perhaps a true Communist is a sort of priest"<sup>47</sup>—he reads *The Communist Manifesto* and realizes that "There are many holy words written which are not in the Bible or the Fathers"<sup>48</sup> and that Marx "was a really good man at heart."<sup>49</sup>

As the novel progresses, both men realize that while their respective books of chivalry can inspire them, the words have often been grotesquely twisted, with the Kremlin and the Roman Curia representing the corruption of the best intentions. The Monsignor dreams of Christ descending triumphantly from the Cross, obliterating all doubt and establishing a world in which "everyone is certain that the same belief is true"<sup>50</sup> and prays that he—and Sancho—will be saved from that kind of belief. In the waking world, the friends spend the night in a brothel, go to a mildly blue film, collude in the escape of a robber, and evade the Guardia. Their adventures and debates of

39 familylifecenter.net.

40 *Articles of Faith*, 82.

41 *Ibid*, 75.

42 *Ibid*, 81.

43 *Ibid*, 39.

44 *Ibid*, 77.

45 *Ibid*, 40.

46 *Ibid*, 67.

47 *Ibid*, 93.

48 *Ibid*, 109.

49 *Ibid*, 107.

50 *Ibid*, 70.

Part I of the novel end with the Monsignor saying, with a laugh, "You are my moral theologian, Sancho."<sup>51</sup>

Part II of the novel, much shorter, deals with the Monsignor's imprisonment by his bishop, who would rather think him deranged than criminal, and his deliverance by Sancho. At the climax of the novel is his most quixotic act, denouncing the profanation of the Virgin's procession by simoniac priests, where he is injured by a swinging censor (perhaps Greene's pun on "censor"). While fleeing the secular authorities—unlike the Mexican the Monsignor is accompanied by his materialist colleague—his beloved car Rocinante crashes, and he falls into delirium. After promising Sancho not a governorship but a kingdom, he goes through a form of the Mass, at the end of which he collapses after putting a phantom Host on Sancho's tongue. Like his double the Lieutenant, Sancho feels uneasy, but, more like Maurice in *The End of the Affair* than the Lieutenant, he fears not that his task is at an end, but whether "the love which he had begun to feel for Father Quixote" can continue—"And to what end?"<sup>52</sup>

At least as instructive as the similarities between *The Power and the Glory* and *Monsignor Quixote* are not just the differences but the complicated and sometimes intellectually torturous reasons for the differences. Behind *The Power and the Glory* lay Greene's awareness of parallels between the persecution of the Church in Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s, especially the execution of Father Pro, and the Elizabethan persecution of Edmund Campion and

his fellow priests. He had wanted to go to Mexico to write about the persecution of the Catholic Church as early as 1936, but the need to support his family made it necessary for him to finish writing *Brighton Rock* and to accept the job of literary editor of *Night and Day*, the distinguished, short-lived magazine that died at the end of 1937, freeing him from "a busy but boring life."<sup>53</sup>

But he was anxious to get out of England. Norman Sherry reported that Greene told his agent, "I don't know how I shall get the vitality to think of another novel unless I can get out of bloody Europe" and thought that Greene desired to escape from "the incessant work, the loss of *Night and Day*, and from living the life of a 'gentleman' author in a 'gentleman's establishment'."<sup>54</sup>

Greene's distaste for England is clear in the opening pages of his travel book *The Lawless Roads*, where he contrasts present suburban England, with its suicides and sordidness, with the people who "had lived here once and died with their feet crossed to show they had returned from a crusade." The present has corrupted the past: a photographer's shop has a "diamonded Elizabethan pane—a genuine pane, but you couldn't believe it because of the Tudor Cafe across the street." Anticipating the trip to Mexico, he thinks, "why Mexico? Did I really expect to find there what I hadn't found here? 'Why, this is hell,' Mephistopheles told Faustus, 'nor am I out of it'."<sup>55</sup>

In Mexico, reading Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, Greene concedes that "The world is all of a piece, of course; it is engaged

