

“All Writers Are Equal but Some Writers Are More Equal Than Others:” Some Reflections On Links and Contrasts Between Graham Greene and George Orwell

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The title of this paper is somewhat frivolous and of course indebted to, and a variation on, one of Orwell’s immortal slogans in *Animal Farm*. Yet all writers *are* equal in the sense that all of us are potential writers with stories to tell and, at the point of entry, i.e. the blank page or blank screen staring at you, we are all equal. It is at that point, though, that *equality* ends and *quality* starts. There are two relevant quotations I would like to cite here.

Firstly, from Greene’s introduction to a book by the brother of the actor Charles Laughton, Tom Laughton, called *Pavilions by the Sea: The Memoirs of a Hotel-Keeper* (1977), where Greene writes “Rashly I encouraged him to write a book—rashly, because that hackneyed phrase everyone has one book inside him is deceptive and

totally untrue. Everyone has the material in his memories for many books, but that is not the same thing at all.” Secondly, at the end of “Fielding and Sterne,” Greene quotes T.S. Eliot: “At the moment when one writes . . . one is what one is, and the damage of a lifetime . . . cannot be repaired at the moment of composition.”

In *Speaking to Each Other, Volume Two* (1970), Richard Hoggart said of Orwell that “he was one of those writers who *are* what they write,” and I think Greene was the same. He and Orwell did not just write for a living; they lived to write. I think one of the reasons that both of them were resistant for a long time to the idea of a biography—and it is curious that they should share one biographer, Michael Sheldon—was that both felt that their books told more about them than an account of their lives would. And what made them “more equal” than most other writers of the last century was their ability to cross the cultural divide: to write in a manner that commanded the attention and study of the academic community—for I would guess that collectively, the number of books written about Greene and Orwell would total well over one hundred—but to write also in a manner that was accessible to a mass readership and has entered the public consciousness. Think only of Orwellian phrases and concepts like “Big Brother” and “Room 101” from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and how they have been used and abused and what they now portend. In Greene’s case, hardly a week goes by without coming across some reference to a Greene-like phrase—“Our Man in somewhere-or-other,” or “a quiet American.” Even Peter Mandelson lifted the title of “The Third Man” for his political memoirs, presumably in the full knowledge that the central theme of Greene’s screenplay is betrayal.

They were born within a year or so of each other—Orwell in 1903 and Greene in 1904—which meant that, when they came to artistic maturity more or less at the same time, the mid 1930s, they were essentially reacting to the same set of social and political circumstances in what was a vital decade for both men personally, politically, and aesthetically. Orwell, of course, died at a much younger age than Greene, but one of the reasons that their work transcends their times is that both were unusually prophetic writers, not simply in the sense that they anticipated the future but that they were novelist/prophets: they wrote books with a strong moral sense, they wrote novels of warning.

I find that there are links both trivial and significant between the two writers. They were both very tall. Greene was well over six feet and Orwell was six foot three inches with size twelve feet. How significant that is to their personalities as writers would be difficult to say, though Orwell did actually comment that one of its consequences for him was that to see what was in front of his nose was a constant struggle. I would say that the essence of his writing credo is there: to look beyond the obvious.

They both had blue eyes. Orwell had sea-blue eyes; Greene's blue eyes were, to a lot of people, his most striking physical feature. Apparently they struck terror into Norman Sherry; they fascinated Stravinsky, when the two men met; and in Paul Theroux's novel *Picture Palace* (1978), in which Greene makes an appearance, Greene's eyes are said to give the impression "of a creature who can see in the dark . . . they gave away nothing but this warning of indestructible certainty." In his autobiography, Greene says one of his favorite childhood games was hide-and-seek in the dark, and now we know

why: he had an unfair advantage. More fundamentally, piercing perception into the dark recesses of the human psyche was to be a prime characteristic of his writing.

They also share biographical coincidences. Their professional names differed from their birth names. George Orwell's "real" name was Eric Blair and the change of name was a conscious determination to take on a change of identity and, as it were, reject his heritage and upbringing. He disliked the name "Blair" and chose "Orwell" after the name of a river in Suffolk. He chose "George" as his first name because it sounded very English, he thought, and also he hated the name "Eric": he said he always had the feeling that people grew into their names, and, as he did not want to grow into an "Eric," he decided to do something about it.

