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A World Remade: Graham Greene's Thrillers And The Nineteen-thirties

Brian Diemert

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**A WORLD REMADE:
GRAHAM GREENE'S THRILLERS AND THE NINETEEN-THIRTIES
Volume I**

**by
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**Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
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ABSTRACT

Within Graham Greene's large body of work stand several texts which, for reasons explored in this thesis, he originally called "entertainments". Because this label seems to suggest that these texts are not as important as his other novels, they have received relatively little critical attention. This thesis helps to redress this imbalance.

Beginning with a brief consideration of generic distinctions, I argue that Greene's use of the "entertainment" label is tied to the specific historical, political, and literary context of the nineteen-thirties in Britain. At this time, Greene and other writers reacted to the literary and critical practices of the high modernists, who emerged during and after World War One. With a renewed sense that literature could not be divorced from the social and political milieu of which it was a part, Greene and others sympathetic to the cause of the Left returned to a realistic mode of fiction and used popular forms of writing in their works. Greene's particular response, seen primarily in his "entertainments", was to develop the

classical detective story as practised by Poe, Doyle, Christie, and others into the political thriller.

By looking at the form of the detective story along lines suggested by Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Peter Brooks, and Dennis Porter, I show how Greene's texts explore the problem of reading and understanding in an intensely political age. In this context, his texts are seen as "narrative[s] of narratives" (Brooks 25).

After discussing several of Greene's early texts, such as "Murder for the Wrong Reason," Rumour at Nightfall, Stamboul Train, It's a Battlefield, and England Made Me, in terms of how they develop a political critique while exploring aspects of popular literature, I turn to a consideration of A Gun for Sale, Brighton Rock, The Confidential Agent, and The Ministry of Fear. In my examination of these texts, I consider a number of related issues involving the production and interpretation of narrative, and I relate these concerns to questions of ideology in politics and literary criticism. Ultimately, I find The Ministry of Fear to be Greene's fullest treatment of the materials of detective fiction.

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Chapter One

GRAHAM GREENE AND THE NINETEEN-THIRTIES

Until his death on April 3, 1991, Graham Greene was routinely referred to as "our greatest living novelist," but what this actually tells us is open to debate. Certainly it is, in part, meant as an acknowledgment of Greene's undeniable and continuing popularity--a popularity forged from his "ability to excite readers and create a convincing atmosphere of danger and suspense in [his] 'entertainments'" (O'Prey 43) and attested to by the fact that all but two of his forty or so books remain in print and available in paperback editions.¹ But being popular is not necessarily a measure of artistic worth; in fact, as David Lodge observes of Greene's reputation among literary critics, Greene's popularity is often seen as reason to doubt the quality of his work ("GG" 2). Indeed, there has been in the past a strong critical bias within the academy against popular works and popular forms or sub-genres such as science fiction, crime fiction, the western, and historical romance novels. At its most extreme, as in the case of the Leavises or Ortega, this bias sees popularity and artistic quality as mutually exclusive traits. Today, thanks to the work of critics like Leslie Fiedler, Dennis Porter, William Stowe, and Janice Radway and to structuralist and post-structuralist theorists such as Umberto Eco, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida, this bias

against the serious analysis of popular forms and popular texts is openly questioned, particularly when the issue of canon formation is discussed by feminist, minority, and interdisciplinary critics. Within the academy, the concept of there being a "great tradition" (which is to be read, studied, and taught) is crumbling as troubling assumptions behind the canonization of literary texts are increasingly exposed. Yet, as a relatively recent issue (July 1989) of Esquire magazine shows, publishers continue to employ a critical apparatus that maintains a hierarchy of authors and of texts in those periodicals, magazines, and newspapers from which the majority of readers get their literary news. The case of Graham Greene, then, is an interesting one.

As both a figure of critical praise and of critical scorn within the academy for his use of the thriller format in many of his texts², Greene exposes a host of critical biases--against popular fiction, against genre fiction, and against realistic fiction--to which critics are slowly opening their eyes. What renders this issue even more complex is that, although Greene is undoubtedly a popular writer, the same media that most strongly preserve the hierarchical distinctions between "serious" literature and "popular" literature also hailed Greene as the "best living novelist" currently writing in English.³ As Time magazine declared in a cover story on Greene in 1951,

[h]is stories, as gripping as a good movie, are penny dreadfuls about moral problems--but they cannot be dismissed as penny dreadfuls.

The people who have made Graham Greene the popular success he is today are, by and large, people who like the movies--people who go for a "good thriller" . . . he is now seriously discussed as possibly 'the finest writer of his generation'. No other writer in England enjoys Greene's combination of popular and critical success. ("Shocker" 62)

In many ways, this remains the critical consensus on Greene's work.

To study Greene's fiction in light of his use of the popular form of the thriller, then, is also to explore indirectly, through an examination of the strategies for reading that Greene develops in his texts, the twin concepts of canon formation and critical authority, of privileging certain types of literary texts--for whatever reasons--over others, and also to consider one response to the modernist enterprise after 1930 or so. In this regard, the whole question of Greene's attraction to the thriller form and the subsequent distinction he applied to his work between "entertainment" and "novel" prior to 1969 must be brought into focus.⁴ Similarly, the form of the thriller, including its relation to the detective fiction formula, needs to be

explored as a metaphor for the activity of reading. Finally, an examination of a selection of Greene's texts will show us how these ideas are put into practice while also enlarging our understanding of Greene and his work.

In this chapter I begin my investigation of Greene's use of the thriller by seeing it as part of a widespread response in the 1930s to the literature and criticism of high modernism, which emerged during and after World War One, and to the political, social, economic and military crises of the 1930s. After a brief discussion of the "entertainment" label that Greene applied to those books that explicitly used elements of the thriller, and of the critical response which this action elicited, Greene's attitudes to popular literature and art will be examined within the context of critical opinion prevalent in the thirties. Crucial to this will be the place of detective fiction within Greene's aesthetic. Subsequent chapters will explore the implications of detective fiction providing a metaphor for the reading process, Greene's turn in his fiction to narrative patterns derived from the detective story, and his explorations of this metaphor as a means of fictionally interrogating the hierarchical structures governing both literary criticism and socio-political relationships.

"Entertainments" and "Novels"

Greene says that he employed the designation "an entertainment" selectively between 1936 and 1969 to distinguish those of his books which deliberately made use of the popular form of the thriller from his "more serious work" (WE 78). A Gun For Sale (1936) was the first text to be so marked, and five subsequent texts also bear this label: The Confidential Agent (1939), The Ministry of Fear (1943), The Third Man (1950), Loser Takes All (1956), and Our Man in Havana (1958). These texts were "entertainments" because, as Greene told The Paris Review in 1953, "they [did] not carry a message" (Shuttleworth 32). However, the issue of how Greene used this designation becomes problematic when one considers other incidents of the heading's use.

His fourth published novel, Stamboul Train (1932), was not originally called "an entertainment" in its first editions but was given this heading after 1936 and is generally treated with the six other entertainments by critics. Also called an entertainment is "The Basement Room" (1935) but only when it is reprinted as "The Fallen Idol" (after the title of the film version) and published, after 1950, by Heinemann and later Penguin with The Third Man.⁵ The most difficult case, however, is that of Brighton Rock (1938), which was called an entertainment in its first American edition but not in its first British edition

published a month later; subsequent American reprintings removed the sub-heading.

What this vacillation suggests is that the issue of the entertainments and Greene's use of this label must be addressed. However, despite the growing volume of critical commentary that Greene has excited, much of the critical work on Greene offers brief and dismissive treatments of those works that Greene chose to call "entertainments." And, although Stratford (Faith), Adamson (Dangerous), and Malamet offer good discussions of all or some of these texts, only Wolfe's 1972 study Graham Greene: The Entertainer treats them exclusively.⁶

The reasons that the novels, particularly the so-called Catholic novels (Brighton Rock [1938], The Power and the Glory [1940], The Heart of the Matter [1948], The End of the Affair [1951], and The Burnt-Out Case [1961]) receive most of the critical attention are, as an anonymous reviewer noted, threefold: (1) they offer easy thematic handles and a certain guaranteed seriousness (that is, damnation is serious); (2) Catholic critics have been quick to offer Catholic explanations and interpretations; and (3) Greene's distinction between "novels" and "entertainments" has "encouraged critics to take his best work lightly" ("GG: Man Within" 11). More recent studies by Donaghy and McEwen continue to prove the validity of these remarks as both dismiss the "entertainments" with brief comment.

To be sure, the adoption by Greene of the label "An Entertainment" for some of his books is problematic since the selective use of the label implies a difference between a text that bears this label and one that does not. What is more, this difference is seen by the majority of critics as both generic and qualitative; that is, the "entertainments" are considered to be "lighter" or "lesser" fare since they are more obvious in their attempts to reach a large audience through their explicit use of the conventions of the thriller. By contrast, the novels are deemed "serious" both in theme and form. Hence, in the 1950s when theological concerns particularly dominated the work of Greene's critics, it was fashionable to dismiss A Gun For Sale (1936), The Confidential Agent (1939), and The Ministry of Fear (1943) as "trial run[s]" (Lewis 240) for the more significant novels that followed each: Brighton Rock, The Power and the Glory, and The Heart of the Matter. For R. W. B. Lewis, these texts make up Greene's "trilogy" which explores an explicitly religious theme.⁷

Some critics have attempted to play down the distinction between "novel" and "entertainment", yet they frequently run into the difficulty of operating as if a difference is genuinely marked between two types of texts. For example, Robert O. Evans calls this difference "superficial" but follows the commonly held position, coming from Waugh, that sees the "entertainment" label as a mark of

the degree to which the texts deal with the seriousness of life (Evans, "Introduction" vii)⁸; consequently, the entertainments are of less importance, and Evans' selection of critical essays reflects this. Similarly, John Atkins, Richard Kelly, David Pryce-Jones, and Martin Turnell question the distinction, but each also implicitly validates the practice of designating some texts entertainments and others novels by treating the label as a mark of genuine difference.⁹ The point here is that critics, including those who admire the "entertainments" above the "novels" (such as Robson, Lambert, and, to an extent, Lodge), have largely accepted the idea that Greene's texts are of two kinds, that Greene writes in two distinct genres.

Indeed, most commentators accept the definition of "entertainment" as a genre that was proposed in 1951 by Kenneth Allott and Miriam Farris in the first book-length study of Greene's fiction¹⁰. They suggested that the entertainments were distinct from the novels by a comparative lack of character development, by the wilful use of an interesting background for its own sake, and by the free use of coincidence and improbabilities to link aspects of the plot (78-79). Others have added to this definition by claiming that the entertainments possess relatively happy endings, melodramatic storylines (particularly in their use of violence) (Kunkel 157), and rapidly paced action that

moves "in short, sharp, cinematographic flashes" which give the reader little time to weigh probabilities (105).

On a more thematic level, De Vitis argues that the novels express "the serious preoccupation with religious and ethical problems" while in the "secular" entertainments these concerns are of secondary importance to "plot, action, and melodrama" (27). For De Vitis and others, this emphasis ensures that the "entertainments are not the thought-provoking documents that the novels are" (53), although "any writer of thrillers or light fiction would be proud to have written" them. De Vitis suggests that "[u]ltimately Greene is important for the scope and originality of those novels that have provoked critics and readers alike into philosophical and religious arguments" (53).

In one sense, De Vitis and the many others who share this view of the entertainments cannot be blamed for seeing them as less important work. As we have noted, Greene himself has contributed to this view in a number of places; and, in a 1955 radio interview with Walter Allen, he commented:

In one's entertainments one is primarily interested in having an exciting story as in physical action, with just enough character to give interest in the action, because you can't be interested in the action of a mere dummy. In the novels I hope one is primarily interested in the

character and the action takes a minor part.

(cited in Pryce-Jones 62; Wolfe 32; and
Silverstein 24)

Turning to Greene's own comments about his work for support, however, is a risky venture for any critic, since Greene is just as apt to say the opposite of what one would expect in the next interview or essay he provides. In the case of his views on the use of "an entertainment", this is equally true. For instance, in an interview with Anthony Burgess, Greene expressed his concern over the kind of thing that critics do when they separate his fiction into the serious novels--therefore, important work--and the not-so-serious entertainments (thrillers)--therefore, escapist or minor work:

The more I think of it, the more I worry about this division of literature into the great because hard to read, the not so great--or certainly ignoble by scholars--because of the desire to divert, be readable, keep it plain. You don't find Conan Doyle dealt with at length in the literary histories. Yet he was a great writer. He created several great characters-- . . . Something ought to be done about this double standard. (Burgess 22-23)

Similarly, in The Other Man, an extended interview by Marie-Françoise Allain, Greene notes that he originally employed

the distinction in order to escape melodrama (by which he means "a measure of violence in the action" [37], that is, the thriller element), but that after The Ministry of Fear the "novels and entertainments resembled each other more and more" so that he "abandoned the dichotomy once and for all with Travels With My Aunt, for it served no further purpose" (148). What is curious here is that earlier in the interview Greene confesses that he "only avoided melodrama in one or two books, The End of the Affair and Travels With My Aunt" (37), which suggests that if the "entertainments" were written to purge, through an imaginative process, "the temptation of melodrama" (Stratford, "GG" 67), as Lewis and others seem to think, they failed in their purpose.

Nonetheless, because it was Greene who offered the subtitle "an entertainment" for several of his texts, the label has acquired an authority that is largely accepted by critics who seek marks of difference between texts without first determining if such a difference really exists. The label is viewed as a generic or modal signal that, like other similar terms--"a mystery," "a romance," or "a history"--structures a set of expectations against which the text is measured and judged, and directs us in how we read and in what we take from our reading. As a mark of genre, the label invokes that part of the reading experience with which we are already familiar before we come to the text. Hence, the label "an entertainment" is an explicit

indication of what Barthes calls the "already read" (S/Z 19). But for some of Greene's critics the fact that he seems to construct two different sets of expectations for his readers poses considerable problems.

The chief difficulty, despite the warnings of more conservative theorists including Frye and Fowler who note that "genres are . . . in a state of continual transmutation" (Fowler 24), lies in seeing genre as a "natural" or prescriptive entity and in seeing Greene as an author working in distinct genres. On a general level, this has led critics to take Greene's "entertainment" designation at face value and so make it the marginalized term in the Greenian binary opposition of "entertainment"/"novel" (thus the entertainments are treated separately and/or differently from the novels). However, on a more specific level of concern, this way of thinking has led to some remarkable charges against Greene which seem to miss the point of his work because critics assume that genres are not to be, and cannot be, mixed.

A case in point is R. W. B. Lewis, whose influence has caused others to repeat the charge that Greene is guilty of generic confusion in his early novels. According to Lewis, these texts display "an apparent failure to distinguish between various fictional genres. . . . [and] the confusion of purpose and the blurry handling of the elements are rooted in a failure to disentangle the mystery of the

mystery, to separate it out from the contingencies of melodrama and the staged surprises of the brain-twister" (239-40). For Lewis, who would agree with McCarthy before him, Greene's early novels fail because they do not conform easily to standards of decorum for generic conventions: Greene, it seems, does not know how to write a proper thriller because he has mixed seriousness of purpose with the artificial constructions of this genre. The text that demonstrates this confusion most clearly for Lewis is Brighton Rock which, although it does effectively exploit the "confusion" of genres, still "betrays an initial confusion between what Greene calls an 'entertainment' and what he finally offered as tragedy . . ." (239). André Maurois is similarly critical of Brighton Rock and does not rank it high among Greene's texts because he finds that the detective story element in the novel (Ida Arnold's pursuit of Pinkie Brown) holds a disproportionate place in the story (Maurois 387). (By way of contrast, David Lodge admires Brighton Rock precisely for its use of the crime story [Lodge/Gregor 165].)

John Atkins runs into slightly different problems, though they stem from the same root assumptions that are shared by Lewis and Maurois. Atkins complains that it is unwise of Greene to label his fiction [as entertainments and novels] . . . It smacks of lecturing the reader, attempting to control his

responses, when in fact the essential product of an author's mind should be indivisible, regardless of its superficial lightness or gravity. Once again Greene's wistful desire to be thought intellectual, linked with his sense of personal insufficiency, peeps out. . . . The fact is, Greene can only write well in one way . . . By pretending that some of his books are intentionally more "popular" than the others he is in fact admitting that the others are rather more strained than the some. (30)

Here, Atkins exhibits a number of common assumptions. On the one hand, he seems to be suggesting that Greene's texts, whatever their designations, are all of a piece, that "entertainment" and "novel" are more or less the same kind of writing because they are products of the same mind. On the other hand, just prior to this quoted passage, he parenthetically describes the two terms of division in Greene's work ("novels" and "entertainments") as "serious work" and "pot-boilers" (30), and, in his comment that "the essential product of an author's mind should be indivisible" (my italics), there is the suggestion of an implied recommendation that perhaps indicates that Greene's work is divisible, though it "should" not be. What is more, the "serious work" (the novels) is described as "more strained" (implying that all of Greene's fiction is strained?) than

the entertainments. Atkins seems to be having it both ways, that is, he discounts the notion of difference between two texts (for example, Stamboul Train and It's A Battlefield [1934]) while consistently remarking on the presence of difference (serious work/non-serious work, more strained/less strained etc.). Try as he might, Atkins cannot escape the influence of the sub-heading he disavows.

However, what Lewis, Maurois, Atkins, and other critics demonstrate is the power of genre. Essentially, in being aware of the fact that genre signals control reader response (as they do for these critics), Atkins and the others rely on an understanding of genre similar to Jameson's formulation: "Genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact" (Political Unconscious 106): Here, the idea of genre as a contract suggests that a kind of legitimate, legal, authority lies behind reading.

The presence of the "entertainment" label itself, though, raises a number of questions about genre since it is a commentary superimposed on the text by the text, yet, as Derrida notes, it is not of the text ("Law of Genre" 61). What renders the classification of a text as a particular genre problematic is that the concept of genre involves prohibition or delimitation; that is, to place a text in a particular genre is to define the specificity of the text

and mode against another genre (Political Unconscious 142).

Or, as Derrida puts it,

[a]s soon as the word "genre" is sounded, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limitation is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: "Do," "Do not" says "genre," the word "genre," the figure, the voice, or the law of the genre. And this can be said of genre in all genres . . . ("Law of Genre"

52)

Hence, in the terms Greene uses, "entertainments" are marked against unmarked texts which, therefore, comprise a second grouping, "novels".

Of course, there are obvious problems with this terminology stemming largely from the fact that "genre" is used by critics in two distinct ways. On the one hand, "genre" describes the broad classifications of form such as novel, short story, novella, play, poem, epic, lyric and so on into which we place literary texts. On the other hand, "genre", in the sense of genre fiction for instance, describes particular types of narrative such as detective fiction, science fiction, or the western which can be found in any text regardless of its form as novel, film, play or whatever. For critics of Greene's work these differing uses raise potential difficulties since, with the two exceptions of "The Fallen Idol," a short story, and Loser Takes All,

a novella, Greene's entertainments are also novels in the first sense of the term genre. However, the distinction between "entertainment" and "novel" which Greene makes is usually treated as a generic difference in the second sense of the term, and so the "entertainment" becomes figured as a type of genre fiction which, as we have seen, is accorded less respect by critics. To avoid possible confusion, it is important to remember that for this study I use "genre" in the second sense of the term, although other critics might use terms such as type, mode, or sub-genre to describe the distinction between "entertainment" and "novel".

But whether one treats "entertainment" as a modal or a generic term hardly matters since Jameson's definition of the term "genre" extends its meaning to encompass all other possible distinctions (type, kind, mode, form, sub-genre). In this way one can speak of thrillers, mysteries, detective stories, spy stories, police procedural novels (to name five closely related forms) as distinct genres, although a more precise typology might call them sub-genres of the novel or types of crime fiction--itself a variety of the mode of romance--or even forms of the "entertainment". In any case, Derrida's remarks about the law of genre are equally applicable whatever our chosen terminology:

The trait common to these classes of classes is precisely the identifiable recurrence of a common trait by which one recognizes, or should

recognize, a membership in a class. There should be a trait upon which one could rely in order to decide that a given textual event, a given "work," corresponds to a given class (genre, type, mode, form, etc.). And there should be a code enabling one to decide questions of class-membership on the basis of this trait . . . [This code] should provide an identifiable trait and one which is identical to itself, authorizing us to determine, to adjudicate whether a given text belongs to this genre or perhaps to that genre. ("Law of Genre" 59-60)

That is, this trait is marked in any text, and, when it is repeated in a second text, the two texts can be described as belonging to the same genre, mode, or form.

Derrida's remarks on the law of genre are of some interest in a discussion of Greene's deployment of the "entertainment" label, since Derrida's example (Blanchot's La Folie du jour) also bears a generic sub-heading ("Un recit?") of questionable status. Essentially, Derrida finds that "genre" (like "presence," "centre," "norm," "speech," "male," etc.) is the privileged term in a structure of binary opposition (hence, presence/absence, centre/periphery, norm/deviation, speech/writing, male/female, or in Greene's terms novel/entertainment), so "genre" becomes "genre-clause" (61). Genre limits--"as soon

as genre announces itself one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity" (53)--but it also marks the edge of what it does not contain. That is, it is impossible not to mix genres since the law of genre involves the presence of a counter-law that both threatens in advance and constitutes, by making it possible, the very law of genre (54). The law of genre defines an edge ("'Do.' 'Do not'") by containing within it "a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy. In the code of set theories . . . I would speak of a sort of participation without belonging--a taking part in without being a part of, without having membership in a set." This Derrida calls "the law of the law of genre" (55).

For Derrida, evidence for the "law of the law of genre" is found in the individual trait that marks genre within a text. The mark that a set of texts shares sets this group off from other texts, but in itself the mark (or "re-mark" since it is repetition that renders a trait a mark of genre) evinces the contamination of a generic distinction. What Derrida suggests is that "it is always possible that a set [or text] . . . remarks on this distinctive trait within itself" (60). Any text, whether a newspaper-editorial or a novel, can indicate by means of a mark, even if it is not explicitly designated as such, that it is an article of the genre newspaper-editorial or novel.

Although "this does not constitute a text ipso facto as 'literature' . . . [this re-mark] is absolutely necessary for and constitutive of what we call art, poetry, or literature. It underwrites the eruption of techné [art] . . . Can one identify a work of art, of whatever sort, but especially a work of discursive art, if it does not bear the mark of genre, if it does not signal or mention it or make it remarkable in any way?" (60). The answer to Derrida's question obviously is "no". The mark of genre is crucial to our understanding of a text, and to condemn a text for openly declaring its generic allegiance raises serious problems. As Todorov has noted, the text that is generally considered literature is traditionally seen as that text that breaks generic boundaries, so it must essentially be seen as a genre unto itself. (It is this view of literature that is at the heart of the critical prejudice against genre fiction.) The best example of a popular form, by contrast, most clearly shows its generic membership because it conforms exactly to the strictures of generic formula; to improve upon the formula is to write literature (Poetics 43).¹¹ But if it were truly the case that the text of literature broke completely from generic patterning to become a genre unto itself, then the text would be incomprehensible. Instead, any text teaches us how to read it by putting forward generic signals, by re-marking on the mark of genre within it, that appeal to our experience of

reading because they are the trace of the already-read. As Frye has never tired of teaching, "all fiction is conventionalized" (Secular Scripture 45).

Derrida continues by noting that the (re)mark of genre can take on a number of forms and pertain to highly diverse types. One such form is the designation or mention of the type that may be found beneath the title of certain books ("novel," "entertainment," "mystery," "romance," etc.), but "[t]he remark of belonging need not pass through the consciousness of the author or the reader, although it often does so. It can also refute this consciousness or render the explicit 'mention' mendacious, false, inadequate, or ironic according to all sorts of overdetermined figures" (60). Nor need this remark be a theme or the thematic component of the work. What happens is that the mark exists and is re-marked upon in the text even in the absence of a sub-heading. By Derrida's reasoning, a paradox is arrived at whereby the "distinctive trait, a mark of belonging or inclusion, does not properly pertain to any genre or class. The remark of belonging does not belong" (61). For example, in Greene's texts, the designation "entertainment" "places within and without the work, along its boundary, an inclusion and exclusion with regard to genre in general, as to an identifiable class in general" (61). The status of the sub-heading, then, is severely undermined since it is only one form of self-comment that texts possess. Such a

designation "commits one to nothing. Neither reader nor critic nor author are bound to believe that the text preceded by this designation conforms readily to the strict, normal, normed, or normative definition of the genre, to the law of the genre or of the mode" (62-63). A second point about the status of this kind of designation is that its effacement "leav[es] a trace that, inscribed and filed away, remains as an effect of supplementary relief which is not easily accounted for in all of its facets" (63). (Hence, Brighton Rock, though no longer called an "entertainment", still exists under the trace of that name.) Ultimately, despite many critics' attempts to make a clear distinction between an "entertainment" and a "novel" by Greene, the task of determining the difference between the two, by Derrida's reasoning, is an impossible one that has at its heart the very question of what literature is; that is, why is one piece of fiction accepted as literature and another piece, specifically a work that uses the form of a popular genre, dismissed as insignificant fiction destined to be forgotten? In Derrida's analysis, serious literature and popular literature inscribe each other: each is crucial to the survival of the other.

We cannot, then, think of the designation "entertainment" as a formal description marking some of Greene's books as different from his others. The experiences of a number of Greene's critics easily

demonstrate the difficulties into which one can stumble if one sees in "an entertainment" only an expression of the law of genre and not of the law of the law of the genre as well. More important to recognize about Greene's work is how his texts comment on their generic qualities. Indeed, Greene's texts exist on and investigate the border or the frontier of genre. Whether "entertainment" or not, they embody a process of reflexive investigation that holds critical distinctions between entertainment and novel, popular genre and literary genre, popular fiction and canonical literature up to scrutiny by challenging our methodology of reading.

If, however, the entertainment label is not a formal description, we still need to clarify its place in Greene's work. One might argue that Greene's comments to Allain and to Burgess suggest that he did have a definite sense of what constituted an "entertainment" and of what constituted a "novel" which changed over time. In this case, one would expect that differences between the two types would be most clear in the early novels up to The Ministry of Fear (1943), since Greene states that after this point the entertainments and the novels came to resemble each other more and more. Hence, despite the fact that The Third Man, Loser Takes All, and Our Man in Havana were still called "entertainments", one would argue that in the 1950s Greene saw less difference between these texts and the novels of the same period than he saw between entertainments and novels in the 1930s. By

1969, when he came to write Travels With My Aunt, the distinction was no longer relevant to him so he abandoned the idea of calling some of his books "entertainments" and others "novels", although novels like Travels With My Aunt or The Human Factor (1978) might very well have been thought of as entertainments by a younger Greene. This change in Greene's thinking also explains why the designation "entertainment" was removed from all of those novels to which it had been affixed when they were reprinted for the collected edition of his works and from the list of works that appears opposite the title page of Travels With My Aunt and subsequent novels. Since Greene chose not to call even the "entertainments" from the thirties "entertainments" any longer, one would have to assume that the older Greene saw no difference where the younger Greene had, erroneously, detected one. There are, however, a number of problems with this approach since it continues to see the "entertainment" label as a formal designation.

Greene's criticism, particularly in the thirties, makes it clear that he has always questioned the idea that cultural production could be separated into categories of high, meaning serious or elite, art and low, meaning escapist or popular, art. If anything, it seems that he was determined to bridge this gulf in his own work at least. Hence, it is no surprise to discover that his early entertainments resemble his early novels enough to justify

for some the removal of the "entertainment" subtitle. However, when we consider that Greene only gave this label to books published between 1936 and 1958 (Stamboul Train was belatedly termed an "entertainment") and allowed its use until 1969, we can see that it is tied to a specific historical period. More particularly, if we take into account Greene's comment that the novels and entertainments began to resemble each other more and more after The Ministry of Fear, it becomes apparent that the label is most important for Greene from 1936 to 1943 and perhaps slightly beyond. What this suggests is that the reasons for its use are closely tied to a specific historical and literary context, and Greene's comments from this period found in his essays and film reviews are particularly interesting in this regard.

Greene has noted that "melodrama is one of my working tools and it enables me to obtain effects that would be unattainable otherwise" (Shuttleworth 39-40); one of these effects is to excite his readers by getting them "involved in the story". This has always been crucial to Greene: "If you excite your audience first," he wrote in a 1936 review of Rhythm on the Range starring Bing Crosby, "you can put over what you will of horror, suffering, truth" (Pleasure Dome 94). More than thirty years later, he added, that "[t]his is still true and applies to the novel as well as to the film. By exciting the audience I mean getting them

involved in the story. Once they are involved they will accept the thing as you present it" (Phillips, "GG: On Screen" 172-73). What this suggests is that in the same year he first decided to use the term "an entertainment" to describe A Gun For Sale, Greene saw the thriller form as offering more than just a personal purging of melodramatic creative impulses. What it offered was a means of putting ideas, specifically political ideas, across to readers who would otherwise not be reached by more conventional political discourse. As Carolyn Scott notes in one of the better discussions of the entertainments, there is a "political emphasis" in those books designated as entertainments that is less well marked in the other, more theologically oriented work (2). Although she is not free of the same kind of assumptions that De Vitis and others make about genre, Scott's suggestion of a political emphasis in those texts marked "entertainment" provides a clue to Greene's use of the thriller form and to his decision to adopt this nomenclature.

Detective Story and Thriller

It has been suggested that the "entertainment" label reflects Greene's "squeamishness" about the melodramatic elements in certain of his novels and that, consequently, the subtitle is some sort of apology to critical fashion (Davis 47; Lambert 138). Greene, however, has never been

shy about his affection for what Orwell, borrowing from G. K. Chesterton, called "good bad books" ("Good Bad" 19) and their authors. Indeed, Greene's attraction to melodramatic forms of literature such as detective fiction and adventure stories is clearly seen not only in autobiographical reminiscences but also in his contributions to a bibliography of Victorian detective fiction and to an edition of four Victorian mysteries.¹² The critical "double-standard" that dismisses popular art and popular forms, like the thriller, as the inferior cultural products of a mass consumer-oriented society is something with which Greene has never been comfortable. In his reviews he is just as apt to praise the work of Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard, Anthony Hope, or John Buchan as he is the work of more "literary" figures like Henry Fielding, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, or James Joyce. This is not to imply that Greene is uncritical of the products of popular culture. He frequently takes popular authors, such as Charles Morgan and Mrs. Parkinson Keyes, to task for careless writing. Similarly, in a 1937 film review he applied a distinction Ford Madox Ford made between "novels" and "nuvvels" to film, suggesting that films could be divided into either cinema or movies with the former approaching the condition of art and the latter pandering to popular taste and fashion (PD 186).¹³

Critically, Greene has adopted a somewhat paradoxical stance towards the products of popular culture: what is popular is not necessarily artistically valuable but what is valuable artistically is necessarily rooted in the popular. Repeatedly in his criticism, particularly in his film reviews and in the short British Dramatists, he stresses the artist's need to be aware of an audience: "I doubt if the best work has ever been produced in complete independence of a public. . . . Popular taste makes a thoroughly bad dictator, but the awareness of an audience is an essential discipline for the artist" (PD 40). For Greene, the work of art fails when it is separated from the people by being too intellectual or too academic (British Dramatists 10). The logical outcome of this is his conviction that the artist must make use of popular forms, like the thriller, and shape them so that they present "the truth as [the artist] sees it" (Why? 30). This implies an essential belief in the connectedness of art or literature and society. That is, the novelist has a responsibility to society and to the state which specifically involves accepting a political role. He or she must, as a primary task, awaken sympathy; the novelist "is to draw his own likeness to any human being, the guilty as much as the innocent" (Why? 48).

This concern for art's social role reveals how firmly rooted Greene's critical position is in the cultural milieu of the 1930s--Greene's formative period as a novelist and

the decade in which he was most prolific.¹⁴ Greene's sense of what the novel should be and of popular culture in society is not unique among writers of his generation. His conviction in the value of the popular in the arts arises out of more than a personal sense of loyalty to the authors of his youth; it is a part of the response of second generation modernists--that is, the writers who emerged in the 1930s--to the high modernists, who emerged during and after World War I, of the previous literary generation. For many of the younger writers of the 1930s, literature and art had to align themselves with social concerns. In this period of economic, political, and military crisis, literature could not remain disinterested, and to this end numerous critics and authors from both the political Left and the Right sought to redefine the role of literature within the culture. Although Woodcock sees Greene as "aloof" from the party politics of the thirties' generation of writers and, consequently, a survivor of the period (129), Greene's fiction and his decision to use popular forms of discourse demonstrate that he shared his generation's view of the modernism of the twenties and mark him as sympathetic to the aims of the Left though detached enough to avoid the traps of dogmatic positions. Indeed, as Webster notes, Greene's novels of the thirties offer a more accurate picture of the decade than do the "Marxist" works of Steinbeck or Dos Passos precisely because Greene is

equally critical of both the established order of the Right and of the excesses of the Left (106). Like Auden and his followers, Greene shared the belief that the artist could be, had to be, serious without being "highbrow," and it is in this context that his thrillers and his decision to use the "entertainment" label have their place. The entertainments are of particular importance in this period since they establish the foundation of all of Greene's fiction--as Gransden states: "the special qualities of excitement and anticipation which we chiefly associate with Greene are seen at their best in the early novels and entertainments" (41).

Although some critics, John Bayley and Stephen Hynes for example, see all of Greene's novels as thrillers,¹⁵ those with the "entertainment" label are most often associated with the thriller genre. However, as one quickly realizes in studying detective fiction, generic terminology is a vexed issue, and what constitutes a "thriller" is hardly a matter of agreement among analysts of crime or detective fiction. Mary McCarthy, for instance, gives historical priority to the thriller as a literary type when she suggests that Greene discarded the detective story plot for the "more old-fashioned machine" of the thriller (228). Todorov, on the other hand, uses "thriller" to describe a genre that emerged in the United States prior to and during World War II (Poetics 47). This kind of diversity in the

use of the term is quite common, but for my purposes it is best to use "thriller" as a broad heading for all forms of detective fiction but the classical detective story.¹⁶ That is, I distinguish the "thriller" from the "classical detective story" or, simply, "detective story" and use "detective fiction" as an umbrella term for the genre as a whole under which "detective story" and "thriller" can be grouped. Tentatively, then, we can suggest ways in which the thriller, or "shocker" to use a synonymous British term,¹⁷ is distinct from the classical detective story.

Between these two forms the marks of distinction rest on more than just certain features of content: distinctions also rest on differences between methods of presenting narrative. What the thriller and the detective story have in common is a plot based on a pattern of pursuit (as do almost all forms of detective fiction), but the differences in how this pattern is presented help to distinguish thrillers from classical detective stories.

The classical detective story exemplifies the primary structure of detective fiction in what is perhaps its purest form. Most typically in this form a crime is committed either just prior to or soon after the beginning of the narrative. The narrative then recounts the efforts of a detective or a detective figure to retrace the path of the criminal in order to expose, at the end of the narrative, the origins of the crime that instigated the narrative.

Essentially, this structure contains two stories: the story of the investigation which is present to the reader and moves forward in time in the narrative, and the story of the crime which is hidden from the reader and constructed backwards from the scene of the crime to its source (Poetics, 44; Porter 29; Brooks 24-5)¹⁸. Ideally, in the classical detective story there are few points in common between these two stories: the story of the crime ends before the story of the investigation begins, and the story of the investigation ends with the telling of the story of the crime (Poetics 44). In this way, as will be seen, the classical detective story shows itself to be a metaphor for the reading process wherein the detective's investigation--his or her reading of the story of the crime--is likened to the reader's experience of this or of any other text.

In the thriller, however, the story of the crime is not hidden from the reader, although it remains the detective's task to uncover the origins of the crime for those around him or her. What happens is that the story of the crime is foregrounded and vitalized while the story of the investigation is suppressed to an extent. This structure removes the question of "whodunit?" from the reader's mind, but renders the metaphor of reading more complicated as the detective still seeks to read the story of the crime while, correspondingly, the criminal seeks to read the story of the

investigation in order to prevent his or her own story from being read.

Given the numerous possibilities for variation within this structure, critics have failed to agree on a common definition for "thriller", and certainly Greene's texts defy existing typologies in many ways. For example, Palmer suggests that thrillers present a hero distinguished from other characters by his or her professionalism and success. Greene's thriller "heroes", however, are all amateurs more given to failure than to success. Contrary to Palmer's definition, Ida Arnold in Brighton Rock, D. in The Confidential Agent, Arthur Rowe in The Ministry of Fear, Rollo Martins in The Third Man, and even Raven in his role of avenger in A Gun for Sale all go about their tasks in haphazard ways without help from, or in opposition to, legitimate professional authorities; and, with the possible exception of Rowe none works to solve or thwart some heinous crime posing a major threat to the social order.

Todorov's use of the term is no better in its application to Greene's texts, since Todorov sees the thriller as a late development of the classical detective story constituted around a represented milieu and around specific characters and behaviour instead of a method of presentation (Poetics 48). In his definition, the thriller involves violence, sordid crime, and amoral characters--all of which can be found in Greene's entertainments. However,

Todorov, perhaps thinking of Ian Fleming's books, goes on to suggest that the thriller milieu tends to be marvelous or exotic, which is certainly not true of the milieu in Greene's texts.

Possibly more useful with reference to Greene's work is a third classification which Todorov places between the classical detective story and the thriller. The "suspense novel", as he calls it (50), combines properties of the classical detective story and of the thriller. It keeps the structure of two stories (of the investigation and of the crime), but it does not reduce the investigation to the simple detection of truth. As in the thriller, the story of the crime occupies a central place in the narrative (Poetics 50), but in the structure of the suspense novel the reader is interested both in what has happened prior to the narrative and in what will happen next in the narrative. The opening enigma becomes a point of departure for the story taking place in the present that is the reader's main concern. Todorov even goes so far as to distinguish two sub-types of the suspense novel: "the story of the vulnerable detective," as exemplified in the writings of Hammett, Chandler, and other writers of the hard-boiled school of detective fiction; and "the story of the suspect as detective", as found in the work of William Irish (Cornell Woolrich), Patrick Quentin, Charles Williams and, although Todorov does not mention him, John Buchan in The

Thirty-Nine Steps (Poetics 50-51). Greene's texts exhibit aspects of both these sub-types and could profitably be termed "suspense novels".

In any case, as this brief discussion of terminology demonstrates, the whole question of generic labels in analyses of detective fiction is a vexed one. "Thriller," though often applied to Greene's work, seldom means the same thing for two different critics. But so long as we are aware of this and can account for differences, there should be no problem with using "thriller" as a broad term for all of the various types of detective fiction, excepting the classical detective story, from spy story to adventure story. This is the way in which most critics of Greene's work use the term, and it is by and large the way in which Greene and others used the term in the 1930s.

Although T. S. Eliot proposed three categories for detective fiction (detectives, thrillers, and "curdlers") (Eliot, Criterion 175), W. H. Auden in his 1938 essay "The Guilty Vicarage" (147) and Greene in his film criticism (PD 89) distinguished only two: classical detective stories and thrillers. (Auden preferred the former and Greene the latter although both men were attracted to detective fiction for similar reasons.) For Auden the classical detective story is similar to a modern morality play in that it ritualistically presents the discovery and expulsion of

guilt from an "Eden-like" setting through the agency of an individual--the detective--"who is . . . in a state of grace."¹⁹ The result is the restoration of a "state of grace" to the "Great Good Place." Auden goes on to suggest that "the typical reader of detective stories is . . . a person who suffers from a sense of sin" and that "[t]o have a sense of sin means to feel guilty" (157). The classical detective story offers the reader an escapist "fantasy of being restored to the Garden of Eden, to a state of innocence, where he may know love as love and not as law" (158). The thriller, on the other hand, presents "the ethical and characteristic conflict between good and evil" in terms of "Us and Them" (147); it "gratif[ies] in fantasy the violent or murderous wishes they [readers] dare not, or are ashamed to, translate into action" (157).

Auden's metaphysical and religious reading of the classical detective story is shared by Greene, and this aspect of the genre is, no doubt, one of the reasons for Greene's attraction to detective fiction. Auden's essay, which appeared in the May 1938 issue of Harper's Magazine, is quickly echoed in Greene's June 17, 1938, review of L'Alibi and A Slight Case of Murder:

Murder, if you are going to take it seriously at all, is a religious subject; the interest of a detective-story is the pursuit of exact truth, and if we are at times impatient with the

fingerprints, the time-tables and the butler's evasions, it is because the writer, like some early theologians, is getting bogged in academic detail. (PD 192)

However, the difference between Auden's and Greene's views is alluded to in these remarks. For Greene, classical detective stories, which he elsewhere describes as "modern fairy tales" (CE 161), are too often mired in detail. Their public consists of tired intellectuals and crossword-puzzlers (PD 48) whose sole concern is the logical puzzle presented in such texts. Here, death is only a "cypher" of which readers and film audiences have grown tired (PD 11). As Greene notes, the actual detection, because it involves an intellectual exercise undertaken by the detective, is usually the weakest part of any detective film (PD 48), and what action there is in a detective story involves little more than talk (266). Correspondingly, the pace of a detective story is considerably slower than is that of the thriller. Hence, Greene finds the film versions of Charlie Chan or of Sherlock Holmes stories wanting, although he does praise the evocation of a specific time and place in Sherlock Holmes (PD 274).²⁰ For Greene, the detectives of classical detective stories are seldom convincing because their upper-class backgrounds would, he feels, prevent them from being effective in the criminal milieu. He prefers Perry Mason, because "he belongs to the same class as his

criminals," to Lord Peter Wimsey or to William Powell's portrayal of Nick Charles in The Thin Man movies (PD 49). In addition, he complains that the classical detective story fails to give the vivid sense of life that is found in some of David Frome's novels, in the early work of Dorothy Sayers, and in all of Hammett's fiction (PD 48).

