

Preface

Far from turning to new interests after completing his last “theological” novel, *The End of the Affair* (1951), Graham Greene has been consistent and unrelenting in his themes over the course of the past 50 years. These themes are more fundamental than the religious problems of his middle period. They include such concerns as the divided self, the betrayal of a friend, justifiable suicide, and the real presence of supernatural evil in the world. Such dominant concerns are seen as early as *The Man Within* (1929) and perdure through the present. Moreover, Greene’s perspective as a writer has always been the one he described in his “virtue of disloyalty” address at the University of Hamburg: “The writer is driven by his own vocation to be a protestant in a Catholic society, a catholic in a Protestant one, to see the virtues of a capitalist in a Communist society, of the communist in a Capitalist state. . . . He stands for the victims, and the victims change. Loyalty confines you to accepted opinions. Loyalty forbids you to comprehend sympathetically your dissident fellow; but disloyalty encourages you to roam through any human mind; it gives the novelist an extra dimension of understanding.” Though this book is not primarily intended to argue a thesis but rather to introduce the common reader to the novels of Greene, to the peculiar strengths and weaknesses of each novel, the novelist’s enduring themes and perspective are kept steadily before the reader’s eyes.

To help the reader see the genesis of Greene’s ideas, the first chapter discusses the major events of and influences upon Greene’s life. The facts of that life will make evident where Greene’s “obsessions” (to use his own word) come from. The obsession with betrayal, for example, will be seen as dating from a public-school trauma and the preoccupation with suicide probably belongs to the same school days, as well as to his love for a governess. The conviction that supernatural evil abounds in the world dates to early nightmares and to the reading of *Vipers of Milan* at fourteen years of age, though his understanding the reasons for that conviction did not come until he visited Liberia.

Nonetheless all these themes antedate Greene’s religious conversion and his later concern with theological matters. Moreover, the reader will notice that other themes, like the need for engagement or the virtue of disloyalty, begin with Greene’s first novel and continue to the present.

Thus, while certain themes receive greater or lesser emphasis at different stages in his career, Greene's concerns have been consistent. Religion helped him explain these concerns, and continues to do so, but it did not give rise to them.

I would like to thank H. Wayne Schow for reading this manuscript and for his constructive suggestions; I would also like to thank Rita Matthiesen for her typing and editorial help.