Graham Greene was born Henry Graham Greene. I am not sure at what point he became "Graham" but I have always thought that "Graham Greene" is a wonderful name for a novelist, because it is so strong and alliterative. Intriguingly, Greene once slipped back into his original identity calling himself "Henry Graham" in his cameo as an insurance executive in Francois Truffaut's film, *Day for Night* (1973), a sort of practical joke on Truffaut who didn't immediately recognize him.

Another odd coincidence: on different occasions they were both treated by the same physician, Dr. Andrew Morland, a consultant at University College, London, who was a specialist in tuberculosis and who had treated D.H. Lawrence in his final illness as he was also to do with George Orwell. Morland was a very cultured and highly respected man. When he died in 1957 it was said of him in the *British Medical Journal*: "He had a strange power to unify antagonisms, to reconcile contradiction

and to merge thought into action He was a good physician and a good man.” Substitute “writer” for “physician” and that could almost serve as an obituary for both Orwell and Greene.

On a more serious note, one finds similarities of literary motivation. In 1947 George Orwell wrote an essay entitled “Why I Write,” and in 1948 Graham Greene participated in a published work entitled *Why Do I Write? An Exchange of Views Between Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene and V.S. Pritchett*. There are certain passages in the Orwell essay about his literary motivation that reveal striking parallels between his and Greene’s writing inspiration and personality. Early on in the essay Orwell wrote of his “lonely child’s habit of making up stories” and sensed that his “literary ambitions were mixed up with the feeling of being isolated I knew I had a facility with words and . . . I felt this created a sort of private world in which I could get my own back for my failure in everyday life.”

There are two more things relevant to Greene’s motivation for writing than anything he himself says in *Why Do I Write?*, which give his thoughts on the relationship between writer and society. The writer, he says, “should accept no special privileges from the State” and about the relationship between literature and morality, “Literature has nothing to do with edification . . . a novelist must tell the truth as he sees it . . . literature presents the personal morality of an individual and that is seldom identical to the morality of the group.” He begins to go deeper into his literary motivation in *A Sort of Life*, which turns out to be remarkably similar to Orwell’s view.

When Orwell refers to writing as a way of “getting my own back,” that phrase would undoubtedly have struck a chord

with Greene. In his 1939 essay “Man Made Angry,” Greene quotes with approval that statement of Paul Gauguin, “Life being what it is, one dreams of revenge.” Some of his fiction serves as a means of paying off old scores—what the psychiatrist Edmund Bergler, in his book *The Writer and Psychoanalysis* (1950), called “injustice collecting.” Bergler’s definition of a writer was “a person who tries to solve an inner conflict through the sublimatory medium of writing.” That seems suggestive of what both Greene and Orwell were seeking to achieve.

Connected with this are two matters that Orwell mentions and again which might also apply to Greene: his childhood feeling of being, as Orwell put it, “isolated and undervalued” and his reference to his unpopularity at school. In Greene’s case this similarly perceived “unpopularity” at school arose from being the son of the headmaster and the bullying he received at the hands of two fellow pupils whom he referred to in his autobiography as Carter and Watson. As part of Greene’s avenger strategy when he became a writer—and he had a particular interest in Jacobean Revenge tragedy—Carter would turn up in various unsavory guises: he is explicitly referred to in Greene’s introduction to Marjorie Bowen’s novel, *The Viper of Milan*, as having the same “genius for evil” as the novel’s villain, Visconti; it is the name of the intended assassin in *Our Man in Havana* whom the hero will kill. Yet there is an extraordinary moment in *A Sort of Life* when Greene recalls running into Watson by chance in Kuala Lumpur in 1951 and being quite disarmed by Watson’s recollection of their school days and how inseparable the three of them had been. Like Gauguin, he had been dreaming of revenge all these years and planning to

humiliate them in public, only to find the reunion a total anti-climax because Watson is nostalgic and Carter is apparently now dead. Actually, Norman Sherry was to discover that Carter was not dead at all and did not die until 1971, the year *A Sort of Life* was published.

The key is Greene's reflection on this encounter and its meaning in relation to his writing:

I wondered all the way back to the hotel if I would ever have written a book had it not been for Watson and the dead Carter, if those years of humiliation had not given me an *excessive* [my emphasis] desire to prove I was good at something, however long the effort might prove.

