

CHAPTER V

HIS TECHNIQUES

Greene is praised particularly for his "craftsmanship", his ability to "tell a story". One technique that he uses is the cinema camera technique. In describing a scene and creating an atmosphere, Greene selects certain images like a film camera. In the beginning of The Power and the Glory he describes:

Mr. Tench went out to look for his ether cylinder out into the blazing Mexican sun and the bleaching dust. A few buzzards looked down from the roof with shabby indifference : he wasn't carried yet. A faint feeling of rebellion stirred in Mr. Tench's heart, and he wrenched up a piece of the road with splintering fingernails and tossed it feebly up at them. One of them rose and flapped across the town over the tiny plaza, over the bust of an ex-president, ex-general, ex-human being, over the two stalls which sold mineral water, towards the river and the sea. It wouldn't find anything there : the sharks looked after the carrion on that side. Mr. Tench went on across the plaza.¹

All these selected images : the blazing sun, the bleaching dust, the vultures, the sharks, Mr. Tench going for a drink, give the atmosphere of seediness, ugliness, unfriendliness, loneliness and misery.

The cinema camera technique allows Greene to tell a story in a series of fast-moving scenes. In Stamboul Train, using the moving-picture camera technique, he moves from point to point on the speeding train, developing his theme and characters on the way. In Brighton Rock, the technique of the cinema camera prepares for the climaxes as Greene moves from scenes of color to scenes of unrelieved drabness, from scenes of purposeless activity to scenes of tense inactivity - Pinkie on the bed amid the remains of his sausage

¹Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory, p.3.

roll, Pinkie looking at the woman who is saved, Ida at the race track. The cinema technique allows the reader to follow the chase, to understand the panic, to savor the suspense.

Also, the technique of the cine-camera eye is appropriate to the realization of Greene's characters. We are told, concerning Ida Arnold, that "man is made by the places in which he lives."² This statement could be applied to most of Greene's characters. Pinkie, the whiskey-priest and Scobie are trapped in this closed world and suffocating atmosphere ; they cannot break away from it in order to take an objective view of their environment. Their environment thus becomes of very great importance.

In order to stress his motifs, Greene uses the technique of using certain words as key words, recurring as insistently as a drum beat. He borrowed this technique from Joseph Conrad. In Under Western Eyes, the narrator speaks of the necessity of finding

" some key word ... a word that could stand at the back of all the words covering the page, a word which, if not truth itself, may perchance hold truth enough to help the moral discovery which should be the object of every tale."³

In The Confidential Agent, the key word is trust or its negative form distrust and mistrust. The "trust-system" for buying newspapers contributes significantly to the plot. The Confidential Agent describes the mission of D., a confidential agent representing a foreign government (which is pretty obviously the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War) who is sent to England to negotiate a coal contract.

²Graham Greene, Brighton Rock, p.37.

³David Lodge, Graham Greene, p. 20.

Pacing the deck of the cross-channel steamer as it nears Dover, D. thinks:

You would trust nobody but yourself, and sometimes you were uncertain whether you could trust yourself. They (i.e., his own government) didn't trust you ... He wasn't certain that he wasn't watched at this moment. He wasn't certain that it wasn't right for him to be watched ... And the watcher - was he watched ? He was haunted by the vision of an endless distrust.⁴

In It's a Battlefield, the key word is justice. On his way to meet the secretary of the minister, the Assistant Commissioner thinks :

... I've got nothing to do with justice, he thought, my job is simply to get the right man, and the cold washed air did not prevent his thoughts going back to damn paths steaming in the heat under leaves like hairy hands. One pursued by this path and that, and only as a last resort, when there was no other means of ensuring a murderer's punishment, did one burn his village. Justice had nothing to do with the matter. One left justice to magistrates, to judges and juries, to members of Parliament, to the Home Secretary.⁵

The End of the Affair illustrates Greene's use of key words more strikingly than any other novel. The words "love" and "hate" appear again and again. For the statistical record, these words or forms of them recur respectively about three hundred and one hundred times in this short novel. The effect is not monotonous because Greene is continually exploring new dimensions and interrelationships of love, hate, and the mixture of love and hate that is jealousy. Both Bendrix and Sarah become aware that love and hate are equally strong evidence that the defenses around

⁴Graham Greene, The Confidential Agent, p. 8.