51 Ibid, 144.

52 Ibid, 221.

53 Sherry, Norman. *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume I: 1904-1939*. Penguin, 1990, 656.

54 Ibid, 659, 660.

55 Greene, Graham. *Another Mexico* (hereafter *AM*). New York: Viking Compass, 1964. Originally published in England as *The Lawless Roads*, 1939, 6.

everywhere in the same subterranean struggle, lying like a tiny neutral state, with whom no one ever observes his treaties, between the two eternities of pain and—God knows the opposite of pain, not we.” He does see a difference between “quiet and active sectors” of the battle line. But, he adds, “So many years have passed in England since the war began between faith and anarchy; we live in an ugly indifference.”<sup>56</sup>

Except very briefly—in the small region between the debilitating altitude of Mexico City and the claustrophobic tropics, for example—Greene is never comfortable. Fleetinglly aware of “something simple and strange and uncomplicated, a way of life we have hopelessly lost but can never quite forget,”<sup>57</sup> he hates the slovenly, corrupt police and the swaggering pistoleros who hang about the politicians. He hates with equal vigor the world represented by an American woman’s magazine—“it wasn’t evil, it wasn’t anything at all, it was just the drugstore and the Coca-Cola, the hamburger, the graceless, sinless, empty chromium world.”<sup>58</sup>

Greene also hated most of the Mexicans, except the back-country Indians, and almost everything about Mexico. But if in Mexico there “were idolatry and oppression, starvation and casual violence . . . you lived under the shadow of religion—of God or the Devil.”<sup>59</sup> Back in London, he is no more comfortable with England than when

he left. He sees new posters for Air Raid Precautions. Looking at the ugliness of the city, he asks, “How could a world like this end in anything but war?”<sup>60</sup> And at Mass, so different from the ones he attended in Mexico, he thinks, “We do not mortify ourselves. Perhaps we are in need of violence.”<sup>61</sup>

Then a plane flies overhead and everything changes for a moment as people wait to see what will happen and “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.”<sup>62</sup>

In reviewing *The Lawless Roads*, Evelyn Waugh decided that Greene was “an Augustinian Christian, a believer of the dark age of Mediterranean decadence when the barbarians were pressing along the frontiers and the City of God seemed yearly more remote and unattainable . . . Contemplation of the horrible ways in which men exercise their right of choice leads him into something very near a hatred of free-will.”<sup>63</sup> Waugh might have cited, though he did not, Greene’s bilious admission that the buzzards, pervasive in both the travel book and in *The Power and the Glory*, on one occasion “looked domesticated, as if they were going to lay an egg. And I suppose even a bird of prey does sometimes lay an egg.”<sup>64</sup> That seems only part of the natural order, but elsewhere

<sup>56</sup> *AM*, 27.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 207.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 225-6.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 225.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 277.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 278.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 278.

<sup>63</sup> Waugh, Evelyn. *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*. Ed. Donat Gallagher. London: Methuen, 1983, 249.

<sup>64</sup> *AM*, 146.

Greene admits that "Nature appalls me when unemployed or unemployable."<sup>65</sup>

The trip to Mexico and political events in Europe did have more positive effects on Greene and, more important for his readers, on his writing. Until 1938, he said, "My professional life and my religion were contained in quite separate compartments, and I had no ambition to bring them together." That changed because "of the socialist persecution of religion in Mexico, and . . . General Franco's attack on Republican Spain," both of which "inextricably involved religion in contemporary life," though, one might think, in opposite ways. As a result, Greene came to feel, "Catholicism was no longer primarily symbolic, a ceremony at an altar" but "closer now to death in the afternoon."<sup>66</sup>

In this vein, Greene quotes a surviving Mexican priest as saying of Pro and the other martyrs, "The Church needed blood . . . It always needs blood."<sup>67</sup> At least as important here—and for years to come—is Greene's sense that "Catholicism...had to rediscover the technique of revolution"<sup>68</sup> because "the only body in the world today which consistently—and sometimes successfully—opposes the totalitarian State is the Catholic Church."<sup>69</sup>