By his insistence on a standard of realism in detective fiction, Greene rejects the ritualized world of the classical detective story that Auden prefers and, in remarks that anticipate Raymond Chandler's reflections on the emergence of the hard-boiled detective story in the United States, champions the thriller as a response to the artificial and formally contrived world of the classical detective story:

We are driven back to the "blood", the thriller. There never was a school of popular English bloods. We have been damned from the start by middle-class virtues, by gentlemen cracksmen and stolen plans and Mr Wu's. We have to go farther back than this, dive below the polite level, to something nearer the common life. (Reflections 65-66)

In Greene's view, the thriller is better suited to dealing with the political, ethical, and historical realities of the modern world than is the detective story which, in Chandler's words, is "too contrived and too little aware of

what goes on in the world" ("Simple Art" 12). And, in the eyes of Greene, Auden and others in the thirties, what goes on in the world is the stuff of thrillers.²¹ As Arthur Rowe dreams of telling his mother in The Ministry of Fear, "It [his life] sounds like a thriller . . . but the thrillers are like life . . . You used to laugh at the books Miss Savage read--about spies, and murders, and violence, and wild motor-car chases, but dear, that's real life. . . . The world has been remade by William LeQueux" (65).²² For many critics, Rowe's remarks alone justify Greene's use of the thriller form, but the suggestion that thrillers are like life remains troubling and is hardly powerful enough in itself to explain Greene's interest in the form.²³

Greene's preference for the thriller is also deeply rooted in his early experience of reading. Most prominently in "The Lost Childhood" (after remarking that the first book he recalls ever reading was Dixon Brett: Detective), he cites Rider Haggard, Percy Westerman, Stanley Weyman, M. R. Ballantyne, Anthony Hope, Captain Gilson, and Marjorie Bowen's The Viper of Milan as shaping influences on his own fiction (CE 13-18).²⁴ Elsewhere he adds figures like John Buchan (CE 167) and A. E. W. Mason (CE 157) to this list of now largely forgotten authors.

Childhood and the importance of formative experiences are recurring concerns in Greene's writing, and the profound influence of childhood reading is insisted upon throughout

his autobiographical work and in much of his fiction. Again, "The Lost Childhood" is most relevant here:

Perhaps it is only in childhood that books have any deep influence on our lives. . . . in childhood all books are books of divination, telling us about the future, and like the fortune-teller who sees a long journey in the cards or death by water they influence the future. I suppose that is why books excited us so much. What do we ever get nowadays from reading to equal the excitement and the revelation in those first fourteen years? Of course, I should be interested to hear that a new novel by Mr E. M. Forster was going to appear this spring, but I could never compare that mild expectation of civilized pleasure with the missed heartbeat, the appalled glee I felt when I found on a library shelf a novel by Rider Haggard, Percy Westerman, Captain Brereton or Stanley Weyman which I had not read before. (CE 13)

A corollary to this view is Greene's sense that "the creative writer perceives his world once and for all in childhood and adolescence, and his whole career is an effort to illustrate his private world in terms of the great public world we all share" (CE 83); and for Greene this private world is composed out of the images and patterns of the

books he loved as a boy, as his often quoted remarks about The Viper of Milan elaborate:

when . . . I took . . . The Viper of Milan from the library shelf, the future for better or worse really struck. From that moment I began to write. All other possible futures slid away . . . It was as if I had been supplied . . . with a subject. . . . As for Visconti [the villainous Duke of Milan], with his beauty, his patience, and his genius for evil, I had watched him pass by many a time. . . . His name was Carter. He exercised terror from a distance . . . Goodness has only once found a perfect incarnation in a human body and never will again, but evil can always find a home there. Human nature is not black and white but black and grey. I read all that in The Viper of Milan and I looked round and I saw that it was so.

There was another theme I found there. . . . the sense of doom that lies over success--the feeling that the pendulum is about to swing. That too made sense; one looked around and saw the doomed everywhere . . .

One had lived for fourteen years in a wild jungle country without a map, but now the paths had been traced and naturally one had to follow them. . . . she [Bowen] had given me my pattern--

religion might later explain it to me in other terms, but the pattern was already there--perfect evil walking the world where perfect good can never walk again, and only the pendulum ensures that after ail in the end justice is done. (CE 16-17)

Such remarks offer a popular way into Greene's fiction--here are the theologic interest, the attraction to romance, the autobiographical information, and the sense of a moral world which all find their ways into the fiction. However, as Greene himself points out in his essay on Mauriac, stressing the formative influence of early experience and the continuity of consciousness has distinct consequences for characterization because the implication is that origins and not events shape character; hence, action can only reveal character: it cannot change it. (CE 95). The goal of a narrative, then, is to uncover the origins of character.

In these respects, the thriller becomes an apt genre for Greene to write in: much of his own early reading consisted of thrillers and adventure stories, and the importance he places on origin finds its corollary in the detective fiction's emphasis on discovering the origins of crime. But what the thriller does as well is contain the pattern of romance, which also concerns itself with the origins of the hero, that Greene found so appealing in Bowen's novel and then used in various forms throughout his

career.²⁵ Greene says he saw in the struggle between Visconti and della Scala in Bowen's novel an archetypal struggle that religion later explained in terms of good and evil. This is the sort of conflict that, according to Auden, informs the thriller, wherein the battle between the two forces takes place under the cover of everyday reality and wherein the reader is made to feel a partisan of one side ("Guilty Vicarage" 147; "Heresy" 43). However, while we do find ourselves sympathetically located in Greene's novels, the issue of partisanship is always problematic. Human nature is not black and white, and the writer must be able, as Greene says, "to write from the point of view of the black square as well as of the white" (Why? 32). Hence, Raven and Pinkie are made sympathetic, but they are also cold-blooded murderers; both D. and Rowe at the end of their respective novels are in positions that on one level seem to offer the reader a happy ending, but at another level these endings open only onto uncertainty.

For Greene the elemental nature of the romance conflict is best seen in the action of the thriller and not in the leisurely meditation of the detective story: "action has a moral simplicity which thought lacks" (Reflections 79). This is the appeal of the thriller that Greene refers to in the account of his own search for origin that is Journey Without Maps (1936):

Today our world seems peculiarly susceptible to brutality. There is a touch of nostalgia in the pleasure we take in gangster novels, in characters who have so agreeably simplified their emotions that they have begun living again at a level below the cerebral. We, like Wordsworth, are living after a war and a revolution, and these half-castes fighting with bombs between the cliffs of skyscrapers seem more likely than we to be aware of Proteus rising from the sea. It is not, of course, that one wishes to stay for ever at that level, but when one sees to what unhappiness, to what peril of extinction centuries of cerebration have brought us, one sometimes has a curiosity to discover if one can from what we have come, to recall at which point we went astray.

(21)

Again, we see that Greene finds the thriller to be the genre best suited to the contemporary situation, but what is striking here is his linking of the pattern of the thriller to the quest for origin both at a socio-political level that seeks the cause of society's and humanity's failings and at a personal level that seeks the roots of his own character.²⁶

The search for origin is crucial in detective fiction, but for Greene this search is undertaken in the context of

the romance of the thriller. With its necessary reduction of characters to basic levels of emotional and moral simplicity, the melodrama of the "superior" thriller, to add Greene's qualification, re-presents an ancient conflict between good and evil (PD 260).²⁷ In this way, then, Greene's preference for the thriller turns on the same concerns as Auden's preference for the classical detective story. Ultimately, the origin that the thriller and Greene seek lies in an understanding of the "aboriginal calamity" (to use Cardinal Newman's phrase which Greene is fond of quoting [LR vii]) in which all humanity is implicated.²⁸

From an early point in his career, however, Greene's attraction to romance as a form is tempered by an equally strong attraction to realism in the depiction of political and social situations. To be sure, the moral or "religious sense" of fiction (CE 91) remained a crucial element in Greene's sense of what the novel should be and in his own fiction, and, as we have seen, the romance pattern of the thriller allows an elemental presentation of religious or moral conflict. But in choosing the thriller over the detective story, Greene chooses the form that is better able to accommodate realism to the structures of romance. This is the basic imperative of the thirties' generation of writers, and it is a driving force, as Chandler described it, behind the development of the hard-boiled detective novel that is best exemplified in the work of Dashiell

Hammett. The hard-boiled detective novel remains the story of a detective "in search of a hidden truth" (Chandler, "Simple" 21), but the degree to which this quest is successful is tempered by, among other things, the sense of reality that both the thriller, as Greene writes it, and the hard-boiled novel contain.²⁹

The Thriller and the 1930s

Histories of detective fiction generally refer to the period of the 1920s and 1930s as the "golden age". Not only did the number of detective novels published annually increase enormously in the period, but formal patterns quickly took shape as many of the most familiar practitioners of the genre began writing at this time: Christie, Sayers, Allingham, Hammett, Chandler, and a host of others emerged in this period. As well, essays and reviews by Sayers, Van Dine, Knox, Eliot, Auden, and, at Greene's request, Herbert Read, to name a few, helped to establish a critical attitude that gave some measure of respectability to the genre. By 1932, Graves and Hodge tell us, popular reading was dominated by detective fiction (300).

The tremendous popularity of detective fiction in the period following the First World War defies any single explanation. On the most facile level, the genre's popularity may reflect a general desire for imaginative

escape from the memory of the war, from the hardships of economic depression, and from the fear of another war. Auden's suggestion that the genre appeals to those with a sense of sin is also a tempting explanation as we might then see, as Edmund Wilson did, the proliferation of detective stories as a reflection of a collective desire to exorcise a sense of guilt arising from the war ("Why Do People" 236). Similarly, one might argue that the ritualized world of the detective story confers significance and order on the seeming randomness of murder and killing (Cunningham, British Writers 75). We might also link, as Wyndham Lewis does in The Apes of God (1931) and in Left Wings Over Europe (1936), the blood-lust of the war with a general "blood-psychosis" that covertly manifested itself in the prevailing political climate and in the popularity of thrillers until openly surfacing in the second war (Cunningham, British Writers 74). In any case, though, it seems probable that the popularity of detective fiction and the period's preoccupation with war are related.

The effects of the Great War were complex; and, on those writers who were too young to have fought, the war inspired ambivalent feelings of revulsion at its brutality and waste, of guilt for not having fought, and of envy of those who had (Hynes, Auden 21). Orwell recalled that "[y]ou felt yourself a little less than a man, because you had missed it" ("My Country" 537-8). Similarly, Christopher

Isherwood confessed: "Like most of my generation, I was obsessed by a complex of terrors and longings connected with the idea 'War'. 'War,' in this purely neurotic sense, meant The Test. The test of your courage, of your maturity, of your sexual prowess: 'Are you really a Man?'"

Subconsciously, I believe, I longed to be subjected to this test" (75-76). The psychological effort to come to terms with this led Isherwood to daydreams of heroism and to "the pages of adventure stories designed for boys of twelve years old" (78). This suggests that in part at least the imaginative appeal of adventure stories and of thrillers for writers in the 1930s stemmed from a confused sense of having missed out on some "great adventure". Greene, too, seems to confirm this when looking back in Ways of Escape (1980):

"We were a generation brought up on adventure stories who had missed the enormous disillusionment of the First World War, so we went looking for adventure" (37). On one level, this search for adventure explains the attraction of travelling and the consequent vogue in travel writing (Hynes, Auden 229), but on another level it helps account for the enormous popularity of detective fiction. Eliot's and Auden's published remarks on the genre as well as certain of Eliot's poems and plays ("Macavity: the Mystery Cat", "Sweeney Agonistes," [1927], Murder in the Cathedral [1935], and The Family Reunion [1939]) and of Auden's poems ("The Secret Agent" and "Detective Story" to name two)

clearly demonstrate the importance of the thriller for writers at this time. Similarly, C. Day Lewis, one of the poets most closely associated with Auden, expressed his affection for the genre by writing his own series of detective stories under the pseudonym of Nicholas Blake.

But the interest in adventure stories that the war reawakened in the young writers of the thirties was not the same kind of interest they had had as children or adolescents. The disillusionment of the war exploded the traditional virtues of what Patrick Howarth calls "the Newbolt man", who was the hero in books by Weyman, Hope, Buchan, Haggard, Oppenheim, Kipling and others (Howarth 13-14). (The same virtues were also celebrated in the popular poetry of Rupert Brooke, Rudyard Kipling, and, of course, Henry Newbolt.) No longer could a strong sense of institutional loyalty, a belief in a moral right to empire, an ungrudging acceptance of service and duty, and a belief in a natural power to command and achieve worldly success be unequivocally accepted by writers of the post-war generation. Nonetheless, as Martin Green argues, the impact of those writers who celebrated the Newbolt man, and of Kipling especially, was felt by all the writers of Greene's generation.

In his reading of the history of modernism, Martin Green suggests that a changing scheme of literary values in the 1880s narrowed a division within English fiction between

serious fiction that was domestic and largely written by and for women (the Brontës, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot) and adventure fiction that, stimulated by Disraeli's rhetoric of imperialism, sought to win a new audience for fiction by dealing with larger national questions such as those of empire (English Novel xvi, 10). Of the practitioners of this latter type of fiction, it was Kipling who, because he achieved enormous critical success with professors, popular reviewers, and Henry James, brought literature and adventure together. Prior to Kipling, Green argues, moral and aesthetic seriousness from Defoe to Richardson to Austen was the prerogative of domestic fiction and, though the serious novel expanded to include industrialism, politics, and cultural change, it did not give up its domestic centre. On the other hand, stories of adventure such as Robinson Crusoe were gradually repressed from the literary system, because of ambivalent feelings about colonialism and Empire on the part of intellectuals (Dreams 63-65), and read by men though it was felt they should be for boys (English Novel 12-13).³⁰ With Kipling's success, and the popularity of other figures like Stevenson, Haggard, Conan Doyle and Buchan, the adventure novel assumed an influential place in literature before the war despite not being taken seriously by men of intellect (15). After the war, however, literature was dominated by a reaction against the ideologies of Kipling and other adventure story writers, and "[t]his to some

degree separated literature off from the rest of life, for non-literary readers continued to like what they had liked before" (203). However, Green continues, post-1930 novelists in England seem more inspired by adventure writers (even if the former are reacting against the latter) than they are by the more serious writers of domestic fiction (15). Martin Green suggests that Conrad's, Maugham's, and Graham Greene's heroes are "genuine Kipling heroes" (107).

Although Martin Green's reading of literary history is debatable, Graham Greene's comments in a 1947 book review suggest that he, too, saw the history of the English novel as following two distinct paths, one of which stemmed from Jane Austen and the other from Daniel Defoe (Reflections 109-110). Similarly, the attention that Auden, Isherwood, Orwell, and Greene all gave to "boy's weeklies", the adventure stories of Haggard, and the thrillers of Buchan and Conan Doyle tends to confirm Martin Green's conclusions, which again demonstrate the powerful hold of popular authors on the imaginations of the writers of the thirties.

This situation gave rise to feelings of ambivalence in the writers of the thirties since the authors they enjoyed reading in their youth, though ideologically discredited by the events of the war, continued to fascinate. The paradox is neatly summarized by Johnstone, who remarks that the thirties' writers' "exaggerated consciousness of origins" led them to recognize "the inadequacy in the modern world

of values inherited from another age"; however, Johnstone notes, this recognition was coupled with "an instinctive faith [instilled by the public school system] in those values--the values, in short, of the English gentleman--that prevented their complete abandonment" (133). In Greene's fiction this ambivalence towards childhood authors and traditional values is integral to all of his novels, but it is particularly evident in England Made Me and The Ministry of Fear.³¹

Johnstone sees the consciousness of origins in the generation of thirties' writers evinced in a nostalgia and a fascination for the British public school and its values. For Isherwood and Auden school days were romanticized into a time of heroic resistance that continued to colour their view of the world; Auden wrote in 1934, "The best reason I have for opposing Fascism is that at school I lived in a Fascist state" ("Honour" 9). For others such as Cyril Connolly and Greene the experience of school was traumatic and, in Greene's case, the source of a personal mythology that reverberates throughout his work.

Connolly's response to the values of the public schools was relentlessly critical, and he speculated that prep schools and public schools fostered a kind of "permanent adolescence" that affected "the greater part of the ruling class" (Enemies 271). The results of this were twofold: on the one hand, the values and beliefs that the war

discredited for writers and intellectuals continued to have great currency within the society and among politicians; and, on the other hand, many of those who recognized the failures of public-school values continued to have a school-boyish attitude towards the world and an idealistic, even naive, view of "revolutionary change"¹² that, as the decade wore on, dissolved into pragmatism or apathy (Orwell, "Inside" 510; Johnstone 9-10).

Ultimately, many of the writers who are seen as characterizing the thirties--Auden, Spender, Day Lewis, MacNeice--can all be criticized for insular and naive attitudes in their politics (which is Greene's view ["While Waiting" 14; Couto 207]). However, their allegiance to the Left and their admiration for Communism express a widespread feeling among intellectuals in the decade. What the thirties quickly become associated with in literary history is the rejection of modernism as it developed after the war in favour of a renewed dedication to realism and political commitment. Both are related and both, by and large, are associated with the emergence of the Left as a dominant force among young writers in the thirties.

External events--the onset of the depression, the crises in government, the rise of fascism in Europe, Germany's rearming, the threat of war, the Manchurian invasion, the Abyssinian invasion, the Spanish Civil War, Stalin's purges--contributed strongly to a sense of crisis

in the England of the 1930s. The consequence of this for the writers of the time was a shared feeling that political commitment was unavoidable. Looking back in his introduction to England Made Me for the collected edition, Greene writes, "I think of those years between 1933 and 1937 as the middle years of my generation, clouded by the Depression in England . . . and by the rise of Hitler. It was impossible in those days not to be committed . . . as the enormous battlefield was prepared around us" (WE 29). Virginia Woolf expresses a similar view of the writers of the thirties in "The Leaning Tower" (172), and George Orwell argues that "the invasion of literature by politics was bound to happen . . . [since writers had developed] an awareness of the enormous injustice and misery of the world, and a guilt-stricken feeling that one ought to be doing something about it" ("Writers" 408-409). This made the 1930s the decade of "serious purpose" ("Inside" 510). However, Orwell also viewed the movement towards an ill-defined Communism on the part of Auden, Spender, and company as symptomatic of a need to believe in something in the face of the debunked and discredited values of patriotism, religion, and Empire (514-15).³³ According to Orwell, the old values of imperialism were replaced by the equally inadequate values of communism and/or religious orthodoxy.

In the judgments of Woolf, Orwell, and many others, the literature of the period is severely weakened by its

attachment to political ideology, despite the awareness in the period that political orthodoxy hurt literature: Connolly saw politics as one of the "enemies" of a writer's "promise" and even Spender argued that poetry could not be political ("Poetry and Revolution"). Nevertheless, it remains a constant in accounts of and from the period that the era was dominated by a political consciousness. As Greene declared in 1934, the ruling passion of the decade in fiction was "the political consciousness of the modern novel" ("Seed Cake" 523); he could "imagine no prose, critical, religious or philosophical, which does not suffer by its divorce from social consequences" (521). Whether orthodox or not, politics implicitly becomes a necessary point of reference in Greene's and other writing from the period.

While Greene clearly saw the importance of a political awareness in literature, on a personal level he was careful not to align himself formally with any one ideological or political group, and, as he admits, this has made him suspect in the eyes of both literary and Catholic establishments (Couto 207). Although briefly a member of the Communist party as a joke in 1925 and then a member of the Independent Labour Party for a short time in 1933 (Couto 206), Greene frequently states that it is the writer's duty to remain free of rigid ideological positions; the writer must claim the privilege of "disloyalty" so that he or she

can "act as the devil's advocate [and] . . . elicit sympathy and a measure of understanding for those who lie outside the boundaries of State approval" ("Virtue of Disloyalty" 609). (His own "disloyalty", Greene argues, prevents his Catholicism from being a problem in his writing [Why? 31].) Because of his sympathy for the underdog and the victim, it is no surprise to find that Greene places himself on the Left of the political spectrum (Couto 206); equally, it is no surprise that Orwell found Greene, despite his Catholicism, to be "in outlook . . . just a mild Left with faint CP leanings." In a 1944 letter to T. R. Fyvel, Orwell goes on to say that he thought that Greene "might become our first Catholic fellow-traveller, a thing that doesn't exist in England but does in France, etc. . . . [In] books like A Gun for Sale, England Made Me, The Confidential Agent and others . . . there is the usual left-wing scenery. The bad men are millionaires, armaments manufacturers etc. and the good man is sometimes a Communist" (496).

Of course, this is not to imply that Greene is blindly supportive of the Left in his fiction. It's a Battlefield (1934), which he describes as his "first overtly political novel" (OM 87), is as critical of the self-deluding and ineffectual efforts of the Communist Party, headed in the book by Mr. Surrogate, as it is of a political and judicial system that brutally oppresses dissent. Similarly, in The Confidential Agent both sides in the war (the Spanish Civil

War, though this is not explicitly stated) are guilty of similar crimes--as D. remarks in the novel: "It's no good taking a moral line. My people [the Communists] commit atrocities like the others. I suppose if I believed in a god it would be simpler" (60).³⁴ Whether or not things are simpler because of a belief in God is a debatable point for Greene, but his sense that the crises of the thirties cannot be overcome with the pat solutions of political parties is clear. For Greene, the roots of the crisis lie deeper than economics, and so, rejecting party allegiance, he declares his "distrust of any future based on what we are" (Journey 20). Ultimately, he comes to see that the world of the thirties had to end in destruction because only violence could "satisfy that moral craving for the just and reasonable expression of human nature left without belief" (CE 334).

However, despite seeing the destruction of the Blitz as a "just and poetic" (CE 336) expression of inherent human failings, Greene remains concerned about social injustice and the possibilities for social change in his fiction (OM 88). The main theme of It's a Battlefield may be the "injustice of men's justice" (WE 28; and injustice may be given, as critic Grahame Smith points out, "a universal dimension . . . inseparable from basic human processes" in the novel (117), but injustice also has specific and local causes since "the laws were made by property owners in

defence of property" (It's a Battlefield 169). What we see in this is a mixing of moral or religious and political beliefs that stems from Greene's sympathy for both Catholicism and Communism (see Couto 211-15). As Orwell noted, it is unusual for such sympathies to coexist in an English writer, yet Greene has consistently been an advocate of Catholic-Marxist dialogue in the interests of social justice.

Greene is always uncomfortable with attempts by critics to label him as one or another kind of writer. He denies the view of John leCarré, Denis Donoghue and others that he is strictly a thirties' man (OM 133), and he is similarly uncomfortable with being called a political novelist or a Catholic novelist (OM 80, 159). However, his assertion that "politics are in the air we breathe, like the presence or absence of a God" (OM 87) and his suggestion that he is "more a political writer than a Catholic writer" (Burstall 676) demonstrate the continued power of the "political consciousness" that he developed in the 1930s and the profound mark that Greene says the decade left on those who experienced it ("Man of Mystery" 442).

Rejecting Modernism

The rejection of modernism that accompanied the felt necessity of political commitment among thirties' writers initially took place on ideological and then on certain

formal grounds. Criticism in the 1930s of modernist writing came largely from the Left (although the older generation of realists--Bennett, Wells, Galsworthy and, in their tradition, Walpole and Priestley--continued their opposition³⁵) and quickly focused on the overly subjective and apolitical qualities of the experimental literature of the late 'teens and early twenties. Edmund Wilson, who otherwise praised the modernists, early on identified a number of shortcomings in the writings of Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Proust, Stein, and, by extension, Lawrence, Woolf, Forster and others: "they have tended to overemphasize the importance of the individual, . . . been preoccupied with introspection sometimes almost to the point of insanity, [and] . . . endeavoured to discourage their readers, not only with politics, but with action of any kind" (Axel's Castle 297-98). With the intensification of the sense of crisis, these things were soon deemed major flaws in the writing of the previous generation.

Marxist commentators such as Philip Henderson and Ralph Fox intensify the criticism of modernist writing as introspective, abstract, and ahistorical. (Lukács' "The Ideology of Modernism" [1956], though not a product of the thirties, is perhaps the best known statement of this position.) Less radical commentators such as Connolly and Orwell are equally critical of the high modernists. Orwell called the twenties "the golden age of the rentier-

intellectual, a period of irresponsibility such as the world had never before seen" ("Inside" 509). What he finds astonishing is that the writers of the twenties seemingly ignored every important event in Europe; even the best of them demonstrated "too Olympian [an] attitude" and too great a readiness to wash their hands of practical problems (508-10). For the most part, the politics of the high modernists were authoritarian, or at least conservative, and figures like Yeats, Pound, and Wyndham Lewis openly flirted with and admired fascism,³⁶ which did not improve their standing among the younger generation of writers. As well, in the increasingly shrill climate of political rhetoric, it quickly came about that those who did not openly support the aims of the Communist party were declared fascists.³⁷

However, the rejection of the high modernist mode of discourse was not based solely on the personal attitudes of its practitioners. As Martin Green noted, post-war disillusionment contributed greatly to a shift away from the earlier models of Edwardian and Georgian literature, and this shift, to an extent, separated literature from the rest of life (English Novel 203). What the modernists offered, writes Connolly, was

a religion of beauty, a cult of words, of meanings understood only by the initiated at a time when people were craving such initiations.

The world had lived too long under martial law to desire a socialized form of art, for human beings in the mass had proved but a union of slaughterers. There was more hope and interest in extreme individuality. (Enemies 67)

Modernist art stressed formal experimentation and a language of metaphor.³⁸ The conception of reality as an absolute, as something out there that was experienced in the same way by everyone, shattered under the weight of the war and the growing currency of Bergson's, Einstein's, and Freud's thought. Formally, in the realm of the novel, the result was a turn from traditional modes of realist discourse to an exploration of new modes of discourse capable of presenting life as it is experienced. And, in this regard, Virginia Woolf's statements "Modern Fiction" (1919) and "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924) are most often cited as declarations of modernist aims.

In the first of these, Woolf expresses the new sense of reality in the post-war period. Life is experienced as an "incessant shower of innumerable atoms . . . not [as] a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (189). The task of the modern novelist, then, is to "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, . . . [to] trace the pattern, however disconnected and

incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon consciousness" (190).

Following from this, Woolf emphasizes, in the second essay, both the necessity of the modern writer's focus on character and the creation of character through the recording of responses to outside stimuli at the elemental level of human nature. The result of this is the highly subjective, highly self-conscious fiction of Proust or Lawrence or Woolf herself. The outside world is reduced and subordinated to the experience of the individual, however narrow that experience may be.

What Woolf does in these essays is to clear a space within the dominant mode of fictional discourse--typified for her by the work of Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and H. G. Wells--for a new modernist discourse that claims to present a truer representation of reality. She is reacting to both the "doctrines, sing songs, [and] ... celebrate[d] glories of the British Empire" ("Mr. Bennett" 97) that found their home in the work of Kipling and company and to a fictional representation of reality that shifts interest from character to "something outside" the book. With the analogy of Mrs. Brown in the railroad carriage, Woolf demonstrates how the Edwardian writers would treat the scene by shifting their interests from Mrs. Brown to the world around Mrs. Brown whether that world be one of gentility and manners or one of drudgery and long hours or, allegedly in

Bennett's case, the world of the carriage itself in all its particulars. None, in Woolf's estimation, gets inside Mrs. Brown so that the reader might know her; Mrs. Brown's character remains a thing identified with surface detail only.

What the moderns do is violently break from the outmoded conventions of an old realism to create a form for literature that struggles to remain true to the sense of reality as it is perceived and experienced by individuals. This involves a defamiliarizing of accepted literary practices and a shift, as David Lodge argues, from metonymically to metaphorically based prose.³⁹ The writers of the thirties, though, engage in the same process of defamiliarization and turn back to the metonymic, realist prose that preceded the moderns. This is done on two accounts, and Woolf is the figure most often cited on both.

In the first place, modernist writing is thought to negate history and to attenuate reality. Those on the Left, like Philip Henderson, charge Woolf--despite her support of the Labour party⁴⁰--with a refusal to acknowledge the fact that the world consists of more than Mrs. Dalloway shopping in Bond St. and giving parties in Westminster. For Henderson it is imperative that the writer of the thirties turn from Mrs. Brown to look at the world of poverty and misery outside the carriage window (26). Greene, though not so stridently leftist, shares in this typical response of

the period. As he sees them, the characters of Woolf and Forster are "cardboard symbols" in a "paper-thin" world (CE 91). The high modernist novel reduces the outside world, and again Mrs. Dalloway is the target, to "a charming whimsical rather sentimental prose poem" (92), but the world, in this case Regent St., Greene continues, "has a right to exist; it is more real than Mrs. Dalloway" (92).

The conviction that Bond St. or Regent St. has a right to exist is partially responsible for a return to the realist mode of discourse in the work of thirties' prose writers.⁴¹ Greene, picking up Woolf's image of the railroad carriage in a 1938 review of Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage, refers to "the stream of consciousness" as an "embarrassing cargo" and remarks that the method which "must have seemed in 1915 a revivifying change from the tyranny of the 'plot'" proved itself sterile⁴²: "after twenty years of subjectivity, we are turning back to the old dictatorship, to the detached and objective treatment" (CE 114-16).

Although the extreme subjectivity of a Woolf or a Richardson could not adequately present the contemporary socio-political situation of the thirties, the revival of "the detached and objective treatment" equally could not be a return to the confident realism of the pre-war period characterized by an omniscient narrator who exercises complete authority within the text (Fox 103). As Peter Widdowson points out, the novel as a form, with its

traditional emphasis on the experience of the individual's relationship with society and on the individual's consciousness, is both in literary and ideological terms a kind of recognition of liberal-bourgeois individualism, which has at its heart the belief in the essential freedom of the individual (134-35); and traditional realism, the mode of discourse associated with the novel, is then the vehicle for a fundamentally liberal-bourgeois outlook (161). Widdowson argues that the fiction writers of the thirties were aware of a crisis in liberal-bourgeois ideology and felt constrained by the individualist emphasis of the novel form, which accounts for the sense of uncertainty and irresolution in the fiction of the period (162).⁴³ On a formal level, this uncertainty expresses itself in the diversity of the modes of fiction used in the period such as formal realism, documentary reportage, fable, allegory, satire, dystopia, and the continuation of the structural and textual discoveries of modernism (134). Each attempts to address what Isherwood called the "fantastic realities" of the everyday world that are the manifestations of the crisis of liberal humanism (Isherwood, *Forward* 34; Widdowson 135).

For the thirties' writers of the Left, the realist mode offered the possibility of revolutionary art because it could represent both the ideas of the rising class and the situation of the individual within a web of social, political, economic, and military forces that not only

marginalized him or her, but also essentially endangered the individual's freedom and, ultimately, his or her life.⁴ The traditional focus of the novel, the individual and his or her relationship with society, is thus displaced. In the case of Greene, Widdowson sees this displacement enacted in two ways: first, Greene's characters (D., Pinkie and Raven) are in some way marginalized (by nationality, by class and by physical deformity), degraded and made to seem insignificant, interesting not for themselves but for what they endure; second, Greene defines the form of the individual's relation with society not as a negotiation but as a war--his dominant metaphor for society is the battlefield (seen most clearly in It's a Battlefield but equally present in all of the novels through to The Ministry of Fear) on which the class war is fought and the individual is hunted by "rapacious capitalism" (Widdowson 154). Greene's use of the thriller, then, ideally suits Widdowson's reading of the thirties' response in fiction to the crisis affecting the dominant ideology: the thriller offers realism in a popular form. But there is another way in which the realism of the thirties departs from the traditional realism of the nineteenth-century novel.

Julian Symons notes that the thirties "attempted to deny utterly the validity of individual knowledge and observation" (Thirties 142), and certainly this is seen in the rejection of the high-modernist mode of discourse which

made individual perception and subjectivity the governing means of representing the world. Other attempts to represent a "true" reality by John Grierson in documentary film or by Tony Harrisson, Charles Madge, and Humphrey Jennings in the Mass Observation project equally attest to the decade's desire to overthrow the interpretive authority of individual subjectivity and to replace it with a more objective authority based on a collective or, as Spender suggests, a shared sense of reality (qtd. in Lodge, Modes 190).⁴⁵ However, the cult of facts that emerged in the period betrayed less a scientific faith than a loss of all faith (Thomson 183). In fiction a return to the standards of nineteenth-century realism was impossible because such a return would imply the substitution of one form of individualist subjectivity, identified with the presentation of consciousness in Woolf, Richardson, or Proust for example, with another equally individualistic authority found in what Colin MacCabe calls the "meta-language" (13ff.) of the omniscient narrator in George Eliot, Thackeray, or Dickens. (Something of this sort happens in the documentary film where Grierson's typical use of voice-over narration ultimately replaces one monologic authority with another.) Faced with this dilemma the thirties' writers confront the constraints of the novel form to which Widdowson draws attention.

For the Left, realism was, unavoidably, the necessary means of presenting the complexity of social relations, but its links to a liberal-bourgeois ideology made it equally necessary to undermine the structures of authority implicit in realist discourse. One way to do this, though of questionable validity, is to use a form of documentary reportage, as Isherwood does in Goodbye to Berlin (1939)--"I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking" (11)--or as Orwell does in Down and Out in Paris and London (1933) and The Road to Wigan Pier (1937). This approach would more or less free the text of the kind of interpretive meta-language which had been the traditional prerogative of the omniscient narrator, although the necessary selectivity involved in observation and the force of juxtaposition would not eliminate an interpretive frame from the text. Satire, fable, and allegory also offered ways to undermine the authority of the realist discourse by their construction of fantasy worlds which distanced the narrative and the narrator's authority; and Rex Warner's The Wild Goose Chase (1937) and The Aerodrome (1941), Edward Upward's "The Railway Accident" (written in 1928, published in 1949), Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1932), and Orwell's two novels, Animal Farm (1945) and Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949), are just some of the texts that use these methods. More important for a consideration of Greene's work is the technique of replacing the individual who stood

at the centre of the novel with a kind of collective hero, as John Sommerfield did in his novel May Day (1936)⁴⁶ or else with a variety of figures none of whom comes to dominate the text. Although it has practical limitations, this last is the technique that Greene first employed in both Stamboul Train and It's a Battlefield before he discovered that the thriller--with its plot of an individual's pursuit by agents of a socially legitimate authority, its themes of betrayal and violence, its self-consciousness as a form, and its use of interpretative and interrogative structures derived from the classical detective story--presented a less problematic way of discrediting not only the constitution of society but also the authority of realist discourse.

The second point on which modernism was rejected by the young writers of the thirties was that the literature of the high modernists addressed itself, as Connolly pointed out, to an initiated elite. The turning of literature away from life that Martin Green spots in the post-war period shifts the emphasis in modernist art from a revolution of the world to a revolution of the word. In 1925, José Ortega y Gasset, in "The Dehumanization of Art", praised the modernist movement for its ability to dehumanize art. "Modern art," Ortega observed, "will always have the masses against it. It is essentially unpopular; moreover, it is antipopular" (5). Consequently, the public is divided into two groups:

the "vulgar" masses, who feel threatened by the new art because it is perceived to belong to a privileged aristocracy, and the illustrious minority who see themselves as cultural guardians preserving an Arnoldian ideal of "the best that has been thought and known in the world" (Culture and Anarchy 70) against the rising tide of democracy.⁴⁷ Modern artists, argued Ortega, evince a "will to style" ("Dehumanization" 25); hence, modernist commentators such as Eliot, Richards, the Leavises and Ortega himself addressed an elite who could appreciate an aesthetic pleasure based on the artistry of style.

Ultimately, the high modernists and their defenders sought to preserve in their art and especially in their criticism a cultural heritage that seemed threatened in the post-war world. Eliot, Richards, F. R. and Q. D. Leavis all feared the collapse of moral, social, cultural, and aesthetic standards under the weight of both a growing, increasingly literate, population and an accelerating commercialism that was blamed on the Americanization of English life (Leavis, "Mass" 7) and on the proliferation of the products of popular culture itself. The result is the promotion of an elite responsible for maintaining cultural and aesthetic standards ("Mass" 5) and for attempting "to bring the level of popular appreciation nearer to the consensus of best qualified opinion" (Richards 36).

To this end, modernism's defenders condemned what were deemed escapist forms of art--Music Hall songs, cinema and radio, magazine verse, best-sellers, and genre fiction⁴--and formulated theories of aesthetic value that, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith says, pathologized the Other (Smith 38). That is, those who do not share "the consensus of best qualified opinion," because they prefer popular forms of artistic expression, are seen as possessing some debility that is attributed to defective "organs" or defective "organization" (Richards 202), or to innate deficiencies that result in the inability to experience "adequate impulses" in response to aesthetic stimuli (Richards 202).

Also blamed were the mass media and the products of popular culture themselves. For Q. D. Leavis, the training provided to an individual by cinema, by looking through magazines and newspapers, and by listening to jazz creates habits that are inimical to mental effort and, thus, prevents one from normal development (224).⁴ The habit of reading popular literary forms, such as the detective story or the thriller, is likened by Leavis to drug addiction (7, 19, 152) and considered equally destructive in that it, too, can lead to maladjustment in actual life by encouraging the habit of fantasizing (54). Individuals afflicted with these kinds of disabilities are deemed unable to have full existence in the modern world. A person's preference for popular literature--Richards' example is a sonnet by W. B. Yeats

Wheeler Wilcox (200-201)--is seen as evidence of this inability and, consequently, of a kind of biological unfitness. The point is made clear in the opening "Manifesto" of Scrutiny (May 1932): "there is a necessary relationship between the quality of an individual's response to art and his general fitness for humane existence" (Knights 3).⁵⁰

The modernists' concern for the state of high culture in the late twenties and early thirties marks the onset of a revival in the decade of what has come to be known as the mass-culture critique. There is nothing new in Richard's or the Leavises' critical statements: such ideas have their champions in any age. (F. R. Leavis's pamphlet "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture" [1930] seems an updating of positions taken in Arnold's Culture and Anarchy [1868].⁵¹) But in the thirties the general concern for the state of culture easily evolved into an attack on all forms of popular culture with the publications of "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture", Fiction and the Reading Public (1932), Culture and Environment (1933) by F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, and with the founding of Scrutiny (May 1932). (As well, Ortega's The Revolt of the Masses, originally published in 1930, appeared in an English translation in 1932, the same year that Dover Wilson's edition of Culture and Anarchy was published.) A more forceful response to the crises of the period would be

difficult to imagine. Fuelled by the regular publication of Scrutiny and by the appearance of those books just mentioned as well as many others, the prejudice against popular literary forms entrenched itself within the academy and, to a lesser extent, within literary circles.⁵²

For Leavis and his followers, the growth of popular culture meant the decline of literary, artistic and cultural standards, and the consequent diminishing of the value of high art. Popular fiction, like best-sellers, appealed to and reflected the instincts and desires of the herd, who denied distinctions between good and bad art ("Mass" 19; Q. D. Leavis, Fiction 195). Best-sellers were further condemned because the prospect of large sales and financial success would, it was felt, corrupt the talent of serious writers who would seek to produce popular work by repeating the tried and true formulas of what had been commercially successful in the past. As well, the indiscriminate marketing of "serious" literature with popular work would expose the superior work to the great mass of the semi-aware and semi-literate whose lazy reading habits and misunderstandings would debase and degrade the cultural heritage (Fiction 136).

More or less shared by Richards, the Leavises, Ortega and Eliot, this condemnation of popular culture by the Right finds a correspondence later in the decade in the views of certain segments of the Left, such as Adorno and Horkheimer

of the Frankfurt School, who see the artifacts of popular culture as the debasement of art into commodity. They argue that the products of mass culture--jazz, kitsch, best-sellers, genre-fiction--are the substitutions of commercial production for genuine art by a capitalist economic elite. Thus, mass culture is seen as an imposed culture that reflects and conveys the dominant ideology of capitalist society. Instead of offering new possibilities and encouraging new modes of thought, mass culture presents a homogeneous blend of reassuring fantasy, wish-fulfillment, and the confirmation of prejudices and attitudes that are essential to the maintenance of the established order.⁵³ Under the pressure of monopoly capitalism, culture and entertainment are fused, and, with the merging of advertising and the culture industry, mass culture becomes a procedure for manipulating the public (Bottomore 45).

