



A Sort of Preface: The Riddles of Graham Greene - with an incursion into the manuscript

Gallix François

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A Sort of Preface: The Riddles of Graham Greene - with an incursion into the manuscript

François Gallix

François GALLIX is a Professor of contemporary literature in English at Paris IV-Sorbonne and co-director of ERCLA. He has published books and articles on various XXth century novelists including D.H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, Graham Swift, Kazuo Ishiguro. He has published *The Power and the Glory : Le Credo de Graham Greene* (Ellipses, 2006), edited with Vanessa Guignery *Plus sur Greene* (Atlande, 2007) and written "Un écrivain sous influence : Joseph Conrad au cœur de Graham Greene". Institut Polonais de Paris, 2008. Université de Paris IV.

manuscrit, hypotextes, paratexte, adaptations cinématographiques

Illustration 1



Late XIXth century edifying religious illustration, with the Ten Commandments Including the complete doxology: "The Kingdom, and the power and the Glory"

‘Mourir pour des idées...’

Georges Brassens, 1972

This book includes the edited papers read at the Sorbonne on 26th October 2007, to which have been added the articles written by other Greenean academics. There was also a display of Greene’s cover illustrations thanks to ‘The Graham Greene’s birthplace Trust’ and a few samples of the manuscript of *The Power and the Glory* kept at the ‘Harry Ransom Center’ at Austin (Texas).

Joyce’s wry comment on *Ulysses* comes to mind when reading Greene’s novel: “I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of ensuring one’s immortality.” In a way, Greene outdid Joyce in that he left a great number of unanswered riddles both about his life, with his succession of personae, and about his works – most of all about *The Power and the Glory* – a textual maze inviting thought-provoking interpretations varying from one generation to the next – so much so that Cedric Watts can write: “many of today’s British students regard as natural and proper a secular materialistic outlook of Greene’s novel.” The enigmas to be deciphered abound: the priest’s numerous giggles that have kept puzzling readers and critics since the publication of the book (Dickinson, Mianowski, see also Miyano, Shoko, 71-84), his card conjuring tricks “Fly away Jack”, 37, 190 (Dickinson), as in *The Third Man* (Sinyard),

the unMexican character of Greene's bestiary (Larsonneur), its symbolic contents (Delmas), Coral's emblematic Morse code (36) – two long taps and a short one for G, perhaps meaning God (Watts) and three long and one short (208) during the priest's dream, meaning "News" according to her (Remy), or possibly an exclamation mark (Watts), or else echoing the structure of the novel: three long parts and its fourth short section (Lanone). Other teasing puzzles are: the lieutenant's mysterious scar on his jaw (14), his excessive shining "neatness" (Sinyard), Luis's dream about a bleeding fish and the dead priest winking at him (220): "not only an allusion to Christ's miracle of the bread and the fishes but also to the sufferings of the Mexican people" (Larsonneur); the characters' dreams as a web of symbols (Lanone) and the anonymous girl's song about a rose stained with blood (13).

As Vanessa Guignery puts it:

"On se plaît souvent à relire des ouvrages fétiches que l'on croit connaître jusqu'au bout des doigts mais qui, à chaque lecture révèlent de nouveaux secrets."

[We often delight in re-reading cult novels that we thought we knew by heart but which reveal new secrets at each reading.]

Focusing on *The Power and the Glory* immediately brings to the fore several recurring points that seem to be almost obsessional leit-motifs in their continuity throughout the novel and other works by Greene: Greeneland, seediness, the motif of the hunted man at the end of his tether (Sinyard), the all-pervading presence of the father-figure of Joseph Conrad (Delmas), the novel being centred on flight more than on pursuit (Ravez), the manhunt motif, the blurred zone around the border (Mianowski). There is also the inclusion of Juan's sugary hagiography as a parallel story or a metafictional mirror to the frame story (Remy), the interplay between man and animal in Greene's "not so abject bestiary" (Larsonneur), the mock- heroic fight with the mongrel, 144 (Girard) and the novel as a seventeenth- century morality play according to Greene himself.

