



“An inhabitant of both countries”: Division in *The Power and the Glory*

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"An inhabitant of both countries": Division in *The Power and the Glory*

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Dans *The Power and the Glory*, le protagoniste n'est pas présenté sous des traits héroïques mais il finit par devenir une figure de saint tandis que le deutéragoniste n'est jamais présenté comme une figure de saint bien qu'il soit doté de traits héroïques. Il n'y a donc pas coïncidence entre la figure du saint et celle du héros et, puisque cette coïncidence constitue l'une des caractéristiques de l'hagiographie, le récit du prêtre anonyme ne ressortit pas à l'hagiographie ; or, si *The Power and the Glory* n'est pas une hagiographie bien que décrivant l'itinéraire d'un saint, c'est bien que le roman de Greene entend se montrer séditieux envers les métarécits canoniques. De fait, l'hagiographie enchâssée fait l'objet d'une mise en texte caricaturale et de fait, le héros contrevient à toutes les typologies du héros classique tel qu'il est défini par Baudoin, Campbell ou Sellier. Si Greene s'efforce de mettre en cause les acceptions et les conceptions conventionnelles des concepts de saint et de héros, c'est pour signaler son hétérodoxie fondamentale tant sur le plan théologique que romanesque. Dans l'axiologie idiosyncrasique de Greene, le protagoniste tire sa sainteté de son avilissement et le héros romanesque est à la fois un anti-héros et un héros qui échappe aux classifications génériques. En redéfinissant et reconfigurant le saint et le héros par un processus d'hybridation, Greene souligne donc son horreur de l'orthodoxie que ce soit dans le domaine religieux ou dans le domaine littéraire.

syllepse, topographie, égarement, errance, éthique

Division is a quintessential feature of Graham Greene's world, a feature which may easily be connected with his own early experience of life, as is revealed by *The Lawless Roads*, the 1939 travel book which functions as a kind of blueprint for Graham Greene's 1940 novel *The Power and the Glory*. Indeed, this travelogue is based upon a structural partition, as it depicts Greene's 1938 journey to Mexico but begins with an account of Greene's divided self as a wretched pupil at Berkhamstead, his father's school. Greene describes the infamous green baize door which divided the maternal world – the world which he was allowed to re-enter at week-ends – from the public school where he remained as a boarder during the week – and where he was bullied by jealous schoolboys: "I was an inhabitant of both countries: on Saturday and Sunday afternoons of one side of the baize door, the rest of the week of the other" (13). He describes his life as restless, pulled by conflicting allegiances, ties of love and hate, hence the slight spelling shift from "boarder" to "life on a border" (Greene 2002, 13), the limit which he dared to cross illegally, sneaking back home "unknown to frontier guards" (Greene 2002, 14). This border, this strange demarcation line which triggered an emotional crisis (Greene ran away and was sent to live with a psychoanalyst in London), foreshadows the programmatic boundary which haunts all his novels, mapping conflicts and spatial, political, temporal or metaphysical divisions. Borders recur as a paradigm of instability, locating and dislocating desire and textual energy. The ominous baize door reappears for instance in the story "The Fallen Idol", where it separates the world of servants from the safe world of a spoilt upper-class child, Philip. Philip ventures to cross the threshold, enters the

world of lust and adults which he fails to understand, betrays his friend the butler to the police, and dooms himself to a lonely life of selfish withdrawal. In *The Ministry of Fear*, the door reappears in a psychiatric asylum, the boundary of amnesia and lost identity, of coercion and spying. In the novel *The Power and the Glory*, the image of the door functions as a mere metaphor pointing to multiple divisions, between past and present, hope and degradation, home and exile, loss and expectations, against the background of political strife and radical historical revisioning. In order to unravel a few emblems of division, we shall first look at the prosaic object associated with the image of the door, Tench's cast of a cleft palate, as the emblem of the split entailed by passivity. Then we shall pay attention to the topography of division and the systematic pairing of characters, leading to a somewhat divided sense of resolution.