Neither of these two views of popular culture sees it as a natural artistic expression arising out of the people. For both the Right and the Left, such an expression can only occur outside of the present: for the conservatives, it is found in an idealized past where high art had an appreciative audience at all levels of society (Q. D. Leavis, Fiction 84, 134, 226); for Adorno and Horkheimer, it is something that can only emerge once the influence of monopoly capitalism is removed.

In attempts to find a middle ground between these two extremes, some analysts, such as Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, and Greene himself, have tried to make a distinction between genuinely popular or populist art and what might be termed mass culture or industrial culture. Such a distinction is useful in considering Greene who, as we have briefly noted, is critical of much that is part of popular culture: Hollywood films, certain bestselling novels by Priestley and others, the "metroland" world of Brighton, the insipidness of theatrical revues (cf. A Gun for Sale 152), and the homogeneous housing developments of British cities (cf. GS 44). However, Greene's admiration for film as an art form, for music-hall tunes, and for popular literary forms shows that he is certainly not of the same mind as either Leavis or Adorno.

For Greene popular forms offer the possibility for a genuine art. His separation of film into movies and cinema demonstrates this conviction. In Greene's judgment genuinely popular film must come from the level of the people. The early work of Chaplin, the Marx Brothers' Duck Soup, and a few Laurel and Hardy films are seen as popular art because they "convey a sense that the picture has been made by its spectators and not merely shown to them, that it has sprung . . . from their level" (PD 94).

Similarly, Greene rejects the common idea, which he imagines studio executives to have, that popular

entertainment, like Rhythm on the Range, should be soothing and gently amusing. Greene argues that the public does not ask to be soothed but to be excited to a mass feeling of collective strength (PD 94). This distinct sense of what the popular should be is at the root of Greene's complaints about "popular" novelists, such as Walpole, Priestley, Brett Young, Charles Morgan or Parkinson Keyes, who "bring nothing new to their readers" and specialize in producing novels that are full of clichés (OM 147). Theirs are "crude minds representing no more of contemporary life than is to be got in a holiday snapshot" because a critical sense of life is missing from their work (Reflections 58-59).

Of course, as Michael Wilding observes, in any attempt to distinguish between genuine popular art and the artifact of mass culture one is always faced with the problem of determining difference: is or is not a certain phenomenon art? (Wilding 175). The area between the two becomes murky and ill-defined with attempts to draw distinctions easily modulating into lists of personally preferred texts or artifacts, which only serve to discredit the very attempt to make such distinctions. Here, one comes up against the same dilemma that is involved in attempts to distinguish, in the general sense, "serious" literature (high art) from other literature (popular fiction), or, in the particular sense, Greene's novels from his "entertainments".

Nevertheless, in the early thirties, certain proponents of the emergent Left sought to challenge and debate the conservative assumptions and statements, associated particularly with Leavis, by reinvesting the popular with aesthetic and cultural importance. On one level this was done to preserve at least some of the cultural heritage in a time of decay; Connolly summarizes this position nicely:

If culture is to survive it must survive through the masses; if it cannot be made acceptable to them there is no one else who will be prepared to guarantee it, since the liberal capitalist society who protected it will not be in a position to do so after another slump or a war. Much that is subtle in literature and life will have to be sacrificed if they are to survive at all; consequently it is necessary for literature to approach its future custodians in a language they will understand. (Enemies 81)

This rationale, says Connolly, explains a shift in the dominant mode of fictional discourse from what he calls "the Mandarin style" to "the vernacular style" by writers in the period. Although it produces a relatively uniform prose style (85), the vernacular style--with its realism, simplicity, and colloquial tone--is more popular with readers and, consequently, with writers as well. As Greene

noted, being "hard to read" is no guarantee that a text is "great" literature (Burgess 22).

On another level, though, the efforts made towards creating and using popular art forms were aimed at social change. Like Eliot, Richards, Leavis and Ortega, those on the Left recognized a widening gulf between what were seen as "high-brow" and "low-brow" tastes (Auden, "Poet's Tongue" 326). However, instead of retreating into the abbey of a cultural clerisy, the young writers of the thirties turned to popular art forms in the hope of invigorating them with new life, freeing them from the pressures of commercial demands, and reaching through them a large audience. Commenting in a 1933 review of texts by F. R. Leavis, by Leavis and Thompson, and by L. C. Knights, Auden wrote:

We live in an age in which the collapse of all previous standards coincides with the perfection in technique for the centralized distribution of ideas; some kind of revolution is inevitable, and will as inevitably be imposed from above by a minority; in consequence, if the result is not to depend on the loudest voice, if the majority is to have the slightest say in its future, it must be more critical than it is necessary for it to be in an epoch of straightforward development. (317)

Auden and the Left, including Greene, recognized that in the new cultural situation, wherein mass media--radio,

cinema, mass publishing--existed, there was the potential for disaster: the "loudest voice" in Germany in 1933 was Hitler's and Mussolini's dominated Italy. But rather than join the high moderns in denigrating those cultural forms considered popular or "low brow", Auden and others on the Left saw these forms as the means of not only combatting fascism but also of instilling in a large segment of the public that was disenfranchised by high modernism a sense of the value of the culture that all citizens shared. In this way, it was hoped, the gap between "high-brow" and "low-brow" art could be bridged and a new, more egalitarian, society could emerge. Hence, Auden attacks Richards' assumptions about bad art by asserting that "[t]he secret of good art is . . . to find out what you are interested in, however strange, or trivial, or ambitious, or shocking, or uplifting, and deal with that, for that is all you can deal with well" ("Poetry, Poets, and Taste" 360). For Auden, "[e]verything that we remember no matter how trivial" ("Poet's Tongue" 328) is a possible subject for poetry. The definitions of art and culture are broadened so that high art and high culture are not restricted to a canon defined by the consensus of a minority; as Rickword notes, culture, for the Left, includes "not only music and science and philosophy [but also] games and dancing and popular songs" ("Political Pamphlet" 80). In terms of poetry, Auden's anthology of Light Verse (1938) and his own use of the

ballad and other verse forms deriving from popular song attest to his desire to reach beyond the traditional audience for poetry to break down artificial and elitist distinctions between literature and, say, magazine verse. Indeed, it was precisely for this reason that Greene thought Auden "the finest living poet" and admired him as "[a] popular poet--as distinct from a popular versifier . . . [who put] no barrier between himself and his public. The obscurity is where it should be, in the layers of suggestion under the lucid surface" (Comments 29). Appropriately for one who seeks a revolution in the literary establishment, Auden concludes his 1936 essay "Poetry, Poets, and Taste" by invoking Marx: "'To each according to his means; from each according to his powers', in fact. Personally, the kind of poetry I should like to write but can't is 'the thoughts of a wise man in the speech of common people'" (360).

Although we must be careful not to take Auden's as the over-riding voice in the thirties, his influence was widespread and felt not only by those closest to him (Spender, Day Lewis, MacNeice, Isherwood, and Upward) but also by other poets and novelists such as Rex Warner, Orwell and Greene.⁴ In the coupling of Marx and Wordsworthian ideas of poetic revolution, Auden clearly identifies popular forms in literature with the cause of the Left; and, for Greene, the consequences of this identification are to use, first, the realist mode of discourse and, second, the

thriller form which, in this the "golden age" of detective fiction, dominated popular reading.

Greene's movement towards the thriller was not as straightforward as the preceding comments may suggest. Like other young writers in the thirties, he had to confront the achievements of the high modernists. The influence of T. S. Eliot was profoundly felt by all who followed him, and Greene's vision of the modern world owes as much to The Waste Land as it does to anything else. (This debt is clear not only in Greene's fiction but also in the opening pages of The Lawless Roads.⁵⁵) Similarly, as Davis and Bloom have noted, Greene's own critical stance develops along lines traced by Eliot, whom Greene referred to as one of "the two great figures of my young manhood" (the other being Herbert Read) (WE 33).

In terms of formal technique, the influence of the high modernist prose writers was also apparent, particularly in the early work of some of the thirties' writers such as Isherwood, in The Memorial (1928), or Greene (Stevenson 34-36). Even as late as 1935 with England Made Me and the short story "The Bear Fell Free", Greene was experimenting with modes of presenting consciousness and of organizing time that are more familiar and more comfortably handled in the work of Joyce or Woolf. Similar experiments, coupled with clumsy attempts to construct fine prose, mar his first

three novels--The Man Within (1929), The Name of Action (1930), and Rumour at Nightfall (1931)--which, as Allott and Farris point out, fail as much for their self-conscious attempts to be "serious" literature as for their weak plots and unconvincing characterizations (73-74).⁵⁶

Greene is not ignorant of the weaknesses in these novels, and he credits a review by Frank Swinnerton with opening his eyes to the "defects of what [he] believed to be true art" (WE 17).⁵⁷ Looking back on Rumour at Nightfall, Greene writes: "The author is too much concerned with style and the style is bad and derivative. . . . All is vague, shadowy, out of focus--there are no clear images, but the same extravagant similes and metaphors as in The Name of Action" (WE 17). Like many in his generation, Greene turned away from the deliberately literary and artificial--mandarin--prose to a more natural--vernacular--prose based in clarity, compression and precision. Of his first novels, Greene notes:

Now I can see quite clearly where I went wrong. Excitement is simple: excitement is a situation, a single event. It mustn't be wrapped up in thoughts, similes, metaphors. A simile is a form of reflection, but excitement is of the moment when there is no time to reflect. Action can only be expressed by a subject, a verb and an object, perhaps a rhythm--little else. Even an

adjective slows the pace or tranquilizes the nerve. I should have turned to Stevenson to learn my lesson ... No similes or metaphors there, not even an adjective. But I was too concerned with "point of view" to be aware of simpler problems, to know that the sort of novel I was trying to write, unlike a poem, was not made with words but with movement, action, character.

(SL 144-45)

The last sentence here implies a conscious rejection of old-style fine writing and of the experimental discourse of high modernism as typified by Woolf, Forster and others (Sharrock 52). What Greene wanted, he says, was for his novels "to be in a sense adventure stories" (Couto 216).

In suggesting that "movement, action, [and] character" make up the novel, Greene acknowledges a world outside the text to which the text refers. Again, the novel is assumed to be a realistic, mimetic form whose sole concern is to present things as they are. "There have been no revolutions in the history of the novel," Greene, echoing James, writes in 1934, "only technical discoveries with the object of making more perfect the illusion of life" ("Seed Cake" 517).⁵⁸ And, in this respect, Greene denies that the novel is made solely out of words, although he is all too aware that words are all the novelist has to work with (Josipovici 122-24). What Greene insists on is "[d]iscrimination in

one's words . . . not love of one's words--that is a form of self-love, a fatal love which leads a young writer to the excesses of Charles Morgan or Lawrence Durrell" (SL 145). The important thing is that the language not draw attention to itself so that it can render a true picture of the world.

Greene's criticism from the thirties emphasizes this view, which is consistent with the aims of the literary left in the period. In 1934, Greene wrote in a discussion of Charles Morgan that "the danger to the novelist is that he should write with his mind on the subjective response of his readers instead of being concerned only to express his idea with the greatest accuracy and the greatest economy" ("Seed Cake" 518); and, in his 1938 review of Pilgrimage, he condemned Richardson for having Miriam "[read] far too much significance into a cup of coffee, a flower in a vase, a fog, a sunset" (CE 116). The lyricism and introspection of high-modernist discourse as it appears in the subjective novel leads only to self-indulgent and insular prose in which the emotions of the author blend into the emotions of the character; such an "undetached method" fails because it blurs the boundaries of character and author (CE 116).

Accuracy and clarity are qualities identified with truth in Greene's criticism of his own work and of the work of others. The novelist must "tell the truth as he sees it" (Why? 30), so he or she must avoid using phrases and turns of speech that are not true because, as Orwell argues as

well in "Politics and the English Language", such usages muddle thought: poor writing leads to poor thinking (Why? 30). It is to be expected, then, that Greene should insist on the veracity of what critics have been prone to label "Greeneland"--the allegedly stylized and distorted milieu in which almost all of his fiction takes place (WE 60).⁵⁹

However problematic the attempt to produce a transparent prose is, it is an attempt thoroughly bound in the literary climate of the 1930s. Having rejected the high-modernist mode of discourse with oedipal fervor, Greene aligns himself with the earlier tradition of Conrad, James and Ford--each of whom is "modern", though in a way that is distinct from the modernism of Woolf, Forster, Richardson and Proust.⁶⁰ But, the difference between the two modernisms is not solely based on technique since Conrad, James and Ford are just as innovative as the later group of writers and, like them, just as attuned to the vagaries of perspective, consciousness, and the experience of time. Similarly, Woolf and the subjectivist writers of the post-war period are equally concerned with "making more perfect the illusion of life" ("Seed Cake" 517).

Where the two camps differ is in their conceptions of reality, and in large measure this accounts for their differing approaches to fiction. For Woolf and those like her, including the Ford of "On Impressionism" (1913) and The Good Soldier (1915), reality is filtered through

consciousness, and the world is experienced in a highly personal and subjective manner. Conrad and James, on the other hand, share a sense of reality that is also found in the young writers of the thirties; the older writers, no matter how ironic or experimental they are, believe in history and in the presence of a "visible universe" that exists independently and outside of the individual's experience.

Conrad asserts that "art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe" ("Preface" to The Nigger of the Narcissus 160) and that the novelist's task is, "by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see. That--and no more, and it is everything" (162). Similarly, the work of James, which Greene sees as fulfilling Conrad's definition of art (CE 29), shows an obsessive concern with point of view and with consciousness. Yet the consciousness James presents apprehends "a specified social and historical environment" (Bradbury 126)⁶¹, whereas in Woolf consciousness overwhelms the environment and the discreteness of character so that the novel ultimately becomes a dramatization of the creative process itself (128-29, 125).⁶²

Ford follows James in believing that fictional technique must answer to experience, not predetermine it;

hence, subject matter is crucial since--and the panoramic scope of Parade's End (1924-28) bears this out--Ford thought that the task of art was to register the temper of the age (Bradbury 135). But to do this properly the novelist had to be aloof, "rendering the world as he sees it, uttering no comments, falsifying no issues and carrying the subject--the Affair--he has selected for rendering, remorselessly out to its logical conclusion . . . the story of a novel should be the history of an Affair" (English Novel 129-31). Ford's sense that the writer must be aloof from his subject--an idea taken from Flaubert and echoed in Joyce's Portrait (1916)--finds a complement in the thirties' writers' desires to produce a realistic fiction free of the ideological structures of the traditional novel; aloofness is crucial to "the detached and objective treatment" (CE 116) that Greene welcomed in the 1930s.

Although Greene learned a great deal about fictional technique from his study of Conrad, James and Ford, he found their influences, particularly Conrad's and James's, damaging to his own fiction. Greene has stated that after the failure of Rumour at Nightfall he ceased to read Conrad because "his influence was too great and too disastrous" (Search 42).⁶³ He also found himself so concerned with James's techniques, as outlined in Lubbock's The Craft of Fiction, as to be unable to present action convincingly.⁶⁴ What he does then, after 1931, is move towards a new mode of

discourse that synthesizes the technical and aesthetic innovations of Conrad, James and Ford with the action and excitement of the popular texts of Stevenson, Buchan and Haggard. The resulting form is one that has the potential to reach a large readership and the ability to interrogate the political, social and literary positions of the modernists by undermining the critical hierarchies that structure the canonization of particular texts and genres. Implicit in this procedure is a criticism of the social and class structures of society.

These are grand claims to make about Greene's texts and the measure of his success in light of these claims is difficult to judge. Certainly, the three novels published between 1932 and 1936's A Gun for Sale represent tentative gropings towards the form best able to meet the requirements of being realistic, popular and critical. Stamboul Train, It's a Battlefield and England Made Me are each individual attempts to reorient the values and ideology of the traditional realist novel. And, although only Stamboul Train belatedly received the designation "an entertainment" after 1936, each contains elements associated with the genre of the thriller. With A Gun for Sale, however, Greene fully develops what critics have oxymoronically called the "highbrow thriller".⁶⁵ This novel is also the first to bear the "entertainment" label and, thus, is the first to challenge explicitly, though the previous three novels do so

implicitly, the distinction between serious literature and popular fiction.

Traditional and modernist critics alike often forget Henry James's injunction that "[t]he effect of a novel--the effect of any work of art--is to entertain" ("Alphonse Daudet" 93), and so condemn or neglect works that are seen as escapist or just entertaining. However, Greene and others realized that entertainment and escape are not only valid and valuable effects but also that such effects do not preclude a text from being considered art.⁶⁶ "One is apt to forget that the literature of escape is literature just because it is a real escape; it contains a recognition of life as much as the action of a deserter contains the recognition on an enemy" (PD 240).⁶⁷ This view is in sharp contrast to that of the Leavises (who frequently use "entertain" as a pejorative term in descriptions of popular texts⁶⁸), yet it is consistent with the respect of certain writers on the Left for popular forms and those who enjoy reading them.

Hence, thrillers and detective stories, dismissed as escapist literature by Q. D. Leavis and others, become doubly charged in the thirties because they have the potential to be both entertaining and serious. Indeed, defenders of detective fiction assert its kinship with all fiction, since any novel or story has operating within it what Barthes calls in S/Z the hermeneutic code. Ford noted

in 1938 that the "superior intelligences of the day" were wrong not to apply themselves to mystery stories (one might argue that many did) because "the greatest novels of the world, whether of the romantic, the classical or the realistic modern schools, have all--and this is no paradox--been mystery stories" ("Detective Novel" 286).⁶⁹ The implications of these remarks are obvious in that distinctions between serious literature (high art) and popular literature (low, "escapist" art) collapse. In this respect, it is no surprise that critics and authors in the post-modern period have come to see detective fiction as the genre best able to undercut epistemological structures and a literary hierarchy that are perceived as being largely based on class (Worpole 20).⁷⁰

In his turn to the thriller, Greene was more fortunate than other writers of the period who failed to achieve the same ends; although, despite the early success of Stamboul Train, he was not able to support himself solely with his fiction until after the publication of The Heart of the Matter in 1948 (Yours 214). Auden and the poets of the thirties who followed him did not gain the wide readership they desired (Skelton 36-37; Fraser 278). Similarly, despite impressions to the contrary, the Left was not as strong a force as it presented itself to be (Cunningham, "Neutral?" 50). (Claud Cockburn tells us that Marxist fiction did not enjoy the same popularity in Britain in the

thirties as it did in the United States largely because there were not enough publishers willing to market it [179].) As well, as Woolf observed in "The Leaning Tower", the major writers on the Left were almost without exception from the upper and middle classes and so found themselves in an awkward position with respect to the society they attacked. As Stephen Spender later remarked, "communism had not provided the young writers with a belief, but it did provide them with a bad conscience" ("Theme" 144).

In many ways, Auden's departure from England with Isherwood in 1939 and his subsequent dismissal of the thirties as "a low dishonest decade" ("September 1, 1939") signal the end, in literary terms, of the Left's influence.⁷¹ Greene, on the other hand, because he refused to be identified with any specific position or party, continued to develop his own type of fiction based in the mixing of serious themes and popular forms. The leftist political and literary concerns of Stamboul Train, published in the same year as Fiction and the Reading Public, echo throughout Greene's work and find their fullest expression in those texts that are most obvious in their use of patterns derived from detective fiction.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

1. Greene has suppressed his second and third published novels, The Name of Action (1930) and Rumour at Nightfall (1931). Neither is part of the Collected Edition of his work nor of the Penguin catalogue.
2. See, for example, Mary McCarthy's attack, "Graham Greene and the Intelligentsia,"; or, more recently, Paul Fussell's review, "Can Graham Greene Write English?"; and John Bayley's "God's Greene".
3. The phrase occurs in Ian A. Hunter's review of the first volume of Norman Sherry's biography of Greene in The Globe and Mail, June 10, 1989, p. C7. Reviewers routinely attached this and similar epithets to Greene, and in the wake of his death such tributes continue to be heard: Jack Kroll of Newsweek called Greene "one of the most significant novelists of his time" (75), and Philip Marchand of The Toronto Star speculated that Greene "may be remembered as the last great English novelist of the 20th century" (4 April 1991, p. C1). Also attesting to Greene's reputation in the popular press were comments by Greene's fellow novelists who were quoted in obituaries: Kingsley Amis said that until his death Greene "was our greatest living novelist" (qtd. in Allen, "Literary Consul" 65), and William Trevor remarked that Greene "was the best novelist in the English language" (qtd. in Coles 23).
4. Although Greene abandoned this distinction, it is still employed by the editors of Penguin books and by a number of critics. For example, McEwen treats Travels With My Aunt and The Human Factor as entertainments despite the fact that Greene called neither of them by this name. The standard critical practice is to treat the seven texts originally labelled "entertainments" separately from Greene's other, by implication, more serious work.
5. In short story collections--"The Basement Room" and Other Stories (1935), which was reissued with nine additional stories as Nineteen Stories (1947) and then reissued again with two stories omitted and four new ones added as Twenty-One Stories (1954) (included in Collected Stories [1972])--"The Basement Room" continues to have its original title and is not designated as an entertainment.
6. Studies of Greene's work, for the most part, have been of three general types: introductory surveys that present a broad and repetitive, usually thematic, overview of his writing, exemplified by the work of DeVitis, Kelly, Kulshrestha, McEwen, O'Prey, and Grahame Smith; more specialized studies, such as those by Stratford, Kurismmootil, and Gaston, which

focus on Greene's theological concerns; and, more recently, considerations of Greene's relation to cinema, as typified by Falk's and Phillips' books as well as Adamson's Graham Greene and the Cinema. Lately, Greene's political attitudes have begun to receive substantial attention in Couto's Graham Greene: On the Frontier--Politics and Religion in the Novels and in Adamson's Graham Greene: The Dangerous Edge. Other studies aim at investigating particular aspects of Greene's work. Among these are Boardman's book on exploration as a theme both in Greene's travel writing and in his fiction, Rai's on Greene's existentialism, and Erdinast-Vulcan's on "Greene's childless fathers", to name three. As well, numerous collections of critical essays have appeared such as those edited by Bloom, Cargas, Evans, Hynes, and Meyers, and also Wolfe, whose Essays in Graham Greene: an Annual Review has been published since 1987. In addition, Greene has been the subject of many chapters and articles in countless books and journals: essays by Hoggart, Lewis, Lodge, and Zabel are among the more valuable contributions. Finally, a number of journals have published special Graham Greene issues. See, for example, MFS 3 (Autumn 1957), Renascence 12 (Fall 1959), Literature/Film Quarterly 2.4 (Fall 1974), and College Literature 12.1 (1985). One final text that should be noted in connection with this thesis is Elliott Malamet's dissertation "The World Remade: The Art of Detection in the Fiction of Graham Greene", which appeared too recently for me to take account of it here. Malamet's study looks at a number of Greene's novels from A Gun for Sale to The Human Factor and includes discussions of Brighton Rock and The Ministry of Fear.

7. Atkins, Evans, McCarthy, Webster, and Woodcock are just some of the critics who view the entertainments as light work. While theologic issues dominated criticism of Greene's work in the period following the publication of the End of the Affair, Gaston's, Kurismmco'til's and, to some extent, Couto's books demonstrate a continuing interest in Greene's religious themes. R. W. B. Lewis's view of the entertainments as rehearsals for the novels which followed them has influenced and is shared by a number of other critics, such as De Vitis (27), Ian Gregor (Lodge/Gregor 164), and McEwen (117), and is in part confirmed by Greene himself in The Other Man interviews (148). Lewis does not consider The End of the Affair a significant advancement of Greene's treatment of Catholic themes, so he does not place it within his construction of a trilogy.

8. Evelyn Waugh, Greene's friend and a fellow convert to Catholicism, has offered this explanation of the difference between the novels and the entertainments in the critically obscure language of theological metaphor:

Superficially there is no great difference between the two categories. . . . "Novels" and "Entertainments" are both written in the same grim style, both deal mainly with charmless characters, both have a structure of sound, exciting plot. You cannot tell from the skeleton whether the man [Greene] is baptized or not. And that is the difference; the "novels" have been baptized, held deep under the waters of life. (97)

9. Atkins, Kelly, and Pryce-Jones doubt the usefulness of the distinction as a critical tool, but nonetheless find it practical and helpful in their discussions (Atkins 30; Kelly 26; Pryce-Jones 50). Martin Turnell also questions the validity of the distinction (54); but his critique centres on the Catholic novels and, by implication, privileges these texts.

10. Kelly, Kunkel, Webster and Wolfe quote all or part of Allott and Farris' description.

11. Of interest here is Chandler's comment: "To exceed the limits of a formula without destroying it is the dream of every magazine writer who is not a hopeless hack" (Introduction ix).

12. Greene's interest in detective fiction, particularly that of the nineteenth century, is reflected in his catalogue of Victorian detective fiction published in 1966 as Victorian Detective Stories: A Catalogue of the Collection Made by Dorothy Glover and Graham Greene. He and his brother Hugh have also edited two related anthologies: Victorian Villainies (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) and The Spy's Bedside Book: An Anthology (London: Hart Davis, 1957). (Hugh Greene is also responsible for the Rivals of Sherlock Holmes anthologies of short stories.)

13. Ford's distinction is made in The English Novel p. 83ff. Obviously, something of Ford's dualism lies behind Greene's own novel/entertainment distinction.

14. From 1930 to 1940 Greene published nine novels and two travel books (that came out of trips to Liberia in 1935 and Mexico in 1939), completed a biography of Lord Rochester (published in 1974 as Lord Rochester's Monkey), reviewed films from 1935-39 for the Spectator and, briefly (July 1937-Dec. 1937), for Night and Day--of which he was literary editor. As well, he wrote hundreds of essays and book reviews in the period.

15. A. J. M. Smith and Ian Gregor refer to Greene's books as "theological thrillers". See Smith's "Graham Greene's

Theological Thrillers," and Gregor's discussion with David Lodge in The English Novel, 159.

16. Here, for purposes of clarity, "detective fiction" will be used as the umbrella term for all possible sub-forms of the genre such as the classical detective story, or "whodunit?", the hard-boiled detective story, the police procedural, the spy novel, the suspense novel, etc. Although "mystery" is also commonly used in this capacity, the older use of the term identifies those works that evince a strong reliance on a sense of a supernatural occurrence--even if the seemingly supernatural is later explained as natural--for the tale to be effective. Hence, plays such as Abraham and Issac and The Second Shepherd's Play are referred to as "mystery plays", while the title of a Gothic novel such as Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho can suggest that this novel, too, is a mystery novel.

17. See Julian Symons' Bloody Murder: From Detective Story to Crime Novel, 13-16, 162ff. On "shocker" as a British term, see Buchan's "Letter to Thomas Arthur Nelson", which is his dedication to The Thirty-Nine Steps (1915), vi. According to the OED both "thriller" and "shocker" are first used as generic descriptions at about the same time, 1889-1890.

18. Todorov takes this cue from the French novelist Butor, but Chandler had already noted as much in his notebooks: in its essence the crime story is simple. It consists of two stories. One is known to the criminal and to the author himself. It is usually simple, consisting chiefly of the commission of a murder and the criminal's attempts to cover up after it. . . . The other story is the story which is told. It is capable of great elaboration and should, when finished, be complete in itself. It is necessary, however, to connect the two stories throughout the book. This is done by allowing a bit, here and there, of the hidden story to appear. (Notebooks 42)

19. Hence, in The Orators (1932) figures such as Poirot and Holmes take their places in a ritualized liturgy as they are appealed to in the refrains of prayers: "O Poirot deliver us . . . O Holmes deliver us" (67).

20. Greene does praise Conan Doyle's work for a number of its qualities, particularly for the sense of atmosphere present in the Holmes stories. See, for example, Greene's introduction to The Sign of Four (Pan Books, 1973; rpt. Reflections 289-292) or his review of Hesketh Pearson's biography of Conan Doyle entitled, "The Poker-Face" (CE 119-21).

21. In one of his essays on Henry James, "The Lesson of the Master" (1935), Greene remarked: "Life is violent and art has to reflect that violence" (541). Later, Auden's long poem New Year Letter uses the detective story as a metaphor for the state of affairs in 1940: "The situation of our time / Surrounds us like a baffling crime. / There lies the body . . ." (233-235).
22. William LeQueux (1864-1927) was a journalist and British Secret Service agent who became a prolific writer of spy stories. Many, such as The Great War in England in 1897 (1893) and The Invasion of 1910 (1905), aimed to publicize the need for British preparedness for war.
23. Hays, Zabel, and Robson all take Rowe's remarks as Greene's justification for writing thrillers. McCarthy (229) and McEwen (118-119) find the suggestion that life is like a thriller problematic.
24. Greene has suggested that his mention of Bowen was "a little mild baiting of the intellectuals"; but, as he also adds that he chose Bowen because he does not "think that the books one reads as an adult influence one as a writer", his selection of Bowen's novel for special comment is as good as any (Shuttleworth 39).
25. For a discussion of Greene's use of the romance idiom focussing on the work that appeared from 1950 to 1973, see Brian Thomas's An Underground Fate: The Idiom of Romance in The Later Fiction of Graham Greene.
26. Journey Without Maps ostensibly recounts the trip Greene made to Liberia in 1935; but, in its insistence on getting beneath the veneer of civilization and on the importance of returning to the primitive, it quickly assumes the status of a psychological, even metaphysical, exploration of the self that is archetypal in its patterning.
27. Michael Denning sees the thriller's emphasis on the conflict between good and evil working in two different ways. There are "magical thrillers where there is a clear contest between Good and Evil with a virtuous hero defeating an alien and evil villain, and those that we might call existential thrillers which play on a dialectic of good and evil overdetermined by moral dilemmas, by moves from innocence to experience, and by identity crises, the discovery in the double agent that the self may be evil" (34).
28. It is not hard from this vantage to see how Greene's fondness for melodrama of this kind leads to his preoccupation with the "seedy," to his Catholic novels, and to the much discussed issue of his Manichean or perhaps Jansenist

sympathies. This path has been clearly marked both by critics of Greene's work, such as Anthony Burgess, Francis Kunkel and A. J. M. Smith, and by Greene himself, although he has denied these feelings (Couto 212).

29. The hard-boiled detective novel that Chandler and others (Grella, Cawelti, and Stowe for example) discuss is, as Palmer notes, a type of the thriller. Edmund Wilson links Chandler's work with Greene's and Hitchcock's ("Who Cares" 262). Graves and Hodge in their social history of the interwar period in Britain, The Long Week-End, judge Hammett to be the only first-rate writer among authors of detective novels (301).

30. Comments by Orwell support Martin Green's reading of the period's literary history. In "Boy's Weeklies" Orwell stresses the influence of Kipling's work, singling out Stalkey and Co. (1899) for special notice. His essay "Good Bad Books" notes the proliferation of sub-genres in the period between 1880 and 1920; and "Bookshop Memories" (1936) confirms the gender of most readers of adventure stories: Orwell notes that the average novel--"the ordinary, good-bad, Galsworthy-and-water stuff which is the norm of the English novel--seems to exist only for women. Men read either the novels it is possible to respect, or detective stories. But their consumption of detective stories is terrific" (244).

A related discussion is Morris Dickstein's "Popular Fiction and Critical Values: The Novel as a Challenge to Literary History", which locates Robinson Crusoe at an originary point in a tradition of popular fiction and remarks upon the book's influence.

31. Gabriel Josipovici suggests that "the urge to recapture the much more real pleasures and terrors of childhood colours all he [Greene] writes" (120). V. S. Pritchett has also remarked with respect to Greene's ambivalence about childhood authors that "The misanthropy of Greene often reads as if it were a resentment of the deceit of books for boys and a rancour against the loss of the richly populated solitude of childhood" (82). The charge of misanthropy has often been levelled at Greene, particularly by early critics. Sean O'Faolain is perhaps the most emphatic in this regard.

32. In this regard, one thinks of Orwell's critique of Auden's "Spain" in "Inside the Whale" (516).

33. This need also accounts, says Orwell, for the popularity of the Catholic Church among writers in the late twenties and in the thirties (515). In addition to Greene, who converted in 1926, Evelyn Waugh, Anthony Powell, and Malcolm Muggeridge also joined the Catholic Church at this time. Similarly, Eliot joined the Church of England in 1927.

34. In the Couto interview, Greene responds to the suggestion that he has romanticised the left: "Maybe I do. But I don't think I romanticise the Communists. I have a certain sympathy and there's a link between Communism and Catholicism, the Curia and the Politburo. But there's not much of the real Communism left; it's become State Capitalism. In any case I'd rather romanticise the Left than romanticise the Right as Evelyn Waugh did" (211-12).

35. See, for example, Hugh Walpole, A Letter to a Modern Novelist.

36. See Edgell Rickword, "Straws for the Wary: Antecedents to Fascism," for a contemporary's discussion of the link between the moderns and fascism.

37. Since the present capitalist system was assumed to be in its death throes, the polarization of political opinion carried out, by the Left in particular, reduced all political questions to a choice between fascism and communism. Michael Roberts' 1933 "Preface" to the New Country anthology of poetry, the Left Review's Authors Take Sides campaign in 1937, and Henderson's book The Novel Today--wherein he writes, "the central issue of our age is that of a society divided against itself in the struggle of capital and labour, the class-struggle, which, in the last resort, is the struggle between fascism and communism" (17)--all reflect the polarization of political opinion.

38. See Ortega's "The Dehumanization of Art": "Poetry has become the higher algebra of metaphors" (32).

39. Lodge's argument is based on Jakobson's contention that discourse can proceed only along metonymic or metaphoric lines. Prose fiction, because it necessarily moves from a beginning to an end, will always contain both modes of writing, but in different periods of literary history one or the other will be in the ascendant.

Briefly, metonymic discourse, based on relationships of contiguity, is identified by Lodge as the discourse of realism, since it structures itself linearly along both a chronologic time line and a well-defined plot. Its descriptions are largely constructed synecdochally and proceed from one point to another. Metaphoric discourse, for its part, does not insist on structures of continuity and makes up for its weakened narrative structure by employing other modes of aesthetic ordering in the discourse, such as allusion, mythic archetypes, or repetitions of varying motifs, images, and symbols. Time in this kind of fiction is fluid and chronology disturbed. Lodge suggests that literary history oscillates between metonymic and metaphoric modes of writing.

See David Lodge's "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy"; The Modes of Modern Writing; and "Modernism, Anti-modernism, and Postmodernism".

40. Watson places the Bloomsbury group (the Woolfs, Maynard Keynes, Strachey, Forster, Russell) on the Left in his tally of political allegiance among writers in the interwar period (87-88).

Quentin Bell notes that Woolf's relationship with some of the younger left-wing writers--Spender, Day Lewis, Isherwood--was "easy, friendly and cordially appreciative", despite the fact that they "must also have known that although her prose could never be an effective vehicle for conveying political ideas, her attitude to politics was a kind that they found sympathetic" (186).

41. In poetry this same conviction manifests itself in the idiom of the "Audenesque" (a term Greene used in a film review [PD 53]), which, among other things, is characterized by the use of concrete images and details that are emphasized by the definite article. Such a technique clearly draws relations between the reader's experience of the world and the world of the poem. For a full discussion of the "Audenesque", including Greene's relation to it, see Bergonzi's Reading the Thirties, especially 39-65.

42. This was Stephen Spender's judgment as well in his pamphlet "The New Realism" (1939):

there is a tendency for artists today to turn outwards to reality, because the phase of experimenting in form has proved sterile. If you like, the artist is simply in search of inspiration, having discovered that inspiration depends on there being some common ground of understanding between him and his audience about the nature of reality and on a demand from that audience for what he creates. (qtd. in Lodge, Modes 190)

43. Orwell, too, saw fiction as contaminated with liberal-bourgeois ideology: "All fiction from the novels in the mushrooming libraries downwards is censored in the interests of the ruling class" ("Boy's Weeklies" 203). Brecht is similarly aware of the ideology of traditional realism: "Even the realistic mode of writing, of which literature provides many very different examples, bears the stamp of the way it was employed, when and by which class, down to its smallest details" (81). Brecht argues that realism, as a concept, must be cleansed. ("Popularity and Realism").

For a discussion of the ideological implications of the realist novel see Carole Snee, "Working-Class Literature or Proletarian Writing?", 168. Kermode also remarks upon the

problem of form for proletarian writers in the period (History and Value 89).

44. For critics of the Left, literature had to concern itself with two things: the working class and the portrayal of reality. Symons quotes Anthony Blunt from the Left Review: "If we mean by revolutionary art the art which most closely represents the ideas of the rising class, there can be no doubt that the true revolutionary art of today will be realistic" (Thirties 97). As for the representation of reality in the revolutionary struggle, A. Calder-Marshall wrote: "The most important function of the revolutionary novelist, to my mind, is to portray the whole scene as it is" (Left Review 2.16: 876; qtd. in David Margolies, "Left Review and Left Literary Theory" 69). Similarly, Ralph Fox declared: "The revolutionary task of literature to-day is to restore its great tradition, to break the bonds of subjectivism and narrow specialization, to bring the creative writer face to face with his only important task, that of winning the knowledge of truth, of reality" (37). Fox also adds that the new realism must show "man in action to change his conditions to master life, man in harmony with the course of history and able to become the lord of his own destiny" (100).

45. Mass Observation's statement of purpose, "Poetic Description and Mass Observation", emphasizes the goal of transforming subjective opinion into objective statement through a process of defamiliarization. Subjective reports become objective because the subjectivity of the observer is one of the facts under observation.

. . . MASS OBSERVATION is a technique for obtaining objective statements about human behaviour. . . . Poetically, the statements are also useful. They produce a poetry which is not, as at present, restricted to a handful of esoteric performers. The immediate effect of MASS OBSERVATION is to devalue considerably the status of the "poet." . . . In taking up the rôle of observer, each person becomes like Courbet at his easel . . . The process of observing raises him from subjectivity to objectivity. What has become unnoticed through familiarity is raised into consciousness again.

(3)

46. For a discussion of this point, see Stuart Laing's essay, "Presenting 'Things as They Are': John Sommerfield's May Day".

47. In this light, Ortega calls the assumption that all men are equal a "profound injustice" ("Dehumanization" 7). In The Revolt of the Masses (1930), he writes that "the greatest crisis that can afflict peoples, nations, civilizations . . . [is] the rebellion of the masses" (Revolt 11), which is the

inevitable result of the spread of liberal democracy coupled with scientific and techno-industrial advances (Revolt 56). Robert Graves and Laura Riding see democracy as equally destructive for literature: "The populace now exercises a more tyrannical influence over English writers than ever before. This is due to a mistranslation of the democratic principle, that everyone has not only the right, but the obligation, to be responsible for himself, into a statement of historical achievement: that everyone has equal capability with everyone else" ("Poetry and Politics" 273).

48. Q. D. Leavis, who is critical of all forms of popular art, is equally critical of any practice that makes literature available to the general public: circulating libraries (9), books at Woolworth's (14), the Book Society (23), book clubs (37), cheap paperbacks (152), and serialization in the popular press (152, 177-78).

49. "The temptation to accept the cheap and easy pleasures offered by the cinema, the circulating library, the magazine, the newspaper, the dance-hall, and the loud-speaker is too much for almost everyone. To refrain would be to exercise a severer self-discipline than even the strongest minded are likely to practise, for only the unusually self-disciplined can fight against their environment and only the unusually self-aware could perceive the necessity of doing so" (225). Needless to say, for Leavis the highbrow cult of detective fiction shows how strong the temptation is to adopt the easy, that is, the popular attitude (200).

50. In this respect, F. R. Leavis later recalled, "[literature] mattered crucially to civilization . . . because it represented a human reality, an autonomy of the human spirit" ("Scrutiny: A Retrospective" 88). However, the fallacy of Leavis's view has been made all too apparent by George Steiner, whose "Humane Literacy" (1963) severely questions Leavisite assumptions about the social value of art.

51. Indeed, the view that mass culture is dangerous can be traced back to antiquity. See Patrick Brantlinger, Bread and Circuses, and Alan Swingewood, The Myth of Mass Culture, for discussions of the history of the mass culture critique. For a general discussion of the critique see Herbert J. Gans, Popular Culture and High Culture. Other useful discussions are found in C. W. E. Bigsby's "The Politics of Popular Culture" and in Peter Miles and Malcolm Smith's Cinema, Literature and Society.

52. Dickstein's comments on the role of critics in this regard are interesting: "The coming of modernism sharpened the split between high and popular fiction by emphasizing originality, difficulty, and experimentation and devaluing the

formulaic, stereotypical elements which modern mass culture shares with the folk cultures of the past. It also led to a distrust of storytelling . . . But the writers themselves rarely heeded this split, and always borrowed freely from every part of the cultural spectrum. Only the critics, sociologists, and literary historians drew sharp boundaries, routinizing the imaginative" (64-65).