I have always been struck by the use of the word "excessive" there, as if Greene knew that this might be an over-reaction to this childhood trauma, as if it provided the spur for writing rather than the reason, that the trauma served a particular need. I do think it signals Greene's hypersensitivity at this stage of his life, and how writing came to his rescue in the way it did for Orwell too. In both cases, writing became inextricably bound up with their self-esteem: in both cases it was when they were writing that they felt completely themselves. A mutual friend, Michael Meyer wrote: "Every good writer I know hates the actual process of writing . . . Orwell did, so does Greene. I know one or two bad ones who enjoy it." That greatest of all Hollywood screenwriters, Billy Wilder, said the same thing: "Show me a writer who enjoys writing and I will show you a bad writer. This does not mean that every writer who doesn't enjoy writing is a good writer . . ." Towards the end of "Why I Write," Orwell says: "Writing a book

is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven on by a demon whom one can neither resist nor understand." Orwell and Greene wrote not out of pleasure, but out of necessity: it was in their veins. When asked by a television interviewer in Moscow in 1987 what made him write, Greene replied: "I don't know. It's like an illness. It's like a boil on one's cheek and at a certain moment you feel you have to scratch it off. Life would be impossible for me if I knew that I would never write another book."

There are two career similarities. Both of them, at different stages in their life and for different lengths of service, were policemen, which, given the instinctive anti-authoritarianism of both men, is remarkable. Of course, Orwell's anti-authoritarianism actually stemmed from his experience as a policeman for six years in the Indian Imperial Service in Burma, and his growing hostility to Imperialism in all its forms.

This is memorably expressed in "Shooting an Elephant," which is an incident that comes to symbolize for him the futility of Empire, when the man turns tyrant it is his own freedom he destroys and ends with his typically honest reflection that he had only done it to avoid looking a fool. Greene had become a Special Constable for a few months in 1926 during the General Strike, which was completely out of character in terms of his later political sympathies, but I have sometimes wondered whether the experience fed into his later work, as it did with Orwell, and gave him a different slant, for example, on his portrayal of the Lieutenant in *The Power and the Glory*, who is a very interesting character and quite sympathetically observed, as if Greene saw in him something of his own younger, more conservative, self.

I will pass over the fact that they were both members of the Independent Labour Party in the 1930s and were both employed in the Ministry of Information in the 1940s, and they were both film critics for a while. On the surface, this highlights their differences. Although both of them were ahead of their time in writing seriously about popular culture, Orwell's approach was essentially sociological whereas Greene's was more aesthetic. Orwell much preferred book reviewing to film reviewing: he hated having to tramp to a preview theatre to see the film and then attend a reception afterwards with the makers or distributors where, as he put it, "you are expected to sell your soul for a glass of inferior sherry." Greene would never sell his soul for an inferior sherry, and he quite liked getting out of the house and postponing the problems he was having with his current novel. He really appreciated the cinema, delighted in its mass appeal, and wrote about it better than any other film critic of the time.

Interestingly, though, their tastes coincided in one particular area: they both liked Charlie Chaplin. During his twenty-six-week stint as a film critic for *Time and Tide*, Orwell raved about *The Great Dictator*, the film in which Chaplin satirized Hitler and which was controversial at the time because America was not yet in the war. In 1940, filmmakers in Hollywood were under great pressure to refrain from attacking the Fascist threat in Europe. Chaplin also exerted a great influence on Orwell: indeed both *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* owe a great deal to the example set by Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*. The satirical vein that Orwell adopts for the first time in *Animal Farm* has definite similarities with *The Great Dictator*. Chaplin is wiser than the intellectuals, Orwell said, "just as

animals are wiser than men." Perhaps the germ of the idea for *Animal Farm* starts there. In the Chaplin film, Hinkel becomes Hitler and Napolini/Mussolini; in Orwell, Snowball/Trotsky, Napoleon/Stalin, etc.