I. The cast of a cleft palate

In the beginning was – the cast. Not simply the cast of characters, divided between the sparring protagonists, the priest and the lieutenant on the one hand, and the set of flat characters or bystanders hovering on the margin of the plot on the other hand. No, the cast as an object, the simple prosaic object moulded by dentists. Fossil-like, discarded in a wastepaper basket, “the rough toothless gaping mouth of clay” (91) which Tench picked up as a child is turned into an emblem of destiny, the moment of division and definition, the unconscious bifurcation when one chooses one's path and discards the road not taken: “There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in. The hot wet river-port and the vultures lay in the wastepaper basket, and he picked them out” (6). Greene uses here objects as a kind of “objective correlative”, to borrow T.S. Eliot's concept (bearing in mind, of course, the way in which this seedy Mexico or Greenland bears the stamp of T.S. Eliot's waste land and “hollow valley” of “dying stars”, the “broken jaw of our lost kingdoms” which he depicts in *The Hollow Men* [91]). Discussing *Hamlet* in a ground-breaking essay “Hamlet and His Problems”, T.S. Eliot defines an “objective correlative” as a set of objects or a situation which express a particular emotion, so that they become a *formula* for that emotion. When the set of objects appears, the emotion is immediately evoked and aroused in the reader. In a similar way, Graham Greene tends to use objects less as a symbol than as an objective correlative, a formula which gives a literal, concrete shape to an abstract notion or emotion. Thus the cast in the wastepaper basket becomes an objective correlative for the dentist's sense of loss, estrangement, bafflement and disgust. In Greene's parodic vanity, fate is no longer emblemized by a skull held up in a churchyard, as in *Hamlet*, but by the discarded cast of a fake mouth found in a litter box, which creates a very concrete shape for the inescapable direction given to life: destiny is tangible, an imperfect scenario which lurks in a child's chamber: “We should be thankful we cannot see the horrors and degradations lying around our childhood, in cupboards and bookshelves, everywhere” (6). The sequence of events of an entire life is picked up with the first emblematic object, the plaster replica of teeth and surrounding tissues. The first cast leads to other casts, the ones that Tench is desperately trying to make in Mexico, with his cheap apparatus. He proudly explains to the priest that he is attempting for the first time to make a Kingsley cast for a “[c]ongenital fissure”, to no avail of course: “‘I cast in sand’ Mr Tench said. ‘What else can I do in this place?’” (7). Significantly, Tench is attempting to heal a cleft palate, a division, a fissure within the mouth, but his work dissolves, is built on sand. Later on, after the priest has died, Tench recalls his first impression of the nondescript little man, “the photo of his children, that cast he was making out of sand for a split palate” (216). The fake fissured mouth is a symbol of destiny, but also of the dual nature of man. The cast imitates the mouth but it cannot utter a sound, especially if the cast mouth, like the foreign bystander, is split. It signals Tench's status as a foreigner (whose mother tongue is English in a Spanish-speaking land), but also as a