On the entrenchment of modernist assumptions within the academy, see Bruce Robbins, "Modernism in History, Modernism in Power", 237-39.

53. Greene noted that "[i]n a sense all writing for schoolboys is propaganda for the established order" (PD 150). Orwell also remarked on the conservative nature of popular literature in "Boy's Weeklies" (203). Richard Hoggart in The Uses of Literacy and in "Mass Communication in Britain" takes a similar view of popular fiction.

For a specific critique of detective fiction along lines compatible with Adorno and Horkheimer's suggestions, see William O. Aydelotte, "The Detective Story as a Historical Source", wherein he argues that the desire for the wish-fulfilling fantasies of detective stories reflects authoritarian or fascist longings.

54. Bergonzi discusses Auden's influence on the idiom of the age and on Greene in Reading the Thirties.

55. Fred D. Crawford's 'Mixing Memory and Desire': "The Waste Land" and British Novels examines the influence of Eliot's poem on a number of British novelists, including Greene (103-23). Crawford suggests that Greene's entertainments contain more frequent allusions to The Waste Land than do the novels (119), which, he says, attempt to solve the waste land dilemma (123).

56. In The Other Man Greene admits the negative influence on these novels of his reading in the twenties (130).

57. Swinnerton is also mentioned in A Sort of Life (151). The review appeared in The Evening News (Nov. 20, 1931), p. 10, under the title "People We All Know". Stratford notes that it was not as "scathing" as Greene remembers, nor was it a "very perceptive piece of criticism" (Faith, 105 and 116). Sherry quotes many of Swinnerton's comments in his biography of Greene (396).

58. Henry James's "The Art of Fiction" makes it clear that the success of any novel depends upon its ability to produce "the illusion of life" and that this is "the beginning and end of the art of the novelist" (35-6).

59. The term "Greeneland" was first used by Arthur Calder-Marshall in 1940 and has since become a commonplace description of the world of Greene's novels. Greene's irritation with the term has been frequently expressed (OM 18).

60. See Greene's essays on James in Collected Essays ("Henry James: The Private Universe" [1936], 21-34; "Henry James: The Religious Aspect" [1933], 34-44; "The Portrait of a Lady" [1947], 44-50; "The Plays of Henry James" [1950], 55-60) and in The Portable Graham Greene ("The Lesson of the Master" [1935], 541-43). Ford and Conrad are also discussed in many places in Collected Essays but most specifically in "Ford Madox Ford" (1939 and 1962), 121-30; "The Dark Backward: A Footnote" (1935), 55-60; "Remembering Mr. Jones" (1937), 138-40; and "The Domestic Background" (1935), 140-42. (The first two of these are on Ford, the last two on Conrad.) Greene has also edited the Bodley Head's four-volume edition of Ford's work (1962).

61. In "The Art of Fiction" (1884), James writes: "the air of reality (solidity of specification) [resulting from fidelity to exactness or "truth of detail"] seems . . . to be the supreme virtue of a novel" (35).

62. One might argue that James's innovation of the ficelle allowed for the presentation of a character's consciousness without shifting the plane of reality in the narrative. That is, the ficelle (such as Miss Gostrey) allows for a naturalized presentation of consciousness that cannot distort the reality of the visible world presented in the novel.

63. Nevertheless, Conrad's influence is apparent in many of Greene's texts. It's a Battlefield bears affinities to The Secret Agent and contains an obvious acknowledgement of influence in the name of the character Conrad Drover. See Lynne Cheney, "Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent and Graham Greene's It's a Battlefield: A Study in Structural Meaning", for a discussion of one aspect of this relationship. Also of interest are Greene's comments on Conrad in The Other Man (141).

64. Greene specifically mentions Lubbock in A Sort of Life (144) and in Ways of Escape (13). In The Other Man, Greene claims that he still has difficulty presenting action (122).

65. The phrase is from John Mair's review of The Confidential Agent in the New Statesman (18 [23 September 1939], 432; Cassis 20). It is also quoted on the back of the Penguin edition of the novel.

66. Auden in his "Introduction" to The Poet's Tongue (329-30) and, later, Chandler in "The Simple Art of Murder" (13) both insist that escape is a necessary and important function of literature.

67. Later Greene elaborated on his position: "I think that an artist who wants his art to be part of his life should welcome the chance of showing people ways of working with enjoyment, not ways of escaping" (Gilliatt 49).

68. See Fiction and the Reading Public, 46, 51, 53, 286-7.

69. This view has been reiterated by Arnold Weinstein in Vision and Response in Modern Fiction ("all novels are mystery stories and all novels both describe and engender the acquisition of knowledge" [15]) and by James Guetti in "Aggressive Reading: Detective Fiction and Realistic Narrative" ("all verbal form . . . occurs on the grid of a detective story").

70. On detective fiction's role in the deterioration of rigid cultural distinctions, see Dipple (130-31) and Tani, among others. Stowe suggests that "[d]etective fiction shares with demagoguery the capacity to mesmerize, but it also shares with Brecht's art, and Chaplin's, the ability to arouse critical awareness, to 'alienate' its reader from its own plot, characters, and apparent generic assumptions" ("Convention" 589).

71. The decline of the Left was also hastened by a number of external events including Stalin's purges, Franco's victory in Spain, and the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939.

Chapter Two

ASPECTS OF DETECTIVE FICTION

In detective fiction, Greene found a ready-made, enormously popular formula that could interrogate established political, cultural, and critical assumptions, since the plot of the detective story figures the process of reading. Most clearly, the detective is a figure for the reader in the text, since the detective must read a text that is written by a criminal or murderer. As Ross Macdonald says, the detective's "actions are largely directed to putting together the stories of other people's lives and discovering their significance" ("Writer" 185). The detective reads the story of the crime in the clues that he or she finds. However, the murderer attempts to keep this story hidden from the detective by creating a fiction, an alibi, which will cover the story of the crime. That is, the murderer is the author of a palimpsestic account of the murder with the story of the crime as it really happened lying beneath a story of the crime claiming to be the truth of what happened. The detective is forced to interpret one text, the alibi, in such a way that he or she is able to uncover the hidden story that is the true account of the events, for showing through the fictional account of the crime are indications of the truth. The detective story ends with the detective producing a new narrative, which is the explanation and interpretation of the criminal's

fiction. In this way, "[d]etective fiction, particularly of the classical formula, . . . thematizes narrativity itself as a problem, a procedure, and an achievement" (Hühn 451). In other words, the detective story is "the narrative of narratives, its classical structure a laying-bare of the structure of all narrative" (Brooks 25).

The thriller, though structurally different from the detective story in its narrative patterning, enacts this same basic activity; but in the thriller the process of reading is more complexly figured in that both the story of the crime and the story of the investigation change direction in response to the presence of the other. The reader, who finds that neither story is hidden (which is not to say there are no hidden aspects in either of these stories), sees in the thriller a dialectical process of textual interpretation and reinterpretation that can theoretically continue without end. However, as we will see, this same dialectic is also at work in the detective story.

Greene has recently remarked that "in the twenties and thirties I was much interested in the detective story" (Last Word viii). During this "golden age" of detective fiction, the genre developed along a number of lines all leading from a classical model pioneered by Edgar Allan Poe and then modified and extended by a number of authors including Arthur Conan Doyle, E. C. Bentley, G. K. Chesterton, Agatha

Christie, and Dorothy Sayers.~ What Greene does with the thriller in the thirties is meaningful only in light of how these and other writers developed the genre of detective fiction, since it is the classical detective story to which his thrillers respond. In order to see how Greene's work deviates from the norms of the classical detective story in the period, this chapter will consider the nature of the form to which Greene was reacting. To this end, I will consider the process of reading and the detective story's metaphorical representation of this process in specific texts by Poe, Conan Doyle, Bentley, and Christie. Also of importance in this discussion will be a consideration of the epistemological and ideological assumptions that underlie the classical detective story. Greene's work develops out of a well-established tradition, yet he exploits qualities inherent in the genre to subvert these assumptions in his thrillers.

Reading and the Detective Story

We have already seen that the classical detective story is made up of two stories, the story of the investigation and the story of the crime. The first of these is an "open" story, visible to the reader, while the second is a "hidden" tale, existing in absentia for the reader (Todorov, Poetics 44). According to Todorov, in the purest form of the classical detective story these two stories have no point in

common; that is, the "hidden" or repressed story of the crime ends before the second "open" story of the investigation begins (44). Action in the story of the investigation is limited, since the characters within it "do not act, they learn" (44): as a rule nothing can happen to these characters, so the detective himself is immune to physical harm or judicial persecution. Yet, as Todorov notes, this visible story has a peculiar status in that it is usually told by a friend of the detective (like Watson or Hastings or Dupin's unnamed companion) who explicitly acknowledges the fact that he is writing a book (as is illustrated by the openings of "The Five Orange Pips" or "The Red-Headed League".) Essentially, the second, "open" narrative explains how the story itself came to be written. The first or "hidden" narrative, on the other hand, never confesses its literary nature: it is taken as being of the "real" and so tells "what really happened" (45), while the second story explains "how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it" (45).

This second story explicitly concerns itself with two related questions: the first is, how does one read a text? and the second is, how is a text produced? The detective, in moving towards the full disclosure of the story of the crime, is confronted by a number of different texts which he or she must read and interpret. These texts are the clues, the traces of the crime left at the scene of the crime, and

the statements of witnesses, including the statement of one who will eventually be identified as the criminal. By reading or interpreting these texts, the detective constructs a narrative of events which, in the classical detective story, is given the value of truth. Although we will discover that this value is subject to question, convention dictates that, at the end of the story, the detective provide an authoritative reading of events, which is the one true interpretation of the texts he or she reads: the detective's narrative, then, replaces all previous narratives in the text, which are exposed as fictions.

Central to the detective's reading is his or her ability to see the fissures in the texts he or she confronts, particularly in the murderer's account of his or her own actions. What the murderer seeks to do is to construct what Roland Barthes would call a "readerly" (lisible) text. Such a text attempts not only to cover all traces of its author's actual activities but to direct the detective's reading along a single line of inquiry, which will ensure that suspicion is shifted from the criminal-author to another suspect. This "readerly" text, is controlled by the principle of non-contradiction, . . . [stresses] at every opportunity the compatible nature of circumstances, [attaches] narrated events together

with a kind of logical "paste," the discourse carries this principle to the point of obsession

. . . (S/Z 156; Barthes's emphasis)

The readerly provides the illusion that everything in the text is both determined by and the subject of denotative reading. Its governing precept "is to fill in the chains of causality; for thus each determinant must be, insofar as possible, determined, so that every notation is intermediary, doubly oriented, caught up in an ultimate progression" towards closure (181-182).

The murderer's fiction seeks to account for every one of its author's activities in the period before and after the commission of the crime. However, the detective's careful analysis of this fiction, when coupled with his examination of other clues and the statements of witnesses, reveals that the "readerly" text of the criminal is not as coherently seamless as its author would like it to be. In fact, as Barthes notes, a perfectly "readerly" text, a text with only one possible interpretation and only one meaning, is impossible given the vagaries of both language and narrative. The murderer cannot construct a univocal text because narrative is always subject to its "writerly" (scriptible) properties, specifically connotation and the play of intertwining textual codes, that prevent a purely denotative or univocal reading from emerging.

For Barthes, the writerly traits in a text are those things that make the reader an active producer of the text, rather than its passive consumer (S/Z 4). They are those traits that belong to the writerly text, as Barthes conceives it, which is "absolutely plural" in its meaning. This text is

a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach, they are indeterminable . . . the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language. . . . for the plural text, there cannot be a narrative structure, a grammar, or a logic . . . (S/Z 5-6; Barthes's emphasis)

In the end, a purely writerly text is as much of a fiction as a purely readerly text; and just as any attempt to construct a readerly text will fail in the unavoidable inclusion of writerly qualities, so will any attempt to produce a writerly text fail in the unavoidable inclusion of readerly qualities that are inherent in narrative structure, grammar, and logic. Ultimately, "Every 'traditional' novel of any value will criticize or at least investigate models

of intelligibility and every radical text will be readable and intelligible from some point of view" (Culler, Structuralist 190).

In the detective story, the murderer hopes that his or her readerly text will be read in only one way, yielding a univocal or denotative meaning that will attest to his or her innocence. The detective encountering this readerly text seeks those spots which are the indications of a plurality of meaning. Hence, the detective discovers the writerly qualities of the murderer's fiction in order to produce a text of his or her own at the end of the narrative. In a detective story, things like the traces left at the scene of the crime or contradictions between differing accounts of what happened on the night of the murder are the clues that figure the unavoidable presence of the writerly within the texts the detective reads. The criminal-author of the readerly text ultimately finds it impossible to ensure a denotative reading of a text because, as Barthes says, "language is never innocent . . . [since] writing still remains full of the recollection of previous usage . . . words have a second-order memory which mysteriously persists in the midst of new meanings" (Writing 16). Over time, language, as it is used within the literary work, becomes increasingly connotative and increasingly symbolic; thus it defies attempts to limit its interpretation.

In that Barthes metaphorically describes the readerly as having "the careful and suspicious mien of an individual afraid of being caught in some flagrant contradiction . . . always on the lookout and always . . . preparing [his or her] defense against the enemy that may force [him or her] to acknowledge the scandal of some illogicality" (S/Z 156), his comments are highly suggestive in their implications for the application of the readerly/writerly paradigm to works of detective fiction. As Hercule Poirot remarks in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd (1926), cases of the sort described in the novel all resemble each other in that "[e]veryone concerned in them has something to hide" (Ackroyd 84). That is, in this novel Poirot confronts a number of readerly texts supplied by those with "something to hide" that are all aimed at lulling their readers, Poirot and us, into "idleness" (S/Z 4). The witnesses Poirot questions all assume that he believes in the representational function of writing and in its power to construct and convey logico-temporal sequences, but Poirot, alert to the hidden writerly qualities that are present in any text, refuses to be a mere consumer of their testimonies. Instead, he focuses on those areas in their texts where he sees indications of an attempt to cover over something. Like Dupin, Holmes or any other detective of the classical detective story, Poirot is constantly aware of the symbolic nature of language within narrative and, consequently, is attentive to equivocations,

double meanings, and the possibility of a repressed content in any narrative. He recognizes that the texts he encounters are deceptive in that they both reveal and conceal meaning; he knows that even Sheppard, chronicler of his case, is suppressing something.

As in any classical detective story, what is suppressed in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd is both the story of the murder and the identity of the murderer. Sheppard hides his guilt by constructing a logico-temporal sequence (a readerly text) that presents him as well away from Ackroyd when the latter died. Poirot looks for points of textual weakness or of suppression in Sheppard's text that are the visible signs of a narrative that is repressed by Sheppard's fiction. By picking up on the "reticence" of Sheppard's fiction, Poirot discovers Sheppard's guilt even though it was initially hidden within a sequence boasting solidity and non-contradiction. Poirot's reading demonstrates that no textual sequence created out of language can be subject only to a single, denotative meaning determined by its author; Sheppard's secrets are found out by the detective.

Another aspect of the writerly developed in S/Z is the concept of textual codes, or "voices", that freely intersect within any text. Barthes sees a code as the product of a literary tradition and of our (and the writer's) individual experience with that tradition. He identifies five

interdependent codes, but each code is constituted out of what we already know before we approach a particular text.

The code is a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structures; . . . the units which have resulted from it (those we inventory) are themselves, always, ventures out of the text, the mark, the sign of a virtual digression toward the remainder of the catalogue (The Kidnapping refers to every kidnapping ever written); they are so many fragments of something that has always been already read, seen, done, experienced; the code is the wake of that already. (S/Z 20; Barthes's emphasis)

In this regard, the "'I' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)" (S/Z 10). The reader is able to make any text intelligible, at some level, because the text allows these codes to be brought into play. Hence, reading becomes an "uncanny" experience, in Freud's sense of the term, in that the codes are the means whereby the seemingly unfamiliar is made familiar to us.

As we will see, two of the five codes Barthes elaborates are particularly relevant to a discussion of detective fiction, since they are foregrounded by the genre. Both the hermeneutic and the proairetic are linear and

irreversible codes of meaning figuratively occupying the horizontal axis of the narrative, the axis of sequence as it were, and both are easily identified with the readerly qualities of the text. The other three codes which Barthes identifies--the semantic, the symbolic, and the cultural -- extend the text's plurality and operate on its vertical axis. However, none of the codes functions independently of the others, for, as Barthes puts it, "a text is . . . a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash ("Death" 146). The "variety of writings", "anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read [déjà-lu]" ("Work" 160), are the ground out of which the codes emerge. With each utterance in a text, other "voices" are heard which "de-originate the utterance: the convergence of the voices (of the codes) becomes writing, a stereographic space where the five codes, the five voices, intersect" (S/Z 21; Barthes's emphasis). In this "stereographic space" plurality exists; it is the place where meaning is promised and then postponed, where suspense exists.

Given this vision of the text, our experience of reading one text is shown to be dependent on our experience with other texts; hence, our familiarity with one detective story leads us to have certain expectations of another detective story. However, as long as a text is before us, our reading of it must be indeterminate, since our

understanding of what we read is continually altered as we read. For instance, Conan Doyle's "The Norwood Builder," in keeping with the conventions of detective fiction, presents at its outset through a quoted newspaper account (literally a text) the facts concerning the murder of Jonas Oldacre. As readers familiar with the genre, we expect a murder either before or soon after the beginning of a detective story, so we accept the report of Oldacre's death. Despite McFarlane's protestations of innocence, we have no reason to suspect that report, although we may and probably do believe in McFarlane's innocence. The central question of the classical detective story is raised: whodunit? However, when it is revealed at the end of the story that Oldacre is not dead and that no murder of any kind has been committed, we are forced to reassess our interpretation of the earlier sequence, which had been read in error. In this way, "The Norwood Builder" exemplifies the sort of thing that goes on as we read any text: all narrative demands that we constantly reorient our perceptions of the text as we read. Each statement we encounter in a text arouses in us certain expectations of what is to come while also changing our perception of what has gone before (Iser 278). Reading, then, is a process rooted in flux, as the text continually defies our attempts to fix its meaning while we are reading.

Essentially, the process of reading a text in light of our previous experience of other texts is proaireticism, whose "only logic is that of the 'already-done' or 'already-read'" (S/Z 19). The proairetic code (or the empiric voice) is the code whereby actions are discerned and located in an irreversible metonymic sequence that is determined by our experience with both texts and the world (S/Z 19). The point is obvious; for, barring unusual circumstances, we do not expect a murder victim to reappear in a novel; if such an event should apparently occur, as in "The Norwood Builder," then we know that the victim was not murdered in the first place.¹

The other code central to a discussion of detective fiction is the hermeneutic code (or voice of truth), which Barthes says "governs all intrigues modelled on the detective novel" (Grain 75). The hermeneutic code is designated as "all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution" (S/Z 17). The hermeneutic code controls the processes whereby the reader's desire is provoked; hence, this code performs a key structuring function in the struggle to render any text intelligible:

hermeneutic terms structure the enigma according to the expectation and desire for its solution.

The dynamics of the text (since it implies a truth to be deciphered) is thus paradoxical: it is a static dynamics: the problem is to maintain the enigma in the initial void of its answer; whereas the sentences quicken the story's "unfolding" and cannot help but move the story along, the hermeneutic code performs an opposite action: it must set up delays (obstacles, stoppages, deviations) in the flow of the discourse; . . . between question and answer there is a whole dilatory area whose emblem might be named "reticence," the rhetorical figure which interrupts the sentence, suspends it, turns it aside . . . (S/Z 75)

Contributing to the code's advance is a whole series of "dilatory morphemes" or "hermeneutemes" (209)-- thematization, proposal, formulation, promise of an answer, snare, equivocation, jamming, suspended answer, and disclosure (209-10).

In detective novels the hermeneutic code is highly developed because everything described or mentioned in the text has the status of a potential clue. On a mimetic level, something may or may not represent reality; that is, it may or may not participate in creating the "effect of the real." But, on a hermeneutic level, it is always either a clue or a false clue: it either contributes to the solution

of the enigma or else it delays the solution by diverting the attention of the detective and/or the reader, and thus contributes to the creation of suspense (Porter 43). What this does is foreground a property of narrative in general, for in narrative everything signifies:

what is noted is, by definition, notable: even when a detail seems irreducibly insignificant . . . it will nonetheless ultimately have the very meaning of absurdity or uselessness: everything has a meaning or nothing has. . . . it is a pure system, there is never a "wasted" unit, however long, loose, and tenuous the thread linking it to the levels of the story. ("Introduction to Structural Analysis" 104)

The "reticence" of the discourse (indicated in the presence of such things as false clues or sub-plots) preserves the life of the discourse by refusing to allow the discourse to reveal all at once. "Reticence" is "what is required to ensure the interests of reading, that is, its own survival" (S/Z 141).

Implicit in Barthes's view of writing is his belief that narrative is necessarily "occult" in its nature; it both reveals and conceals, meaning is both promised and deferred.

A work of literature, at least of the kind that is normally considered by the critics . . . is neither ever quite meaningless (mysterious or

"inspired") nor ever quite clear; it is, so to speak, suspended meaning; it offers itself to the reader as a declared system of significance, but as a signified object it eludes his grasp. This kind of dis-appointment or de-ception (de-capio: untake) inherent in the meaning explains how it is that a work of literature has such power to ask questions of the world (by undermining the definite meanings that seem to be the apanage of beliefs, ideologies and common sense) without, however, supplying any answers (no great work is "dogmatic"): it also explains how a work can go on being reinterpreted indefinitely . . .

("Criticism as Language" 128; Barthes's emphasis)

Two ideas here are of particular importance to a consideration of detective fiction: the first is that all narrative possesses "suspended meaning" and therefore some sort of suspense is always felt by the reader; the second is that narrative partakes of deception. What we see in a detective novel is how narrative is used by the criminal to deceive the detective while the novel itself presents the reader with false clues aimed at preventing his or her discovery of the origin of the text's central mystery.

Picking up from Barthes, Porter finds two contradictory impulses at work in the detective story, one of which is evinced in those units that seek to close the gap between a

crime and its solution while the other is seen in an equal number of units that impede progress toward that solution (31). In other words, "Every action sequence that occurs in a detective novel between a crime and its solution delays for a time that solution even when it appears logically required by it. Down to the level of a sentence, all telling involves the postponing of an end simply because articulate speech is linear and expresses itself in the dimension of time" (Porter 41). Porter continues by noting that "what emerges most clearly from an analysis of detective fiction as opposed to that of most kinds of novels is . . . that the art of narrative is always the art of withholding as well as of giving information" (51), which is to say that the workings of the hermeneutic code are foregrounded in detective fiction.

The hermeneutic code is essentially the engine of any narrative; it sustains the narrative by pushing it forward while yet providing the elements that inhibit the movement towards the end, which is the goal of any narrative. Peter Brooks finds a paradigm for this process in Freud's consideration of the contrary forces of eros and thanatos, which push an organism towards its own particular death. The reading of plot is conceived by Brooks as a form of desire that "carries us forward, onward, through the text" (37) towards its end; for "the ultimate determinants of meaning lie at the end, and narrative desire is ultimately

desire for the end" (52) of the narrative, which is also "the moment of the death of the reader in the text" (108). This thinking exposes the paradox inherent in narrative in that the force of desire extinguishes the narrative which sustains the desire: narrative consumes itself as it unfolds.

However, also evident in narrative is a contrary force, which seeks to sustain the narrative and to postpone the end. For Brooks, this force is evinced in repetition, which delays the totalizing impulse of the discourse by disrupting the straightforward linearity of the narrative (Brooks 102).² According to Brooks, two forward movements, the drive towards the end and the desire to assimilate data within the narrative into ever larger units of meaning (corresponding to the force of eros), operate on one another to retard the narrative through the creation of a dilatory space (Brooks 103). That is, the force of eros in the discourse generates incidents in order to prolong the life of the narrative. As Barthes notes, when the narrative must "choose" between several possibilities of action within a discourse, it "invariably chooses the term profitable to it, i.e. which assures its survival as narrative" ("Sequence of Actions" 139). Barthes, like Brooks, sees this as "a sort of instinct of preservation" in the narrative that ensures the choice of "the outcome which makes the story 'go on'" (139). The proper ending of the narrative is thus delayed.

In fact, Brooks suggests that it is a characteristic of textual energy that it should always be on the verge of prematurely ending, with the result that "[t]he reader experiences the fear--and excitement--of the improper end" (109), which is figured in detective fiction by the presence of red herrings, false solutions, dangers to the detective, further murders, or, perhaps literalizing the erotic drive in the text, romantic attachments within the narrative. Any of these types of incidents temporarily derails the detective's investigation, taking him or her further from the narrative's proper ending. Similarly, the presence of a sub-plot, possibly featuring characters different from those in the main plot, also serves to postpone the inevitable end of the narrative. The result of these operations within the larger frame of narrative is the creation of plot and of a heightened sense of pleasure in the reader when the narrative tension is finally released (Brooks 101-102). Hence, "[t]he most effective or, at the least, the most challenging texts may be those that are most delayed, most highly bound, most painful" (102).

Detective fiction well reflects the paradigm of these opposing forces in the narrative text. In the best examples of the genre, as in the work of Greene who transcends the limitations of the genre or Chandler who values scene above solution, digressive (delaying) components become central and transform what are normally thought of as texts of

desire into texts of pleasure.³ That is to say, the best novels in the genre, like all novels we admire, are enjoyed for reasons other than the desire to find out "what will have happened." From the moment of the crime a tension is present in the narrative which the narrative strives to eliminate through the detective, whose investigation figures the desire for the end in the text. The obstacles he or she encounters delay the narrative and figure attempts by the discourse to preserve its existence through narrative "reticence". An effect of this process is to increase narrative tension, which serves to heighten the pleasure gained through the release from suspense. The detective novel exploits the workings of the hermeneutic code in order to produce the thrill of suspense in the reader. Barthes explains:

'Suspense' is obviously only a privileged, or if one prefers, exasperated form of distortion: on the one hand, by keeping a sequence open (by empathetic processes of delay and reinauguration), it reinforces the contact with the reader (the hearer), possesses a manifestly phatic function; and on the other hand, it offers him the threat of an incomplete sequence, of an open paradigm (if, as we believe, every sequence has two poles), i.e., of a logical disturbance, and it is this disturbance which is consumed with anxiety and

pleasure (especially since it is always, ultimately, repaired); 'suspense' is therefore a game with structure intended, so to speak, to threaten and to glorify it: it constitutes a veritable 'thrill' of the intelligible: by representing order (and no longer series) in its fragility, it fulfills the very idea of language: what seems most pathetic is also the most intellectual: suspense grips the mind, not the guts. ("Introduction to Structural Analysis" 130)

Suspense occurs at all levels of narrative discourse from the hesitation between alternative meanings in a single word (as is represented in A Study in Scarlet [1887] by the two meanings suggested for "RACHE"--the police read it as a partial inscription of the name "Rachel" [Doyle 31] while Holmes reads it as the German word for "revenge" [32]) to the postponement of the narrative's end; however, its mechanics can best be seen by isolating a single unit within the discourse.

In Conan Doyle's "The Yellow Face," Grant Munro employs Holmes to investigate the behaviour of his wife, who is mysteriously secretive about what she does with money he gives her and about a cottage she visits in the upper window of which he has glimpsed a hideous yellow face. The central mystery of the story turns on the nature of this yellow face. Unable to obey his wife's pleas to let things be,

Munro rushes up the stairs to discover the secret of the upper room.

. . . Grant Munro rushed into the lighted room at the top, and we entered at his heels.

It was a cosy, well-furnished apartment, with two candles burning upon the table and two upon the mantelpiece. In the corner, stooping over a desk, there sat what appeared to be a little girl.

(360-61)

The simple action here is that of entering a room, at which point a child is seen. The discourse, however, is reticent about conveying this information, which is the answer to an enigma, what is in the room that looks out?, and a vital key to the resolution of the larger mystery, what is Mrs. Munro doing?

The postponement of the revelation is accomplished in a number of ways. First, there is the paragraph break, which physically separates the narration of the two events of entering the room and of perceiving its contents. Then there is the imposition of a description of the room, mentioning its furnishings and the location of its lights. Finally, the sentence which reveals the enigma is periodic in its structure, holding back the crucial revelation of the child's presence, which would no doubt have been the first thing observed by the characters upon entering the room. Even so, the equivocation of "appeared" suggests a doubt as

to whether or not it is a little girl that is spotted. And yet two further enigmas need to be answered: what is the little girl's relation to the yellow face seen in the window? and what is her relation to Mrs. Munro? The first of these questions is dealt with relatively quickly by the narrative, but the second requires a lengthy statement by Mrs. Munro which, in this story, serves the same function as Holmes's explanations elsewhere. Mrs. Munro confers significance on the previous, seemingly unrelated events of the narrative (she explains what she did with the money, the reasons for the yellow face, the identity of the old woman at the cottage, and her absences from home), which Holmes had read as elements in a story of blackmail. As we see it working here, the reticence of the discourse foregrounds the operations of the hermeneutic code and it creates the dilatory space wherein the narrative can continue itself.

The Case of "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd"

Thus far I have described the process of reading as it functions in terms of the proairetic and hermeneutic codes and as it relates to the readerly text. I have also shown, with reference to Barthes's work, that the readerly text cannot free itself from the writerly qualities that are inherent in language and in narrative. Hence, within the detective story the murderer's fiction reveals to the detective more than its author intends because the detective

finds those spots in that text where "reticence" occurs, and then develops his own text, which is an interpretation of the previous text. This process is similarly employed by any competent reader encountering any text. Hence, since each detective story has as its central puzzle the problem of reading, each is more or less a description of the reading process. Particularly, Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd is one of many texts that makes the analogy between detection and reading explicit in its content.

Christie's novel holds a special place in the history of detective fiction because its innovation consists in concealing the identity of the murderer behind the "I" of the first-person narrator, Sheppard. Usually, as Barthes points out, "in the novel, the 'I' is . . . a spectator, and . . . it is the 'he' who is the actor" (Writing 34-5). The use of "I" as "eye" is a "typical novelistic convention" (35), and we expect the "I" of Christie's narrative to function in the conventional way; that is, we assume that the narrator will give us a passively observed account of Poirot's investigation in a manner similar to Watson's accounts of Holmes's cases. Christie's departure from this convention marked this novel in some critics' eyes, Ronald Knox and S. S. Van Dine [W. H. Wright] to name two, as a fraud and a violation of the literary codes governing the genre⁴, yet this violation allows Christie to fulfill

another convention of the detective story, that of the criminal as the least likely suspect.

Just as the use of first-person narration helps to conceal the identity of the murderer from the reader, so does Dr. Sheppard's social position help to shield him from the suspicion of having committed the crime. As Stephen Knight notes, "a doctor [is] the very man to be trusted with the individual's bodily secrets and a hope of continuing life, [and he is] the emerging figure of wise authority in an increasingly secular society" (113). For these reasons, a doctor has long been a favourite villain in mystery fiction. (Holmes, we recall, in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band", remarks to his own Dr. Watson, "When a doctor does go wrong he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge" [270].) Sheppard betrays the trust that the people of King's Abbot place in his profession as easily as Christie betrays the trust of her readers. As Sheppard hides behind the title of "Doctor" (his surname also hints at the pastoral role he should fulfill [Knight 113]), so does the murderer hide behind the pronoun "I". Indeed, Christie's use of the "I" as the actor has potent ideological consequences. Commenting on the reaction of critics like Knox and Van Dine, Knight finds that

[t]he extreme reaction [of reviewers] suggests genuine alarm rather than literary disapproval:

though Christie's earlier novels had taught the reader to think anyone in the family circle was capable of murderous disorder, here she cast doubt on the very conventions of narrative fiction. It was a brilliant structural device, enacting the fear the respectable bourgeois held that disorder within society, threats against the self, might be caused from within the charmed circle, and by someone thought trustworthy. (112)

Christie's innovation shows us how, in detective fiction, language deceives and conceals at both the level of the word and at the levels of structure and narration.

As in all detective stories, the murderer attempts to construct a readerly text that will explain the murder. Sheppard's version of events not only suggests that Ackroyd's death took place well after Sheppard's departure from Ackroyd's home, but it also casts suspicion on a number of other characters (Parker, Miss Russell, Ralph Paton, Geoffrey Raymond, Ursula Bourne, and Charles Kent) and so deflects attention from the murderer. What makes this particular Christie novel interesting in a discussion of detective fiction as a metaphorical representation of the activity of reading is that Sheppard's text constitutes the text of the novel: what we read is what Sheppard writes in his journal. Hence, Sheppard records the narrative of Poirot's investigation while suppressing the narrative of

the events leading up to Ackroyd's death. Although we have seen that any classical detective story contains a layering of narratives, The Murder of Roger Ackroyd is distinguished by the fact that this structure is embedded in Sheppard's own text. The reader, then, is placed in a role analogous to Poirot's, since both the reader and Poirot confront the same text. This point is explicitly figured in chapter 23, where Poirot too becomes a reader of the text.

When Poirot recalls the assistance he often received from Hastings' records, Sheppard tells Poirot that he has been writing his own account of the Ackroyd case complete to this point in the text. (His manuscript, we are told, comprises the first twenty chapters of Christie's novel [228].) Poirot reads Sheppard's journal and so repeats the activity of the reader. Reading and detection merge: they are, in this novel, identical activities. Poirot's response to Sheppard's narrative is that of an attentive reader of Christie, for Poirot sees Sheppard's text not as the determined, univocal reportage Sheppard intends but as the connotative, plural text no author can entirely avoid.

Although Poirot may already suspect Sheppard, the manuscript reveals an important, somewhat Holmesian, clue:

"I [Poirot] congratulate you--on your modesty!"

"Oh," I [Sheppard] said, rather taken aback.

"And on your reticence," he added.

I said "Oh!" again.

"Not so did Hastings write," continued my friend. "On every page, many, many times was the word 'I.' What he thought--what he did. But you--you have kept your personality in the background . . . A very meticulous and accurate account," he said kindly. "You have recorded all the facts faithfully and exactly--though you have shown yourself becoming reticent as to your own share in them."

"And it has helped you?"

"Yes. I may say that it has helped me considerably." (228-29)⁵

Even though he notes the suppression of the narrator-author, Poirot discovers nothing in Sheppard's text through any special or "inside" knowledge. In fact, Poirot assures us of the accuracy of Sheppard's manuscript, although he does add one qualification: "It was strictly truthful as far as it went--but it did not go very far" (240). However, Poirot is able to arrive at the knowledge of Sheppard's guilt because he sees indications of an absent, because repressed, content within the narrative. In Sheppard's account, this repressed content is literally signaled by Sheppard's reticence, but, as Barthes observes, reticence is the emblem of the "dilatory area" that exists between the formulation and the resolution of an enigma in any narrative. It is the

emblem of all that stands in the text between the presentation of the initial mystery (the crime) and its solution (S/Z 75). Sheppard's journal, like Christie's novel, explicitly figures the dynamics of any narrative. The journal that was to have been an account of one of Poirot's failures (253) becomes an incriminating piece of evidence, which allows Poirot to construct his own version of what happened.

In The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, Poirot, though a figure equated with the reader, takes over the production of Sheppard's text from the moment he begins to read. Certainly, Sheppard remains the novel's narrator to its end, but he has no opportunity to continue his manuscript except for the one that Poirot gives him. For the remainder of the novel, Poirot directs Sheppard both physically (Poirot suggests "an overdose of sleeping draught" [252] for Sheppard) and textually ("I should suggest that you finish that very interesting manuscript of yours--but abandoning your former reticence" [252]).

After Sheppard notes that "there was not much which escaped Hercule Poirot" (211) at the end of chapter 20, the novel's last seven chapters do demonstrate less "reticence" on Sheppard's part as the investigation comes to focus on him. Many of the enigmas which the text had posed, such as the question of Ursula Bourne's relationship with Ralph Paton, are resolved in these final chapters and with their

resolution comes an end to reticence. Sheppard increasingly finds that he is in control neither of his destiny ("It was a very uncomfortable minute for me" [238]; "I was too abashed to argue" [240]; "He [Poirot] suddenly became dangerous" [241]) nor of his discourse ("'Let us get back to the culpable conduct of Dr. Sheppard'," Poirot directs [239]). In the final chapter, rife with over seventy first-person references in slightly more than two pages of text, all affectations of reticence disappear as Sheppard himself exposes the seams within his text:

I am rather pleased with myself as a writer. What could be neater, for instance, than the following: "The letters were brought in at twenty minutes to nine. It was just on ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread. I hesitated with my hand on the door handle, looking back and wondering if there was anything I had left undone." . . . what a judicious use of words: "I did what little had to be done!" (254-55; Sheppard's italics)

Once Poirot has discovered them, the sites of repression within the narrative are explicitly pointed out by the narrative. Poirot brings about the end of narrative reticence and the end of repression, the condition that had sustained the life of the narrative. In this respect, he is responsible for ending both Sheppard's manuscript and, when

it ends, Sheppard himself: the process of reading is completed.

As they are developed in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, the initial identifications of murderer with author (of the readerly text) and detective with reader (of the murderer's text) undergo a transformation so that the detective takes control over the producer of the text. Indeed, this kind of transformation is often underscored in mystery fiction by the frequent use of a writer either in the role of the detective or in the role of helper to the detective.⁶ Although the identification between the detective and the narrator or author will be discussed further on, it should be noted here that the detective does not fully exchange his role of a reader for that of an author; his position is less determined than that.

Aspects of Repetition in the Detective Story

Metaphorically, the structure of the classical detective story offers a model of how narrative both reveals and conceals a repressed content. As Todorov noted, the story of the crime, occurring in the past, is hidden from the reader. It is "the story of an absence: its most accurate characteristic is that it cannot be immediately present in the book" (46). The story of the investigation, on the other hand, "is a story which has no importance in itself, which serves only as a mediator between the reader

and the story" (46). Hence, the classical detective story has at its core an absence which determines everything that is present in the story. "This presence and this absence explains the existence of the two in the continuity of the narrative" (46). Any detective story, then, contains evidence of a repressed narrative that is glimpsed only in the clues (traces) that are left for both the reader and, within the narrative, the detective to discern. The manner by which this repressed content is brought to light in the detective story is analogous to similar processes that are always at work in the construction of any narrative or of any interpretation, and crucial to these processes is the role of repetition.

Peter Brooks, taking Doyle's "The Musgrave Ritual" as his example, finds that "[t]he work of detection in this story makes particularly clear a condition of all classic detective fiction, that the detective repeat, go over again, the ground that has been covered by his predecessor the criminal" (24). In "The Musgrave Ritual" both Brunton and Holmes interpret a particular text, which is the Musgrave family's rite of passage, as coded instructions meant to guide an initiate to a secret location where crown jewels are hidden. Brunton, seeking to find these jewels, traces the route described in the ritual. Holmes, seeking to solve the mystery, retraces this route in the same manner as Brunton by plotting the points of the ritual in turn. This

basic activity of reinscribing an already existing text means that the detective story itself is a story of repetition, of reading a text and then writing another text. The detective, in fact, rewrites the murderer's text, and his resulting readerly text is also an interpretation of the first text.

Structurally, Todorov observes that this process figures, in the terms of the Russian Formalists, the reworking of the fabula (story) by the sjuzhet (discourse), which stands as an interpretation of the fabula (Poetics 45). In Todorov's analysis, the criminal's hidden story stands as the fabula of the text and the detective's inquiry stands as the sjuzhet of the text; the interaction of these two structures gives rise to the plot of the narrative (Poetics 45; Brooks 25). The detective story, then, dramatizes the reworking of a fabula by a sjuzhet and so presents us with a paradigm of all narrative texts: "in repeating the steps of the criminal-predecessor, Holmes [or any other detective] is literalizing an act that all narrative claims to perform, since narrative ever, and inevitably--if only because of its use of the preterite--presents itself as a repetition and a rehearsal . . . of what has already happened" (Brooks 25). Narrative always implicitly claims to be an act of repetition because it is always retrospective.⁷ As it is figured in the detective story, the situation of Watson or Hastings is always the

same: he is a writer recording experiences after they have occurred and so knows the ending of the story even before he begins it. This is true for any novel: "The beginning implies the end: if you seem to begin at the beginning . . . you are in fact beginning at the end; all that seems contingent in what follows is in fact received for a later benefaction of significance in some concordant structure" (Kermode, Sense 148). Brooks goes on to add to this the idea that

all narrative posits, if not a Sovereign Judge, at least a Sherlock Holmes capable of going back over the ground, and thereby realizing the meaning of the cipher left by a life. Narrative thus seems ever to imagine in advance the act of its transmission, the moment of reading and understanding that it cannot itself ever know, since this act always comes after the writing, in a posthumous moment. (34)

The confounding of beginnings and endings is clearly figured in the detective story's structure wherein the initial crime, which stands at the beginning of the story as the impetus for the narrative (an act of "deviance" that upsets a quiescent state), also stands at the end of the story; its disclosure is the objective of both the detective and of the narrative (Porter 29). What the discourse does is to release gradually the repressed story of the crime into the

main story of the investigation so as to make it visible to the reader. Usually, the discourse concludes only when the repressed content of the tale is fully brought to light. Or, to put it another way, the discourse exists only because repression takes place.