⁵Graham Greene, It's a Battlefield, pp. 7 - 8.

simple selfhood are down. Toward the end of his narrative Bendrix writes :

If I hate her so much as I sometimes do, how can I love her ? Can one really hate and love ? Or is it only myself that I really hate ? ... I look her journal and ... read, "Oh God, if I could really hate you, what would that mean ?" And I thought, hating Sarah is only loving Sarah, and hating myself is only loving myself. I'm not worth hating ... Nothing, not even Sarah, is worth our hatred, if you exist, except you.⁶

Another device that Greene uses is allegory. To understand Brighton Rock, it helps to read it as something of a medieval allegory. In the pattern of the allegory, Ida Arnold represents humanity. She feels that she knows the difference between right and wrong, but she is ill at ease where the issue is one of good and evil. " 'I'm a stickler where right's concerned,' "⁷ she says. She has no religion to speak of. Ida is vitality and strength ; she believes firmly that only what she sees around her is real. She is the humanity of most people, the crowds at Brighton "having a bit of fun." Fred is correct in attaching himself to her, for she is the antithesis of the death that awaits him at Pinkie's hands. Resenting the fact that Fred has been deprived of vital existence, her humanity rushes forth to protest the injustice. Since Ida discounts the idea of God, preferring to believe in a natural order, it is logical for her to assume the role of avenger :

Somebody had made Fred unhappy, and somebody was going to be made unhappy in return. An eye for an eye. If you believed in God you might leave justice to him, but you couldn't trust

⁶Graham Greene, The End of the Affair, pp. 178-179.

⁷Graham Greene, Brighton Rock, p. 17.

the One, the universal spirit. Vengeance was Ida's, just as much as reward was Ida's, the soft gluey mouth affixed in taxis, the warm handclasp in cinemas, the only reward there was. And vengeance and reward - they were both fun.⁸

Since Ida believes in the natural world, within the pattern of the allegory her idea of justice is easy to understand. Pinkie represents evil ; Rose represents goodness. Ida finds it difficult to understand them.

In The Power and the Glory Greene chose a striking method of presenting his theme. On the allegorical level the novel is the whiskey-priest's attempt to avoid sainthood. The alternative title to the novel, The Labyrinthine Ways - an allusion to Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven" - indicates that the priest's flight is a flight from God and that the journey he makes is one of self-recognition. Greene makes brilliant use of counterpoint as he describes the priest's flight from the authorities, which is at the same time his evasion of grace. Only after he is betrayed by the half-caste Judas can the whiskey-priest fully accept his destiny. It is at that moment that the theme of flight and pursuit is reversed, and the lieutenant becomes the pursued.

Within the framework of the allegory the poles represented by the whiskey-priest and the lieutenant are arranged in a satiric fashion ; the secular order is represented by the lieutenant, the religious by the priest. The lieutenant's power is, understandably, the source of his belief; and he accepts the violence and brutality that this power engenders as necessary and rational concomitants of his faith. He is temperate, completely certain of the value of his creed. He is strong, resolute, and dedicated. He has self-respect. And he is celibate. As he exercises his power, he puts

⁸ Ibid., pp. 44 - 45.

killing down to love. In short, he is everything that the whiskey-priest should be and is not. At the opposite polarity the priest is a drunkard who periodically seeks to evade his responsibility. There is the smell of decay about him, and the vulture hovers over him as a token of his destiny. When the reader first sees him, he is attempting to flee Mexico; and Dr. Tench, a bystander, is reminded of death: "The man's dark suit and sloping shoulders reminded him uncomfortably of a coffin, and death was in his carious mouth already."⁹ He is a coward, and a creature of habit ; his great sin is his illegitimate daughter Brigida, the offspring of his loneliness and pride. Yet the differences between these two men are points of irony rather than of satire. For Greene, in holding up to contempt the deficiencies of one man, nevertheless caricatures the virtues of the other. Neither is a hero in the traditional sense, yet both portray the force of their convictions.