bystander who is silenced by the regime, who fails to act. In the beginning was the Word: Tench's interjection "My God" is followed by a ceremonial Latin phrase, "*Ora pro nobis*" (4). But for Tench such signifiers are empty formulae, worn out relics devoid of meaning, they mean nothing to him. Tench often seems at a loss for words, waiting yet expecting nothing, his mouth hanging open, like an empty, broken cast: "His mouth fell open: the look of vacancy returned [...] He stood there like a man in a cavern lost among the fossils and instruments of an age of which he knows very little" (7). The embedded colons carve a gap within the sentence which emphasizes the sense of petrification. A bystander does not necessarily approve of what he is forced to see, to share, yet he cannot fight, speak out, enter the fray. As one of the bystanders, Tench stands on the margin of violence, he is a chance spectator of events in Mexico, but he does not participate. Once more, Greene chooses to take his own symbols literally. The bystander of the opening scene, who is simply lying low and longing to leave, is literally forced to stand by in the end, a mere onlooker witnessing the execution of the priest. Although Tench wishes to react, to say something when he recognizes the priest, it is too late, the latter has already been shot, a routine mediocre scene perceived at an angle, from high above, from a pathetic rather than hegemonic viewpoint. External focalization creates a radical narrative distance as the reader is cut off from the character he has followed throughout the novel, he sees him at one remove. If a mouth opens and moans in the scene, it is not even that of the priest, who barely manages to mumble a clipped word which may or may not be "excuse". Circumstantial evidence seems to give proof of the priest's failure as he collapses into a formless heap on the ground. Only the mouth of the jefe remains wide open, moaning in a grotesque counterpoint "the pain, the pain" at the very moment when the priest is shot, as if the dentist's tools, rather than the firing squad's guns, were instruments of torture. Looking for a crystal among the jefe's teeth, the dentist will find none: for the jefe is a bystander too, as has been implied throughout the novel. For instance, during the drinking scene, when the jefe swindles the priest out of the wine he has paid for, he muses upon the execution of another priest: "life has such irony. It was my painful duty to watch the priest who gave me that communion shot – an old man. I am not ashamed to say that I wept. The comfort is that he is probably a saint and that he prays for us. It is not everyone who earns a saint's prayers" (110-111). Such a speech is indeed ironic: the chief of police presents himself as a passive onlooker pained by the execution, and potentially saved by the martyr in which he is not supposed to believe: the jefe plays it both ways, just in case, just like the half-caste who betrays the priest yet begs for his prayers, just in case. Thus the split between the protagonist and the bystanders seems confirmed in the end, as if the gap between the priest and his fellow human beings – and thereby between the priest and salvation – could not be bridged. The narrative strategy foregrounds fragmentation, division, the plight of a Godless world rather than the re-enactment of Christ's passion.

II. Cast away fragments

Yet the kaleidoscopic dialogic ending also sews together conflicting perspectives, as if attempting to heal the cleft palate and allow the text to end on significant rather than erratic words, suggesting connection rather than division. The cast which is associated with Tench's destiny may reappear in the end, but it is balanced by other objects or destinies which have been picked up among litter and waste, all the rubbish which, like the ever-present vultures and beetles, connotes the disorder of the Godless state of Tabasco, severed from flowing grace. The first example still connotes the inability to let go of a problematic past. As the priest leaves the village and Maria, the woman who is no virgin, he searches a littered stream where cast away cans and broken bottles seem to materialize all the inner "rubble of [the priest's] failure" in a kind of larger-than-life, open-air wastepaper basket; the priest retrieves a few crumbled papers, the metonymy of his past life and status as the plump priest of

Concepcion. But as he plucks the papers from the littered stream he is confronted with his own flesh-and-blood conception, the sniggering daughter whose character has already been set, moulded, cast¹, fixed as a fly in amber, as the sin of her parents is visited upon her. Thus the priest loses his case, both literally (the case containing the papers) and figuratively: he cannot win his daughter back.

But this littered stream, from which only pitiful fragments of the past can be retrieved, must be opposed to another rubbish bin, which the priest finds among other relics in the deserted house of the Fellows. The pieces of paper he picks up in the stripped room may be seen as the scattered fragments of Coral's absent body and mind: "He turned over the contents of the wastepaper box with sad curiosity. He felt as if he were clearing up after a death" (141). Which is indeed what he is doing unawares. As a vulture flaps in the air, the priest reads scraps of poetry in a mildewed book, as if calling out to the jewel lost among carious teeth, acknowledging his vicarious daughter, careful, responsible Coral:

"Come back! Come back!" he cried in grief.
 Across the stormy water:
 "And I'll forgive your Highland chief -
 My daughter, O my daughter." (145)

The rain starts pouring, a devastating, implacable rain which materializes the poem's stormy water: "The roof couldn't keep out *this* rain" (151).