*The Lawless Roads* can be profitably read as a sourcebook for characters, incidents, and mood in *The Power and the Glory*, as Greene made quite clear. Perhaps most important not only for these two books but for *Monsignor Quixote* and perhaps for many others, if I live long enough and no one beats me to the idea, is Greene's use of intertextual references, if the term can be

stretched to include generic and imaginary as well as real texts. *The Lawless Roads* frequently alludes to Trollope's novels and to other literary and journalistic texts. In *The Power and the Glory*, the sentimental saint's life counterpoints the whisky priest's struggles and ends with the martyr's execution just after the priest is shot. *Monsignor Quixote* has a whole library of references, which I shall examine later, not only to Cervantes' novel but to theology and casuistry from the Gospel of John to *The Communist Manifesto*. Greene's use of these counter-texts is obviously very complex, but at present I can only simplify and say that he uses them to represent conventional thought against which his characters can react—or, to put it even more simply, the dead letter against the living and often suffering spirit.

To move from the theoretical to the biographical and historical, the differences between the two novels can be partly explained by forty years of very complicated life, and though Greene did not do a total about-face, his emphasis did shift. Even in 1937, he commented that some novels he was reviewing for the *Tablet* were "concerned with social justice, and they all avoid the merely political approach. The trouble is: what approach can you have but the political or the religious?"<sup>70</sup> Into the 1950s, he emphasized the religious approach in his fiction and nonfiction. He had come back from Mexico with a stronger emotional connection to the Catholic faith, which before then had been more intellectual. Then, paradoxically—how else with Greene?—his

65 Ibid, 64.

66 *Ways of Escape*, 78-9.

67 *AM*, 260.

68 Ibid, 20-1.

69 Ibid, 80.

70 *Articles of Faith*, 105.

affair with Catherine Walston led to a deeper faith. In 1952, the year after their relationship was reflected in *The End of the Affair*, he wrote to her, "I would still stay in the fringes of the church if you left me—perhaps not even in the fringes, for almost all my *Catholic* writing has been done since I knew you and I have certainly been to the sacraments far more often in our five years than in the previous eight."<sup>71</sup>

Although the definitive break with Walston does not seem to have come until 1958, Greene had moved by 1955 from the religious to the political approach in *The Quiet American* and, with the arguable exception of *A Burnt-Out Case* and the obvious exception of *Monsignor Quixote*, for the rest of his career. This may be in part due to the restlessness which took him to Africa, Vietnam, and South America and in part to his increasing interest in and admiration for Marxist-nationalist-leftist leaders like Ho Chi Min, Fidel Castro, and Omar Torrijos.

By this time, Greene had begun to hope for a rapprochement between Catholics and Communists. The roots of this hope may be seen in 1941, when he maintained that "Conservatism and Catholicism should be as impossible bed-fellows as Catholicism and National Socialism."<sup>72</sup> By the 1960s, partly in light of the Second Vatican Council, he had begun to see hope for a truly revolutionary Church in the liberation theology of some Catholic activists in South America, and almost twenty years before he wrote *Monsignor Quixote* he saw in Cuba hope that "Marxism here seems to be shedding much of its nineteenth-century philosophy"

and opening "a first breach in Marxist philosophy (not in Marxist economics)" and quoted Fidel Castro's view that "a revolutionary can have a religious belief. The Revolution does not force men, it does not intrude into their personal beliefs. It does not exclude anyone."<sup>73</sup> And in 1987, in a speech given in the Kremlin, he asserted that "There is no division in our thoughts between Catholics—Roman Catholics—and Communists."<sup>74</sup> As I said in my review of *Reflections*, this would have come as a surprise to many of my Hungarian friends.

These views may have overlapped with what seems to have been a waning of his faith or at least his practice of the rituals of the faith. In *A Sort of Life* he talked about Confession: ". . . we may become hardened to the formulas . . . and skeptical about ourselves: we may only half-intend to keep the promises we make, until continual failure or the circumstances of our private life finally make it impossible to make any promises at all and 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 longer full citizens."<sup>75</sup> This passage echoes the confession of the title character in "A Visit to Morin," first published in 1957. The elderly author, prominently known as a Catholic but no longer practicing, tells his visitor that "Perhaps I wrote away my belief" in the course of "twenty years and fifteen books"—Greene's years as a practicing novelist and the right number of books, if one discounts the suppressed *The Name of Action* and *Rumour at Nightfall*. Having excommunicated himself because he could

71 Sherry, Norman. *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume II: 1939-1955*. New York: Viking, 1995, 502. 72 Greene, Graham. *Collected Essays*. Penguin, 1970, 262.