In The Heart of the Matter Scobie, moving doggedly towards disaster, is oddly associated with the figure of Christ.¹⁰ The role of Judas is played out by the English government spy, Wilson, who covets Scobie's wife as well as his reputation for integrity ; and Scobie tries desperately to condone his act of despair by seeing in it an imitation of Christ : "Christ had not been murdered : Christ had killed himself : he had hung himself from the Cross as surely as Pemberton from the picture rail."¹¹

Also, Greene uses irony in his work. In The Heart of the Matter, Scobie does everything for people whom he cares for. But he gets nothing ; they are not even grateful to him. Having learnt that Scobie is passed over for the commissionership, Louise wants to escape from the situation

⁹Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory, p. 5.

¹⁰A.A. De Vitis, Graham Greene, p. 102.

¹¹Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter, p. 86..

to South Africa. Feeling responsible for his wife, he borrows money from Yusef, a diamond-smuggler. While Louise is away, he meets Helen and has an affair with her. Louise, knowing that Scobie is having an affair with another girl, returns home. To make sure that he has given up his affair with Helen, she asks him to accompany her to Communion. With no wish to hurt her, he chooses sacrilege and damnation by taking Communion without having received absolution at confession: "O God I offer my damnation to you. Take it. Use it for them."¹² He cannot hurt Helen also. To escape from hurting either Louise or Helen, he commits suicide. Besides, he carefully plans his death so that Louise gets money from the Insurance Company. Finding Scobie dead, no one is really sad. His death means nothing to them. Instead of him, Helen has Bagster and Louise has Wilson. Scobie is - "the saint whose name nobody could remember."¹³ As to The Power and the Glory, at the first level the title is ironic. The power and the glory of the Catholic Church is represented by a terrified poor priest who drinks and sins. In The Confidential Agent, the irony of the title is clear. D. is a confidential agent. But no one has confidence in him and he can have confidence in no one.

In A Burnt-Out Case, Querry is kind to Rycker's wife, Marie, because she is a pathetic child. He knows the danger of unhappiness (it is "like a hungry animal waiting beside the road for any victim,"¹⁴ but Marie seems too young to be dangerous. Actually, she is as dangerous as a loaded gun, as egoistic as Willy in Our Man in Havana, as ruthless as Pyle in The Quiet American. To get away from

¹²Ibid., p. 272.

¹³Ibid., p. 257.

¹⁴Graham Greene, A Burnt Out Case, p. 157.



Rycker and return to Europe, she tells Rycker that Querry has seduced her, though he has not so much as touched her. Rycker shoots and kills Querry. The thing that Querry thinks undangerous is the cause of his own death.

There is a use of metaphor in Greene's work. It's a Battlefield has as its central metaphor the battlefield. The epigraph describes an actual battle, "each separate gathering of English soldiery ... fighting its own little battle in happy and advantageous ignorance of the action; nay, even very often in ignorance of the fact that any great conflict was raging." To Greene the battlefield is the world of human affairs in which God figures very little or not at all.¹⁵ Both Lady Caroline Bury and the Assistant Commissioner of Police dream of the millennium, yet both are too realistic to believe it near at hand. The battlefield is also the world of human emotions where betrayal and greatness are found next to each other.¹⁶ This world is depicted in the reactions of the several characters to the imprisonment and impending execution, or reprieve of that execution, of Jim Drover who, in the heart of a Communist rally, had killed a policeman while protecting his wife, Milly. In A Burnt Out Case, Querry is an ecclesiastical architect of international reputation and successful lover. He becomes bored of his success ; he realizes that he was not born to be an artist: only a very clever architect. Also, he could no longer believe in God, whose existence he had once proved by "historical, logical, philosophical and etymological methods." And, he stopped believing in love.