Since we have said that the story of the inquiry figures the sjuzhet and the story of the crime the fabula of any narrative structure, we imply a hierarchy based on priority in the detective story; that is, first there occurs the crime and then its detection. However, as Miller and Culler both point out, the pattern of reinscription described here is problematic, and so the detective story, like all narrative, expresses a kind of double logic. That is, as we have stated it, the crime precedes its detection, fabula precedes sjuzhet (because the sjuzhet is a retelling of the fabula), but it is equally true that it is only because of the story of detection that the hidden story of the crime is revealed (the sjuzhet supplies us with our only indication of the fabula). According to this latter view, the story of the detection precedes the story of the crime--the priority of fabula to sjuzhet is inverted (Culler, "Story and Discourse" 183, 186). The story of the detection and the story of the crime are, as in Miller's analogy of Ariadne's thread tracing the labyrinth, "each the origin of which the other is a copy, or the copy which makes the other, already there, an origin" ("Ariadne's Thread" 67-68).

Ultimately, as with the thread and the labyrinth, the one is the other and at the same time is a repetition of the other (70).

This problematic is often thematically figured in detective fiction in the relationship between the detective and the criminal. Holmes expresses open admiration for his arch-foe, Moriarty (Doyle 471), and occasionally is himself outside the law. (In "The Adventure of the Three Students" and in "The Adventure of the Abbey Grange" he stages his own mock trials, thus protecting guilty parties from the legitimate authorities, while in at least three other stories he plays the thief and commits burglary.⁸) More obviously, this ambiguity is seen in both the thriller and hard-boiled detective fiction, wherein figures like the Op and Sam Spade are frequently seen as little better than those they pursue.⁹ Dupin, too, has his double in the Minister D___ of Poe's "The Purloined Letter", but here the confounding of the story of the crime and the story of the detection is also clearly manifested in the doubleness of the story's structure. That is, the first half of the story consists of the Prefect G___ of the Sûreté telling Dupin and his companion-narrator how an important and somewhat compromising letter was stolen from the Queen, while she stood by helpless to do anything about it. In the story's second half, Dupin tells the Prefect and the narrator how he retrieved the letter by essentially duplicating the crime of

Minister D____.¹⁰ As is the case here, the solution to the mystery depends upon a reenactment or repetition of the crime or, as Porter puts it using Aristotle's terms, of the scene of suffering, which precedes the actual recognition scene wherein the detective discloses his solution (Porter 38). Not only does "The Purloined Letter" bear this out, but so do The Moonstone (1868), The Hound of the Baskervilles (1902), and The Big Sleep (1939). In each case, the story of the detection repeats the story of the crime and, at the same time, is itself the story of the crime. The detective's "murder" of the criminal, whether in the figurative or in the literal sense, is a final act of repetition that purges the community and the narrative of deviant forces in order to establish a new equilibrium signaled by the silence of the discourse.

Repetition, then, becomes the means whereby the detective accomplishes the task of solving the crime. Yet, there is far more to the workings of repetition in the detective story than has thus far been described. The detective's solution, and the narrative of the solution itself, like all narrative, is created out of the "tissue of quotations" that is the "already-read" or "already-written" (figured in the detective novel as the criminal's narrative). Even the narrative of the crime that is exposed in the course of a detective story has at the back of it other narratives, which have other narratives behind them;

and, as Brooks argues, "there is simply no end to narrative on this model" (33).

"The Musgrave Ritual", again, clearly marks the recession into deeper levels of narrative. Here the (re)construction of the story of the disappearance of Brunton and Rachael Howells produces a deeper level of narrative that lies in English history. In uncovering the one mystery, Holmes uncovers another, which he designates as the last meaning for the ritual beyond that of being a rite of passage in the Musgrave family. He discovers that the mystery opens onto the story of the Stuarts, who hid their gold and jewels at the Musgrave estate, Hurlstone, leaving the ritual as coded instructions for their recovery. Into the story of Holmes's investigation, then, comes not only Brunton's story but also a larger story of regicide and usurpation which has other narratives behind it that constitute the whole of English history (Brooks 26). What we see allegorized in the story is the idea that the recovery of one narrative leads to the simultaneous recovery of further narratives through a pattern of embedding that is infinitely regressive.

Similarly, the story expands forward in time through its retellings. Holmes's final explanation of the old coins, told to Reginald Musgrave, is not the last word on the case, since Holmes recounts the narrative to Watson as a story that explains how "a crumpled piece of paper, an

old-fashioned brass key, a peg of wood with a ball of string attached to it, and three rusty old discs of metal . . . are history" (387). It is these items which are the clues to a mystery for both Watson, who asks Holmes to solve it for him, and the reader, who has Watson's narrative of Holmes's narrative as the solution before him or her. "The Musgrave Ritual," then, like other classical detective stories, locates the reader in a chain of narratives which both recedes into the past and continues endlessly into the future with each retelling and each interpretation.¹¹

The issue of repetition in narrative is further complicated by the conditions of the genre, which always ensure some degree of repetition between individual texts. As we noted in chapter one, certain ingredients must be present if a particular text is to be considered as belonging to a specific genre. And, in a sense, all texts belong to a genre even if it is a genre with only one member, for "no one can combine (produce) a narrative without referring to an implicit system of units and rules" (Barthes, "Introduction to Structural Analysis" 97): the "already-read" is always present in any narrative. As Culler and Kermode both recognize, to write a poem or a novel is to engage literary tradition, while the activity itself is made possible only by the existence of genre. Whether one writes against it or within it, genre is always the context within which the activity of writing takes place

(Culler, Structuralist 116; Kermode, Art of Telling 106). And, as we have seen, within the frame of genre, repetition between texts is unavoidable, for "all fiction is conventionalized" (Frye, Secular Scripture 45). Hence, the detective novel is not the worse for its reliance on formal structures of repetition¹². As Miller puts it, "Any novel is a complex tissue of repetitions and of repetitions within repetitions, or of repetitions linked in a chain fashion to other repetitions " (Fiction 2-3). While we can see the truth of this demonstrated on a variety of levels within texts (in the repetition of key words, images, motifs, or actions) and between texts (in the conventions of genre that enable us to recognize two unique texts as detective stories), Miller's point is particularly exact with reference to Barthes's conception of the text as "a tissue of quotations" from the "already-read". (Miller's use of "tissue" implies Barthes's view in his own.)

As is true of all narrative texts, the detective's final solution is a retelling, or a repetition, of an already existing text. Doyle seems to acknowledge this in his stories' contents by telling us in A Study in Scarlet that Holmes's knowledge of "sensational literature" is immense (Doyle 22). Holmes has read Vidocq's memoirs, Poe's Dupin stories, and Gaboriau's stories of Lecoq but finds shortcomings in each.¹³ (In this way, Doyle establishes a space for Holmes within an already-defined genre.)

Similarly, Holmes, who believes that "[t]here is nothing new under the sun. It has all been done before" (29), urges both Gregson and Lestrade to read accounts of previous cases as an aid to solving those crimes they investigate (29). For Holmes, as Doyle conceives him, the "already-read" is the ground out of which he develops and articulates his solution.

What we also realize is that the relationship between the criminal's interpretation of events and the detective's interpretation is one of interdependency and not one of substitution. In this respect, the detective novel is like any novel in that an oscillation of narration and interpretation can be found (Kermode, Genesis 98-99). Indeed, as Todorov makes clear, the line between narrative and interpretation is easily blurred (Poetics 125).¹⁴ Hence, the detective's narrative, his disclosure (exposure) of the murderer's actions, is both an interpretation and a retelling, with significant differences, of the murderer's narrative. Both tellings rely on each other for their existence and both contribute equally to the overall effect of the detective novel, wherein the reader takes pleasure in the ingenuity involved in the presentation of the enigma and the solution.¹⁵ The detective's narrative is created out of the narrative of the criminal; that is, it refers back to a prior interpretation of events which is analyzed, elucidated, and then interpreted in turn. Conversely, the

discourse of the criminal seeks to suppress evidence of the criminal's guilt and so must already anticipate the detective's suspicions and thus his or her later account of events.

The two narratives, the criminal's explanation and the detective's explanation, offer two different but complimentary readings of the same set of events, of the same text. Indeed, the detective novel could be thought of as a dialogue, figured by the detective's interrogation of witnesses (including the criminal), between two interpretations of the same text. Furthermore, since the detective functions as an inscribed figure for the text's reader, these interrogations also figure the dialogue between text and reader; that is, the reader's perception and interpretation of the text undergoes continual change in response to the text. In a sense, neither party in these figured exchanges can have the last and definitive word; as Barthes comments, "[i]t follows that the meaning of a text lies not in this or that relationship but in the diagrammatic totality of its readings, in their plural system" (S/Z 120). He goes on to emphasize that, the meaning of a text can be nothing but the plurality of its systems, its infinite (circular) 'transcribability': one system transcribes another, but reciprocally as well: with regard to the text, there is no 'primary,' 'natural,'

'national,' 'mother' critical language: from the outset, as it is created, the text is multilingual; there is no entrance language or exit language for the textual dictionary, since it is not the dictionary's (closed) definitional power that the text possesses, but its infinite structure. (S/Z 120)

However, this does not mean that the importance of the solution to a detective story and to the fulfillment of the hermeneutic code should be discounted. Since it is both unavoidable and essential that the hermeneutic code--the voice of truth--delay the solution to an enigma, "[e]xpectation [or suspense] . . . becomes the basic condition for truth; truth, these narratives tell us, is what is at the end of expectation. . . . [the design of the hermeneutic narrative] implies a return to order, for expectation is a disorder" (S/Z 76).

In conceiving of narrative as a "disorder", Barthes shares Todorov's view that "[a]ll narrative is a movement between two equilibriums which are similar but not identical" (Fantastic 163). That is, narrative begins in an act of transgression, which disrupts an existing state of quiescence, and proceeds through plot to a new quiescence. The classical detective story figures this movement in that it begins with an act of transgression (the crime), which disrupts the existing social order, and tells the story of

the investigation that aims to uncover the story of the crime and so restore the social order. Brooks is even more explicit in suggesting that the detective story (and the nineteenth-century novel in general) "regularly conceives of plot as a condition of deviance and abnormality" (139). Indeed, he goes on to suggest that "[d]eviance is the very condition for life to be 'narratable': the state of normality is devoid of interest, energy, and the possibility for narration. In between a beginning prior to plot and an end beyond plot, the middle--the plotted text--has been in a state of error: wandering and misinterpretation" (139). The detective story is the figurative record of this "wandering" and "error," since it tells the story of the detective's pursuit both of the criminal and of the truth.

The end of a detective novel traditionally fulfills reader's expectations by having the detective unmask the criminal and then explain the process whereby the criminal's identity was discovered. In this way, the text's central enigma is solved and the narrative is given order--false clues are distinguished from actual clues and what had been hidden or suppressed is brought into the light. In this respect too, the end of the detective story is like the end of any story; as Kermode points out, "the End changes all and produces in what in relation to it is past . . . kairoi, historical moments of intemporal significance" (Sense 47).¹⁶ This sort of ordering can only be done from the perspective

of the end, which in the detective novel is the site of convergences between the final term of the proairetic code (the solution) and the final term of the hermeneutic code (disclosure or decipherment) (Porter 86), and between the story of the crime and the story of the investigation (the logico-temporal gap between the two is closed) (Porter 29). As well, disclosure represents a coincidence within the hermeneutic code:

narrative is a game with two players: the snare and the truth. At first a tremendous indetermination rules their encounters . . . gradually, however, the two networks move closer together, co-penetrate, determination is completed and with it the subject; disclosure is then the final stroke by which the initial 'probable' shifts to the 'necessary': the game is ended . . .

(S/Z 188)

With disclosure comes the end of "reticence", and so "the discourse can do nothing more than fall silent" (S/Z 188). The narrative reaches a second equilibrium which is the same-but-different from that existing prior to the act of "deviance" that began the narrative. The social order is restored without the murderer (a cancer on the body politic) and without the victim (generally deserving of his fate and so no loss to the society).

Nonetheless, we still have to engage the great paradox of the classical detective story, which William Stowe calls a "semiotic trap" (375). In The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, Poirot is correct in his account of how Ackroyd died. Indeed, Poirot, like many detectives in the classical detective story, is never wrong. His account of events stands at the end of the text as the true interpretation of the texts he has read; in a sense, his explanation presented in the novel's final two chapters but one, aptly titled "The Whole Truth" and "And Nothing But the Truth", is the meaning, from the point of view of the novel's reader, of everything that has gone before in the narrative. As something similar occurs in most classical detective stories, this kind of story is frequently considered "the basic model of the readerly text" (Porter 83), since its narrative comes as close as possible to being entirely "singular" in its meaning and goals; that is, "detective stories depend upon the coherence of elements in an occult plot that declares itself only as the book ends" (Kermode, Genesis 53). However, this aspect of the traditional detective story is essentially contradictory, since detective fiction "insists . . . on denying the strangeness it first evokes" (Porter 247).

What seems to happen at the end of the narrative is that the detective, having deconstructed one readerly text, erects another in its place. Hence, a narrative that shows

us how a readerly text can be broken down because of its inherent qualities turns back to the readerly text in the concluding explanation by the detective. Not only does this explanation declare itself to be seamless and coherent, but the reader acquiesces to these claims of coherence because of a desire for closure, which is perpetuated by the workings of the hermeneutic code: the detective's remarks are given the status of truth.

The Detective's Solution

From its beginnings, detective fiction has promoted the myth of the necessary chain--of the readerly text, in fact--whereby the solution is discovered through a step-by-step logico-temporal reconstruction. Sergeant Cuff's reprimand of Superintendent Seegrave in Wilkie Collins' The Moonstone is a particularly clear statement of this position:

"I made a private inquiry last week, Mr. Superintendent," he [Cuff] said. "At one end of the inquiry there was a murder and at the other end there was a spot of ink on a tablecloth that nobody could account for. In all my experience along the dirtiest ways of this dirty little world, I have never met with such a thing as a trifle yet . . ." (136)

In the classical detective novel every incident finds its place in the detective's final explanation, which in a sense

reduces the text to the level of denotation; however, as we have seen, this is a reduction that cannot be made with confidence. Still, denotation has a structural function in the reading process in that, although it "is not the truth of discourse", it justifies the structure of the narrative by "[furnishing] the codes with a kind of precious excipient . . . it is . . . used by the other codes to smooth their articulation" (S/Z 128). In this way, the presence of denotation is admitted in the discourse, and it becomes possible to speak of an enigma's solution as "true" without having to dismiss denotation on the grounds that it limits plurality¹⁷. (The hermeneutic code is, we recall, only one of five intersecting and interdependent codes.)

Still, the issue of denotation within the text is problematic for the detective novel, since the classical detective's final explanation is also governed by readerly qualities; hence, although it replaces the criminal's narrative (his alibi), it is no different in kind--one system of interpretation is substituted for another. We can argue, then, that to privilege the detective's narrative and assign it the value of truth is to practice a self-deception; for, in the contest between the two narratives, "[w]hat applies to the first must apply to the second. The undoing of the first by the second also undoes the second. The second destroys itself in the act whereby it fragments the first" (Miller, Fiction 107).

Equally problematic is the question of how the detective arrives at his or her conclusions. Without going into much detail, a consideration of the necessary role of hypothesis in the detective's interpretation of events, in his progress towards disclosure, exposes one of the great misconceptions that surround the method of the detective in the classical detective story. Even though Doyle called an early chapter in each of his first two Sherlock Holmes books "The Science of Deduction," Holmes does not practice deduction, rather his method is one of combining induction and hypothesis. (In "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" Holmes calls his process of thinking "inductive reasoning" [594].) The same is true of Dupin, Poirot, Trent, and most other detectives of the classical school--each employs a synthetic form of inference based on a mixture of induction and hypothesis, which support each other.

Deduction, we know, is the application of general principles to particular cases, and induction is the inference of the general rule from the particular facts at hand. Holmes employs inductive reasoning in examining specific clues in order to determine how they came to be present. But for him to arrive at his solution he must go beyond inductive reasoning to construct an hypothesis, a fiction, which involves the inferential step that C. S. Peirce calls "abduction"--a term which covers "all the

operations by which theories and conceptions are engendered" (Peirce 237)."

Peirce argues that induction and abduction, though frequently confounded (133), are distinct processes:

By induction, we conclude that facts, similar to observed facts, are true in cases not examined.

By hypothesis [Peirce adopted the term abduction later in his career], we conclude the existence of a fact quite different from anything observed, from which, according to known laws, something observed would necessarily result. The former is reasoning from particulars to the general law; the latter, from effect to cause. (136)

But, however valuable abductive inference is, it is a weaker method of reasoning than either deduction or induction because "[i]t often inclines our judgment so slightly toward its conclusion that we cannot say that we believe the latter to be true; we only surmise that it may be so" (130). What this does is introduce an element of uncertainty into any conclusion (such as those of the classical detective) that is reached by means of abduction. Essentially, the hypothesis is a "fiction" (Peirce 240) used to assist in the production of another fiction.

We are confronted with a situation where the detective, in order to offer his or her final interpretation of events (a fiction amassed from diverse elements of other fictions),

must construct an interim fiction (an hypothesis) en route to his or her final interpretation. What is more significant is that this interim fiction influences the contents of the fiction presented in the scene of disclosure, since it serves to direct the inquiry along lines which it has already prescribed.¹⁹ The final statement of the mystery's solution, then, is again a repetition in that it repeats the interim fiction with difference. In this respect, the final discoveries of the detective are also rediscoveries, since the interim fiction, the hypothesis, has anticipated these discoveries, although it has not expressed them in the form in which they are finally presented.²⁰

Central to the relationship between the interim fiction of the detective and his or her final disclosure is the status of the clue. The detective, by a combination of imagination and past experience, which includes the "already-read", constructs his or her hypothesis to serve as a tentative plot wherein the observed clues are given significance by reference to a proposed end stated by the hypothesis. (Holmes describes "the basis of [his] art" as a "mixture of imagination and reality" ["Thor Bridge" 1070]). In other words, the fiction of the hypothesis is an attempt to structure the repressed content of the detective novel (the story of the crime) along points (clues) that mark the sites of the return of the repressed within the open

narrative of the inquiry. The clue is made to stand as the signifier of a hidden signified that has to be uncovered. However, the abductive fiction, which is a necessary step in the recovery of this hidden signified, does not itself enclose this hidden signified. Instead, it posits a second set of signifiers (the hypothetical fiction) whose immediate signifieds are the clues, which are in themselves signifiers of something else that is the hidden content. The clue, then, has a double-sided nature in that it is both the signified to which the signifying units of the hypothesis point and the signifier of a deeper, repressed signified which is the story of the crime. Ultimately, the sought-after base of the signified is lost in a layering of the levels of signification. The clue, like the Derridian trace, is constituted by the double force of legibility (it can be understood within the interim fiction) and illegibility (it stands as evidence of an enigma, of an absence that is the repressed narrative). Standing without origin or at least with an origin lost in a pattern of repetition, the trace, or in detective fiction the clue, becomes the space where writing exists.²¹ It is the presence of the clue that determines the production of both the hypothesis and the final text of the detective.

The notion that the detective's final interpretation of events is authoritative crumbles in light of both the fictional nature of the hypothesis and Barthes's conception

of the text. Any version of events, whether the criminal's or the detective's, is but one text--one "tissue of quotations"--within a vast intertextual network. The single text, then, "is valid for all the texts of literature . . . in that literature itself is never anything but a single text: the one text is not an (inductive) access to a Model, but entrance into a network with a thousand entrances" (S/Z 12). The detective's final interpretation does not usurp the position of previous interpretations (the criminal's or otherwise) but is one among many existing in the play of differences. The detective's version may be presented last but, as Cameron McCabe (Ernst Bornemann) realized in his novel The Face on the Cutting-Room Floor (1937), "[t]he possibilities for alternative endings to any detective story are infinite" (McCabe 236; McCabe's emphasis).

Barthes makes clear in S/Z that the hermeneutic is only one aspect of reading, but its presence activates other systems of reading (Kermode, Art of Telling 60-61). The narrative processes of a detective novel compel its reader to determine how things fit together, but, like the detective within the text, the reader receives no assurance from the text that his or her ordering will be the correct one. Similarly, he or she receives no assurance, aside from generic convention, that the detective's solution is the correct interpretation of events. The implications of this are far reaching, but it is a mistake to see this as a

"major weakness" (Porter 247) in the genre for a couple of reasons: in the first place, the privileging of the detective's solution is the result of both textual and ideological factors; and, in the second place, writers of detective fiction have not been ignorant of this problem and have made this a crucial aspect of the experience of reading detective fiction from the genre's inception.

Part of the reason that the detective's final reading of events is conventionally given authority lies in the workings of the hermeneutic code itself, which in posing and then resolving enigmas within the narrative implies the existence of a final resolution. The detective's explanation, coming as it usually does at or near the end of narrative, meets the reader's expectations of closure, which the hermeneutic code has perpetuated. Similarly, it is in the nature of detective novels to pit the reader against the detective in a game wherein both attempt to solve the proposed puzzle; as A. E. Murch remarks, "the writer's primary purpose . . . is to puzzle his readers and make them think" (11). According to the rules of this game, the reader considers the various pieces of evidence that the text offers, sorts them, determines their relative values, and, after numerous alterations to account for new evidence, arrives at a version of events which, if he or she has been particularly astute, will be confirmed by the text itself through the actions of the detective and in the detective's

final explanation. As the possibility of agreement exists between the reader's and the detective's versions of events in the classical detective novel, the illusion of a correct reading is preserved: the implied understanding is that what is true develops out of consensus.

In this way, truth becomes linked to a dominant ideology, which Barthes defines in one way as "what is repeated and consistent" (Roland Barthes 104; Barthes's emphasis). Hence, the detective's version of events appears to be natural because it conforms to and reasserts the dominant cultural and political ideology (Stowe, "Popular" 656). Yet, as Barthes cautions, "the natural is never an attribute of physical Nature; it is the alibi paraded by the social majority: the natural is a legality" (Roland Barthes 130). In this respect, the criminal's narrative of events, which differs from both the reader's and the detective's narratives, places the criminal outside the law (he or she has broken the law of the natural) and makes the criminal what he or she is. Hence, his or her punishment (or more often his or her elimination) becomes an ideologic necessity in order for the ideology to survive in the face of the criminal's revolt.

Ideology and Detective Fiction

The question of ideology in the classical detective story cannot be ignored, since it is of crucial importance

to the development of both it and the thriller as Greene practices it. In terms of its narrative content, the classical detective story may be "the last repository of [a] passion for the countryside", as Cyril Connolly remarked ("Deductions" 493), but it is also the repository of a conservative value system that has as its goal the preservation of the established social order. As Ross Macdonald observed of Conan Doyle's work and of the classical detective story in general:

Permeating the thought and language of Conan Doyle's stories is an air of blithe satisfaction with a social system based on privilege.

This obvious characteristic is worth mentioning because it was frozen into one branch of the form. Nostalgia for a privileged society accounts for one of the prime attractions of the traditional English detective story and its innumerable American counterparts. Neither wars nor the dissolution of governments and societies interrupt that long weekend in the country house which is often, with more or less unconscious symbolism, cut off by a failure in communications from the outside world. ("Writer" 181)

Ultimately, the classical detective story reassures its readers of justice within society, of the personal nature of

criminality and guilt, and of reason's ability to penetrate mystery. In P. D. James's words,

the detective story . . . shares the assumption, strong in English fiction, that we live in an intelligible and generally benevolent universe, that crime is the aberration, peace and tranquility the norm, and that the proper occupation of man is the bringing of order to chaos. (639)

As James puts it here, the ideology behind the method of reading employed in the classical detective novel is the same ideology that governs the traditional realist novel and, hence, the readerly text.

Tied to these social concerns are epistemological assumptions that go along with accepting the detective's final explanation as authoritative. The classical detective story, like the readerly text in general, declares that the world and texts are intelligible and governed by principles of sequence and causality. All signs can be read as references to other signs which, in turn, may refer to other signs, but it is assumed that the process will eventually lead to the revelation of truth; as Grella remarks, "Finding a meaning in the tiniest clue enables the detective to know the truth; thus, his universe seems explainable" ("Formal" 101). Hence, it is possible to arrive at an interpretation that can be declared the one true meaning of the text. This

attitude is basic to nineteenth-century bourgeois storytelling because "[b]ourgeois aesthetics had traditionally presumed a passive audience . . . of literate recipients sharing homogeneous backgrounds, values, and attitudes" (Berman 96). Given this presumption, the possibilities of a plurality of meanings are severely limited and, in the detective story, ultimately replaced with a univocal text.

Ideologically, the authority of the final account of the detective reflects the desire of the established order to preserve its position in a time of social and political challenge. Although Howard Haycraft argued in 1941 that the detective story was essentially the product of democracies because it dramatized "many of the precious rights and privileges that have set the dwellers in constitutional lands apart from those less fortunate" (313), critics of the classical detective story have been quick to note the genre's links to conservative political attitudes. Haycraft argues that the detective story's emphasis both on the importance of proof in the determination of guilt by due process of law (313) and on the role of reason in the discovery of proof suggests that the genre is antithetical to the demands of totalitarian, specifically fascist, regimes, which insist upon "the uncritical acceptance of propaganda for their very survival" (314). Haycraft's defence of the detective story is strongly rooted in the

context of World War II (his book Murder For Pleasure appeared in 1941), but it is interesting to note that he also sees the genre as a means of questioning seemingly authoritative accounts.

However, Haycraft's observations are opposed by another view, held especially by critics from the left, that sees the classical detective story as the expression of a bourgeois ideology that reduces all mysteries to readily solvable problems. From this point of view, not only do the gentrified settings of the classical detective novel locate the narratives in a paradisaical upper-class world, but the detective's success preserves the structure of this world and provides a middle-class readership with the illusion of the inevitability and permanence of bourgeois society (Mandel 29). Nonetheless, the classical detective story in many ways reflects the insecurities and fears of a bourgeois hierarchy that undergoes tremendous strain in the forty years before the end of World War I, by which time the aristocracy and its values had lost much of their political power. The detective story of the interwar period may have its appeal rooted in a nostalgia for the long-weekends at the country-house prior to 1914, but even the early stories of Poe and Conan Doyle demonstrate the insecurities of nineteenth-century bourgeois society. As Cawelti points out, the nineteenth century saw an "aesthetic approach" (54) to crime emerge (reflected early on in De Quincey's essay

"Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" [1827]), which "transformed an increasingly serious moral and social problem into an entertaining pastime, thereby enabling a comic metamorphosis of the materials of crime: something potentially dangerous and disturbing was transformed into something completely under control" (105). Crime fiction ostensibly represents an attempt by the dominant bourgeois ideology to assert its control over disrupting forces.

However, the very fact that the private detective should emerge to augment the powers of an inadequate and often incompetent police force suggests at some level the failure of bourgeois structures and institutions to preserve and contain the dangers threatening the social order. As well, the view that crime is an individual problem and not a systemic problem masks the possibility that crime may have its roots within the established social order. Although there is often an implicit awareness in the classical detective story that crime is a ubiquitous phenomenon not confined to any single social class (the murderer is frequently a member of the privileged circle), the criminal is made the scapegoat for society's ills: at one level, the assumption remains that his or her discovery and elimination will solve the problem of crime.

Along with the scapegoating of the criminal in the classical detective story comes the elevation of the detective. Seen against the background of an incompetent

police force, the detective appears to be a gifted genius capable of discovering what no one else has been able to discover. The detective is able to order the universe and so make what had been opaque and mysterious, clear and cogent²². By reading the criminal's text with a thoroughness that encompasses all of Barthes's five textual codes, the detective provides a narrative structure that accounts for all discrepancies and all contradictions, and, in doing so, he or she becomes a figure of power in terms of both the story's content and its narrative technique. As well, the detective becomes an emblem of the bourgeois faith in the power of the individual to control and dominate his or her environment (Knight 43); in Poe's or Conan Doyle's stories "personal achievement and personal morality threatened in a subjectively perceived way . . . [are] ultimately defended by an individualistic hero to whom the audience relates on a one-to-one basis" (95).

However, as William O. Aydelotte argues, our admiration for the power of the detective also reflects a strong desire for order which, in turn, leads us to invest the detective with extraordinary authority. The detective becomes an "extralegal superman who is called in to accomplish by extraordinary measures what is impossible within the traditional organization of society" (Aydelotte 93). In Aydelotte's view the detective becomes, in fact, a dictator controlling both the lives of the other characters and the

world of the story; the detective stands above the law. When one also considers the scapegoating of the criminal that takes place in the classical detective novel, then the genre is seen by Aydelotte to contain the structure of totalitarianism. He concludes by remarking that "[o]ne might even go so far as to say that the detective story marks a kind of transition from liberal to authoritarian society: it arises in and reflects some of the values of the one, but is also a sign which may point toward the other" (94). Submitting to the authority of the detective's final explanation then becomes an act linked to the acceptance of totalitarian authority.

The point may be extreme, but it is not without its validity; and in the 1930s when no single authority could be trusted, writers such as Greene, who wished to make popular writing something other than propaganda for the established order, found that the classical detective story could not be accepted wholly as is. Indeed, in the interwar period, the authority of the classical detective and of the view of reading implied in the classical detective story found itself challenged in at least two ways. One of these challenges came from the American hard-boiled detective novel that emerged in the 1920s, and a second came from a restructuring of the detective story along lines that, though far from dominant within the genre, were certainly inherent in the development of the form. Tied to this

second challenge is the restructuring of the thriller that takes place in the work of Eric Ambler and of Graham Greene, which develop what Denning describes as an "anti-fascist aesthetic" manifested by an ironic approach to the genre, a reversal of earlier codings of heroes and villains, and a realistic approach to violence meant to discredit the antiseptic treatment of violence in earlier thrillers and detective novels (65-66).

Challenging the Ideology

The writers of detective fiction, particularly of the hard-boiled school of detective fiction, quickly realized that "if the detective is a figure for the reader, different modes of detection can be construed as different implicit theories of reading" (Most 349). In the postwar period when nineteenth-century views of reading collapsed, partly because writers could no longer assume shared "homogeneous backgrounds, values, and attitudes" within the reading public, new more sceptical theories of reading emerged. One reflection of this process was the development, primarily in the United States, of the hard-boiled school of detective writing, typified by the work of Hammett and Chandler. This writing came to stand in sharp contrast to the classical school of detective writing, typified by the work of Poe, Doyle, and Christie among others.²³ According to Glenn W.

Most, the classical, mostly English, writers of detective fiction

presuppose the certainty of a correct reading and project back from that end to an initial stage of ignorance from which the path to that goal of knowledge is in principle never in doubt. The Americans, on the other hand, are caught up in the uncertainties of the activity of interpretation itself, for which a final and valid result may be imagined but can never be confidently predicted.

(350)

Stephen Marcus underscores Most's point by observing in a discussion of Hammett's work that the problem of interpretation in the hard-boiled novel is never resolved:

What he [Hammett's early detective, the Continental Op] soon discovers [in any of his investigations] is that the "reality" that anyone involved will swear to is, in fact, itself a construction, a fabrication, a fiction, a faked and alternate reality--and that it has been gotten together before he ever arrived on the scene. And the Op's work therefore is to deconstruct or reconstruct out of it a true fiction, that is, an account of what "really" happened. . . . What is to the point is that the story, account, or chain of events that the Op winds up with as "reality"

is no more plausible and no less ambiguous than the stories that he meets with at the outset and later. What Hammett has done . . . is to include as part of the contingent and dramatic consciousness of his narrative the circumstance that the work of the detective is itself a fiction-making activity . . . (201-02)

Evidence supporting Marcus's judgment is easily found in any of Hammett's novels. For example, in The Dain Curse (1929) the Op concludes a lengthy interpretation of Joseph Haldorn's activities by affirming that none of it happened: "I hope you're [Fitzstephan, the murderer though the Op is not aware of this at the time] not trying to keep all this nonsense straight in your mind. You know damned well all this didn't happen" (103). More to the point, Fitzstephan also accuses the Op of never being satisfied "until you've got two buts and an if attached to everything" (63).

Raymond Chandler, an admirer of Hammett's work, expressed a similar attitude towards interpretive authority in both his fiction and in his comments on the Black Mask stories of the twenties and thirties: "the technical basis [of the classical detective story] was the relative insignificance of everything except the final denouement. . . . the technical basis of the Black Mask story . . . was that scene outranked the plot . . . a good plot was one which made good scenes. The ideal mystery was one you would

read if the end was missing" (Introduction viii). Clearly, Chandler has no confidence in the possibility of one right reading as presented in the "final denouement" of the classical detective story. In fact, his conception of the ideal mystery indicates a readiness to abandon the principle of closure in the detective story altogether, as is illustrated by his first novel The Big Sleep.

At the end of this novel, Marlowe does not turn Carmen Sternwood over to the legal authorities. Instead, he suggests that she be taken away, and he offers to keep the police from discovering both her role in Rusty Regan's death and her whereabouts. Also at the end of the novel, Eddie Mars, a racketeer and the centre of a network of crime and municipal corruption, emerges unscathed. Unlike the classical detective novel, The Big Sleep concludes by rejecting the fiction of a world so ordered that the elimination of a single individual (the murderer) is all that is needed to restore the social order. The discovery of the truth behind the crime does no good whatsoever, for guilt cannot be localized within a corrupt society. The novel ends not with the detective's triumph but with his realization of his own impotence. Marlowe cannot bring Mars to justice and, instead, finds himself a party to the crime: he lies to General Sternwood, and in doing so he protects the network of corruption he has uncovered.²⁴ Novelists of the hard-boiled school cannot accept a simple and

determinate reading of society and, by extension, of narrative in general. For them, any ending is only a temporary respite in a continuing struggle against forces of disruption and corruption that forever evade attempts to have patterns of order imposed upon them.

The second challenge to the authority of the classical detective and of the classical detective novel comes from within the genre itself. While the classical detective story usually ends with the detective's final and supposedly correct explanation of the crime, writers have never been ignorant of the problems of reading and interpretation implied in the form. Convention may demand that the detective's text be a clear, denotative, reading of events, but the simple exchange of one text for another was recognized as inadequate from the moment the genre emerged. A brief examination of texts by Poe, Conan Doyle and E. C. Bentley should clarify this point.

The Case of Poe

Albert D. Hutter remarks that "[w]hat saves Poe and Conan Doyle from sterility is not that, like Collins, they came first, but that the relentlessly logical process of ratiocination is thrown into question by a deeper irrationality" (232). Poe, who anticipated much of the genre's development, clearly recognized the fundamental difficulty inherent in a form that emphasizes the exposure

of supposed truth as fiction. Indeed, Dana Brand argues that Poe initially developed the detective story, at least in part, as a response to a simple-minded view of reading, typified for him in the logic of the feuilleton--a highly popular though highly mannered form of urban description which by the 1830s had become clichéd (38).

In the feuilleton, Walter Benjamin writes, "everyone was, unencumbered by any factual knowledge, able to make out the profession, the character, the background and the lifestyle of passers-by" (qtd. in Brand 37)²⁵. The feuilleton presented people as easily read and therefore easily classified. Those who recorded the descriptions, the flâneurs, "[combined] their interpretive and typological 'skills' with the comfort of their spectatorial detachment . . . [and so] were able to reduce the city to a pleasant spectacle or amusing text . . . If everyone was legible and classifiable, no one could be terribly threatening. . . . even criminals could be thought of as transparent, predictable, and ultimately amusing" (Brand 37). For Poe this process seemed naively simple-minded.

In stories like "The Fall of the House of Usher," "A Descent into the Maelström," and "The Man of the Crowd," narrators encounter "a chaotic and opaque environment" (Brand 38), which they attempt to order and interpret. In this respect, these narrators all exhibit characteristics of the flâneur. Brand takes his cue from Benjamin, who in his

essay "The Flâneur" called "The Man of the Crowd" an "x-ray picture of a detective story" wherein "the drapery represented by the crime has disappeared" leaving "the mere armature: . . . the pursuer, the crowd, and an unknown man" (qtd. in Brand 36). In this story, the narrator associates illegibility with crime: "The old man is the type and genius of deep crime" (Poe 515). The fact that the old man remains enigmatic for the narrator "is a transgression against the laws imposed by the flâneur upon the city", a transgression which opens up the "possibility that no man or woman of the crowd can be read as the narrator has presumed to read them. If this is so, then the entire crowd threatens the physical and epistemological well-being of the narrator" (Brand 43). Also visible in this story is a tension between the individual and the collective body of the urban metropolis. As Mercer notes, "The Man of the Crowd", like any detective story, reflects a tension between two contrary urges: the first is "a 'totalitarian' desire to make everything visible (as in Bentham's Panopticon)", and the second is a sense that in the social complexity of the metropolis, "the content goes beyond the gaze" (Mercer 65). In the detective story, as in narrative generally, something always remains hidden; the text remains occult.

Brand argues that Poe's critique of the interpretive strategies of the flâneur helped to suggest the creation of Dupin, an urban observer who can read and, to an extent,

master what the flâneur cannot (44). Dupin shares the flâneur's keenness of observation, but he is also aware of the existence of a multiplicity of languages and interpretations.²⁶ Hence, he is a kind of meta-reader who attempts to make sense of the variety of languages heard in the Rue Morgue and printed in the conflicting newspaper accounts of "The Mystery of Marie Roget." While Brand acknowledges the fact that "the method of interpretation Poe develops in his detective stories is . . . as much of a fantasy as the 'method' of the flâneur" (54), he also suggests that Dupin's method, though not reducing the city to a "harmless and legible text" (54), "exposes the inadequacies of conventional modes of urban interpretation without suggesting the intolerable possibility that urban interpretation is . . . impossible" (54). However, as an examination of "The Mystery of Marie Roget" demonstrates, Poe's detective is plagued by many of the same shortcomings as is the flâneur.

Considerations of Poe's contribution to the detective story usually focus on "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and "The Purloined Letter" (1844)²⁷, but his second of the three Dupin stories presents Dupin as a reader and interpreter of conflicting texts which describe the circumstances surrounding the death of Marie Roget. However, in "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1842) Dupin, who is successful in the other two stories, cannot present an

accurate reading of the Roget case. Instead, it is made clear that his reading is no more than another interpretation--incomplete at that--of events. His concluding text fails to get past the ambiguities of the texts he interprets; so, despite the insertion of a brief note assuring the reader that Dupin's findings were verified, we are left with a sense of inconclusiveness and dissatisfaction, since our expectation of a conclusive reading is disappointed.

Dupin's hermeneutic difficulties are partially explained by the fact that "The Mystery of Marie Roget" is Poe's attempt to solve the real-life murder of Mary Rogers, who was found drowned in 1841. As the Rogers case was still unsolved at the time Poe was writing "Marie Roget," he could not direct Dupin's reasoning towards a sure end. For Poe, as "The Philosophy of Composition" suggests, this situation was far from ideal.²⁸ At best, he could only have Dupin suggest that Rogers (Roget) was murdered by her lover, whom Dupin took to be a naval officer.²⁹ When information that pointed away from Dupin's conclusions became available in the Rogers case, after Poe's manuscript had been completed and partially published, Poe revised his story in an effort to incorporate the possibilities suggested by the new evidence, that is, that Mary Rogers died as a result of complications arising from an abortion attempt (Walsh 52, 66-72). Dupin, then, is unable to be certain in his account

of events because Poe unnecessarily restricts himself to the facts of the Rogers case.