73 *Reflections*, 218, 219

74 *Ibid*, 316.

75 Greene, Graham. *A Sort of Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971, 169.

not repent his love of a mistress, Morin cannot return to the Church because "I had cut myself off for twenty years from grace and my belief withered as the priests said it would . . . I know the reason why I don't believe and the reason is—the Church is true and what she taught me is true." He refuses to return to the sacraments because "my lack of belief is an argument for the Church. But if I returned and they failed me, then I would really be a man without faith . . ." <sup>76</sup>

Perhaps there was also some influence from what the younger Catholic novelist David Lodge called the disappearance of Hell in the 1960s. Before that, Lodge says in *How Far Can You Go?* "the whole system of religious authority and obedience in which [his characters] had been brought up, binding the Church together in a pyramid of which the base was the laity and the apex the Pope, depended on the fear of Hell as its ultimate sanction." <sup>77</sup> The key question—one which Greene raises in *Monsignor Quixote* and in his 1989 interview—was birth control because "it compelled thoughtful Catholics to re-examine and redefine their views on fundamental issues: the relationship between authority and conscience, between the religious and lay vocations, between flesh and spirit." <sup>78</sup> As I noted earlier, Greene says in the 1989 interview that "I never *have* believed in Hell;" <sup>79</sup> he is very uncertain about heaven; he finds it harder to believe in God but retains, rather than belief in dogmas, a kind of faith as a Catholic agnostic.

As Greene gained hope from *perestroika*, he became less attached to the Church and began to lose hope in the Church as a potentially revolutionary force after the election of Pope John Paul II. He compared Gorbachev to John XXIII and John Paul II to Ronald Reagan—both of the latter lacked a healthy sense of doubt—in a 1989 interview. And the travels in Spain with Fr. Leopoldo Durán in the years surrounding the writing of *Monsignor Quixote* may have given Greene a fuller sense of the ways in which the Church colluded with the Franco regime, which he never ceased to criticize. He also criticized members of the Catholic hierarchy in America for acting as "the voice of the Cold War." <sup>80</sup> And as Yvonne Cloetta said, "religion belonged to a past he wanted to forget, whereas politics had to do with the present." <sup>81</sup>

But less than ten years after Greene met Cloetta, he sought the acquaintance of Fr. Durán, his traveling companion in Spain, a kind of Boswell, and if not a spiritual advisor, a confessor (though in 1989 Greene said that at eighty-five "I've nothing much to confess") <sup>82</sup> who administered the last sacraments to Greene on his deathbed. This seems an unlikely friendship even judging from Durán's account. Durán staunchly supported Franco as "a discerning man [who] brought recovery to the country" and believed that Greene "never understood Franco's political and spiritual ideology;" <sup>83</sup> thought "the Guardia Civil stand for all that is honourable and orderly

<sup>76</sup> Greene, Graham. *Collected Stories*. Penguin, 1986. 225, 227.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 118.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

<sup>79</sup> *Articles of Faith*, 128.

<sup>80</sup> *Reflections*. Ed. Judith Adamson. New York: Reinhardt, 1990, 219.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 95.

<sup>82</sup> *Articles*, 126.

<sup>83</sup> Durán, Leopoldo. *Graham Greene: An Intimate Portrait by His Closest Friend and Confidant* (trans Euan Cameron. Harper: SanFrancisco, 1994, 78, 126.

in Spain;<sup>84</sup> regarded Monsignor Quixote's bishop, whom Greene thought "Hell," "a decent man;"<sup>85</sup> disliked many of the enemies of Opus Dei; and thought that he had convinced Greene to give a positive view of the "Mexicans" buying the favors of the Church near the end of the novel.