The resemiotization of waste and of Coral's relics goes beyond this intertextual quotation. Although he finds nothing but scraps of essays in the wastepaper basket, the priest is later given a significant draft which must have been extracted from that basket and displaced, distorted, misappropriated. The "message" is transmitted when the priest has crossed the border of Chiapas and is reverting to his former habits, bargaining and drinking. Interestingly enough, the regression and inner split is metaphorized by the signifier "cast": "He could feel the old life hardening round him like a habit, a stony cast which held his head high and dictated the way he walked, and even formed his words" (164). Rigidly imprisoned by his weakness and spurious ambition, the priest is recalled to life by the sudden apparition of the half-*caste*, a predator with the yellow fangs of a snake, half cast indeed, half human and half animal, like some medieval allegorical creature. The intrusion of the *mestizo* finalizes the split between the priest's former plump, self-indulgent, ambitious self and the hollow man who must retrace his steps towards death because there is no one else, and so he must act the part he is given as best he can². The final division between past and present is cut by the performative piece of paper, another version of what the text calls elsewhere "the absurd shorthand of grief" (60). The piece of paper is stained, branded by abjection, smeared with grease, one of these typical "objets faux-jetons" defined by François Gallix, deceptively soiled and dirty, yet an agent of salvation. For if on one side the piece of paper bears the bandit's plea ("For Christ's sake, father..." [176]) on the other side a fragment about *Hamlet* is to be found, a fragment written in a child's "familiar" (176) hand which must be construed as Coral's. Thus the piece of paper testifies to the dual nature of man, to the opposition between body and soul, hope and despair, between man's spontaneous capacity to do good and man's spontaneous capacity to do evil. The paper is essentially dual by nature, but in the manner of a Möbius strip, where the opposite side is always somehow on the same side. Holding the piece of paper, the priest is an inhabitant of both countries, connected both to Coral and to

¹ I am grateful to Camille Fort for suggesting that cast may also recall the Latin adjective *castus* meaning chaste, so that the oxymoronic old-young Brigitta is also *casta incasta*, a tainted child.

² This split is a central theme of the novel. On page 91, as the priest muses on the past, the division between past and present is powerfully emblematised by the blank line which separates memory from the sharp, sudden awakening. The dots and the coordinator "and" create a deceptive sense of continuity which is marred by the jarring contrast between the self-portrait of the smug, plump priest of the past and the priest as he now is, helplessly lying by the traitor in torn peon trousers.

Calver. Thus the scrap picked out of the wastepaper basket, a symptomatic object forecasting the fate of Coral, Calver and the protagonist, becomes an objective correlative for the unnamed priest's dilemma. Hamlet's words seem to echo the priest's predicament, as he must give up doubts about the father (or Father) and face the "one blow" which ends it all. The piece of paper is therefore doubly deceptive, a fake appeal which turns out to be a true calling, an obvious trap which is also a liberation. The smeared sheet encompasses the division between the cold-blooded murderer and the independent child, tying them together, just as the priest as a sinner is both the Fallen man and the agent of God.

III. The topographical chasm

Answering the call, the priest is forced to retrace his steps and cross the boundary which divides Chiapas from Tabasco. Christian Gutleben has studied the topography of the novel in terms of centripetal and centrifugal movements, drawing away from or towards the capital³. To this circular dynamic may be added the great dividing line of the "barranca" (154), an emblem of spatial but also ontological division. The "barranca" must be crossed over and over again – as the priest goes towards Chiapas, as he returns towards the Indian woman, then leaves again, and finally comes back with the traitor. A fissure which marks the geography of doubt and its labyrinthine ways, the chasm inscribes a deep dividing line which both is and is not the frontier between Chiapas and Tabasco, or the mental border between duty and escape. It gives a visual shape to choice; topography recalls here Conrad's *Lord Jim*, the chasm between two hills which represents the two halves of Jim's life. Similarly, Greene displaces traditional Christian iconography in which ascent may be read as spiritual elevation. If the plateau resembles a "short cut to the dark and magical heart of the faith" (153), the baby's body remains an unresurrected heap of matter, the crosses turn into ugly cacti. The rain blurs boundaries, turning the landscape into a grey area of loss and desolation, a Conradian blank map of abandonment:

You're on that piece of paper now, the ache told him. But there's a path, he argued wearily. Oh, a path, the ache said, a path may take you fifty miles before it reaches anywhere at all: you know you won't last that distance. There's just white paper all around. (154)

The dialogue between the two inner voices dramatizes the loss of bearings and the temptation of despair. The metatextual path in the wilderness refers to the choice between right and wrong. As the half-caste leads him back towards the village where, just on the other side, the bandit lies, the priest stops at the bottom of the barranca, takes a drink and loudly smashes the bottle, a sign that he has reached a point of no return, that he is ready to cross the divide between shameful freedom and the shamefaced death of a guilty martyr.

