

Symbolism in Graham Green's **THE HEART OF THE MATTER**

BY

Dr. Mani K. Ayeuty

WOMAN wondering why loves West Africa, and why he would not yield to his wife's entreaties to get away from it, Sahbie, the central character in *The Heart of the Matter*, (1) tries to puzzle out the reasons his attachment to place;

Is it because here human nature has't had time to disguise itself? Nobody here could ever talk about a heaven on earth. Heaven on earth. Heaven remained rigidly

in its proper place on the other side of death; and on this side flourished the injustices, the cruelties, the meanness that elsewhere people so cleverly hushed up.

Here you could love human beings nearly as God loved them, knowing the worst:

You didn't love a pose, a pretty dress; a sentiment artfully assumed ... (pp . 33 - 34).

The passage reveals a frame of mind in which there is no room for idealisation or romanticisation. The here has no illusions about the place; it is reduced to its bare essentials without any attempt at assigning to it more than its due. The human situation is laid bare before the artist's searching eye

1) References in the present study are to the uniform edition of *The Heart of The matter*, London, 1957.

The here's attitude is determined by the bare facts, but the vision he in his eye hence the pity and love he cherishes for struggling, erring, suffering humanity.

The attitude is, no doubt, moulded by Graham Greene's religious mode of thinking, which controls not only his vision, but also his manner of expression. Hence his peculiar narrative style, his concentration more on the gesture than the emotion, his selection of the pointed, telling detail, and his focusing on sordid reality. The vision, and the artistic tools which render it could only emanate from Greene's Catholic cast of mind. David Lodge points this out when he says.

There is a gold deal of evidence, internal and external, that in Green's fiction Catholicism is not a body of belief requiring exposition and demanding categorical assent or dissent, but system of concepts, a source of situations, and a reservoir of symbols with he can order, and dramatize certain intuitions about the nature of human experience... (2).

This view may explain Graham Greene's dramatisation of the interplay between the and the divine, but it does not account for the combination of the realistic and symbolic modes of expression in his novels.

Arnold Kettle, on the other hand, attributes Green's realistic handling of his material to his inheritance of the experience of social realists like Hemingway, Faulkner

2) David Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads* London, 1971, P. 89.

and steinbeck. (3) But to force Greene into line with social realiste overlooke his religious preoccupations which on his symbolic imagination. Indeed, the attitude expressed in Scobie's rraminations seems to be more in line with the trend started by T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliet. at the root of this trend lies the distinction they made between romanticism and classicism.

Hulme, no less than Eliet, runs down romanticism because of its conception of man as "an infinit reservoir of possibilities" .

This glotification of man was, no doubt, antipathetic to Cathelic dogma, which favours classicism more as it does exalt man to these idealized heights. According to classicism, Hulme says, "Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant? It is only by teadition and organization that anything decent can be got out of him"(4).

The affinity between this view and Greene's need not be laboured.

3) Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, Vol. 11 london, 1959 ed., ed., P. 171.

4) T.e. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," Criticism from matthew Arnold to the Present Day, ed? Rashed, Cairo, 1968, P. 72.

It is given voice in all clarity in Scobie's line of thought, and put into practice in Greene's artistic performance.

Greene's own agreement with T.S. Eliot's views shows in his exploration on of the Eliot-Baudelaire paradox of good and evil in Brighton Rock. The paradox is pointed out by Eliot in his essay on Baudelaire, and quoted by Greene in his own essays:

So far as we are human, what we do must either be evil or good; so far as we do evil we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing; at least we exist. It is true to say that the glory of man is his capacity for salvation, it is also true to say that his glory is his capacity for damnation. The worst that can be said for most of our malefactors, from statesmen to thieves, is that they are not men enough to be damned. (5).

Evil and good, damnation and salvation innocence and guilt are key words in Greene's work. They are often behind his choice of Subjects; characters and situations. They leave their stamp on his choice of imagery, and the pattern of his novels which reveal the symbolic implications of his work, as will appear in due course.

Further, it should be noted that Baudelaire, like Greene, was fascinated by the horror of life; by its squalor and sordidness. But from ugliness he always won to a sense of the beautiful, by establishing correspondences between

the world of matter and the world of pure spirit; and by selecting such images as could be pregnant with significance. His images may be derived from everyday life, they may be taken from the squalid and sordid aspects of Parisian life; but.