Given these differences, it seems odd that the men shared jokes—about the Trinity being represented by two and a half, later three, bottles of wine—and more serious views, as when Fr. Durán's "I do not believe in God. I touch him" is given to Monsignor Quixote. Marx's distinction between tragedy and farce is not quite accurate, but *Monsignor Quixote* represents the comic side of Greene that emerged from beneath the "Augustinian Christian" that Waugh saw in the Thirties. Perhaps Greene's lack of belief in Hell—and in the Monsignor's lack of belief—allowed him to relax more than a little. The fact that by the 1970s Greene was comparatively wealthy may also have had something to do with his mood—not to speak of the many bottles of wine that, like the Monsignor and Sancho, he and Fr. Durán shared. The novel that resulted provides little physical context and very little psychological context for the characters, perhaps in order to allow Greene to concentrate on the theological issues raised in the dialogues between the Monsignor and Sancho.

What does remain consistent from 1940 to 1982 is Greene's attraction to mystery, whether theological or a broader hunger for the irrational; his distaste for bourgeois

society, whether in its commercial or its stuffy manifestations in religious ceremonies; and, as Yvonne Cloetta put it, Greene's identification with the weak and oppressed against any kind of power, civil or ecclesiastical. As he said in 'The Virtue of Disloyalty,' the writer "stands for the victims, and the victims change."<sup>86</sup> In his books about Mexico, he focused on the Church Suffering and in the travel book sporadically hoped to see the rise of the Church Militant. By the late 1970s, aware that the current Pope was not going to live up to the promises of the Second Vatican Council, allegiance to the Church Militant became less and less possible, and he and the Monsignor turned from the bureaucracy represented by the Curia to a faith—much stronger than mere belief—in the mystery at the heart of Christianity.

Thus, even as his relation to the Church grew more problematic and he changed his label of himself from "a novelist who happens to be a Catholic" to "Catholic agnostic," he never quite abjured his faith. More than forty years before his death, he maintained that his Catholicism "would present me with grave problems as a writer if I were not saved by my disloyalty. If my conscience were as acute as M. Mauriac's . . . I could not write a line" and Greene took comfort in the fact that "the personal morality of an individual is seldom identical with the morality of the group to which he belongs."<sup>87</sup> To adapt George Orwell's line, some moralities are more individual than others. Robert Browning's "Bishop Blougram's Apology," from which Greene

84 Ibid, 218.

85 Ibid, 218.

86 Cloetta, Yvonne. *In Search of a Beginning: My Life with Graham Greene*, as told to Marie Françoise Allain, trans. Euan Cameron. Bloomsbury, 2005., 269.

87 *Why Do I Write: An Exchange of Views between Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene, & V. S. Pritchett*. London: Percival Marshall, 1948, 31, 32.

drew a favorite line, provides a fitting conclusion for the discussion of *The Power and the Glory* and *Monsignor Quixote*—and a not unsuitable way of summing up Greene's view of himself and certainly our response to him:

Our interest's on the dangerous edge  
of things.  
The honest thief, the tender murderer,  
The superstitious atheist, demi-rep  
That loves and saves her soul in new  
French books—  
We watch while these  
in equilibrium keep  
The giddy line midway: one step  
aside,  
They're classed and done with.

Greene may have wavered from time to time, but he never quite took the final step over that edge.

**Robert Murray Davis**, professor emeritus, University of Oklahoma, has published extensively on Evelyn Waugh, including *Evelyn Waugh, Writer* and *Brideshead Revisited: The Past Redeemed*, and other 1930s writers; on the literature and culture of the American West; and on post-Communist writing in Central Europe. His creative nonfiction includes three volumes of memoir, two volumes of essays, and a book of advice for middle-aged divorced men. He has also published several books of poems. He has lectured in ten countries besides the USA, and his writing has been translated into eight languages. Since 2002, he has lived on the outskirts of Phoenix, Arizona, and is co-editing *Brideshead Revisited* for the *Complete Works of Evelyn Waugh*, to be published by Oxford University Press.