It also opens entirely new inroads of interpretation that were revealed and developed during the conference: the Lieutenant as a priest *manqué* (Watts, Sinyard), Greene's novel seen as "deliberately seditious towards canonical notions and genres" (Gutleben), Greene's challenging conventional attitudes (Watts), his deconstruction of exoticism (Delmas), Newman's presence felt in the portraits of the lieutenant and of Coral (Gallet), all the characters being in dire straits as those addressed in the *Beatitudes* (Dickinson) and even the observation of (bad) teeth as *memento mori* (Mianowski). There is also Greene's use of the Conradian oblique technique, with several covert plots that need to be deciphered at a second or third reading (Watts).

Indeed, one way of reading the novel is to see it as a very rich tapestry, so that, by just pulling a single thread out to its full extent, one can create very surprising and rewarding effects of meaning on the texture of the whole book – a sure proof of its literariness and of its timelessness. Catherine Lanone thus connects an amazing string of Eliotian objective correlatives: Mr. Tench's cast of a cleft palate, the characters cast away in Mexico, the fragments cast by the priest during his journey and the half-caste in the cast of characters. Other threads are the considerable influence of Newman on Greene (Gallet), the childhood memories uniting the priest and the lieutenant (Remy), the mestizo's discourse revealing "the Gross, the Trivial and the Grotesque" (Murat) and the thematic and intertextual links between Greene and Conrad (Delmas, see also Gallix), the motif of flight, including that of signifiers (Ravez). As in films, the editing of the novel, the different "effets de montage" are part of Greene's writing: the disposition of words on the page, always very meaningful, with the typographical blanks to edit the various sequences of the book and Greene's frequent use of colons, as in the *Beatitudes* (Dickinson), dashes (Lanone), question marks, hyphens and commas (Mianowski).

One of the main recurring themes tackled in this book is certainly that of duality, of connections and divisions in all their forms in a text with a binary structure of time and space

(Mianowski): a Janiform novel, as the two-faced God, according to Cedric Watts, or “an inhabitant of both countries” as Catherine Lanone puts it – man being seen by Greene as “both an image of God and an incarnation of sin” (Gutleben). The lieutenant and the priest shown as almost interchangeable (Girard), one being, to some extent, his double (Sinyard): both mystics, loyal to their creed, dedicated to their ideal with a sacrificial spirit (Remy), *The Power and the Glory* being Greene’s most Dostoyevskian work reflecting the duality of human nature (Sinyard).

The Manuscript

A close study of the manuscript kept at the Harry Ransom Center at Austin Texas (Box 27, folder 3, Ams. 137p., with A revisions) shows the evolution of Greene’s progressive conception of the novel. Written in longhand in black ink on green lined pages from a log book, the very fine writing that will become almost illegible in later years is not too difficult to decipher. Greene finished writing *The Power and the Glory* on the 13th September 1939, and the book was published on 4th March 1940 (letter to John Hayward, 14th September 1939 (Richard Greene, 101, 103).

Many of the revisions were made by Greene to alleviate the text, to suggest less in order to let the reader find his own way to the implied meaning of the story. The title of the first part of the novel ‘The Spoor’, that would tend to put the reader too early on the track of the manhunt, was thus crossed out, leaving only the title of the first chapter ‘The Port’. Similarly, the second part of the novel was first entitled ‘The Quarry’ and the first chapter ‘The Face’. Greene then took the decision to leave the second and third parts untitled. Two further examples will set the tone of what we could call Greene’s “skimming’ technique” or his “purified minimalist style” (Girard).

Comparing p.54 (Chapter 4: ‘The Bystanders’) in the Vintage edition to the manuscript (p.35) shows that after the line “it was for this [the lieutenant] was fighting...”, Greene had first written, then crossed out: “He was determined that life for them was going to be better (have a certainty, a security)”, exposing too openly the idealism and the humanitarian aspect of the lieutenant. Conversely at the end of the same chapter (p.55), when the lieutenant is looking at the newspaper photograph of the priest on the wall, his interior commentary: “[he] thought: you won’t laugh much [longer], (he shall have something to laugh at)” was not kept in the published edition, probably because it revealed too clearly the sarcastic cruelty of the hunter towards his prey.

The title page

Illustration 2

*I copied
1st copy 1st - 2nd copy*
A New Novel
By Graham Greene.
Ch. Power & the Glory
(+ a plate N.S.)

