

Introduction to *Lucius*

Mike Hill

Graham Greene's 1971 memoir *A Sort of Life* begins with a famous sentence: "If I had known it, the whole future must have lain all the time along those Berkhamsted streets." Greene was born in Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire in 1904, attending the independent boys' school there. The memoir tells us much about his upbringing in the town, the son of a schoolmaster who became head of the school. Greene had an unhappy adolescence, particularly the eight terms he spent as a boarder in St. John's House from September 1918 until April 1921, when bullying and lack of privacy drove him to despair.

The influence of Berkhamsted and its school on the future writer can hardly be overstated. The town appears throughout his fiction, in various guises, including the names "Boxstead," "Denton," and "Bishop's Hendron." The references run from Greene's first (but unpublished) novel *Anthony Sant*, written while he was at Oxford University and set in a school that is recognizably Berkhamsted, right through to his last published novel, *The Captain and the Enemy* (1988), where Berkhamsted is unnamed, but again unmistakable to anyone knowing the place.

Berkhamsted and its school features in another piece of Greene's fictional writing, unremarked on until very recently. In writing of unfinished and unpublished pieces in *A Sort of Life*, Greene refers to "a school novel of a timid boy's blackmail of the housemaster who had protected him." No further explanation is offered, and the reference remained enigmatic for

decades. In researching the second volume of our bibliography, covering the Graham Greene archives, Dr. Jon Wise and I came across a Greene story called *Lucius*. The archive at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas includes a file containing around fifty foolscap sheets in Greene's mature handwriting—clearly an unfinished novel of about 23,000 words. The manuscript is undated, but external evidence shows that Greene wrote it in the interval between finishing *Our Man in Havana* in June 1958 and setting off for the Belgian Congo in January 1959. So this is *Lucius*, a substantial but unfinished story written in the late 1950s of a schoolmaster blackmailed by a timid schoolboy.

The story covers the first term at Bristow School of a boy called Lucius Darling—a boarder in Collier's House. He is a shy boy, unhappy at the school with the lack of privacy, the physical conditions of the dormitories, and being bullied by two other boys despite attempts to protect him by the sympathetic assistant housemaster Stonier. We also become aware of a developing secret relationship between Stonier—a married man, we learn—and Miss Wilson, the house matron. And crucially, Lucius himself (like Greene, a sharp observer) sees evidence of this relationship, dimly aware that something furtive is afoot. The story finishes, incomplete, at the end of Lucius's first, unhappy term at school, with Christmas approaching. The boy's betrayal and blackmail of Stonier lies in the future, untold by Greene.

The town Bristow in the story is clearly Berkhamsted, as the descriptions of the town and school match perfectly, and the details of bullying and lack of privacy for young Lucius parallel Greene's own experiences at the school.

This story of Lucius has a prologue that acts as a framing device for the school story. Here, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Luke Winter, returns to his old school for the first time since leaving there as a boy to give a speech at prize-giving. Sir Luke is Lucius Darling, thirty-six years on, with a changed name. The timid boy has, in the interim, learned to project confidence and authority, but his return to the school reignites memories of his unhappy schooldays.

The extract that follows is that prologue to *Lucius*. It is significant as a hitherto-unpublished piece of mature writing by Greene, and although it was never polished to his own exacting standards, it is recognizably his style and voice, written in a decade when he was still at the height of his powers. It has interest in dealing with the very Greeneian theme of betrayal. And the extract encourages parallels with Greene's own life: just as the story *Lucius* suggests that the bullied, humiliated boy became a famous man to show the world that he could make something of himself, so in *A Sort of Life* Greene wrote that years of bullying had given him "an excessive desire to prove that I was good at something, however long the effort might prove." Sir Luke Winter is not Graham Greene, but he has been formed by similar experiences.

Why did Greene not finish the story? A footnote in *A Sort of Life* reveals all. There, writing in 1970, Greene remembers going back to St. John's House at Berkhamsted School in 1958: "Memory often exaggerates, but some twelve years ago, because I had started a novel about a school, I revisited the scene and found no change. I abandoned the novel—I couldn't bear mentally living again for several years in these

surroundings. A leper colony in the Congo was preferable so I went to Yonda in search of a burnt-out case." *Lucius* was never finished because Greene couldn't cope with the unhappy memories; writing the story proved not to be therapy, but renewed torture. Revisiting his old school was no easier for Greene than for Sir Luke Winter.

Mike Hill is a retired teacher. He edits *A Sort of Newsletter*, the quarterly magazine of the Graham Greene Birthplace Trust. He is currently organizing his sixth Graham Greene Festival, to be held in Berkhamsted in September 2021. The 2011 volume *Dangerous Edges of Graham Greene* included his essay "Greene and Hitchcock." He has co-authored with Jon Wise two books on Greene: *The Works of Graham Greene: A Reader's Bibliography & Guide* (Continuum 2012) and *The Works of Graham Greene Volume 2: A Guide to the Graham Greene Archives* (Bloomsbury 2015).