Confusion of identity closes both works. Chaplin's ferocious attack on totalitarianism and the cult of The Great Leader anticipates *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as do numerous details of the film: countries called Tomania and Bacteria in Chaplin are re-named Oceania and Eurasia in Orwell; Chaplin's state ordered "Happy Hour" in *The Great Dictator*, which is transformed into Orwell's "Hate Week" in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

I think what confirms this connection for me finally is the most contentious aspect of the film, which then and now divided the critics but which Orwell deeply admired: namely, the film's final speech, when Chaplin departs from the Tramp persona for the last time and for the first time speaks to us in his own voice, urging the common people to unite in the name of democracy, "to fight for a new world—a decent world that will give men a chance to work—that will give youth a future—and old age a security." The speech is quoted in full in Chaplin's autobiography. The language Chaplin uses is very similar to the kind of language Orwell uses in his essay "Looking Back on the Spanish War," written in 1943, in which he asks "Shall people be allowed to live the decent, fully human life which is now technically achievable, or shan't they?" Orwell was deeply moved by this film, and its style, tone, and ideas were profoundly influential, I believe, in shaping Orwell's approach to *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. So, even though their approaches to cinema were miles apart, Greene and Orwell both found something in Chaplin to which they could respond in the enrichment of their art.

About half-way through his essay “Why I Write,” Orwell becomes more specific about his writing intentions, which in turn clarifies for him where he had previously been going wrong and the essential ingredient his work had lacked; and Greene had a similar revelation that would change the direction of his writing in a significant way. For Orwell, the turning-point was the Spanish Civil War. “Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936,” he writes, “has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it . . . What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art.” And at the end of the essay, he underlines the point: “Looking back through my work, I see that it is invariably where I lacked a political purpose that I wrote lifeless books and was betrayed into purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives, and humbug generally.” Just as Greene was to suppress his early novels, *The Name of Action* and *Rumour at Nightfall*, it is possible that Orwell, if he had lived long enough to supervise a collected edition, would have done the same and omitted *The Clergyman’s Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*.

Just as politics came to Orwell’s rescue and helped to define his distinctiveness as a writer, in Greene’s case it was the cinema and Catholicism. In the *Arena* documentary on Greene in 1993, Anthony Burgess claimed that Greene had it in him to be a great writer but that he had sold out and become merely a good one; that he had made a Faustian pact with commerce and betrayed his talent. In earlier works like *It’s A Battlefield* and *England Made Me*, Burgess argued, Greene was reaching for greatness through wrestling with

significant social themes in an advanced experimental style, but he sold out to the commercial blandishments of the thriller, which could be turned profitably into movies, and which Greene coated with Catholicism, “for sensational effect.” “He could have been a great novelist,” Burgess said, “but opted to be a good one—and this was a sin,” which, Burgess implied, might have been the attraction.

My own view is more or less the diametrical opposite of Burgess’s. Works like *It’s a Battlefield* and *England Made Me* demonstrate to me that Greene had not yet found his voice. He dabbles with modernist effects in *England Made Me* more out of a sense of literary duty than with any great enthusiasm. If he had continued along the path that Burgess prescribed, he would have remained a good writer in an accomplished but relatively impersonal vein. He became an exceptional writer when he came upon the moral, emotional and narrative terrain that was his alone—Greenland, if you will, though he hated the term—and when he found the style that could unlock all his gifts as a novelist. The cinema vitalized his style and Catholicism deepened his themes; the turning-point came roughly fifty pages into *Brighton Rock* in which a crime story about right and wrong moves into a spiritual allegory about Good and Evil and a hoodlum’s struggle against the law and rival gangs turns into the story of a lost soul wrestling with God and the Devil.

What did they think of each other? A mutual friend, Michael Meyer had introduced them and they had all met at *Rules* restaurant some time in 1947, and apparently had got on well; Meyer’s only disappointment was that they talked more about politics than literature. It led to further meetings which were conducted on

friendly terms. They were very different personalities, though, and it would be fair to say that they were not unconditional admirers of each other's work. Greene did like *Animal Farm* and wrote a favorable review of it in the *Evening Standard*, and indeed recommend it as a possible film subject for Walt Disney—"But is it perhaps a little too real for him?" he wondered. Greene not only liked it but stood up for it when the Ministry of Information, which had received a copy, took a dim view of the satire. Apparently one leading official complained to Orwell, "Couldn't you have made the leaders some other animal than pigs?" That did not bother Greene, because he had a soft spot for pigs, but his championing of the book is interesting because it is a reminder that, incredible as it might seem today, *Animal Farm* had a great deal of trouble getting published. T.S. Eliot had turned it down on behalf of Faber, essentially for political reasons. Greene also thought that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was very good, "except the sex part," he said. "That's ham."