But when he discovered there was no such King as the one he had believed in, he realized too that anything that he had ever done must have

¹⁵A.A. De Vitis, Graham Greene, p. 72.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 73.

been done for love of himself. How could there be any point any longer in making jewels or making love for his own solitary pleasure? Perhaps he had reached the end of his sex and the end of his vocation before he made his discovery about the King or perhaps the discovery brought about the end of everything?¹⁷

To escape from success and the demands of the ego, he made a journey to the Belgian Congo and stopped at a leprosarium. Perhaps Querry is seeking a return to usefulness and integrity. Dr. Colin correctly diagnoses Querry as a "burnt-out case," like one of "the lepers who lose everything that can be eaten away before they are cured."¹⁸ A burnt-out case is a metaphor for Querry's spiritual mutilation.

The use of simile is also obvious in Greene's works. In Stamboul Train, when the story is taking place in Vienna, a man called Josef Greenlich is performing the act of robbery. He is climbing a roof. "Below, the central station burned like a bonfire in the dark." And as he moves on, "Once he slipped and saw for a moment rising like a fish through dark water to meet him the lit awning of a café. "As he reaches the top window a light flashes on him and a whistle blows." He thinks he cannot be caught. "... while his brain began to move like the little well-oiled wheels of a watch," one thought comes to him. When he comes to the next window he taps. In The Ministry of Fear, when Digby is in the hospital, it is spring. "The sun came into the room like pale green underwater light... . Once very far across the fields came a faint wail like a ship signalling departure." During this time Digby learns that Paris is in German hands. This fact appears to him quite natural, but "the fact that we were at war

¹⁷Graham Greene, A Burnt-Out Case, p. 165.

¹⁸ibid., p. 130.

with Italy shook him like an inexplicable catastrophe of nature." The doctor's face is "hawk-like and noble and a little histrionic, like the portrait of a Victorian." In The Comedians, while Brown, Jones and Smith first meet on the Medea "We were idly watching the flat grey sea, which seemed to be within the three-mile limit like an animal passive and ominous in a cage waiting to show what it can do outside." When Brown talks about Smith, he says "... one lock of white hair standing up like a television aerial in the wind..." When Smith comes into the saloon in the evening "...he looked all round the saloon before he stood aside so that his wife could enter under the arch of his arm, like a bride under a sword." It is perhaps arguable that Greene's use of such obtrusive simples is on occasion a defect ; that he sacrifices the flow and continuity of his story for the sake of the striking phrase.

Greene also uses the devices of the modern novel: the emotionally involved narrator, the flashback, the diary, the letter, the inner reverie, the spiritual debate, and the stream-of-consciousness technique. In The End of the Affair, Maurice Bendrix writes an account of a love affair that began five or six years earlier. Because of the flashback technique that Greene uses, the last physical occurrence of the novel's action appears on the first page of the book-Bendrix sits down to tell his story. Bendrix' account of the affairs is the carnal side, the passionate aspect. After portraying the point of view of the hero, Greene allows the heroine's diary to fall into the hero's hands. In the diary, the reader becomes aware of the spiritual struggle which is the chief concern of the novel. In her journal Sarah describes her dream :

Two days ago I had such a sense of peace and quiet and love. Life was going to be happy again, but last night I dreamed I was walking up a long staircase to meet Maurice at the top.

I was still happy because when I reached the top of the staircase we were going to make love. I called to him that I was coming, but it wasn't Maurice's voice who answered ; it was like a stranger's that boomed like a foghorn warning lost ships, and scared me. I thought, he's left his flat and gone away and I don't know where he is, and going down the stairs again the water rose beyond my waist and the hall was thick with mist.¹⁹

The dream sequences allow Greene to describe in symbolic terms the conflict within Sarah, and the debates allow him to give concrete expression to her struggle. The flashbacks permit him to show the reader the various phrases of the development of the action and to portray the state of Bendrix' mind as he describes the affair.

The stream of consciousness technique is obviously used in It's a Battlefield.