Baudelaire was not a naturalist presenting Catalogue of the infernal metropolis. For from copying nature, the artist; he says; must select significant images heighten them, and use them to perfect his vision... (6).

Graham Greene was; no doubt, influenced by this practice of the symbolists. In his novels; one finds that the details of everyday life are not presented for their own sake. He does not take interest in these details as an observer of social phenomena. Rather, he expects these phenomena to score a meaning he discerns in them, a meaning outside the confines of their surface appearance. The surface is always there to indicate suggestions of ulterior associations and significances.

This aspect of Greene's art seems to puzzle Graham Martin, who in discussing the connection between the topicality of Greene's novels and his peculiar sensibility; tends to see that this connection,

6) William York Tindall, Forces in Modern British Literature, 1885 - 1965, New York, 1956, P; 47.

rules out two common views of Greeb's social observation. Neither the view which confines the value of this to the novels of the thirties (where it is certainly more obvious), nor the view which commends it as a superior kind of social documentary padding really accounts for the character of Greene's prose. This implies that Greene's social consciousness is both more extensive and more important than that, and at the same time calls for very careful definition, for if the topicality is always more than a record; if then, it does verge on explicit social comment, it is never easy to define what this comment amounts to(7)

And in attempting to define what the comment amounts to, Graham Martin comes to the conclusion that the realism is only there to generalize the human experience and to interpret it theologically (8)

This is only partially true. It is true that the delineation of actuality in Greene's novels serves no sociological end and that he invests the topical with theological interpretations. But how this is effected is not indicated. By shifting the center of interest from the quality of Greene's prose, from his realistic style, to the theological interpretation, or Graham Martin slants the argument in a

7) Graham Martin, "Novelists of three Decades: Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, C.P.S. now," *The Modern Age*, ed. Boris Ford, London, 1961, p. 402.

8) *Ibid.*, 404.

such a way that he fails to see the connection between the realistic and symbolic styles. Furthermore, the process in Greene's work is not from a particular, specialized to generalized vision; as the critic here seems to imply. To generalize may mean to universalize, or typify; which is certainly less than investing the particular experience with a symbolic significance in mind between the typical and the symbolic when we approach Greene's novels.

By symbolism we do not mean simply extended images, or images which convey a meaning outside the limits of the concrete image. We mean, rather, the correspondences the world of matter and the world of spirit; in the Bergsonian sense; the dramatic implications of the movement from sense impressions to an ontological vision, or what Allen Tate defines in his article on "The Symbolic Imagination" as,

To bring together various meanings at a single moment of action is to exercise what I shall speak of here as the symbolic imagination; but the line of action must be unmistakable, we must never be in doubt about what is happening; for at a given stage of his progress the hero must do one simple thing; and one only. The symbolic imagination connects the action through analogy of the human to the divine; of the natural to the supernatural; of the low to the high; of time to eternity... (9)

9) Allen Tate, *The Man of Letters in the Modern World*, London, 1957, P. 96.

According to this view; the artist artist wins to a vision through the senses; the symbolic is rooted in the detail taken from actuality Committed to the visible, the sensory; the artist's imagination comes into play to establish an analogy between the visual objects and an ultimate meaning. In this manner the human situation does not only acquire a far meaning; it is related to a higher order This is exactly the analogical structure one observes in the Heart of the Matter.

To begin with there is the scene of action. In reading the novel; We may wonder why Graham Greene should fix upon such a foreign locality at all. as he does not seem to be interested in its local peculiarities, or in exploiting the exotic, local colour. His artistic gaze is concentrated more on the white settlers; and a few people of odd nationalities. For this reason he may seem to be viewing the place from without, rather than from within. In this respect he is different from an African writer writing about Africa, and attempting to arrest its peculiar pulse; to tackle its problems, and explore its national character. Greene's interest in the place is nothing of the kind, nor does he exploit it, as a decorative background. This is not the kind of interest he excites in the reader. According to Walter Allen, the local setting is used as a means of exploiting universal situation. (10)

Actually there is more to it than simply this. Walter Allen's view may be justified by certain made by the characters, which reveal their attitude to the place. But a close

reading of the novel shows that the setting has more than merely universal implications Harris may look upon the place as the Tower of Babel.

This is the original Tower of Babel" Harris said
" West Indians; Africans, real Indians, Syrians,
Englishmen, Scotsmen in the Office of Works; Irish
priests; French priests; Alsatian priests." (P.5)

10) Walter Allen. Tradition and Dream, London, 1954, P.205)