However, the revisions Poe made to the text both in late 1842 (after the new evidence emerged but before the publication of the story's final instalment in the Ladies' Companion for February 1843) and in 1845 (when he prepared the story for inclusion in Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque) tend to heighten the ambiguities of Dupin's reading. For instance, the sentence, "There might have been a wrong here [in the thicket (Poe's emphasis)], or, more possibly an accident at Madame Deluc's" (Poe 763), was inserted into the 1845 version of the text. Similarly, in the 1842 text, Dupin concludes, "We have attained the idea of a murder perpetrated, in the thicket at the Barriere du Roule, by a lover . . . ," whereas the 1845 text reads: "We have attained the idea either of a fatal accident under the roof of Madame Deluc, or of a murder perpetuated . . ." (Poe 768). As Walsh points out, the notion of an accident occurring at Deluc's inn is an unprepared and unjustified remark in light of Dupin's earlier statements (71). In any case, the "editor's" noted assurance that Dupin was proven right in his reading is both structurally and textually a very different thing from the presentation of one correct reading that is seen as characteristic of the classical detective story.³⁰

The equivocation that Poe brought to Dupin's analysis of Roget's murder may largely be due to an adherence to the facts of the Rogers case, but one also sees Poe's awareness of the problems involved in the presumption that Dupin's solution is correct in the penultimate paragraph of "Marie Roget," where the narrator stresses that his story is fiction and not an attempt "to suggest that the measures adopted in Paris for the discovery of the assassin of a grisette, or measures founded in any similar ratiocination, would produce any similar result" (772-773).³¹ This passage emphasizing the fictional nature of the story (though probably not part of the original manuscript [Walsh 66]), is curious in light of Poe's adherence elsewhere to the details of the Rogers case. It implies that the equivocation in Dupin's reading cannot entirely be attributed to Poe's efforts to incorporate new information in the Rogers case into the story of Roget. Were this so, there would be no need to emphasize the fictional status of "Marie Roget." Similarly, if the story is to be considered only as fiction based on a factual incident, there is no need for equivocation at all, since Poe could have arranged the story, by the addition or deletion of material, so that an apparently correct reading would have emerged--as in the other Dupin stories. However, Poe not only incorporates equivocations into Dupin's reading of events when he does not have to, but he also emphasizes these equivocations

through his revisions to the story. What we can conclude is that Poe intended to create an effect of uncertainty and indeterminacy at the end of the story.³²

The search for Roget's murderer leads Dupin, at the story's end, to a further search for the boat the murderer used, but the progress of this search is not narrated to us, and the discourse terminates Dupin's inconclusive investigation with the editor's note that unconvincingly assures us that "the result desired was brought to pass" (772). Ultimately, Poe's penchant for the inexplicable and the mysterious that is seen in so much of his fiction does not allow for certainty even in Dupin's analysis. Poe, we can conclude, recognized the contradictory nature of a form that specializes in discrediting one version of events and substituting another for it; he saw that Dupin's method is just as fantastic as that of the flâneur--Dupin's is only one convenient fiction among many.

The Case of Conan Doyle

Implicitly, the presupposition that a correct interpretation is possible is always questioned whenever the detective of the classical detective story is shown to be in error. Granted that this is a relatively rare event in the fiction of adherents to the classical detective story, there are indications that writers of the classical detective story, as we have seen with Poe, are aware of logical

problems in the structure of the detective story itself. Like Poe, though perhaps not to the same degree, Conan Doyle tentatively questioned both reason's power to make sense of the mysterious and the analyst's power to interpret correctly the texts he finds before him.³³

In a general way, we can accept Knight's assessment that "Doyle has two premises: the rational scientific idea that events are really linked in an unaccidental chain, and the individualistic notion that a single inquirer can--and should--establish the links" (68). This implies the possibility of discovering an authoritative reading for any text. However, there are places in the Holmesian canon where this assumption is challenged. Watson notes in the opening of "The Five Orange Pips" that some cases "have baffled his [Holmes's] analytical skill" (217), but since these adventures "would be as narratives, beginnings without an ending" (217) and not show "those peculiar powers" which Holmes possesses "in so high a degree" (217), Watson determines that he will not recount these failures.³⁴ Holmes himself admits in the same story that he has "been beaten four times--three times by men and once by a woman" (219). (Interestingly, the woman he refers to is Irene Adler, who outwitted Holmes in the first Sherlock Holmes short story, "A Scandal in Bohemia" [1891].) In "The Yellow Face," Watson again points out that Holmes has on occasion failed, though "where he failed it happened too

often that no one else succeeded, and that the tale was left forever without a conclusion" (351). Here, Watson also notes that there are "some half-dozen cases" (351) in which the truth was discovered despite errors on Holmes's part.

The vulnerability of Holmes to error, like the equivocation of Dupin in "Marie Roget," serves to undermine those premises upon which the majority of the Holmes stories are based. Knight's view is that, while "Holmes's relative uncertainty can itself be an element of variety in the narrative(s)" (77), this uncertainty may also be an indication of Doyle's doubts about the validity of Holmes as a hero and, consequently, about the assumptions behind the stories (98). Knight suggests that Doyle's growing dislike of the Holmes phenomenon (a dislike that is well documented³⁵), led the author to present a less successful Holmes (97-98). Stories like "The Engineer's Thumb" and "The Five Orange Pips," which contain a measure of uncertainty in their resolutions, and a later story, "The Missing Three-Quarter," in which Holmes is completely mistaken, may suggest that for Doyle a univocal reading is not always possible. Similarly, the fact that Holmes may be correct in his readings does not necessarily prevent catastrophe, as "The Dancing Men" demonstrates. Such points of error or equivocation in the Holmes stories reflect Doyle's cognizance that the conventions of the mystery story lead only to further fictions.

On a general level, this sense is acknowledged by Watson at the end of "The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist"--"Each case has been the prelude to another" (538)-but, more specifically, as we have seen in the case of "The Musgrave Ritual", a proliferation of fictions occurs within each story. Holmes's readings may be "correct" within the confines of their stories, but they remain, assuredly, fictional substitutions for earlier fictions. For example, in "The Adventure of the Norwood Builder," Holmes demonstrates that the newspaper report describing Jonas Oldacre's death is a fiction through the use of another fiction, a false alarm of fire. His final explanation of events notes the deceiving structure of the builder's house and sketches out a plan wherein Oldacre would have adopted a new identity. This plan is entirely conjecture on Holmes's part, since the story does not verify it, but the reader can be fairly certain that Holmes is right in his assessment. Nevertheless, Oldacre's denial coupled with Lestrade's comment that the truth is for "the jury to decide" (510) (implying that truth is determined by consensus) indicate that Holmes's conclusions remain hypothetical, fictional, until they are shown to be otherwise.

The Case of E. C. Bentley

Perhaps a more extreme illustration of the fallibility of the classical detective is found in E. C. Bentley's Trent's Last Case (1913). This novel, which was intended by its author to be "an exposure of detective stories" (Symons 88), demonstrates the weaknesses of the "semiotic trap" and severely undercuts the authority conferred on the detective's final explanation. Although an aberration in its time, Trent's Last Case grows out of the ambiguities inherent in a story like "Marie Roget" and points towards the realization that "the possibilities for alternative endings to any detective story are infinite" (McCabe 236).³⁶

Despite being an "exposure" of the classical detective novel, Trent's Last Case is credited with "effectively transform[ing] the short detective story into the novel of detection" (Grella, "Formal" 91). Grella sees it as "probably the most important work of detective fiction since Conan Doyle began writing in 1887" (91), and its importance has been attested to by the fact that critics such as Sayers, Murch, Grella, and Kermode have singled it out for commentary.³⁷

The novel shares many of the characteristics of the classical detective story: (1) the murder of Sigsbee Manderson takes place near his relatively isolated estate of White Gables; (2) a variety of typical suspects is introduced, including the murdered man's wife, his two

secretaries, his maid, and his butler--the possibility of an assassin from outside the household is also considered though only in the vaguest terms; (3) the detective is supremely rational, and (4) supremely detached both from domestic commitments and initially from any personal involvement in the case; (5) the detective stands in opposition to the official investigator, Murch, although this is a matter of sport between him and Murch and not one of hostility; (6) the detective is a gentleman acting, as he says, "in the character of avenger of blood, to hunt down the guilty, and vindicate the honour of society" (22-23), thus restoring and preserving the status quo; and, (7) the murder victim is an unpleasant character for whom the reader has little sympathy.

The first half of the novel contains Trent's investigation leading to conclusions that he puts into a manuscript which he gives to Mrs. Manderson, to Malloy (his editor), and, later, to Marlowe, one of Manderson's secretaries. As is suitable for a newspaper reporter, writing is the means by which Trent arranges disparate facts into a coherent narrative. His "solution" to the mystery of Manderson's murder (that Marlowe killed Manderson out of love for Mrs. Manderson), presented in chapter eleven, is supposed to be the correct reading of events. However, in the second half of the novel, Trent's interpretation of events is shown to be far from the seamless account he

and of the Salvationist, who is arrested for the Paddington trunk murder. Although each has committed grizzly crimes, both Crippen and the Salvationist present themselves as respectable members of society: Crippen is forever neat and the Salvationist calls for the faithful to "Come to Jesus" (81). The inclusion in the narrative of the Salvationist's arrest not only reinforces the metaphor of the battlefield, since the murderer is a member of the Salvation Army, but also subverts the dominant ideology by dramatizing the disparity between the rhetoric of the established order, as exemplified by religious teaching, and the actions of the speaker. Greene says that he temporarily removed this scene from the novel because he thought it lacked credibility, but his reinsertion of it at a later date attests to its importance in this way (WE 28).

As an example of how religious rhetoric is tied to this ideology, we need only look at Conrad's remorse after his sexual encounter with Milly:

he had pasted the proper labels on his memory of it. 'A mortal sin.' 'The bitterest wrong.' 'A broken commandment.' But the labels were not his; he had taken them from others; others had made the rules by which he suffered; it was unfair that they should leave him so alone and yet make the rules which governed him. It was as if a man

marooned must still order his life according to the regulations of his ship. (159)

Like Robinson Crusoe, Conrad continues to order his life according to the mores of a social order from which he is excluded.

That the contradiction between rhetoric and action ultimately discredits the rhetoric is made clear in the Assistant Commissioner's reflections on his career among criminals:

he thought of innumerable clerics rising in innumerable pulpits to talk of cleanliness as next to godliness . . . praising the clean body as an indication of a clean mind. He thought of Crippen shaving carefully every day of his trial, particular about small things. It was these contradictions, the moral maxims which did not apply, that made it impossible for a man to found his life on any higher motive than doing his job. A life spent with criminals would never fail to strip the maxims of priests and teachers from the underlying chaos. (80-81)

In this case, the mere fact of the murderer gives the lie to the myth of social and political harmony that underpins the classical detective story. In some ways like the American authors of the hard-boiled school of detective fiction, Greene presents crime and murder as stemming from deep

fissures within the structure of society between the wealthy and the powerful, who control the established institutions within the society, and the great mass of people who subscribe to a socio-political ideology that fails to recognize them as equals. The result is that, despite the rhetoric of the prevailing establishment, social, political and economic chaos results from clashes between the powerful elite and the divided majority.

It's a Battlefield shows the chaos beneath the veneer of civilization. Conrad thinks as he sees the Assistant Commissioner walk down the street:

he came slowly, justice with a file of papers; he came, respectability with bowler hat and umbrella; he came, assurance, eyes on the pavement, safe in London, safe in the capital city of the Empire, safe at the heart of civilization ('I see no reason to reverse the judge's decision'; the raised truncheon; the forbidden meeting; 'after one year we allow them to embrace'; reduced staffs, unemployment; the constant struggle with your fellow man to keep alone upon the raft, to let the other drown¹⁶; desire; adultery; passion without tenderness or permanence); down the street the upholder of civilization, eyes on the pavement, neat file under his arm. (161)

As the parentheses within the sentence suggest, in the heart of London exists the brutality and meanness that lie beneath the civilization of Empire. For Conrad and others who are marginalized, safety in London--even civilization itself--is a fiction: "'Them as knows what London is,' Mrs. Simpson [says], 'would not be surprised to find their nearest and dearest bleeding'" (182). Similarly, the maxims of law and justice within the society are also exposed as fictions:

Somewhere, at some time, in a newspaper or a book, Milly had read the words, "Judgement by your peers". She had thought it meant judgement by your lords and had been laughed at for thinking so, "It means judgement by your equals", but where, she asked now of Mrs. Coney, was a judge who was their equal, a man with three pounds a week, who lived as they lived? And the jury? Tradesmen and gentlemen. It wasn't fair, Milly said, with her tea and Mrs. Coney and the long walk home forgotten in a sense of stifled injustice. (97)

Given this vision of the central hypocrisy within the society, it is not surprising that It's a Battlefield blurs the images of detective and murderer alike. Unlike the classical detective story, not even poetic justice operates in Greene's novel; instead, all forms of human justice are seen as inadequate because, as the chaplain says, they are

arbitrary and incomprehensible (199). Later Greene thrillers build on the equivocations in the roles of detective and murderer that emerge in It's a Battlefield and in the other early work. Since the classical detective story could not meet Greene's needs, he turned to the example of the Buchan thriller to help him define the pattern he was working towards because what Buchan's novels showed, Greene writes, was "how thin is the protection of civilization" (CE 169).

NOTES F. CHAPTER FOUR

1. Greene claims that he was under no illusions that It's a Battlefield would be popular (WE 27); however, in that he deliberately wrote the book with the screen in mind (OM 146) during "a time of great financial anxiety" (WE 26), it seems unlikely that he did not hope in 1934 that the book would be successful. (Sherry, too, reports that Greene had hopes that the book would sell well [456].) Greene also seems to have hoped for England Made Me's success, since he spoke of it as "a modern adventure story" similar to Stamboul Train (Shuttleworth 33).

2. Stratford in Faith and Fiction also says of England Made Me: "Quite candidly Greene makes his first appeal with the material of melodrama and the popular thriller, in this way continuing to indulge that taste for excitement and adventure which dominated his earliest work and nourished his desire to write" (135).

3. This discrepancy also raises questions about the veracity of Greene's autobiographical comments. There is in Greene's remarks about himself and his work a carefully measured reticence not only about his personal life but also about his thoughts on his own texts. One has the sense that Greene was forever guardedly attempting to guide his critics' judgments of his work, and, when a particular critical opinion was to his liking, he seemed to reinforce it with comments of his own. Hence, other than some details about circumstances surrounding the composition of his texts, his comments on his own work, though frequently referred to by critics, say little that other critics had not already made commonplace. (Hence, he tells us in Ways of Escape that Stamboul Train is his first thriller and A Gun for Sale his second, which leaves us to wonder at It's a Battlefield and England Made Me.) That Greene believed in influencing his own literary reputation for the better is apparent not only from his autobiographical writings (especially A Sort of Life and Ways of Escape) but also from his decision to suppress The Name of Action and Rumour at Nightfall. (Also evidence of his lack of compunction about suppressing texts for the sake of an author's literary reputation was his decision not to include The Last Post in the Bodley Head's edition of the works of Ford Madox Ford, which he edited.) On Greene's autobiographical writings see Martin Stannard's "In Search of Himself: The Autobiographical Writings of Graham Greene" and David Lodge's "What There is to Tell".

4. See J. R. Christopher's brief discussion in "A Detective Searches for a Clue to The Heart of the Matter".

5. "Murder for the Wrong Reason" has only recently been reprinted for the first time in Greene's latest collection of short stories, "The Last Word" and Other Stories (1990).

6. In A Sort of Life Greene does not mention the story's title, but Wobbe's bibliography of Greene's work lists The Empty Chair as the manuscript of a detective story (dated 1926) in the collection of the Humanities Research Center at Austin, Texas (Wobbe 312). As no other detective story is listed prior to 1929, this manuscript is more than likely the story Greene recalls in A Sort of Life. Sherry also reports that Greene wrote the first four chapters of a "shocker" called Queen's Pawn in 1926 as well; however, all trace of this manuscript has been lost (310).

7. The Art of the Mystery Story reprints both Knox's "Detective Story Decalogue" (194-196) and "The Detection Club Oath" (197-99). Both indicate how rigid the formula for the detective story had become.

8. Greene has commented on the importance of dreams for himself and his work in a number of places. See, for instance, A Sort of Life 73. Of particular interest is his dream, described on page 75, of being pursued by a sinister figure. A number of critics have also remarked upon the importance of dreams in Greene's work.

9. The same awareness is visible in It's a Battlefield when Milly insists Conder write out his promise to give her publicity (she has just got Mrs. Coney's signature on a petition for the reprieve of Jim Drover), and he replies, "writing a thing doesn't make it any more true. You're talking to a man who knows" (104). Here it is Milly who assumes a connection between writing and truth. (The same is true of Mrs. Coney who fears signing anything: "if you sign things . . . you don't know what you let yourself in for" [98].) Conder, however, finds lies most effective in catching attention (85) and, consequently, strips writing of veracity.

10. Dates for comments from Greene's diary are given in Sherry's biography. Those passages relevant to the genesis of It's a Battlefield are found on pages 457-58.

11. The sense that all narrative contains hidden narratives is explicitly remarked upon when Surrogate tells the story of Jim Drover to Caroline Bury:

He told her all he knew, humbly, a little grudgingly, watching the wheels of a fine intellect beginning to turn. He was jealous. Beneath Drover's story, buried only just beneath the succeeding words, "policeman--wife--Hyde Park--appeal", buried so shallowly that between the

phrases scraps of old bones showed plain ("It reminds me . . . by the way . . . you remember"), lay his own tale, the first example he knew of Caroline Bury's passion to help. (88)

If one takes "Surrogate" here in the sense of the word's meaning, then we can see Surrogate's telling of Drover's story as a reference to Greene's own telling of Drover's story and of the response it stirs among the characters of It's a Battlefield. The suggestion, of course, is that behind the literal story of the novel is another story that is the story of the novel's telling, inspired by the condition of England in the early thirties.

This notion that narrative is made up of layers of other narratives is also in part confirmed by some of Greene's characters' names: Surrogate is allegorical, and the Assistant Commissioner and the private secretary are identified only by their occupations--thus making them general types. (Jim Drover, who is a bus driver, might also be seen this way.) Still others such as Bennett, Patmore, Crabbe and most clearly Conrad Drover are deliberately named after writers, which again suggests the novel's self-consciousness of its place in literary history.

12. The "battlefield" of the title, then, can also be seen as the place where a number of narratives, roughly corresponding to the number of characters but also including things like the pram on the taxi narrative, struggle for dominance within the textual field that is the novel. No one narrative emerges as central and so the conflict of narratives continues throughout the novel. The title, then, can be read as a description of the novel's structure of warring narratives.

13. Foucault argues that detective fiction emerges at a time, around the 1840s, when the penalties imposed upon criminals by the courts ceased to be a matter of public spectacle. Detective fiction, then, takes the place of the public spectacle in showing the workings of law. That is, the spectacle of punishment was intended to show, among other things, that criminal behaviour was discoverable; hence, when these spectacles no longer were acceptable to the majority of the populace, a new kind of crime fiction emerged which represented and glorified the discovery of guilt. Thus the power of the law continued to be demonstrated to the people (Discipline and Punish 68-69). However, in that the classical detective story generally omits the punishment of the criminal from the narrative, it reflects the moral ethos that drove the public display of punishment from the square to the prison yard. By way of contrast, the hard-boiled novel, being somewhat cynical about the institutions sworn to uphold the law, again makes punishment a part of the narrative. In the face of ineffectual courts and corrupt police, the function of determining guilt and exacting punishment falls to the

detective, as is illustrated most explicitly by Spillane's I, the Jury (1947). However, as in the classical detective story, the hard-boiled novel continues to show that criminal behaviour is detectable, though the hard-boiled detective may not be as effective in dealing with it.

14. We are told that Mason, when he was Callum, also sought to serve a higher cause, but like the Assistant Commissioner Callum was unable to take the necessary steps in this direction: "He [Callum] wanted to be a doctor because he had a passionate devotion to a sentimental idea of service. But he hasn't a clear enough idea of what he wants to serve" ("Murder for the Wrong Reason" 128).

15. For instance, the Assistant Commissioner's housekeeper, Mrs. Simpson, agrees with the courts: "'I'd like to see 'em [murderers] all strung up and finished with'" (76-77).

16. This same image is used at the end of England Made Me when Kate describes the world of Krogh's to Minty:

"There's honour among thieves. We're all in the same boat."

"He [Anthony] wasn't a thief," Minty said

. . .

"We're all thieves," Kate said. "Stealing a livelihood here and there and everywhere, giving nothing back."

Minty sneered: "Socialism."

"Oh no," Kate said. "That's not for us. No brotherhood in our boat. Only who can cut the biggest dash and who can swim." (206)

Chapter Five

THE THRILLERS OF THE THIRTIES

In 1947 Donat O'Donnell wrote that "far more than the left-wing militancy of such poets as Auden and Spender . . . , the thrillers of Mr. Greene reflect the state of the West European mind in the 'thirties." (25). For O'Donnell Greene is "the most truly characteristic writer of the 'thirties in England, and the leading novelist of that time and place" (28). Pryce-Jones echoes these comments by asserting that "A Gun for Sale, The Confidential Agent and The Ministry of Fear form an unplanned trio combining into one of the more elucidating records of the tensions set up by the threats and final outbreak of the World War" (62).¹

What Greene draws attention to in both his "entertainments" and his novels from the period is, as McEwen notes, the condition of violence and savagery repressed beneath a seeming peace. It's a Battlefield, Journey Without Maps, and The Lawless Roads each has passages comparable to the following from The Confidential Agent:

[T]hey bumped slowly on across the Park. The soap-box orators talked in the bitter cold at Marble Arch with their mackintoshes turned up around their Adam's apples, and all down the road the cad cars waited for the right easy girls, and the cheap prostitutes sat hopelessly in the

shadows, and the blackmailers kept an eye on the grass where the deeds of darkness were quietly and unsatisfactorily accomplished. This was technically known as a city at peace. A poster said: "Bloomsbury Tragedy Sensation". (136)

When the war came at the end of the decade it did not, for Greene, represent a sudden change, but rather it was the manifestation of tensions that existed within the society of the thirties (McEwen 118). As Greene wrote in 1940,

Violence comes to us more easily because it was so long expected--not only by the political sense but by the moral sense. The world we lived in could not have ended any other way. The curious waste lands one sometimes saw from trains--cratered ground round Wolverhampton under a cindery sky with a few cottages grouped like stones among the rubbish: those acres of abandoned cars round Slough: the dingy fortune-teller's on the first-floor above the cheap permanent waves in a Brighton back street; they all demanded violence, like the rooms in a dream where one knows that something will presently happen--a door fly open or a window catch give and let the end in.²

I think it was a sense of impatience because the violence was delayed . . . that made many writers of recent years go abroad to try to meet

it half-way: some went to Spain and others to China. Less ideological, perhaps less courageous, writers chose corners where the violence was more moderate but the hint of it had to be there to satisfy that moral craving for the just and reasonable expression of human nature left without belief. (CE 334)

Hence, the dominant image of the battlefield as a figure of social conflict and class war in Greene's novels of the thirties was realized on a more literal level in The Ministry of Fear, The Third Man, and The End of the Affair, which are set during and immediately after World War II.

In the novels of the thirties, crime and violence are often shown to be routinely dismissed or denied by an established authority who repeatedly invokes the idea of London (or England) as the centre of law and order, the heart of civilization, in opposition to contrary claims of a pervasive and underlying menace. We see, for example, that the Assistant Commissioner pacifies Mrs. Simpson's fears for his safety by saying, "Come, come . . . this is London" (IB 181); that Mather ironically boasts that the assassin of the Czech minister would have been caught within a week were he in England (GS 10); that the police refuse to give credence to Ida's suspicion of foul-play in Hale's death (BR 78-81); that Forbes dismisses D.'s account of an attempt on his life as a "tall story" (CA 94) and then later urges him

to give himself up because "This is London" (107); and that even Rowe tells Anna Hilfe that they have nothing to worry about because "This isn't Vienna, you know. This is London" (MF 103). With The Ministry of Fear and The Third Man, however, the war brings about a reversal of sorts in that, unlike the detective figures in the pre-war novels--Anne, Ida, and D. who must convince the legitimate authorities of the existence of a hidden menace within a seemingly peaceful society--it is the naive and amateur investigators of The Ministry of Fear and The Third Man who must be convinced of the extent of the corruption by the legitimate authorities, Prentice and Calloway, who possess more knowledge of things as they are than do Rowe and Martins. It is as if the war raised the level of criminality to a height of which the ordinary citizen could not conceive. In The Ministry of Fear and The Third Man the war makes all things possible because reality, from the physical appearance of the world to the moral strictures governing individual and social behaviour, has been so altered as to be unrecognizable--a fact that may account for the increasingly fantastic and fabulous nature of Greene's "entertainments" as time goes on.

Thus, we are led back to the often-made claim that Greene used the thriller in this period because it was the genre best able to reflect the climate of violence and uncertainty in the 1930s and '40s. Conversely, then, it may

be surprising to observe that Greene's thrillers, while continuing to be true to the premises of realism as the thirties valorized them, become increasingly "literary"; that is, they become increasingly self-conscious and increasingly aware of their status as texts. This aspect of the "entertainments" reaches its apex in The Ministry of Fear where the boundaries between the world and the text collapse: "Thrillers," Rowe dreams, "are like life. . . . The world has been remade by William Le Queux" (65). The Third Man and Our Man in Havana consolidate these views by emphasizing the role given to fiction and fiction-making. In The Third Man Martins is a writer of "cheap novelettes" (23) while Calloway, the first-person narrator of The Third Man, indulges in his own literary artistry. In Our Man in Havana Wormold is not a writer by occupation, although he tells Milly that he is becoming an "imaginative writer" (74) and Beatrice accuses him of talking "like a novelist" (108). Nonetheless, Wormold, the vacuum-cleaner salesman, creates a fictional world of spies and conspiracy that becomes all too real once his superiors take his reports for reality.³

Earlier work such as A Gun for Sale or Brighton Rock used the apparatus of the thriller to expose and investigate contemporary social problems; these novels are vehicles for social commentary particularly in the implicit equation they make between the violence and cruelty of their protagonists, Raven and Pinkie, and the background of poverty against

which they are presented. As Edwin Muir wrote of Pinkie in a review of Brighton Rock, "he is an evil product of an evil environment, a living criticism of society, and on that plane genuine" (76). (James MacDonald has even gone so far as to call Brighton Rock "a proletarian novel" [199].) Muir's remarks could just as easily apply to Raven, who is said to be "made by hatred" (66). Indeed, because one of his obsessive boasts is "I'm educated" (15, 46ff.), the social system that shapes Raven is severely criticized. In Brighton Rock there are hints of a repressed desire for goodness and peace in Pinkie that are seen in his emotional reactions to music, his recollection of his days in the church choir and his desire to be a priest, his faint stirring of tenderness for Rose and pity for Prewitt, and his sense of an "enormous emotion beat[ing] on him . . . the pressure of gigantic wings against the glass" as he drives Rose to what he assumes will be her death (242)--all of which indicate that Pinkie's evil arises out of the corruption of his innocence. In his case, the crippling effects of his environment destroy a natural tendency to goodness.⁴ The three "entertainments" that follow Brighton Rock, while not abandoning the social critique of the books from the thirties, become more obvious than Greene's earlier texts were in the interrogations of the thriller form and of the structures of authority--whether political, literary or textual--that exist within society.

Basically, A Gun for Sale, Brighton Rock, The Confidential Agent, The Ministry of Fear, and The Third Man all follow to varying degrees at least one investigator (Raven, Ida, D., Rowe, and Martins) who functions in part as a detective attempting to discover, to read, the hidden story behind the accepted interpretation of events. But if the detective of the classical detective story is too often perceived as a privileged figure capable of placing an authoritative interpretation upon events--and so admired as a superman standing above and beyond the law--then Greene's detectives are deliberately conceived in opposition to what Aydelotte sees as the genre's incipient fascism (92-94). Indeed, as part of the "anti-fascist aesthetic" that Denning sees in the "serious thrillers" of the thirties (66), the situation of Greene's detectives demonstrates the distrust, common among segments of the left, of the single authoritative point of view. His detectives are incapable of the kind of confident assertions made by Dupin, Holmes, or Poirot for instance. Instead, Greene's thrillers foreground the interpretive limitations of any fictional detective and so of any reader. As Stratford remarks of Greene's pursuers:

Detective Sergeant Mather in A Gun for Sale, Ida Arnold in Brighton Rock and the Police Lieutenant in The Power and the Glory, if not painted entirely unsympathetically are represented as

having only a partial understanding of the nature of the crime they are investigating. They have no sense of sin, no notion of Good and Evil, are not spiritually alive. Their concern is with human justice, with the Hebraic law of vengeance, with the maintenance of social order. (Stratford, "Master" 73)

However, as It's a Battlefield suggests, Greene has little confidence in the machinations of human justice, and the goal of maintaining the existing order is dubious at best.

In the five novels I have been discussing the authority of the investigator is undermined in a number of ways. As representatives of law and/or justice, Raven, Ida and Rowe are ironic figures in their respective texts: Raven and Rowe are both murderers themselves, although their crimes are vastly different in circumstance; and Ida is presented as a fun-loving, amoral pleasure-seeker who pursues Pinkie less because she is driven to expose his crimes and see justice properly executed than because she wants excitement, fun and "a bit of life" (45). D. represents a slightly different case from Raven, Ida, Rowe, and Martins in that, although he seeks Else's killers, he is not principally investigating the circumstances surrounding a murder; rather, he attempts to read the truth about his mission in the numerous fictions, the layers of deceit and mistrust, that he encounters:

He hadn't yet had time to absorb the information the child had given him--was the manageress another of his, as it were, collaborators, like K., anxious to see that he followed the narrow and virtuous path, or had she been bribed by L.? Why, in that case, should he have been sent to this hotel by the people at home? His room had been booked; everything had been arranged for him, so that they should never lose contact. But that, of course, might all have been arranged by whoever it was gave information to L.--if anybody had. There was no end to the circles in this hell. (50)

Ultimately, D. concludes that the only authority for any reading of events lies within himself: "There was no end to the complicated work of half-trust and half-deceit. Suppose the ministry had made a mistake . . . suppose, if he handed the papers over, they should sell them to L. He knew he could trust himself. He knew nothing else" (72). In the deceit-filled world of The Confidential Agent, where a number of fictions compete for dominance, D. must make his choice and remain bound to it even though he has no certainty of having made the right decision: "'You choose your side once for all--of course, it may be the wrong side. Only history can tell that'" (60). Yet for all his self-awareness, D. is an amateur uncertain of what action to take and incapable, even when outraged, of moving decisively.

Only too aware that ideological biases underpin the claims of any text's authority--witness his discussion of the differing versions of The Song of Roland (62)--D. cannot even succeed in promoting his own version of the truth: he fails in his attempt to buy coal, and it is only in spite of his efforts that he prevents its sale to the other side.

Also undermining the interpretive authority of Greene's detectives is that the function of detection in the novels is split or at least shared with other characters. Raven in A Gun for Sale may be working to find Davis and Davis's boss Sir Marcus, but he is not trying to discover the truth behind his murder of the Czech Minister of War which opens the novel. The facts of the crime are only uncovered by him incidentally with Anne's help. Raven is merely working to avenge himself upon Davis and Sir Marcus for their betrayal of him by paying him with stolen money. Mather of Scotland Yard, on the other hand, tracks Raven not as a murderer but as a suspect in a bank theft. In the case of A Gun for Sale, neither of these detective figures works to solve the murder of the old minister. As Mather short-sightedly says, "'It's got nothing to do with us'" (10). Only Anne Crowder attaches any importance to solving the crime, so she too becomes an investigator of sorts, bringing to three (four if one counts Mather's stuttering partner Saunders) the number of detective figures in the book.

The situation is different in Brighton Rock, but again the detective's success is determined by forces outside the detective. Ida is not only assisted in her investigation by Phil Corkery, but her powers of detection depend on her belief in the occult--particularly her ability to read the language of the ouija board--and on the workings of chance in the occurrence of Black Boy winning a race, which enables her to win enough money to continue her investigation. In The Ministry of Fear and The Third Man more orthodox detectives, Prentice and Calloway, assist the principle investigators, Rowe and Martins; hence, the prospect of a single authoritative interpretation of events is again thrown into question. Indeed, in The Third Man, the interpretation of events established at the narrative's outset is Calloway's, and Martins sets out to make Calloway "the biggest bloody fool in Vienna" (27) by discovering what really happened to Harry Lime. As The Third Man plays itself out, Martins succeeds in making Calloway seem foolish, since Calloway, the legitimate investigator, is wrong about Lime's death. This situation is not unusual in the detective story where amateurs frequently demonstrate the failure of the police. However, when we remember that Martins is also mistaken about Lime's death and when we consider that Calloway as the novel's first-person narrator is in part a figure for the writer, a theory of reading that credits the authoritative interpretation of events to the

detective/author immediately becomes problematic. In The Third Man Greene continues to move beyond the detective story to the more indeterminant world of the thriller.

Of the books Greene wrote between 1936 and 1950, A Gun for Sale and Brighton Rock are closest in structure to traditional patterns derived from the classical detective story (both novels, for instance, contain a murder early in the narrative), though neither follows the form as closely as "Murder for the Wrong Reason." Indeed, if we are to make a distinction, Brighton Rock follows the paradigm of the classical detective story more than A Gun for Sale, which is patterned after John Buchan's stories and has been described as Greene's "purest thriller" (Wolfe, Entertainer 54). The Confidential Agent and The Ministry of Fear are patterned differently from A Gun for Sale and Brighton Rock, but in the later novels the genre's self-consciousness is heightened, and so Greene investigates strategies for reading in a more overt fashion than he does in A Gun for Sale and Brighton Rock. By The Third Man both the detective's authority and the epistemology of the form have been thoroughly undermined by Greene's earlier books.

What follows will trace the process by which Greene undermines the form through A Gun for Sale, Brighton Rock, The Confidential Agent, and The Ministry of Fear. These novels offer Greene's fullest explorations of detective fiction and extend his conception of the thriller to its

limits, particularly in The Ministry of Fear. After this novel, Greene continues to use the thriller and elements derived from it, but none of the books that follow The Ministry of Fear significantly advances his sense of the form. Instead, they repeat strategies that were already developed in the thrillers of the late thirties and early forties.

A GUN FOR SALE

Greene writes in Ways of Escape that A Gun for Sale evolved out of an updating of the Buchan thriller, but "[t]he hunted man of A Gun for Sale . . . was Raven not Hannay; a man out to revenge himself for all the dirty tricks of life, not to save his country" (54). Sir Marcus, Greene adds, was "a more plausible villain for those days [the mid-1930s] than the man in Buchan's The Thirty-Nine Steps who could 'hood his eyes like a hawk'" (55). Nonetheless, Greene argues, The Thirty-Nine Steps established the pattern for adventure writers since its publication. "John Buchan was the first to realize the enormous dramatic value of adventure in familiar surroundings happening to unadventurous men, members of Parliament, and members of the Athenaeum, lawyers and barristers, business men and minor peers: murder in 'the atmosphere of breeding and stability'" (CE 167). But Buchan's failings became apparent to Greene in the thirties

when "it was no longer a Buchan world" (WE 54). In "The Last Buchan", Greene condemns the intellectual content of Buchan's work for emphasizing the values of empire and the ideology of capitalism. The "vast importance Buchan attributed to success, the materialism . . ." repels Greene in 1941 (CE 168). Similarly, the "enormous importance" Buchan places on individuals can no longer be justified in light of events in the thirties and in light of the war: "it is not, after all, the great men--the bankers and the divisional commanders and the Ambassadors--who have been holding our world together this winter [1940-41], and if we survive, it is by 'the wandering, wavering grace of humble men' in Bow and Coventry, Bristol and Birmingham" (169). Greene praises the Buchan thriller for showing "the death that may come to any of us . . . by the railings of the Park or the doorway of the mews" (169) (it shows "'how thin is the protection of civilization'" [169]), but he also condemns it on ideological grounds. For A Gun for Sale and his subsequent "entertainments" (The Confidential Agent and The Ministry of Fear), then, Greene takes the Buchan pattern of flight and pursuit but works against his precursor's ideology. As Couto observes,

The subversion of the content of the traditional adventure form reaches its apotheosis in A Gun for Sale with the themes of heroic action, violence, the exploited, courage and hope explored at

various levels. The empire of capitalism is exposed with a hero who is ugly and deformed. His only sense of purpose is provoked by a deep and sullen rage rather than by heroism; his courage is despair. The description of Sir Marcus lifts him out of nationality and race to make him the embodiment of the forces of exploitation that are a continuing element of contemporary life. (55)

Perhaps because of the "entertainment" label, A Gun for Sale at one time was largely dismissed by critics with brief comment as "a kind of secular rehearsal for Brighton Rock" meant to help finance other "more serious" books (Lodge, "G.G." 95; McEwen 114), but it has recently been more typically praised as "one of the best and most significant novels of the 1930s, and a far more nearly perfect work of art than Brighton Rock" ("GG: Man Within" 11). Similarly, Hynes calls it "a war-novel before the event" and finds it "[t]he best single example of the way in which the real present incorporated the apocalyptic future, while remaining real" (Auden 232). And, certainly, there is little doubt by the end of A Gun for Sale that, although the novel's action involves war's prevention, war is seen as inevitable. For Raven, of course, there is always a war (47, 129), but the point is taken further with Anne's thoughts in the book's final pages: "she couldn't stop a war. Men were fighting beasts, they needed war . . . how they love it . . . it

occurred to her . . . that perhaps even if she had been able to save the country from a war, it wouldn't have been worth saving" (182-83). As we have seen, such a reflection is not an isolated occurrence in the period.

In A Gun for Sale Raven assassinates the Czech Minister of War, is paid for the job in stolen notes, and, when he discovers that the police are after him because of the stolen money, sets out to track down Davis (who paid him) and Davis's boss to get proper payment and revenge himself upon those who betrayed him. In this way Raven is both murderer and, in a sense, detective, although the consequences of and the truth behind the murder he commits are only of interest to him after Anne alerts him to parallels between the minister and himself.

For the reader, the explanation for the murder does not come until more than half-way through the novel, although he or she is prepared for the revelation of Sir Marcus's guilt by a number of clues scattered throughout the text, such as the chief reporter's advice to buy armament shares (23), the disclosure of Davis's connection with Midland Steel (58), and Davis's cryptic remark, "he won't forgive me again", made before he tries to kill Anne (64). As the head of Midland Steel, Sir Marcus sees a war as the answer to his company's financial problems. Midland Steel, we are told, employs only a fifth of the workers it once had, and the company's layoffs are "ruining the town" (59). As well,

Davis later confesses that the company is on its "last legs" and in desperate need of money (165). Sir Marcus, then, welcomes a war because it will increase the company's business and the value of the company's shares. To this end, Raven is hired to kill the Czech minister, whose murder, like the Archduke's assassination at Sarajevo in 1914, will ignite a series of events which will lead to war.⁵

Sir Marcus, like Krogh in England Made Me and Colleoni in Brighton Rock, is esteemed as a successful businessman by the general public and by the established legal authorities. (Sir Marcus has the respect of the city's Mayor and Chief Constable: "after the General Strike Sir Marcus had given a fully equipped gymnasium to the police force in recognition of their services" [109].) However, as is the case with Krogh and Colleoni, beneath the outward show of respectability Sir Marcus supports his success with criminal activity; like the others, he is able to kill with clean hands.⁶ When confronted by Raven, Sir Marcus exhibits an indifference indicative of what Arendt later called "the banality of evil"; he is "apparently unmoved" by the description Raven gives of the twin killing: "old age had killed the imagination. The deaths he [Sir Marcus] had ordered were no more real to him than the deaths he read about in the newspapers . . . a very small persistent, almost mechanical, sense of self-preservation: these were

his only passions" (165). Earlier, we are told that he is "a man almost without pleasures; his most vivid emotion was venom, his main object of defence: defence of his fortune, of the pale flicker of vitality he gained each year in the Cannes sun, of his life" (108). As McEwen observes, Sir Marcus in his physical decrepitude can be read as an image of modern capitalism in its decline (McEwen 116). Like Krogh, Sir Marcus is an internationalist whose origins are obscure.

He spoke with the faintest foreign accent and it was difficult to determine whether he was Jewish or of an ancient English family. He gave the impression that very many cities had rubbed him smooth. If there was a touch of Jerusalem, there was also a touch of St. James's, if of some Central European capital, there were also marks of the most exclusive clubs in Cannes. (107)⁷

Sir Marcus is also said to have "many friends, in many countries" (115). As is the case with Krogh, this kind of internationalism denies loyalty to anything or anyone beyond the maintenance of fortune and of self. It is, then, highly ironic that Sir Marcus should invoke patriotism in his attempt to have Raven killed by the police: he calls Raven a "waste product" (110) and a "traitor" (111). Sir Marcus, like capitalism, is figured as dependent upon violence for his preservation. He has used Raven for his own purposes

and now sees him as something to be discarded. In this context, Raven's violence, like Fred Hall's in England Made Me, is the extension of a larger public violence; Raven's guilt in the murder of the Czech minister is consequently diminished and his pursuit of Sir Marcus and Davis becomes, as Anne realizes, if not the pursuit of law (which is figured in Mather's pursuit), at least the pursuit of justice.

Cold-blooded killer that he is, Raven has at least one ethical imperative and that is that members of his own class not betray each other: "this was evil: that people of the same class should prey on each other" (91). (Raven is consequently outraged at finding himself betrayed by Dr. Yogel and his nurse [29].) It is this betrayal of class and not some sense of duty owed to humanity or to the state that drives him to uncover Sir Marcus and Davis. Shortly after Anne has told him of the Czech minister's background (122), Raven confesses to the assassination and adds, "'I didn't know the old fellow [the minister] was one of us [that is, of the working class]. I wouldn't have touched him if I'd known he was like that. All this talk of war. It doesn't mean a thing to me" (129). Raven is outraged not so much because he has been used to start a war (certainly cause enough), but because he has been used against someone of his own class. The minister, Anne says, "wasn't one of the rich. He wouldn't have gone to war. That's why they shot

him. You bet there are fellows making money now out of him being dead. And he'd done it all himself too . . . His father was a thief and his mother committed--." Raven, recognizing the parallels with his own life, completes Anne's sentence, "Suicide" (122).