The Assistant Commissioner nodded and crossed carefully where the signs pointed. I've got nothing to do with justice, he thought, my job is simply to get the right man, and the cold washed air did not prevent his thoughts going back to damp paths steaming in the heat under leaves like hairy hands. One pursued by this path and that, and only as a last resort, when there was no other means of ensuring a murderer's punishment, did one burn his village. Justice had nothing to do with the matter. One left justice to magistrates, to judges and juries, to members of Parliament, to the Home Secretary.²⁰

The structure of Greene's novels is interesting. In The Power and the Glory, the plot is episodic and consists of a succession of encounters between the harried protagonist and a number of unrelated persons. Within that disorderly succession, we observe a pattern of three

¹⁹Graham Greene, The End of the Affair, p. 121.

²⁰Graham Greene, It's a Battlefield, pp. 7 - 8.

dominant and crucially meaningful encounters. We first see the priest when, in disguise, he sips brandy in the office of Mr. Tench, the morose expatriate dentist. We follow him, episode by episode, as he is hidden and given food by Coral, the precocious daughter of an agent for a banana company, Captain Fellowes, and his miserable death-haunted wife ; as he arrives in the village which is the home of the woman, Maria, by whom he has had the child Brigida ; as he travels onward in the company of a "mestizo," the yellow toothed ignoble Judas who will betray him to the police ; as he is arrested and released and fights his way over the mountains to freedom in a neighboring state and the comfortable home of Mr. Lehr and his sister, German-Americans from Pittsburgh, in charge of a mining operation ; as he is enticed back across the border of Tabasco to attend the death of James Calver, an American murderer who has been fatally wounded by the police ; is arrested again by a lieutenant of the police, taken back to ^{the} capital city and executed. Tench, Coral, Maria, the Lehrs, Calver : these are all strangers to each other. The episodes with each of them thicken and expand the novelistic design (Coral, for instance, is the priest's good spiritual daughter, while Brigida is his evil actual daughter); but the design itself is created by the three encounters between the priest and the Lieutenant. These occur at carefully spaced intervals, about one-third and two-thirds through the book, and then at length in the climax. The first time, the Lieutenant whose whole energy and authority are directed exclusively to capturing this last remaining agent of the Church - sees the priest and interrogates him ; but he neither recognizes nor arrests him. The second time, the priest is arrested, but he is not recognized : the charge is carrying liquor. The third time, recognition is complete and the arrest final. But those are mere indices of a carefully constructed plot.

As an artist, Greene is able to put both entertainment and tragedy in one single book. The beginning of Brighton Rock is an entertainment. It is like a detective story ; there is a melodrama of murder and revenge. Hale, who betrays Kite to the opposite group, is pursued and murdered by Pinkie. Ida, who is with Hale while he is pursued, plans to discover who is his murderer. "She stared out over the red and green lights, the heavy traffic of her battlefield, laying her plans, marshalling her cannon fodder."²¹ But as the story goes on, it becomes a tragedy. Greene tries to show that there is evil everywhere and that the power of evil is difficult to explain. Pinkie murders Hale. He marries Rose, who knows about Hale's murder, for protection. A little later, he persuades her to commit suicide. Discovered by Ida and a policeman, he blinds himself with vitriol and jumps into the sea. Brighton Rock might be two different books put between the same covers by mistake. But as a result of Greene's artistic ability, it becomes one original and striking work :

...the relation between the detective story and the tragedy is exactly what Brighton Rock is finally about. It is a relation between modes of narrative discourse which reflects a relation between incommensurable and hostile forces : between incompatible worlds, between the ethical world of right and wrong, to which Ida constantly and confidently appeals, and the theological world of good and evil inhabited by Pinkie and Rose.²²

²¹Graham Greene, Brighton Rock, p. 38.

²²R.W.B. Lewis, "The 'Trilogy' of Graham Greene," p. 202.

Perhaps the final word about Greene is this combination of intricate craftsmanship with a deceptively simple ease of writing. He is an artist above all in the way he disguises the joints of his construction ; the final productions are among the most polished of all English novels.