IV. Division and self-division

Thus what Robert Hoskins calls the "self-division" (4) afflicting Greene's protagonist is materialized by the spatial line of demarcation. The tension of inner division is also enhanced by the systematic pairing of characters, which both connects the priest to other characters and divides him from them. The priest is thus paired with Jose, the outcast who has betrayed his vows, with Calver (the bandit whose photograph duplicates his own on the wall of the police station) and, most significantly, with the lieutenant. The lieutenant is given sound, convincing arguments as Greene deliberately shows the other side of the story, refusing manichean edification. The lieutenant and the priest, the hunter and the hunted, are mirror images. A dedicated "theologian going back over the errors of the past" (18), the lieutenant is a priestlike, ascetic, disciplined man who sleeps in a kind of cell and is bent on chastity.

³ For Gutleben this pattern may be connected with the circles of Hell (49).

Division becomes highly ambiguous, making the disputation scenes between the priest and the lieutenant more powerful.

But the ending reaffirms the textual politics of division and dissent. Throughout the novel, the lieutenant practices a policy of division and isolation (the taking of hostages marginalizes the priest who is rejected by the villagers' community and turned into an outcast); in the end, however, the lieutenant is the one who is left alone. His hatred for the priest has weakened, he seems confused rather than elated by the latter's death. On the contrary, though the priest seems wretched at the end, his dream connects him with Coral; Luis (the little boy who may be seen as the touchstone of evaluation in the novel) spits on the lieutenant's gun which used to fascinate him and greets the new priest. Thus the tactics of isolation are reversed. Dreams are very important for Greene, they create a web of symbols. It is significant that the lieutenant's last dream should emphasize division, partition, a wall with no opening, "a long passage in which he could find no door" (206), echoing with mocking laughter, suggesting his success is but a hollow, Pyrrhic victory. On the contrary, in the priest's dream, Coral offers him wine from her father's - presumably her Father's - house. Luis dreams that the dead priest winks at him, a clear sign of connection emphasized by the dash, a link rather than an interruption here. The sounds which wake the child turn the imaginary hammering of nails into a knocking at the door, a calling which echoes the tapping in the priest's own last dream, materializing Coral's Morse code (the structure of the novel, with its three long sections and its short fourth section, also echoes the three long taps and one short tap of the dream code). Whereas no door opens for the lieutenant in his dream, the novel ends on a threshold, an entrance, a door held ajar by a pointed shoe as "Father - " (220), yet another unnamed priest, steps in to become the new last priest of Tabasco.

Thus Graham Greene probes into spatial, thematic or symbolic division and connection. The play on textual montage (on focalisation, interruptions or ellipsis, temporal sequences), on blanks, on syntactic elements, comparisons (Greene's famous "leopards"), or homophonic signifiers all create a complex pattern of disruptions and echoes⁴. Mingling abstract notions and concrete objects, Greene is fascinated by the coincidence of opposites, eschewing manichean division to focus on the puzzling split of man's dual identity, the enigma of arrival. Hence his favourite quotation by Browning, which he claimed might have been the epigraph of all his novels:

Our	interest's	on	the	dangerous	edge	of	things,
The	honest	thief,	the	tender	murderer	[...]	
We	watch	while	these	in	equilibrium	keep	

The giddy line midway [...] (168).

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⁴ Other objective correlatives may be found in the novel, such as the code, the bestiary, or specific objects like shoes. A syllepsis links for instance belief (the priest compares belief to friction in a badly-fitting shoe) to actual shoes which turn into emblems of the character's moral state (the pedestrian pious woman in jail is "flat-footed", incapable of spiritual elevation; the second-hand shiny shoes given by the Lehrs are "the badge of a deserter" (160) whereas when he reaches the village he has almost no shoes left, they are "symbolic" (38), so worn out that he is almost barefoot; the new priest's shoe is pointed, a sign of purpose). Thus the sole of shoes is dimly connected with the soul, if one may risk such a pun.

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