Orwell's most extended critique of Greene came in a rather notorious review he wrote of *The Heart of the Matter* for *The New Yorker*. It is a fascinating piece because it really does highlight fundamental differences of outlook between the two men, however many other things they might have agreed on. In fairness, it is worth noting that Orwell might have felt a bit guilty about the review because he said to a mutual acquaintance, Anthony Powell, "If you happen to see Graham Greene, could you break the news to him that I have written a very bad review of his novel for *The New Yorker*?" Whether the advance warning was a sign of regret, or to cushion the blow, or to encourage Greene to cancel his subscription to *The New Yorker*,

is unclear; and it is likely that Greene was unconcerned because adverse criticism seemed not to bother him and because the book had been a huge seller and made him financially secure as a writer for the first time. Coincidentally the same thing was to happen to Orwell the following year with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, so at least he had a taste of success before his death in 1950: it is astonishing to think that even a classic like *Homage to Catalonia* had only sold 800 copies by the time Orwell died.

Orwell's review is witty, well written, combative, and defiantly prejudiced but with some acute observations. His main objection seems to be basically that it is not *Burmese Days*, i.e., that it does not square with Orwell's own experience of serving as a policeman in a colonialist situation and community. Consequently, he finds the plot "ridiculous," and because Greene does not really address racial tensions, which would have been a dominant emotion in that community, the setting becomes irrelevant: "the whole thing might as well be happening in a London suburb," he writes. Orwell also cannot understand the hero Scobie because he seldom seems to think about his work and hardly ever about the war, even though it is 1942. "All he is interested in," writes Orwell, "is his own progress towards damnation." Given that this is the main focus of the novel, it seems fairly reasonable; and as Henry James might say, one must surely allow the author his basic idea—one's only criticism should be directed towards what he has done with it.

Orwell was a marvelous critic when he was on a writer's wavelength, as in his magnificent essay on Dickens. But in *The Heart of the Matter* he underestimates the skill and importance of Greene's evocation of the setting; he also underestimates the

colonialist theme; it is not emphasized but is nevertheless there. In *The Art of Fiction* (1994), David Lodge has written a masterly analysis of the opening of the novel, in which he teases out some of the undercurrents of colonialist prejudice embedded in the style; he suggests that even the title of the novel might be a conscious allusion to one of the most devastating critiques of European colonialist exploitation in literature, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Probably the most provocative part of the review, though, is his commentary on the novel's Catholicism. Orwell was brought up in a Catholic school, which does not seem to have been a happy experience and no doubt colors his response. He dislikes what he calls a "sort of snobbishness" in Greene's attitude, that, as Orwell interprets it, "it's spiritually higher to be an erring Catholic than a virtuous pagan" and that, as he puts it, "ordinary human decency is of no value." It is intriguing that the word "decent" or "decency"—which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "generally accepted standards of behavior and morality or propriety"—is a word that Orwell returns to again and again, whereas the word seems to be completely absent in Greene—I cannot recall an occasion when he ever uses it.

Individual morality interested Greene more than general morality and conformity to accepted standards of behavior interested him not at all. Orwell goes on: "Hell is a sort of high-class night-club, entry to which is reserved for Catholics only, since the non-Catholics are too ignorant to be held guilty." *The Power and the Glory* excepted because at least the struggle "between the worldly and the unworldly values," as Orwell puts it, is split between two characters, and makes for an

interesting character conflict and contrast between the priest and the Lieutenant. But he finds *Brighton Rock* incredible because, he says, "it presupposes that the most brutishly stupid person can, merely by being brought up a Catholic, be capable of great intellectual subtlety." I would not have thought Pinkie's upbringing was a particularly good advertisement for Catholicism. Orwell sometimes does have a somewhat prescriptive, monolithic view of character. Greene never found contradictions in character at all surprising, drawn as he was to "the honest thief" and "the tender murderer" that Robert Browning wrote about.