It is possible as well that Sir Marcus, though his origins are unclear, also violates Raven's ethical code by ordering the death of someone from his own class, since both Sir Marcus and the old minister were in the same orphanage. Sir Marcus's villainy is then compounded because he too has turned against his own people both in ordering the minister's death and in exploiting Raven. Similarly, Sir Marcus is, himself, imagistically linked to Raven in that Sir Marcus hides a scar beneath his beard while Raven has a hare-lip. In that Sir Marcus is able to hide his scar, he is able to deny his past. However, Raven's poverty prevents him from doing the same (14).

This allegory of class conflict and exploitation under capitalism is completed with the figure of Mather who, as the colourless detective stalking Raven, is the unwitting protector of the institutionalized crime existing beneath the veneer of civilization. Like the Assistant Commissioner of It's A Battlefield but without the same self-awareness, Mather protects a capitalist establishment built on crime, violence and militarism. He blindly offers his loyalty to the State, and he places his commitment to the police force

above his personal feelings for Anne: he feels "a small chill of hatred against Anne for putting him in a position where his affection warped his judgement" (80), and he hastily assumes Anne's guilt in her dealings with Raven even before he has had a chance to speak with her. The things Mather values and desires--certainty, organization, and routine--all account for his dedication to Scotland Yard:

he was part of an organization. He did not want to be a leader, he did not even wish to give himself up to some God-sent fanatic of a leader [although Anne notes that "he always did what other people did" (24)], he liked to feel that he was one of thousands more or less equal working for a concrete end--not equality of opportunity, not government by the people or by the richest or by the best, but simply to do away with crime which meant uncertainty. He liked to be certain.

(38)

As a member of the force, Mather is freed of personal responsibility for his actions and his emotions; however, in the climate of the thirties, Greene perceives this kind of freedom as an indication of an incipient tendency to fascism (already seen in the character of Jules in It's A Battlefield) in both the police and the British people. With respect to the latter, the medical students' rag under

Buddy Ferguson's leadership clearly allegorizes the fascist terrors of Mussolini, Hitler and Franco.

Since he is a detective tracking Raven, Mather fulfills the demands of the detective story promised by the "entertainment" label. With Saunders, Mather fits the role of the master sleuth accompanied by a less able companion, a paradigmatic relationship often found in works in the genre—Dupin and his unnamed companion, Holmes and Watson, and Poirot and Hastings are three similar couples. Mather also shares with the classical detective a commitment to the pursuit of an exact truth, which for him means a strict factual accuracy: "he always noted facts, he didn't trust his brain for more than theories, guesses" (78). Similarly, in equating crime with uncertainty, Mather hearkens back to a view of detection and of reading found in Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" where "the type and genius of deep crime" is located in the enigmatic, the unreadable.⁵ For Mather, to resolve the enigma by turning experience into a readable text is to eliminate crime and uncertainty, figured as the disruption and transgression of predictable codes of behaviour, so as to restore order and certainty.

On a most basic level, A Gun for Sale demonstrates the limitations of Mather's method of reading experience and, by extension, of reading narrative. With reductive simplicity Mather declares early in the novel that the motives behind the Czech Minister's murder are "Politics. Patriotism" (10);

but A Gun for Sale shows that for Mather, as is the case for the narrator of Poe's story, experience resists its transformation into readable text. Certainly, as the "entertainment" label seemingly promises, the story of the crime that opens the novel is uncovered through the story of the investigation, and the narrative arrives at a renewed state of quiescence wherein the disruptive forces are eliminated and a new order, following the traditional pattern of romance, emerges: the bad are eliminated (not just Raven but Sir Marcus and Davis as well) and the good are rewarded (Mather gets a promotion so he and Anne are able to marry). Yet Greene makes clear in A Gun for Sale that such a reading is idealistically simple and ideologically naive.

In part he accomplishes this goal through the evocation of sympathy for Raven in the reader. Raven's background, his tenderness for a stray kitten (65), his trust in Anne, and his desire to confess his crimes and so remove the burdens of the past all render him a sympathetic victim of environmental forces. As well, the consequent diminution of his guilt is furthered by the contextualizing of his crimes within the larger framework of an economic system that holds Sir Marcus up as a model of success. However, the unmasking of the traditional assumptions behind the detective story is also accomplished through the presentation of Mather as

little more than a parodic caricature of the great detective such as Holmes or Dupin.

As Kenneth Alley observes in a discussion of the novel, **Mather**

represents a dead or dying order of things . . .
he represents an era in which order and a
universally accepted moral code had marked the
criminal--and even at times the socially inept or
untutored--as a force inimical to the group's
common good, and the detective's function had been
to expose the aberrant's misdeeds for the purpose
of restoring harmony to the injured social body
. . . Mather is one who sees himself as such a
protector, and therein lies much of the ironic
tension of A Gun for Sale. (176)

While the comfort Mather gains from the thought of being one of many working within a vast organization is not felt by the great classical detectives who usually work independently of or in opposition to the police, Mather does share their assumption that certainty can be established in the reading of experience and of texts (in the form of the criminal's story or the accounts of witnesses). However, in the world of A Gun for Sale, a belief in this kind of certainty leads to a position of political neutrality that plays into the hands of the Right by preserving the dominant ideology; thus, Mather's desire for certainty works against

Mather discovering the full story behind the money Raven is suspected of having stolen.

As Greene presents him, Mather's "logic is not particularly striking, his memory is not exceptional, and his judgment is fallible" (Alley 177). Mather's obsession with accuracy and the narrow vision of his "anchored" mind (GS 34, 37) prevent him from seeing beneath the surface of things. He is incapable of conceiving a connection between the assassination of a foreign politician and his own life ("'It's got nothing to do with us" [10]), despite the fact that the text makes these connections increasingly clear for the reader whose suspicions of Mather's interpretive authority are consequently aroused.' Mather's interrogation of Anne late in the novel illustrates the imaginative limitations under which he labours. He is unable to get beyond the fact that Raven has possession of stolen money:

Mather said, "There's only one chance you won't be charged with complicity. If you make a statement."

"Is this the third degree?" Anne said.

"Why do you want to shelter him? Why keep your word to him when you don't--?"

"Go on," Anne said. "Be personal. No one can blame you. I don't. But I don't want you to think I'd keep my word to him. He killed the old man. He told me so."

"What old man?"

"The War Minister."

"You've got to think up something better than that," Mather said.

"But it's true. He never stole those notes. They double-crossed him. It was what they'd paid him to do the job."

"He spun you a fancy yarn," Mather said.

"But I know where those notes came from."

"So do I. I can guess. From someone in this town."

"He told you wrong. They came from United Rail Makers in Victoria Street." (137)

In Mather's quest for certainty, the interpretive depths of the texts he confronts are overlooked. A Gun for Sale shows us that neither Mather's values of organization, routine, and law nor his conviction that experience can be read with certainty is adequate for the restoration of order in a society whose social, political, and economic values create and encourage the broadest kind of disorder.

For Greene, Mather's failings are also the failings of the master detectives of the classical detective story, and, in this respect, Mather is "Greene's ideal detective" (Boardman 36). As Alley notes, his skills are limited and his speech, and that of the other detectives, is peppered with the clichés of detective fiction. Following the

language of the genre, Mather and the others refer to Anne as a "moll" (76); and Mather twice remarks on his attraction to the case: "there's something about this case . . . I can't leave it alone" (71), and "it's getting to me. There's something about it" (75). As well, Mather regularly responds to colleagues who suggest that there is "nothing" in a report or a location with expressions of Holmesian assurance: "I don't agree with you, sir" (75); "Everybody remembers something" (76); and "There's always something" (78). Greene never lets us forget that Mather is a character in a book, a fiction patterned on other fictions.

Mather's discussion of the case with the superintendent clearly illustrates the point. Soon after the latter notes that "In these stories you read people always remember something, but in real life they just say she was wearing something dark or something light" (75), Mather responds, "the books are right. People generally do remember something" (75). Similarly, when the two are reviewing their reconstruction of Raven's movements in Nottwich, they create a fiction in which Anne (though they do not yet realize it is her) is thought of as Raven's girl. Mather conjectures:

"She was coming for a long stay (a woman can get a lot in one suitcase) or else, if she was carrying his case too, he was the dominant one. Believes in treating her rough and making her do

all the physical labour. That fits in with Raven's character. As for the girl--"

"In these gangster stories," the superintendent said, "they call her a moll."

"Well, this moll," Mather said, "is one of those girls who like being treated rough. Sort of clinging and avaricious, I picture her. If she had more spirit he'd carry one of the suitcases or else she'd split on him."

"I thought this Raven was about as ugly as they are made."

"That fits too," Mather said. "Perhaps she likes 'em ugly. Perhaps it gives her a thrill."

(76)

Aside from the irony of Mather's unknowing speculation about his fiancée (perhaps not entirely mistaken since Mather does dominate Anne), what is notable here and in the statements made earlier in the discussion between the two policemen is that Mather openly sides with the conventions of "gangster stories". Instead of using self-conscious comparisons between "real" life and the fictional world of detective novels to give the detective an opportunity to distance him- or herself from the fictional by claiming a privileged status (which, as we have seen in Christie's texts or even in Greene's "Murder for the Wrong Reason", is the usual practice in detective fiction), Greene, aware that such

declarations occurring within a fictional text only double-back to confirm the status of the detective as fiction (as text), uses these references to affirm the very fact that his detective is a fictional character existing within a fictional text. That is, Mather explicitly responds as a character in a book would respond: in gangster stories the girlfriends of criminals are called "molls", so Mather calls the girl accompanying Raven a "moll". Similarly, Mather affirms the validity of practices represented in books: "The books are right" (75). As the narrative proceeds, the text continually indicates its own status as a text because Mather as a character is so one-dimensional as to be almost an abstraction. Greene might very well have called him "the detective" and thus have employed a strategy that he uses elsewhere.¹⁰

Foregrounded here is the formulaic nature of the detective story plot. In A Gun for Sale Greene uses the formula, but the text always points to its own formal structures. The apparatus of the detective story is thus laid bare to the reader with the aim of demystifying fictional conventions. This same reasoning also accounts for the "happy" endings, which are seen by many of Greene's critics as distinctive of the "entertainments" and also as serious flaws in these books (Webster 12). The entertainments' endings are not happy ones in any satisfying sense of the word (the point is most obvious in The Ministry

of Fear), despite the fact that all of them involve the bringing together of two "lovers". In this way, Greene employs what Peter J. Rabinowitz calls "an excessive cadence" (125) which, like Macheath's rescue at the end of Brecht's The Threepenny Opera, ironically exposes the artificiality of the conventional ending in detective fiction: Greene provides the elements of a happy ending in a context which renders them ironic. At the end of A Gun for Sale, Anne and Mather arrive home bewildered, if only momentarily, by their success: Mather is not quite sure how or why things worked out so well for him, and Anne is haunted by the thought of Raven.

A Gun for Sale exploits the formulaic pattern of pursuit that Todorov and Brooks both link to the recovery of narrative. As a detective, Mather retraces the path of the criminal, Raven, who, in turn, retraces the path of Davis. In this case, the double pursuit helps contrast, thematically, the pursuit of law with the pursuit of justice, which, as in It's a Battlefield, are not identical. But this double pursuit again draws attention to A Gun for Sale's status as a detective story. At about the half-way point in the text, Raven enters a bazaar in order to pick women's purses for money. When he sees an old woman with Anne's purse he follows her home:

she was just in sight, trailing her long old-fashioned skirt round a corner. He walked fast.

He didn't notice in his hurry that he in his turn was followed by a man whose clothes he would immediately have recognized, the soft hat and overcoat worn like a uniform. Very soon he began to remember the road they took; he had been this way with the girl. It was like retracing in mind an old experience. (91-92)

At the level of the narrative itself, the "old experience" Raven retraces is his walk with Anne out to the new housing estate, but on an intertextual level the "old experience" is the detective's journey to the scene of the crime. More particularly, Raven, pursued by Mather, is heading to a locked room wherein a woman's body is stuffed up the chimney. The situation recalls that of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Greene's investigators retrace the path taken by Dupin in what is often considered the first detective story. In this way the novel's repressed past--figured as the already-read--returns to the surface in the text. A Gun for Sale, like "Murder for the Wrong Reason", reveals its position within a textual network that acknowledges the narrative's status as repetition with difference. The novel identifies itself as a reinscription of Poe's tale (and of every detective story since) with variations. Because Raven retraces Anne's and Davis's paths and Mather retraces Raven's line, A Gun for Sale allegorizes the development of narrative as a process of (re)inscribing

earlier narratives.¹¹ And, again, the narrative, through the allusion to Poe's story, consciously points to its own textuality by likening itself to a previous narrative which stands as the novel's origin--however problematic that concept may be since the very determination of origin relies on a narrative construction.¹² Similarly, the text also looks ahead to its own retellings when Buddy Ferguson's future is briefly alluded to: "All through his life the tale cropped up in print in the most unlikely places: serious histories, symposiums of famous crimes" (148).

In this way, A Gun for Sale shows itself to be a narrative of narratives while engaging in a critical examination that explodes cherished ideas of success within a capitalist economy and of the authority of socially and politically sanctioned readers. Raven's and Mather's pursuits, when taken together, uncover a third narrative line which is the story of Sir Marcus's corruption and the criminality at the heart of thirties capitalism. However, on their own neither Raven's nor Mather's tracings fully disclose this aspect of the narrative.

Even at the novel's end neither Raven nor Mather is completely aware of the extent of his investigation. Raven is killed before all can be explained to him, and Mather is perplexed by the whole affair: "I'm to have pro.otion. I don't know why. It seems to me as if I'd bungled it" (184). Similarly, Saunders reflects that "It hadn't been a

satisfying job . . . There was a mystery about the whole affair; everything hadn't come out" (174). Even Anne, who is perhaps closest to understanding the implications of Raven's actions, ultimately fails to see the deep truth of things. Too concerned with her own narrowly defined interests (the prospect of war matters only insofar as it will affect her and Mather [55]), she quickly and completely forgets her glimpse into the English heart of darkness when she returns to London (185).

All these characters take little or nothing away from their experience because ideology limits their readings of that experience: Saunders, Mather and Anne continue to believe in the inviolability of England. However, it is apparent at the end of A Gun for Sale that, although Sir Marcus, Davis and Raven are dead, nothing changes. The people of Nottwich, typified by Ruby and the porter, continue to admire Sir Marcus and Davis, and feel sympathy for them (173), while Saunders reflects at a meeting for stutterers that

[i]t almost seemed as if Raven's act had had no consequences: as if to kill was just as much an illusion as to dream. Here was Mr Davis all over again; they were turned out of a mould, and you couldn't break the mould, and suddenly over Mr Montague Phelp's [the speaker's] shoulder Saunders saw the photograph of the Grand Master of the

Lodge, above the platform: . . . Sir Marcus.

(176)

Ultimately, Sir Marcus, Davis and Raven are the inevitable products of forces working within the society and of the implicit conflicts within capitalism. Hence, A Gun for Sale at once offers the consolation of the happy ending, traditionally the province of the thriller, and then withdraws this consolation by suggesting that the enemy cannot so easily be found out and eradicated. In the world of the novel, the social and political corruption that capitalism breeds is found in those figures who are most honoured.

In this respect the social and political hierarchy is inverted since it is the economic elite and their protectors, the established legal authorities, who are shown to bear the brunt of guilt. A Gun for Sale, then, demonstrates both the failure of conventional hierarchies and the limitations of any reading, since none of the text's inscribed authorities are able to do more than partially read the texts they confront. Hence, the novel boasts itself to be "an entertainment", thus distancing itself from the literature of the elite that is identified with both modernist experimentation and the Right. The sub-heading becomes a signal of political and literary resistance.

BRIGHTON ROCK

Greene also conceived his next novel, Brighton Rock, as a thriller. A Gun for Sale had been both a literary and a financial success, and another thriller offered Greene the opportunity to develop those issues that emerged in A Gun for Sale and to capitalize on his success.

In Brighton Rock Pinkie's gang murders Hale but only after he has made the acquaintance of Ida Arnold, a fun-loving pragmatist who repeatedly insists on her knowledge of the difference between right and wrong. Responding to an irrational compulsion--she calls herself a "sticker where right's concerned" (16)--she investigates Hale's death, seeking to bring Pinkie to justice and to save Rose the suffering that Pinkie will inflict upon her.

Like Mather, Ida, despite fulfilling the role of the detective, is mocked by the narrative: her inability to see beneath the surface of things severely limits her understanding of the case and of the world she inhabits. Brighton for her is a place of fun and excitement, and life is always "good" (19, 72): "I always say it's fun to be alive" (17). The dark side, both of life and of the city with its beggars and its crime, is completely alien to her (73):

Death shocked her, life was so important. She wasn't religious. She didn't believe in heaven or hell, only in ghosts, ouija boards, tables which

rapped . . . but to her death was the end of everything. . . . Life was sunlight on brass bedposts, Ruby port, the leap of the heart when the outsider you have backed passes the post and the colours go bobbing up. Life was poor Fred's mouth pressed down on hers in the taxi, vibrating with the engine along the parade. . . . She took life with deadly seriousness: she was prepared to cause any amount of unhappiness to anyone in order to defend the only thing she believed in. (36)

Both her naive optimism, which has "something dangerous and remorseless" (36) in it, and her spiritual blindness prevent her from understanding Pinkie and Rose and account for the ironic tone that dominates many of the descriptions of Ida:

Ida Arnold was on the right side. She was cheery, she was healthy, she could get a bit lit with the best of them. She liked a good time, her big breasts bore their carnality frankly down the Old Steyne [a Brighton street], but you had only to look at her to know that you could rely on her. She wouldn't tell tales to your wife, she wouldn't remind you next morning of what you wanted to forget, she was honest, she was kindly, she belonged to the great middle law-abiding class, her amusements were their amusements, her

superstitions their superstitions (the planchette scratching the French polish on the occasional table, and salt over the shoulder), she had no more love for anyone than they had. (80)

This kind of mockery has led numerous critics to denigrate Ida for her lack of spiritual awareness (she boasts to Rose that "It's the world we got to deal with" [198]) and to elevate Pinkie to tragic stature because he professes a belief in a divine order ("it's the only thing that fits" [52], he says) wherein the crucial difference is not between right and wrong but between Good and Evil.¹³ In that Rose shares Pinkie's knowledge, she and Pinkie are presented both in the text and in critical discussions as morally superior to Ida and other characters like her such as Dallow, Cubitt, Colleoni, and Phil Corkery. The point is made particularly clear in comments made by Rose to Pinkie and in exchanges between Ida and Rose:

"I [Ida] only came here for your sake. I wouldn't have troubled to see you first, only I don't want to let the Innocent suffer"--the aphorism came clicking out like a ticket from a slot machine.
"Why, won't you lift a finger to stop him killing you?"

"He wouldn't do me any harm."

"You're young. You don't know things like I do."

"There's things you don't know." She brooded darkly by the bed while the woman argued on: a God wept in a garden and cried out upon a cross; Molly Carthew went to everlasting fire.

"I know one thing you don't. I know the difference between Right and Wrong. They didn't teach you that at school."

Rose didn't answer; the woman was quite right; the two words meant nothing to her. Their taste was extinguished by stronger foods--Good and Evil. The woman could tell her nothing she didn't know about these--she knew by tests as clear as mathematics that Pinkie was evil--what did it matter in that case whether he was right or wrong?

(198)

As is illustrated here, the narrative frequently contrasts two distinct views of the world--the secular outlook of Ida and others and the religious perception of Rose and Pinkie.

As justification for asserting the moral superiority of Pinkie and Rose, it is usual for critics¹⁴ to cite T. S. Eliot's remarks, based on Revelation 3:14-16,¹⁵ from the essay, "Baudelaire" (1931):

So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, 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.

(183)

In this context, "damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation--of salvation from the ennui of modern life because it at last gives some significance to living" (Eliot 181).

Certainly, it is difficult to argue against the suggestion that Greene conceives of Pinkie as one who seeks his own kind of salvation through damnation: "a prick of sexual desire disturbed him [Pinkie] like a sickness. That was what happened to a man in the end . . . Was there no escape--anywhere--for anyone? It was worth murdering a world" (92). The text confirms the sense of Pinkie as one who deliberately courts his own damnation in passages like those I have already quoted and especially in the final scene in which the priest tells Rose that "a Catholic is more capable of evil than anyone. I think perhaps--because we believe in Him--we are more in touch with the devil than other people" (246). As well, Greene's comments elsewhere attest to the influence of Eliot's thinking.¹⁶ Similarly, in that Greene says a spiritual awareness is said to give "some significance to living," what he calls "the religious sense" is crucial for the novel. Woolf's and Forster's characters wander through a "paper thin" world because the

absence of a spiritual context in their novels reduces the importance of the human act (CE 91). Through Pinkie and Rose, Greene strives to bring a religious sense into Brighton Rock, and in this context Ida becomes one of the "lukewarm" (Rev. 3:16) who is of no consequence in the religious world of the novel (Kunkel 102).

Yet such a judgment, however common and however confirmed by the text, is not without its own limitations.¹⁷ Greene may find Ida a flat character, like Krogh in England Made Me, whom he feels refuses to come alive (WE 61); but, if Brighton Rock is read as a detective story and in the context of Greene's other crime novels, Ida must be seen as more than a spiritually ignorant character and, therefore, a figure of mockery: she also stands with Mather, Raven, Rowe, and even Mason. As a detective, Ida differs only in trifles from these other figures, and her spiritual blindness only serves as one of the means particular to this novel of discrediting her authority. To condemn Ida for her religious beliefs, or lack of them, implies making a distinction between the character's actions and her beliefs. In the case of the whiskey priest in The Power and the Glory, critics use this distinction to defend the priest and ultimately to read him as a martyr. In the case of Ida, however, this distinction is used to dismiss Ida as a subject of serious consideration.¹⁸ On the other hand, Pinkie, who dominates both the narrative and critical

commentary on the novel, is praised because he acts against or in spite of the prohibitions of the highest authority, God: "Credo in unum Satanum" (165) is Pinkie's declared creed. Pinkie, then, is seen as a tragic hero like Macbeth (Hall 116; G. Smith 63-64), Richard III (McEwen 52), or Milton's Satan (Kelly 42; Evans 154).¹⁹

From a social perspective there is no escaping the fact that Pinkie's evil makes him a criminal. However, as with Raven, Pinkie's guilt is mitigated by a background of poverty ("Man is made by the places in which he lives," the text tells us [37]) and by the presence of Colleoni, a self-described "business man" (64), who, though the leader of a vast criminal organization, is also well regarded by the Brighton police and by the Conservative party which seeks to persuade him into politics (159). As for Ida, whatever her shortcomings, she succeeds in her task of ridding society of Pinkie's menace, although as in A Gun for Sale the conditions that produced Pinkie, the source of the evil, remain. On one level, then, Ida is the instrument of law and order who brings about the socially desirable end, the social good, that Rose, representative of a religious or spiritual Good, cannot.²⁰ Ida is, in this respect, a figure of the law defending a secular middle-class vision of society that relies on human justice which, as we have noted, Greene sees as both limited and limiting.

On the other hand, criticism of Ida often seems to have at its root a prejudice against the detective story because it is a popular form of literature. Ida, herself, is strongly tied to popular culture, and in many respects she represents a populist spirit. The text tells us that "She was of the people, she cried in cinemas at David Copperfield, when she was drunk all the old ballads her mother had known came easily to her lips, her homely heart was touched by the word 'tragedy'" (32). Similarly, her bed-sitting room contains the trappings of popular culture and an assortment of popular literature:

pieces of china bought at the seaside, a photograph of Tom, an Edgar Wallace, a Netta Syrett from a second-hand stall, some sheets of music, The Good Companions, her mother's picture, more china, a few jointed animals made of wood and elastic, trinkets given her by this, that and the other, Sorrell and Son, the Board. (42)²¹

In one sense then, her success represents the triumph, albeit limited, of the popular. However, for critics like R. W. B. Lewis, Ida's "popular heart" (BR 34) and her role as the investigating detective underpin the condemnation of her character and the neglect of her function in the book. In Lewis's eyes, the Ida Arnold plot threatens Brighton Rock with the disaster of being two different books under the same cover (244): "The entertainment is Ida's; it begins

with the first sentence . . . The tragedy is Pinkie's; it begins more subtly in the atmosphere of place" (243). As these remarks imply, not to condemn Ida is to elevate in their importance the book's detective-story aspects--something Lewis or Maurois cannot and will not do.

For traditionally minded critics, it is easier to see Brighton Rock through the lens of canonical literature than in the context of popular works or genres. Hence, Pinkie becomes the key figure in most analyses of the novel because he is easily placed as the latest in a line extending from Macbeth and Milton's Satan, through the damned heroes and heroines of the Romantics, and into the present. If, however, the novel is looked at from the perspective of other detective stories, then a different structure emerges and Ida becomes a central character conceived as both a literary heir to and a reaction against a tradition of extremely rational and esoteric amateur detectives. Like them, she is highly observant--we are told, perhaps ironically, that "she missed nothing" (20)--and, like them, she seeks the truth (37). As well, like Poirot's in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, Ida's task is explicitly figured as one of reading, only in her case the texts she reads, "Sukill" and "Fresuicilleye" (44), are literally occult ones provided by the ouija board and not by a naturalized author inscribed in the narrative.

In one respect, the two ways that I have described of looking at the novel account for the apparent inconsistency in Greene first calling the novel an "entertainment" and then removing the subheading. It is possible, of course, to see Brighton Rock as a novel containing two stories, in the way that Jameson sees Lord Jim as containing both the adventure story and a story of "the intricate and proto-textual search for 'truth'" (Political Unconscious 207); whichever way we see Brighton Rock depends upon our critical perspective and on the textual grid against which we choose to read the novel.

For a number of critics, Brighton Rock is either a serious study of sin and damnation that is taken as probable and "entirely believable" (Webster 110; A. J. M. Smith 19) or else it is a modern-day allegory (De Vitis 67; Hoggart 80) in which Pinkie functions as would a figure in a medieval morality play (Kelly 41; O'Faolain 91; Sherry 637; Spurling 27). Others dismiss the novel as only an "entertainment" (G. Martin 405), and see it as a detective story that, like so many others, is considered light or escapist literature. And still others see the novel as "transitional" between the "entertainments" and the more serious novels (G. Smith 59; De Vitis 25) or else as a "hybrid" of the two types (Turnell 16). However, all these different views of Brighton Rock share a tendency to see one story as serious and the other as light or escapist. But

since this tendency is the result of an artificially created prejudice that privileges one story and not the other, nothing prevents us from seeing the detective story plot as being as "serious" as the story of Pinkie. Indeed, if we accept this view, then we can also see how the detective story complements and underscores the narrative of Pinkie's religious struggle. To be fair, however, Lewis does recognize the interdependence of the two stories, despite his perception of "generic confusion" in the novel (239):

the relation between the detective story and the tragedy expresses exactly what Brighton Rock is finally all about. It is a relation between modes of narrative discourse that reflects a relation between two kinds or levels of reality: a relation between incompatible worlds; between the moral 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.

(244)

However, we might add to these remarks that the relation between the two modes of narrative discourse can also be read as an inscription of the relationship between popular discourse and serious discourse, and, as I discussed it in chapter two, of the relationship between the Russian formalists' categories of fabula and siuzhet or, as Culler prefers, story and discourse (Culler, Pursuit 169-170).

In the pure classical detective story that Todorov describes, we recall, the story of the crime becomes present in the text only through the story of the investigation; that is, the crime takes place outside the frame of the narrative and all its details are revealed only in the course of the investigation. The events leading to the crime make up a story that is seen only through its periodic intrusion by means of clues, or ciphers, into the story of the investigation which we read: we find out about the one story in the telling of the other. As Todorov figures it, this pattern reveals the two aspects that the Russian formalists identify as part of any story--fabula and sjuzhet--where the fabula is revealed only through the sjuzhet while yet providing the sjuzhet with the material of its own existence. However, as we have noted, to determine which of these two precedes the other is a task fraught with ambiguity, and this ambiguity is reflected in Brighton Rock's departures from the paradigm of the classical detective story.

This ambiguity emerges in the novel's handling of the mechanics of the classical detective story's structure: Ida explicitly begins her pursuit at the place from which Hale disappeared (81) and then works to reconstruct the crime which, as even Pinkie realizes (86), is the standard investigative process. In a general sense, Ida traces over the previously laid path of Pinkie and his gang--an activity

that is consistent with the structural dynamics of the classical detective story plot--and so figures the actions of the sjuzhet (the discourse) upon the material of the fabula (the story). As well, her retracing figures the act of writing that produces narrative as a rewriting of a prior narrative which is repressed in the later narrative although its existence is revealed in the later narrative--the narrative of the investigation--through the presence of clues which are the tangible signs marking the return of the repressed.

However, in Brighton Rock Ida's pursuit of Pinkie intensifies the story of Pinkie's efforts to avoid capture. As Ida proceeds in her reading of events--explicitly linked to her reading of an occult text ("Fresuicilleye")--she uncovers indications of Pinkie's story marked in the narrative's details, which in more orthodox detective fiction are formalized as clues: things such as Hale's dislike of Bass beer (a point revealed early in the novel [10] and given importance later on) and his confession that he was "going to die" (18) arouse Ida's "instincts" so that she senses that "there [is] something odd" about Hale's death (31). Later details that come out after his death, such as the fact that he used a false name (31), had bruises on his arms (79), and left a restaurant without eating despite telling Ida he was hungry (33), confirm Ida's

suspicions that something is puzzling about the death while, at the same time, they reveal details of Pinkie's story.

As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Ida's investigation of Hale's death forces Pinkie's actions. Since the official investigators agree that Hale died of natural causes, they have closed the case (78-80), which means that it is only Ida whom Pinkie has to fear. In an odd way, then, Ida's search originates, explains, and validates all of Pinkie's actions from his courtship of Rose to his murder of Spicer to his attempt to arrange Rose's suicide: as Dallow accuses Ida late in the novel, "this [the attempt on Rose's life] is your doing. You made him marry her, you made him . . ." (236). To be sure, Pinkie fears that the police may ask questions about the man who left the card at Snow's, but, as we realize, they do not and will not reopen their inquiry. In their place, though, is Ida.

In this sense, the detective story plot determines the course of Pinkie's story; although, conversely, it is Pinkie's story that gives rise to the detective narrative. The two lines of action are entangled in each other with each standing as the origin of the other. Indeed, the question of origin is complicated further by the fact that the disturbance that excites the narrative of Brighton Rock into being--the murder of Hale--is considered an act of revenge: the initial action occurs in response to an earlier action--the murder of Kite--the story of which, though

sporadically erupting into Pinkie's story (63, 218-19), lies in another narrative, another text;²² as the text explicitly remarks, "The whole origin of the thing was lost" (217). As a model of narrative mechanics, then, Brighton Rock figures narrative's ability to perpetuate itself by inscribing within itself two separate narrative strands that generate and then feed on each other.

Since Pinkie's story--the story of the crime--sparks Ida's story into life and since her investigation determines the content of Pinkie's story, each story can be seen as the origin of the other as each lies behind the other. Ida's investigation uncovers the contents of Pinkie's story, but his narrative also becomes the means by which Ida's story is discovered.

To illustrate with just one example of how this works one can look at part 4, section 1 (99-120), where Pinkie and Spicer are at the race track. Although the storyline in the foreground involves Pinkie's betrayal of Spicer to Colleoni's men, one glimpses the other narrative line involving Ida. Spicer tells Pinkie about a woman who "backed Black Boy for a pony" (103). One then finds out that Black Boy won the race, and again Spicer mentions the woman who now has won so much money (104); the narrative goes on to report that Pinkie "heard a laugh, a female laugh" which is attributed to the same woman (104-105). She is, of course, Ida, who bets on Hale's tip and so wins

enough money to persist in the investigation. In this example one sees how the story of detection is revealed in the telling of Pinkie's story.

Another way for us to see the relationship between the two narratives of Ida and Pinkie, of investigation and crime, is to think of either narrative strand as the repressed content of the other: each reveals its presence in intermittent clues that surface into the respective narrative. However, whichever way one chooses to view Brighton Rock again depends on one's point of view, but ultimately one is looking at the same thing.

Greene reflects the indeterminate nature of narrative origins in his handling of the classical detective story's structure. As Brighton Rock stands, the story of the detection is interrupted by the story of the criminal, which reveals details of the crime;²³ the two stories are presented in roughly alternating chapters occurring more or less along a shared timeline. The reader, then, gains knowledge of the circumstances of Hale's death from two sources, the chapters dealing with Ida and the chapters dealing with Pinkie. The two stories of the investigation and the crime become blurred in the novel as each begins to include the other. As if to underscore this blending of narrative, it is notable that the novel's first scene places Pinkie, Ida and Hale in the same room: murderer, detective, and victim have their stories begin at the same time in the

same place. The novel figures, then, the indeterminate nature of narrative origin from its outset.

Because Ida's investigation of events, metaphorically figured in her reading of an occult text, both reveals and determines the text she reads, we also see in Brighton Rock how the perceiving subject effects what it perceives, and in terms of reading the implications of this action are complex. On one level, reading a text actualizes that text for the reader by inscribing it in the reader's consciousness where it previously did not exist. At the same time, the reader sees in the text what he or she is, in a sense, programmed to see through his or her experience of the "already-read". This phenomenon lies behind the differing judgments on Brighton Rock: probable or improbable plot, proletarian novel or moral allegory, detective story or religious drama, light fiction or serious literature, entertainment or tragedy, and so on. However it is seen, the novel is the product of an interpretive act. Brighton Rock shows us both how these differences are generated and how they coexist within the textual field of the novel.²⁴

The question of how texts are read is one of the issues at the heart of Brighton Rock. Perhaps more than in other detective stories, Brighton Rock foregrounds the reading process as a concern from the first page when we find Hale as Kolley Kibber²⁵ following a route (itself prescribed by a text) through Brighton in search of someone with a copy of

The Daily Messenger in hand who can repeat a prepared text: "You are Mr. Kolley Kibber. I claim the Daily Messenger prize" (5). Language is, thus, explicitly figured as a code. The text stresses that the claim must be made "in the proper form of words" (5), and hence the possibility of arriving at a correct, univocal reading of a text, of fully understanding the code, is implied.²⁶ However, since the challenge Hale receives ultimately results in his death, we see figured in Brighton Rock the inadequacy of such a simple method of reading.

This possibility is confirmed in the larger investigation of reading that is enacted in the novel. As the detective, Ida is the reader of the fictions that Pinkie creates to explain Hale's, Spicer's, and, though it does not occur, Rose's deaths. In producing these fictions, Pinkie uses tangible signs which are meant to mislead their reader. The cards he has Spicer lay along Hale's route are meant to stand as the visible traces of Hale's presence, as Hale's signature. Similarly, in preparing the story of Rose's suicide, Pinkie uses a note that Rose herself has written and insists that she "add a piece" to explain her death (231); for Rose, this involves "signing away more than her life" (227) because in committing suicide she commits a mortal sin which will, according to her belief, damn her. But in both instances, and particularly in the latter, the creation of a fiction is explicitly tied to the production

of a written text, and in this way the act of detection that involves the reading of Pinkie's texts mirrors the activity of Greene's reader and of reading in general.

As the novel's investigator, Ida is, like any detective in mystery fiction, already a figure identified with the reader. She, too, must sift the stories that emerge from her interrogations of numerous witnesses--Molly, the bartender, the police, Crab, Cubitt, Dallow, and, most importantly, Rose--for traces of an underlying, suppressed narrative that tells the story of Hale's death. In Brighton Rock the identification between the detective and the reader is strengthened by explicit references to Ida as an interpreter of written texts. This identification is made early in the novel in Ida's interpretation of the ouija board's messages (43-44), but we also see it in her assertion that Tate's mistake of writing "Black Dog" for "Black Boy" means "Care" (70) and in her reading of the police report on Hale's death (79). However, what the narrative stresses about Ida's particular method of reading is her certainty and her confidence in her own interpretive skills. In the midst of a conversation between Phil Corkery and Ida, we are told that "[i]n every word either of them uttered she detected the one meaning" (145). Similarly, the text emphasizes Ida's past experience as a reader:

She said slowly over to herself: ". . . Brighton
Rock . . ." The clue would have seemed

hopeless to many women, but Ida Arnold had been trained by the Board. Queerer things than that had spidered out under her fingers and Old Crowe's: with complete confidence her mind began to work. (163)

For Ida, texts "must mean something" (44), which is to say, given the importance she attaches to being right, that they must have an unequivocal and determinable sense which closes itself off from ambiguity and plurality. To write "Black Dog" instead of "Black Boy" means "care" and no further explanation is seen by Ida as necessary nor is one forthcoming.

However, Brighton Rock shows Ida's approach to reading to be limiting and even self-reflecting. Sherlock Holmes may be able to assert confidently in A Study in Scarlet that "rache" means "revenge", but fifty years later Ida's equally confident assertions are opened to questioning and doubt. Not only is Ida's authority as a detective undercut by her self-righteous sense of justice and pagan sensibility in the face of Pinkie's and Rose's religious awareness (the text draws attention to her "old and vulgarized Grecian name" [16]), but her very certainty in matters of interpretation embodies a delusive sense of the world and of texts: Ida's conclusions are often both error-ridden and misguided. Certainly she finally tracks Pinkie down, but her understanding of the circumstances surrounding Hale's death

remains vague. Indeed, as the novel progresses Ida explains Hale's death as suicide (44, 75-76), murder (163), and the result of a heart attack brought on by fear (197). Nowhere in the text, however, is an account of Hale's death given, although a number of critics such as De Vitis (68), Sherry (636), and Wright suggest otherwise by stating that Hale choked to death on a piece of Brighton rock candy which was pushed down his throat.²⁷ As Ida realizes, "Brighton Rock" is undoubtedly a clue to the circumstances the murder, but its meaning remains enigmatic. Greene's readers also regard "Brighton Rock" as a significant piece of information, since it is both the novel's title and a recurring phrase in the narrative, although just how it is significant is open to interpretation. Ida's last conclusions about Hale's death, then, remain an unconfirmed fiction.

Similarly, Ida's understanding of Pinkie and Rose is inhibited by both Ida's lack of a religious sense and by her adherence to a middle-class vision of the world. Unable to see otherwise, Ida assumes that her world is the only world (Sharrock 94). She cannot see what is not part of her experience and so she is blind to the dark side of Brighton--the poverty, the crime, the early deaths of so many young people.²⁸ For this reason, too, she is completely ignorant of the knowledge that comes with the experience of poverty.

The point is driven home at the end of Ida's second of three encounters with Rose:

"He doesn't love you [Rose]."

"I don't care," the childish voice stubbornly murmured.

"What do you mean, you don't care?"

"I love him."

"You're acting morbid," Ida said. "If I was your mother I'd give you a good hiding. What'd your father and mother say if they knew?"

"They wouldn't care."

"And how do you think it will all end?"

"I don't know."

"You're young. That's what it is," Ida said, "romantic. I was like you once. You'll grow out of it. All you need is a bit of experience." The Nelson Place eyes stared back at her without understanding: driven to her hole the small animal peered out at the bright and breezy world: in the hole were murder, copulation, extreme poverty, fidelity and the love and fear of God: but the small animal had not the knowledge to deny that only in the glare and open world outside was something which people called experience.

(123)

By invoking the authority of Rose's parents, Ida reveals her own particular middle-class conception of family life. She never realizes that families in Nelson Place, where Rose grew up, and in Paradise Piece, where Pinkie was raised, are conditioned by their poverty. When, in the novel's penultimate section--a location in the detective narrative that is traditionally the site of the detective's summation that concludes the story--Ida sits back with her friend Clarence and summarizes the case, she asserts that "[w]hat [Rose] needs at a time like that is her mother and dad" (243). This assertion immediately renders the narrator's comment, "Ida Arnold had an answer for everything" (243), ironic since we are aware of the nature of Rose's parents: we have seen how they are brought out of one of their "moods" (141) with no less than the sale of their daughter to Pinkie for fifteen guineas (143). Given this knowledge, Ida can hardly be credited with an understanding of Rose's experience.