*Amsterdam
Universalis*

*"A" inclosure narrow'd; the sagacious power
of hands & death drew nearer every hour."
Dryden.*

*"The Best of what we do & are,
Just God, forgive!"
Wordsworth.*

Much more striking is the presence on the original manuscript, following the two lines from Dryden's poem, of a second epigraph that Greene finally decided not to include in the published version. The quotation by Wordsworth:

'The best of what we do and are,
Just God, forgive'

comes from the last lines of his third poem "Thoughts suggested the day following, on the Banks of Ninth, near the Poet's Residence" from *Memorials of a Tour in Scotland* (1803) III, 65–67¹.

Written by Wordsworth after leaving the churchyard where Robert Burns was buried, those last lines would have added a new paradox to Greene's title by replacing "and forgive us our trespasses" in the *Lord's prayer* by "forgive the best of what we do and are" – a new apocryphal version, linking this second epigraph to the title of his novel. Keeping in mind that, in all Greene's novels, epigraphs are always meaningful as they encapsulate the whole atmosphere of his books (Sinyard), one could assume that Greene most probably decided not to include this second epigraph because it announced too early and too plainly his Péguy-like belief that the sinner was the same as the Saint: "Nul n'est aussi compétent que le pécheur en matière de chrétienté. Nul, si ce n'est le saint. Et en principe c'est le même homme." [No one is more competent than a sinner in matters of Christianity. No one, unless it be a saint. And, in principle, it is the self-same man] (Péguy, 181).

The note, at the bottom of the title page of the manuscript also adds a new point to Greene's very keen interest in naming or not naming his characters. At the last moment – so it seems – he decided to turn Carol into Coral – a probable reference to Coral Musker in *Stamboul Train* (1932) – which might then lead to a reinterpretation of the character in the novel: "one of Greene's recurring types: the girl who is minimally attractive, frail, waif-like, and vulnerable, but always plucky" (Bergonzi, 26).

Cover illustrations

The duality highlighted in several papers is visually revealed in the cover illustrations of the novel, particularly in the Penguin editions since 1962 with the artwork of Paul Hogarth. While the illustrations of the first American edition, under the title of *The Labyrinthine Ways*, concentrated on Power with a fully-armed Mexican sitting in front of a maze,

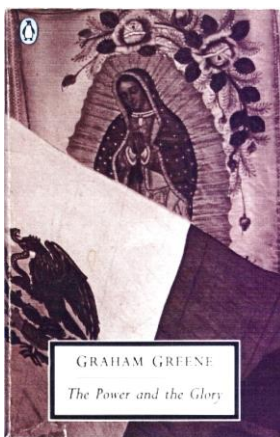
Illustration 3

¹ I am grateful to Pascal Aquien and Aurélie Thiria-Meulemans for helping me to find the reference.



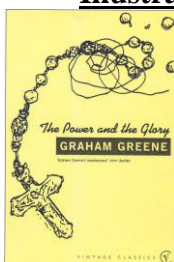
The eighth Penguin issue in 1990 emphasized the Glory, with the picture of the Virgin Mary and hinted at the Power with the Mexican flag at the bottom.

Illustration 4



The 2001 Vintage edition concentrated on the Glory with the picture of a set of beads, the threat of the Power appearing with the detached beads at the top.

Illustration 5



The violence and the parallel between the two protagonists were majestically embodied by Paul Hogarth's black and white illustration of two identical fighting cocks thus recalling the sub-chapter "Cock-fight" in *The Lawless Roads*, p.47 (Dickinson).

Illustration 6



“How do you fight an idea?” asks Neil Sinyard. One could add “How can you die for an idea?” Strangely enough, those questions could almost apply to both the whisky priest and the lieutenant. One should then remember that, under the Soviet régime in the USSR, Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* was banned because those who fought for the Polish resistance considered that the main theme of the book was the concept of “honour” (a word that is constantly repeated in the novel). It seems that many modern readings of *The Power and the Glory* have privileged man’s struggle to fight for his ideas in an oppressive society at the cost of his life – a further proof of the polysemy and timelessness of Greene’s novel.

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