But for Orwell, those kinds of character ambivalences do not seem to register. "Scobie is incredible," he concludes, "because the two halves of him don't fit together. If he were capable of getting into the kind of mess that is described, he would have got into it years ago." One asks why? Orwell continues, "If he believed in Hell, he would not risk going there merely to spare the feelings of a couple of neurotic women." Surely it is more complicated than that. "And one might add that if he were the kind of man we are told he is—that is a man whose chief characteristic is—a horror of causing pain—he would not be an officer in a colonial police force." Now there he might have a point; and it was the one point that Greene responded to in his "Congo Journal," when he said that he had known a Commissioner in Freetown who was humane and sensitive. Still, it is notable that, for all its success, Greene always thought *The Heart of the Matter* was one of his weaker novels, good on description, but exaggerated in its portrayal of the hero's dilemma. I sometimes wonder whether Orwell's critique affected him in some way and influenced him against the novel.

To conclude, the importance of the impact of their childhoods and their public and private school experiences on their artistic development cannot be overstated. Greene's experience at Berkhamsted School had profound ramifications; Orwell always said that his experience at his boarding school, St. Cyprian's, which he immortalized in his essay "Such, Such Were the Joys," gave him an insight into what living in a totalitarian state must be like, which became invaluable when he wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Their artistic characters were formed in the 1930s; Greene and Orwell can provide a sense of the whole decade, particularly in terms of its social and political upheavals. Both wrote their Spanish Civil War books: Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*; Greene *The Confidential Agent* and, almost by default, *The Power and the Glory*, which, although not set in Spain, addresses religious persecution and dictatorship, which dominated Greene's perception of the conflict. Their respective novels of 1936, Orwell's *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying* and Greene's *A Gun for Sale*, although ostensibly about other things, are peppered with prophecies of war and foreboding for the future. Greene even uses the word "holocaust" at one moment in his novel. Greene and Orwell are also the least insular of writers—Greene travelled to Liberia, Sweden, Mexico etc., during the decade for the material of his books, and Orwell was down and out in Paris as well as London, fought in Spain, and found Wigan to be a foreign country. Ironically, this makes them peculiarly aware of English insularity.

When Orwell died in 1950, Malcolm Muggeridge, who knew both men well, wrote in his obituary that "Orwell's writing, like Graham Greene, expressed in an intense form some romantic longing."

When Muggeridge wrote those words, Greene was actually about to embark on the novel that, more than any other, expressed an intense romantic longing, *The End of the Affair*. "Romantic longing" seems less obvious in Orwell, but I think Muggeridge was using the idea of Romanticism in the way that T.S. Eliot used it of Henry James: not in the sense of romantic love but in the sense of a romantic view of life's potential, to convey the intensity of his idealism, the capacity to see the possibility of an ideal society, and to cling to that possibility however many times he is made aware of the disparity between hope and fact. An attitude of cynicism was alien to both men.

Richard Hoggart referred to Orwell as "the conscience of a generation;" William Golding described Greene as the ultimate "chronicler of twentieth century man." When they sat down to write, they were afraid of nothing and no one. They relished their freedom in belonging to no literary clique or party line or artistic movement or anything that might inhibit their capacity to speak the truth as they saw it. They saw through propaganda and cant and occasionally had enormous fun in satirizing their absurdities. Their consistent theme was sympathy for the underdog: standing up for the poor against the rich, the weak against the powerful, the outsider against the Establishment, the oppressed against the dictatorial, the individual against the State.

It would be hard to think of two more coruscating yet compassionate chroniclers of the last century nor two voices more urgently needed in our present time, to speak out with eloquence and moral authority against injustice, hypocrisy, and the abuse of power. When Orwell reviewed Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, he

concluded: “the allure of power politics will be a fraction weaker for every human being who sees this film.” He linked Chaplin with what he called “one of the basic folk-tales of the English-speaking people, Jack the Giant Killer—the little man against the big man.” There is something of that in both Greene and Orwell. There are Big Brothers at large and they take many forms—social, political, bureaucratic, governmental—but an individual can still nibble away at the base, can still be a piece of grit in the State machinery, to use Greene’s phrase; and, in so doing, give hope to those who are downtrodden or simply tired of being lied to. And occasionally—just occasionally—the Giant falls.

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