Where Ida's reading of Rose collapses is in Ida's failure to recognize how her reading is determined by her own pre-conceptions. Her dubious assessment of what is good for Rose is just one illustration of this, but another is more explicitly tied to the way Ida reads written texts. In interpreting the ouija board's "Fresuicilleye", Ida explains: "'it's clear as clear. Fre is short for Fred and Suici for Suicide and Eye; that's what I always say--an eye

for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. . . . See that Eye. That as good as tells me what to do" (44). Here, Ida's interpretation of "eye" reflects her own ideology based on a conception of Old Testament justice. In other words, Ida reads what she is programmed to read: she creates the text, as it were, in her own image. The other parts of Ida's interpretation here are equally questionable in light of her subsequent investigation; "Fre" may be a cipher for Fred (though this is not Hale's real name), but "suici" as "suicide" is wrong given the information she uncovers about Hale's death. As well, the two "L's" remain enigmatic since Ida cannot interpret them at this point. Towards the end of the book, she revises her reading of the board's text and concludes that "[t]he Board had foreseen it all--Sui, its own word for the scream, the agony, the leap [of Pinkie]" (245). Significantly, however, the two "L's" remain unaccounted for: Ida's reading, despite her own terrible certainty (222), is incomplete, as any reading must be.

If Brighton Rock demonstrates the limitations of reading, it also insists upon the necessity of reading. Just as Chesterton described every detail within the urban landscape as a sign to be read by the detective in his or her search for truth, so is every detail within a detective story of potential significance to the reader's interpretation of the narrative. In Brighton Rock the experience of the world is figured in terms of reading; the

world of Brighton is explicitly a world of text. Rose's father's face is "marked deeply with the hieroglyphics of pain and patience and suspicion" (142); "the edge of the sea [is] like a line of writing in whitewash: big sprawling letters" (152); and Ida, herself, is likened by the narrative to an enigmatic text that insists it be read: "she stood there like a wall at the end of an alley scrawled with the obscene chalk messages of an enemy" (196). In this context, reading becomes an unavoidable activity linked to power; those best able to read or even to offer convincing and authoritative readings are those who exercise power in this world. Both Ida and the police are confident in their interpretations of clues and events. The police, assigned the task of interpreting evidence in order to determine whether or not a crime has been committed, produce their own reading of Hale's death. Their report presents a univocal interpretation of the details of the death and so preserves their power because in their eyes and in the eyes of the society the case is solved. The closing of the case thus maintains an impression of efficiency which, in turn, justifies the authority conferred upon the police.

Ida's own certain reading of events is no less powerful. Her investigation is the motivating pressure behind Pinkie's actions: Rose sees Ida as "the explanation" for Pinkie's behaviour (196) and Dallow blames Ida for what happens in the novel (236). As well, Ida's belief in her

own righteousness gives her power over those like Rose and, to a lesser extent, Pinkie who are less sure of their interpretive skills. For Pinkie, Rose, Cubitt, Dallow, and Spicer, Ida is frightening because they cannot read her: "'She scares me," Rose whispered. 'I don't know what she wants'" (112). Ida and Phil Corkery are enigmas for Pinkie's gang because the two of them cannot be placed in any context that would provide an interpretive key for a reading of them. "'Who are you?' Rose implored her. 'Why do you interfere with us? You're not the police'" (196).²⁹ The question of who Ida is plagues Pinkie (100, 127), Rose (138, 196), and Dallow (232); none is able to read her, and so Ida has power over them because she believes in her ability to decode the texts they present. In one sense, Ida's power is apparent in the ease with which she is able to gain the confidences of men; in another sense, her power is clearly seen in that Pinkie is pressured into killing Spicer and into attempting to kill Rose, in that Dallow is persuaded to help rescue Rose, and in that Rose is returned to her parents by Ida (243).

A similar situation wherein power is linked to the ability to produce an authoritative reading of texts is played out in the relationship between Pinkie and Rose. The source of Pinkie's power over Rose is, in part, his confidence in his reading of things and his corresponding belief that one can construct univocal fictions that will be

read in only one way. Rose, on the other hand, is uncertain and unable to read the various texts in the world she confronts:

She went cautiously down--seven o'clock--what
furious faces--in the hall a ball of paper
scuffled under her feet. She smoothed it out and
read a pencilled message: 'Lock your door. Have a
good time.' She didn't understand it: it might as
well have been in code--she assumed it must have
something to do with this foreign world where you
sinned on a bed and people lost their lives
suddenly and strange men hacked at your door and
cursed you in the night. (190)

To Rose, Pinkie is both knowledgeable and accurate in his readings. In contrast to her own textual ignorance, he is able to manipulate texts and language for his own ends. Hence, he can deceive Rose into believing that he loves her and convince her that suicide is the only way to escape the prospect of the two of them being separated.

He watched her closely while he did his sleight of hand passing off his idea as hers. "I got the car all ready. We could go out into the country where no one would hear . . ." He measured her terror carefully and before she could pass the card back to him, he changed his tone. "That's only if the worst comes to the worst." The phrase intrigued

him: he repeated it: the worst--that was the stout woman with her glassy righteous eye coming up the smoky road--to the worst--and that was drunken ruined Mr Prewitt watching from behind the curtains for just one typist. (213)

As Pinkie realizes, language is a source of power because it can direct the actions of others, and for this reason he insists on Rose adding a piece to her suicide note because he wants others--Ida and the police--to read his fiction in a certain way; and, in this regard, Pinkie shares Ida's conception of reading. Like her, he assumes that a text will direct its reader to a single interpretation.

However, the novel illustrates that the power both Pinkie and Ida think they have is illusory because it is based on its own fiction of univocal reading; despite her claims and his intentions, their sense of reading is limited and incomplete. Not mindful of his own belief that "it [is] the little things which [trip] you up" (27), Pinkie continues to attempt to construct readerly texts that will close off all but one reading. But, as quickly becomes apparent, "little things" in these texts, such as Spicer's leaving one of Kolley Kibber's cards in Snow's, Spicer's being photographed, Rose's realizing that Spicer was not Kolley Kibber, and a host of other things open Pinkie's fictions to other ways of reading. Consequently, as each of Pinkie's fictions reveals its status as a fiction, Pinkie is

compelled to create another fiction which will both account for and cover up the weaknesses in the previous fiction. His efforts to conceal the facts of Hale's death lead him to kill Spicer, which necessitates efforts to hide the truth about Spicer's death which, in turn, lead to the fiction of Rose's suicide. The chain of fictions could go on without end--something Pinkie despairingly acknowledges: "there wasn't any end to what he had begun" (106).³⁰ Each murder that he commits and each corresponding fiction that he constructs are attempts to control the reading of the initial crime because each seeks to be the final "true" account of what happened, though this status is elusive.

In the case of Ida, the text makes it clear that her certainty rests upon gaps in her reading and a blindness to the interpretive effects of her own desires. This limitation in her reading, as has been observed, is seen first in her interpretation of "Fresuicilleye", but it is also explicitly pointed out to us by Phil Corkery's criticism of Ida:

"But you're so terribly certain about things, Ida. You go bursting in . . . Oh, you mean well, but how do we know the reasons he may have had . . . And besides," he accused her, "you're only doing it because it's fun." (222)

Ultimately, Ida never does discover the reasons for Hale's death, though as readers we understand that in some way Hale

shares responsibility for Kite's death. And, here again, one is able to see Ida's inadequacy, which helps to undermine one's confidence in both her certainty and in her authority as a figure of justice.

In linking power to the construction of readerly texts and authoritative readings and then in exposing the impossibility of this construction, Brighton Rock expresses a radical scepticism of any person or institution that claims for itself the ability to discern and present a single meaning or truth. And it is in this context that the priest's final comments to Rose about no one being able to conceive of "the . . . appalling . . . strangeness of the mercy of God" (246) have their place as the authority of Church doctrine is also questioned.¹¹ The consequences of this kind of scepticism are, indeed, very far reaching since it undermines the basis of any kind of authority whether political, religious, or critical. In this way Brighton Rock, like A Gun for Sale, urges a method of reading that can guard against both political and intellectual domination.

THE CONFIDENTIAL AGENT

Greene's next published novel The Confidential Agent picks up where Brighton Rock leaves off. Here, too, the world is explicitly figured as a text, so how one reads is

again made an issue of vital importance. From the novel's outset, the world is seen, as in Brighton Rock, in terms of writing: D.'s memories of England are "rather literary" (9); an organization can have the wrong initial letters (10); a child D. sees is "like writing so illegible you didn't even try to decipher it" (11); and we are told that "[n]ow there [are] so many varieties of economic materialism, so many initial letters" (56). Similarly, the fact that three of the book's characters--D., L., and K.--are identified only by initials underscores the textual nature of this world.³¹ When we are told that D. and L. are "separated by different initial letters" (11), our attention is drawn not only to their different names but also to their opposing organizations and ideologies, for these too are figured as texts.

As in Brighton Rock, it is essential in the world of The Confidential Agent for one to develop and practice a radically sceptical method of reading; but, as the situation of D. makes clear, such a practice has its own set of difficulties:

You could trust nobody but yourself, and sometimes you were uncertain whether after all you could trust yourself. They didn't trust you, any more than they had trusted the friend with the holy medal; they were right then, and who was to say whether they were not right now? You--you were a

prejudiced party; the ideology was a complex affair; heresies crept in . . . He wasn't certain that it wasn't right for him to be watched. After all, there were aspects of economic materialism which, if he searched his heart he did not accept . . . And the watcher--was he watched? He was haunted for a moment by the vision of an endless distrust. In an inner pocket, a bulge over the breast, he carried what were called credentials, but credence no longer meant belief. (10)

Essentially, D. finds himself caught between different fictions, knowing that in any text there will always be the "heresies" that prohibit unquestioning acceptance of a single revealed reading or interpretation. As well, the point pressed here implies the ideologic consequences of D.'s scepticism: action of any kind becomes impossible as the subject freezes between two poles, uncertain even of the self.³³

Within this frame of a potentially paralysing indeterminacy, D. finds that the only solution is to choose the fiction he wants to believe while acknowledging its status as a fiction open to various interpretations.³⁴ D., like the writer of the thirties, knows he may be wrong, "[o]nly history can tell that" (60); but, if life is not to become "impossible" (32), he must believe that the truth can be discerned, though it may elude his or anyone else's

understanding: "It [the problem of choosing] wasn't so much a question of morality as a question of simply existing" (32).

The difficulty with this position is that the fiction one chooses determines one's experience of the world. In D.'s case, the fact that he chooses a side, an ideology, brings him into a world of melodramatic conflict where all things are perceived as being involved in that conflict. "He had imagined that the suspicion which was the atmosphere of his own life was due to civil war, but he began to believe that it existed everywhere: it was part of human life. . . . It was as if the whole world lay in the shadow of abandonment" (64). As the text frequently asserts, "He [D.] carried the war within him. Wherever D. was, there was a war. . . . Danger was a part of him" (9-10); and, given this perspective, the ship he travels to England on reminds him of a "hearse" (9), and its deck is "like a map marked with trenches" (10). As the plot of the narrative quickly develops, D.'s "suspicion widen[s] to include the whole world" (37) with the result that he is forced into a position that is almost impossible to maintain:

He hadn't yet had time to absorb the information the child had given him--was the manageress another of his, as it were, collaborators, like K., anxious to see that he followed the narrow and virtuous path, or had she

been bribed by L.? Why, in that case, should he have been sent to this hotel by the people at home? His room had been booked; everything had been arranged for him, so that they should never lose contact. But that, of course, might all have been arranged by whoever it was gave information to L.--if anybody had. There was no end to the circles in this hell. (50)

As we will see with Rowe, because D. reads the world as if it were a melodrama, a thriller, the text foregrounds his status as a melodramatic character. Rose calls him "the mystery man" (27) and repeatedly urges him not to be melodramatic because she does not like it (19, 25) nor do others such as Lord Benditch, Forbes, Fetting, and Brigstock see the world that way (63, 94). On the other hand, D. attributes his own impulses to L. when he speculates that L. may also read melodramas, and so may also be acting as if he were in a melodrama (53). If this is true, then D. cannot help but play his part in the melodrama conceived by L. Textually, the consequence of D.'s reading of the world is the emergence of explicitly melodramatic moments that the narrative ties to D.'s thoughts:

this time he couldn't sleep at all--never before had he let those papers [his credentials as an agent] out of his possession. They had been with him all across Europe . . . He felt uneasy without

them. They were his authority and now he was nothing--just an undesirable alien, lying on a shabby bed in a disreputable hotel. Suppose the girl [Else, to whom D. has given his papers for safe keeping] should boast his confidence . . . suppose she should change her stockings and leave his papers lying about, forgotten . . . L., he thought grimly, would never have done a thing like that [give the papers to Else]. In a way the whole future of what was left of his country lay in the stockings of an underpaid child. (55)

Similarly, the moments before his meeting with Benditch exploit the mechanics of narrative suspense:

In three-quarters of an hour, he thought, as a clock told eleven-fifteen, everything would be decided one way or another. They would probably try to take some advantage of the fog. . . . He came downstairs with his heart knocking; he told himself in vain that nothing could happen in daylight, in London: he was safe. . . . He turned away, his heart still knocking in its cage, as if it were trying to transmit a message, a warning, in a code he didn't understand. . . . This was the best policed city in the world. . . . The fog came up all around him . . . He walked quickly, listening hard. . . . It couldn't take more than

half an hour. Everything would have to be decided soon. . . . The fog clouded everything; he listened for footsteps and heard only his own feet tapping on stone. The silence was not reassuring. . . . Somehow, somewhere, they would have to strike. (77-80)

Here, short, simple sentences and repeated references to the fog, to D's footsteps, to his heartbeat, and to an impending danger combine to create an atmosphere of menace, heighten tension, and foreground the melodrama. For D. the meeting with Benditch is crucial on two accounts: first, D. believes the fate of his country to be at stake; and, secondly, the conclusion of the meeting means the conclusion of his mission, and so represents a possible end for the narrative. However, the intrusion of another melodramatic event, the theft of his credentials by the butler, results in the failure of his meeting and the perpetuation of both his melodramatic reading of the world and the text's thriller plot; D., like Rowe, cannot escape the melodramatic narrative of which he is a part. Self-consciously, he cannot help wondering at the absurdity of his situation:

He was a confidential agent employed in an important coal deal on which the fate of a country might depend; she [Rose] was a young woman, the daughter of a peer whose coal he wanted, and the beloved, apparently, of a Mr Forbes who also

controlled several mines and kept a mistress in Shepherd's Market (that was irrelevant); a child had been murdered by the manageress or Mr K.-- action, presumably, on behalf of the rebels, although they were employed by his own people. That was the situation: a strategical and political--and criminal--one. (131)

Again, the narrative draws attention to its status as a thriller by summarizing and re-presenting important and not-so-important information for the reader. As it is expressed here, D.'s situation prefigures Rowe's in The Ministry of Fear when in a dream Rowe describes the world to his mother (MF 65); however, The Ministry of Fear, more than The Confidential Agent, makes it clear that the protagonist's vision of the world is based upon his reading of melodramatic texts typified by Charlotte M. Yonge's The Little Duke. Both D. and Rowe, however, are self-conscious enough to see that they are participating in fantastic adventures without being able to separate themselves from them.

As The Confidential Agent develops the link between how one elects to read the world and its apparent reality, stories are shown to be efficacious; that is, we see that fictions determine the conditions of the reality from which they supposedly stand apart. While this is most apparent in D.'s reading of events as incidents in the melodramatic

narrative of his own adventure, it is also seen in the effects stories have upon characters in the book. For instance, the text frequently draws attention to the fact that Else's reading of "twopenny trash" shapes her speech (70, 76, 114, 116). Similarly, her diary reveals that she sees her relationship with D. in terms of her experience with these texts (104-105). Again, as is the case with Ida Arnold and Arthur Rowe, Else's reading of events is conditioned by her predisposition which, in turn, is conditioned by her experience of other texts. In this respect, Else illustrates Barthes's notion of the reader as a product of texts finding in texts those elements which are already read.

A second illustration of fiction's power is seen in D.'s attempt to force K. to confess his role in Else's death. After following K. into the elevator of the Entrenationo Centre, D. begins to menace K. by stopping the elevator to tell a detective story which he says is written by someone named Goldthorb:

"One man killed another in a lift. Rang the lift down. Walked up the stairs. Rang the lift up and--before witnesses--discovered the body. Of course, luck was on his side. You have to have a fortunate hand for murder."

"You wouldn't dare."

"I was just telling you Goldthorb's story."

Mr K. said weakly, "There's no such man. The name's absurd."

"He wrote in Entrenationo, you see." (124)

As in The Ministry of Fear, narrative is used as a weapon. D. tells the Goldthorb story to frighten K., and, despite the story's invention, it has the desired effect: K. begins to reveal the circumstances of Else's murder. D. cannot know, however, that the fear he inspires will eventually kill K. This is not to suggest that the Goldthorb fiction is solely responsible for K.'s heart attack, but it is a contributing factor. Again, fiction, in this case explicitly a detective story, alters the reality outside of it.

Greene has said he wrote The Confidential Agent in a period of six weeks under the influences of benzedrine and the fear of war while he was also working on The Power and the Glory (WE 67-68). While the book does investigate some interesting questions, such as the role of intellectuals in the Spanish Civil War and, by extension, the coming war (Denning 87), it is not surprising given the circumstances of its composition that the novel goes over much of the ground Greene had already explored in A Gun for Sale and Brighton Rock. As he admits, "[t]he book moved rapidly because I was not struggling with my own technical problems: I was to all intents ghosting a novel by an old writer," who

was himself at an earlier point in his development as an author (WE 69).

The Confidential Agent may be Greene's last novel published in the 1930s, but it is certainly not the last to be shaped by the conditions of that decade. The Ministry of Fear picks up from The Confidential Agent and extends Greene's investigations of the relationship between the text and the world and of the reading experience beyond anything he had done previously or would do in the future: The Ministry of Fear is his most elaborate treatment of these issues and his most complicated use of the thriller.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FIVE

1. It is interesting to observe that Pryce-Jones, in his zeal to match R. W. B. Lewis's trilogy, should only consider the three "entertainments" in this regard when, as we have seen, the whole of Greene's fiction in the thirties is a part of this record as well.

2. The waste lands seen from trains are described in The Confidential Agent (159-60) where the names of mining villages offer ironic commentary on the world of the depression in both Wales and the northern parts of England where unemployment averaged 22.8% between 1929 and 1936 (Miles and Smith 17). Brighton's occult world is well-evoked in Brighton Rock, as Ida uses a ouija board and Cubitt gets his fortune told from a mechanical machine. Slough has been immortalized in John Betjeman's 1937 poem "Slough", whose first stanza reads:

Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough
It isn't fit for humans now,
There isn't grass to graze a cow
Swarm over, Death!

Here violence is not only expected but prayed for. Similarly, Greene in The Lawless Roads suggests the need for violence as a tool of purgation (224).

3. The question of spy fiction's influence on reality and reality's influence on the fiction is certainly complex. (See David Stafford, The Silent Game: The Real World of Imaginary Spies [Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1988] for a discussion of this relationship.) Our Man in Havana deals with this most explicitly in that Wormold's fabricated network of spies is taken seriously by both his own and the other side which compels Wormold to act as a real spy. The result is that innocent people are killed because of coincidental similarities to Wormold's fictional characters. After Wormold's fiction is unmasked by British intelligence, Wormold is given the task of instructing young members of the intelligence force in how to run a spy network. Hence, Wormold's fictions determine the reality and so perpetuate the fiction-making process.

4. Greene has stated, "I don't think that Pinkie was guilty of mortal sin because his actions were not committed in defiance of God, but arose out of the conditions to which he had been born" (OM 158-59).

5. In linking the armaments industry to the coming of the next war, Greene is reflecting a position commonly held in the thirties which grew out of the cynical belief that the arms industry was responsible for World War I. See Ivan Melada's work in this regard in "Graham Greene and the Muritions

Makers: The Historical Context of A Gun for Sale" and in Guns for Sale: War and Capitalism in English Literature, 1851-1939. The link between war and financial prosperity is also made clear in a discussion among the policemen in A Gun for Sale:

"You can't expect people to buy gas masks at twenty-five bob a time, but we're having a raid the day after tomorrow with smoke bombs from Hanlow aerodrome, and anyone found in the street without a mask will be carted off by ambulance to the General Hospital. So anyone who's too busy to stop indoors will have to buy a mask. Midland Steel are supplying all their people with masks, so it'll be business as usual there."

"Kind of blackmail," the superintendent said. "Stay in or buy a mask. The transport companies have spent a pretty penny on masks." (71)

6. In this context, it is worth pointing out that Raven tells Anne that he killed a race-course gangster named "Battling Kite" (GS 127). In Brighton Rock we discover that a gang leader named Kite was killed by Colleoni's mob. Hence, a relationship between Colleoni, the wealthy gangster of Brighton Rock, and Sir Marcus of A Gun for Sale is drawn by Greene since both men use Raven as a hired killer.

7. Sir Marcus's origins are similarly described a couple of pages later:

Everyone knew a lot about Sir Marcus. The trouble was, all that they knew was contradictory. There were people who, because of his Christian name, believed that he was Greek; others were quite as certain that he had been born in a ghetto. His business associates said that he was of an old English family; his nose was no evidence either way; you found plenty of noses like that in Cornwall and the west country. His name did not appear in Who's Who, and an enterprising journalist who once tried to write his life found extraordinary gaps in registers; it wasn't possible to follow any rumour to its source. There was even a gap in the legal records of Marseilles where one rumour said that Sir Marcus as a youth had been charged with theft from a visitor to a bawdy house. Now he sat . . . one of the richest men in Europe. . . . No one even knew his age, unless perhaps his dentist . . . (109)

8. It is, perhaps, an indication of Poe's influence on A Gun for Sale that Mather, like the narrator of "The Man in the Crowd," prefers to search for his clues in crowds (86), while Raven, too, stays in "the most crowded streets" so as not to feel conspicuous (88).

9. Mather's ignorant belief that events on the continent won't affect England is shared by Bates, the union leader in The Confidential Agent who asks D., "What's this [the fact that coal will be sold to the fascists in D.'s country] got to do with me?" (168). Similarly, in The Ministry of Fear Rowe decides at one point to give up his investigation, concluding: "It's nothing to do with me: it's their war, not mine. . . . It's not my war" (77); but as Rowe comes to realize, "the world is a small cramped place" (89). What each of these novels reflects is the erroneous nature of such a limited reading of events while at the same time offering a critique of British isolationist sentiment.

10. In It's a Battlefield and The Power and the Glory characters are identified by their functions: the Assistant Commissioner, the Priest, and the Lieutenant for example.

11. In this context, Mather's story becomes a variation of Raven's story. Significantly, Mather's background has points in common with Raven's: both include the suicide of a family member. Similarly, both Mather and Raven feel a desperate need to belong and be a part of a wider context: Mather fulfills this desire by being a member of the police force; Raven, however, is unable to find the fulfillment of being part of a community.

12. The question of locating the narrative's origins becomes even more complex when we consider the beast fable of the cat and the fox that Anne tells to Raven. Although the text of A Gun for Sale does not explicitly comment on Anne's fable, it seems clear that we are to link the participants in the fable--the cat, the fox, and the dogs--with characters in the novel; thus A Gun for Sale again acknowledges its status as a reinscription of a much earlier narrative.

13. Kunkel (107), Hall (116), and O'Prey (73) all are critical of Ida's blatantly secular outlook, while Lewis (23), Kelly (41), and Hall (116) are three of many critics who think of Pinkie as a tragic figure.

14. See, for example, Davis (23), Kunkel (109), O'Prey (71), Stratford ("Master" 72), Webster (101), and Zabel (36).

15. "14 And unto the angel of the church of the La-od-i-ceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; 15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. 16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3: 14-16).

16. In a 1934 essay, "Frederick Rolfe: Edwardian Inferno", Greene echoes Eliot's remarks: "The greatest saints have been men with more than a normal capacity for evil, and the most vicious men have sometimes narrowly evaded sanctity" (CE 131).

17. Orwell astutely observed as much in his review of The Heart of the Matter. Orwell writes that he finds Brighton Rock improbable (106), and he accuses Greene of being part of a "cult of the sanctified sinner", which for Orwell seems entirely "frivolous": "underneath it there probably is a weakening of belief, for when people really believed in Hell, they were not so fond of striking graceful attitudes on its brink" (107).

18. Lambert suggests that to "deny [Ida] a 'soul' because she doesn't live on the Catholic level of good and evil sounds like the religious equivalent of racial prejudice" (148). King notes that, "[a]ccording to Greene's theology, Ida should be condemned; yet the book leaves her position deliberately undecided" (233).

19. Pinkie grew up in a Brighton slum ironically called Paradise Piece, but the place has been demolished, and he is unable to return to it. Insofar as Pinkie is a figure of evil, the text describes him in terms that suggest obscure, satanic origins. Of particular importance in this regard are descriptions of Pinkie's eyes "touched with the annihilating eternity from which he had come" (21). Elsewhere his eyes are described as "ageless" (23). A number of other details contribute to a sense of Pinkie as evil incarnate: his birth is not registered anywhere (166) and his phone number is, significantly, "Three sixes" (48). Allusions to Marlowe's Dr. Faustus confirm the implication that Pinkie is an inhabitant of hell. See Robert O. Evans, "The Satanist Fallacy of Brighton Rock", for a discussion of Pinkie as a satanic figure.

20. In a sense, Rose's helplessness before Pinkie's evil is completely logical in that, if we think of her as a figure of an absolute "Good", she cannot, by her nature, condemn or punish. Rose and Pinkie share a "dark theology" (114) in which, as Pinkie is surprised to realize, Rose's goodness completes his evil: the two of them "[live] in the same country, [speak] the same language, [come] together like old friends, [feel] the same completion" (127). Again we venture into Greene's potentially Manichean vision: "the world . . . lay there always, the ravaged and disputed territory between the two eternities" (139).

21. Edgar Wallace's work, as we have already noted, was both hugely popular and much admired by Greene. Netta Syrett, now largely forgotten, wrote a number of very popular books some

of which were for and about children; her name, then, takes on an ironic significance in the context of Greene's account of Pinkie who is referred to as "the Boy" throughout the text, for Syrett "delight[ed] to take for her plot-idea the eccentric or the child of genius faced with the unexpectedness of life" (H. Williams 467). Syrett also possessed a keen interest in psychical phenomena (Lester 92-93). The Good Companions (1929), by J. B. Priestley, and Sorrell and Son (1925), by Warwick Deeping, were both tremendously popular and reassuring novels. Throughout the thirties, Greene was frequently critical of Priestley, whom he satirized in Stamboul Train; however, in 1940 he paid tribute to Priestley for his role as a commentator on the BBC in the aftermath of Dunkirk (Reflections 87-89). Deeping's novel dealt with the plight of veterans of the war and an emerging sense of class conflict. Both Sorrell and Son and The Good Companions are referred to in a number of places in Brighton Rock. At the end of Greene's novel, Ida returns home to find "Warwick Deeping wasn't in a bookshelf and The Good Companions was on its side" (244).

22. Again, it is interesting to remember that in A Gun for Sale Raven's past includes working for a Brighton race gang: the murder of Kite is one of the things Raven confesses to Anne.

23. One could, of course, reverse this and say that the criminal's story is interrupted by the story of the investigation. As well, it is interesting to observe that Pinkie, too, struggles with an enigma which is the question of Ida's identity, a problem that Pinkie and his followers turn to frequently in the text (for example, 100, 197, 232). In this way, too, the stories of the investigation and of the investigated are inverted.

24. This coexistence is seen particularly in Ida's three encounters with Rose wherein the two stories of detection and crime meet.

25. "Kolley Kibber" alludes to the eighteenth-century dramatist and poet Colley Cibber, who was poet laureate from 1730-1757 and is generally considered one of the worst poets to hold the post. (He is attacked by Pope in The Dunciad.) That Greene echoes the name of an author, particularly an author who is perhaps better known for his satiric portrait in Pope's Dunciad than for his own work, again foregrounds questions of textuality from the opening pages of Brighton Rock. For a brief discussion of the Kolley Kibber promotion see Michael Routh's "'Kolley Kibber'--Newspaper Promotion in Brighton Rock."

26. As we will see, a similar situation opens The Ministry of Fear when Arthur Rowe says, "Don't tell me the past. Tell me the future," to Mrs. Bellairs, the fortune-teller (16).

27. David G. Wright offers the most complete discussion of Hale's death in "Greene's Brighton Rock".

28. Aside from Pinkie, Hale, and Spicer, who all die in the course of the novel, various young women are mentioned periodically as the casualties of Brighton's poverty and crime: Peggy Baron, scarred with vitriol (47); Violet Crowe, "violated and buried under the West Pier" (142); Annie Collins, suicide on the rail tracks (165); and Molly Carthew, also a suicide (199). As well, the News of the World that Pinkie reads bears the headline, "Assault on Schoolgirl in Epping Forest" (200). In this context, the experience of Rose, who is tempted to suicide by Pinkie, becomes in many ways typical of Brighton's poor, young women.

29. The point is similarly seen in a discussion about Phil Corkery that takes place between Pinkie and Rose:

"Has any one been around again talking, asking questions?"

"That man the woman was with."

"A bogey?"

"I don't think so. He said his name was Phil."

"You seem to have done the asking."

"They all tell me things."

"I don't understand it," the Boy [Pinkie] said. "What do they want if they aren't bogies?"

(111)

30. The same acknowledgement is implicit in his twice repeated question, "Have I got to have a massacre?" (201, 242). Earlier in the text, Pinkie thinks along similar lines: "Had he got to massacre a world?" (175). In a sense, this chain of fictions is perpetuated beyond Pinkie's final attempt (his authoring of Rose's suicide) by Ida, who uses a fiction of her own in lying about the arrest of Prewitt to convince Dallow to lead her to Pinkie.

31. What this does is force a reconsideration at the end of the novel of the whole problem of Ida's moral inferiority when placed alongside the religious sense of Pinkie and Rose. In this light it is, perhaps, significant that it is the priest who suggests that Ida may have been right (246).

32. Reference is also made in a discussion between D. and L. to "Z.'s pictures" (29). Of course, by using letters to identify characters, Greene is able to avoid revealing the nationalities of his characters--a move that probably has its

origins in his desires to present the story in terms of a general situation not unique to any one nation and to avoid possible libel suits.

33. Greene's own mistrust of dogmatic positions is also implied here. Unlike many of his contemporaries who adopted clear partisan positions, Greene's response to the Spanish Civil War was complex. He did not respond to the Left Review's "Authors Take Sides" campaign, and he has since stated that he found that he could support neither side in the conflict (Couto 208). His contemporary statement on the crisis is made indirectly in his essay "The Apostles Intervene" (CE 230-234) where he is critical of the "hysterical partisans" who responded to the "Authors Take Sides" campaign with "the sweeping statements, the safe marble gestures, the self-importance of our own 'thirties" (230-231).

34. In this respect, D. differs from Dr. Bellows, the inventor of the Entrenationo Language and founder of the Entrenationo Language Centre. Bellows's dream of a universal language is based on the mistaken notion that differences between languages, not difference within language, create misunderstanding and conflict. Bellows assumes that language and texts can only be interpreted in one way, and that misunderstandings and conflicts would be avoided if everyone read in the same way. As D. realizes, however, Bellows fails because reading is not so straightforward a process. (Rennet, in The Ministry of Fear finds this as well.) Where Bellows's dream collapses is in his inability to recognize that differences in meaning can emerge within the same language or even within the same word.

Chapter Six

THE MINISTRY OF FEAR

John Spurling points out rather derisively that The Ministry of Fear is "like a summary of Greene's political thrillers in the 1930s" (39), and to an extent this is true. However, the novel does more than rework familiar material; it is also a book that picks up from Brighton Rock and The Confidential Agent to develop and explore the implications of a world of texts and of the role of fictions. Perhaps because it was written during the war, The Ministry of Fear radically restructures conventional modes of literary realism; it is as though the release of tension that accompanied the explosion of the war's long-awaited violence freed Greene from the textual restraints of his earlier fiction. The "funny and fantastic" thriller that results (WE 74) moves easily among various levels of textual play while at the same time foregrounding the conventions of the thriller with their attendant enigmas, suspense, and danger.

Although one of Greene's favorites (WE 78), The Ministry of Fear, like most of his books, has had a mixed reception from critics. Many, like Spurling, dismiss the novel as a weak or, at best, an uneven rehearsal of earlier concerns; others are more generous and praise it as the finest of the "entertainments" and one of Greene's best novels.¹ Again, much of this praise or condemnation is tied to the novel's perceived status as light or escapist work;

yet with The Ministry of Fear Greene succeeds in producing what is, and remains, one of his most skilful and complex novels. As "the most fantastic and most personal of the 'entertainments'" (Sharrock 151),² the book explicitly engages the question of the ideology of popular literature while, at the same time, it restructures the popular formula of the thriller. As Couto observes, the artistry of The Ministry of Fear "lies in breaking the mould of the thriller to integrate concerns that are tragic and spiritual" (105). More specifically, Panek suggests that The Ministry of Fear "demonstrates that detective novels are impossible" (124), and so the novel justifies its status as a thriller, which gives us a valuable approach to Greene's most ambitious handling of the form.

There is much that The Ministry of Fear shares with Greene's earlier texts. As in A Gun for Sale and Brighton Rock, its principle investigator, Arthur Rowe, is presented as an equivocal figure whose moral authority as a pursuer of truth and justice is severely undercut by his own belief that he is a murderer for having performed the mercy-killing of his wife. Because he is sentenced lightly by the courts and only temporarily confined to an asylum, Rowe is not clearly defined as a murderer by the society at large, although most of his friends have deserted him. Not being considered a murderer, however, does not alleviate his sense of guilt; and, as the novel opens, he is seeking "to mislay

the events of twenty years" (13) and to return to a time of innocence before his marriage. This desire draws him to the charity bazaar, and this action pulls him into the novel's plot; as the text remarks, the fête gives Rowe the feeling that "the familiar pattern of life that afternoon might be altered for ever" (13).

As The Ministry of Fear develops, Rowe's feeling is proven to be a harbinger of what is to come. Similarly, his desire to "mislay" twenty years of his life is granted later in the text when a suitcase supposedly filled with books explodes causing the loss of his memory. Within the fantastic world of The Ministry of Fear Rowe's dreams and desires are actualized in the plot of the novel: his own imagined plots become his reality, which is to say that at one level his own fictions determine the novel's fiction. As this dynamic works itself out, the reality Rowe experiences is shown to be highly questionable being not only the product of fictions but also explicitly figured as a text, another fiction, which is specifically a thriller since "thrillers," we are told, "are like life" (65).

Because Rowe loses his memory, The Ministry of Fear develops the idea of the investigation of a murder as an investigation of the self that we first saw Greene use in "Murder for the Wrong Reason". In The Ministry of Fear, the pattern is complicated by the fact that Rowe, though he may be a murderer for killing his wife, investigates an

expanding series of crimes that are largely unconnected with his wife's death. Beginning his investigation in order to learn the reasons behind Poole's attempt to murder him, Rowe finds himself searching for the supposed murderer of Cost for a microfilm of secret government documents, and for the leader of a Nazi spy ring operating in Britain. In that Rowe's investigation moves outward from the personal to the national, it conforms to a pattern typically found in the thriller. Like Hannay in Buchan's The Thirty-Nine Steps, Rowe spends much of the novel thinking he must clear himself of a murder he did not commit; the difference between the two is that in Rowe's case no murder has been committed.

Rowe's many pursuits are violently thrust into the background with the explosion mid-way in the novel that causes his amnesia. The second half begins with a seemingly new character, Richard Digby, who has lost his memory in a blast during an air-raid. Digby, we quickly realize, is in fact Rowe, and the rest of the book develops his attempt to reconstruct his past, a process likened by the text to the assembly of a "jig-saw puzzle" (169); central to this reconstruction is the story of his killing of his wife. Hence, in The Ministry of Fear, the investigation of the self is tied to the investigation of a murder, but the murder of Rowe's wife is not the crime that initiates events in the novel--except insofar as Rowe's desire "to mislay the

events of twenty years" (13) is partially the result of his guilt over his wife's death.

For Rowe the fête is the place where, figuratively, three roads cross. It calls to him "like innocence" because it is "entangled in childhood" (11). It is a visible sign in the present that contains within it not only an expectation "that the familiar pattern of life that afternoon might be altered for ever" (13) but also the experience of the past: the past coexists with the future within Rowe's memory in the present "as if Providence had led [Rowe] to exactly this point to indicate the difference between then and now" (15). Linking past and present is Charlotte Yonge's The Little Duke, a book Rowe purchases from one of the stalls in a gesture deliberately designed to be a repetition of the past, since he had purchased The Little Duke at a similar fête when he was a child.

Rowe's purchase of The Little Duke proves to be a significant moment because it figures in the narrative the entry of Rowe, and the reader, into a world of texts: immediately after his purchase Rowe reflects that the people at the bazaar "might be playing a part in an expensive morality for his sole benefit" (15). As a romance of adventure, Yonge's novel represents both the popular literature of the past and Rowe's adolescent dreams of heroism whose values he seeks to recover and live by, particularly in the novel's second half. However, the

narrative thoroughly discredits the ethos of the romantic adventure tale by contrasting it with the thriller world of war-ravaged London. Not only are the virtues of the Newbolt man, such as bravery, courage, loyalty, strength, faith (all illustrated in The Little Duke), shown to be lacking in the present, but they are also shown to be impossible to maintain. A. Couto observes, "The structure of the novel relates the form and the content of the adventure story to invert it . . . [;] its romance is hideously transformed" (107). The novel figures the process whereby the nineteenth-century romantic adventure is replaced by the thriller of the thirties and forties.³

Just as The Little Duke links past and present for Rowe, so does his request of the fortune-teller, "Don't tell me the past. Tell me the future" (16), bind the present to a future course of events that follows the plot of a thriller. Throughout The Ministry of Fear, the two popular forms of the adventure story and the thriller are continually held before the reader either thematically, in Rowe's thoughts which explicitly compare the two, or structurally, by means of the epigraphs for each chapter that are taken from The Little Duke.⁴ In this way, The Ministry of Fear specifically engages the issue of popular writing and argues for the more "realistic" form of the thriller, since it has the greater potential to render the wartime world of the blitz mimetically.

As The Ministry of Fear deals with it, the whole question of the thriller as the appropriate form for recording the experience of life during the blitz rests on the tautology involved in the paradox of self-inclusion. The war's reality makes the violence and treachery described in the novel credible, since the reality of the world outside the text is violent and treacherous. However, Rowe's declaration that "thrillers are like life . . . The world has been rerode by William Le Queux" (65) presents a self-justifying rationale for the thriller, while alerting the reader to parallels between the fictional plot of a thriller and the reality outside the text that is London during the war. Because of the war, The Ministry of Fear is able to present the thriller as a reflection of the anterior reality with unusual power. However, in that this reflection is contained within a thriller that describes the world in terms of a thriller, the sense of an anterior reality is lost, and in its place is put only another text. As the novel develops, similarities between the outside reality and thrillers allow the text to absorb the reality so that the world the novel describes is presented as a world of texts. Rowe's declaration made during a moment when "he [is] master of the dream" (65) cancels any sense of The Ministry of Fear as a mimetic portrayal of London life during wartime. Ultimately in the novel, reality can only be figured as a text taking its place within a text. After all, as the

narrative makes clear, contemporary history is something to be read, not experienced.

It is curious, then, to see that the novel has been praised for its realism. Couto suggests that "one could not find a better picture of the blitz than this novel gives" and adds that "The Ministry of Fear is studiously unmelodramatic, continuously realistic, and minutely observed" (Couto 106). Wolfe, in a similar fashion, praises Greene's portrayal of the psychological conditions of wartime England (102), while A. J. M. Smith calls the book "a kind of Kafkaesque parable of . . . wartime" (27). Greene himself stresses the novel's realism and its accuracy of detail in Ways of Escape. Despite saying that The Ministry of Fear was to be a "funny and fantastic thriller" (74), he wishes that "the espionage element had been less fantastically handled" (78): this work was supposed to be a novel (like the Innis book that he read on the way to West Africa in 1941) that would possess a realism that the English detective story did not have. Hence, it is no surprise that Greene should compliment himself on how well "the atmosphere of the blitz" is conveyed in The Ministry of Fear (WE 78); he even goes so far as to include as part of his remarks on the novel, in his "Introduction" to the novel for the Collected Edition of his works and then in Ways of Escape, a fragment of a journal that he kept during 1940-41. While the journal has a certain autobiographical and

historical interest in its own right, that Greene saw fit to include it seems to reflect his need to convince us of the veracity of the novel's presentation of reality. (Of course, just how valuable a novelist's journal is as evidence of veracity in his fiction is certainly a point open to question.)

There are, however, problems with Greene's approach to the novel in Ways of Escape. Since The Ministry of Fear itself declares reality to be a fiction, specifically a thriller, then Greene's strategy in Ways of Escape of emphasizing the novel's mimetic aspects denies, on one level, Rowe's view that life is like a fiction. At the same time, though, Greene implies in Ways of Escape that fiction can accurately mirror the world; but, if fiction can accomplish this mirroring and Greene's own novel is a thriller, then, on another level, his comments about The Ministry of Fear must be seen as supporting Rowe's sense of life as a thriller. The result is that we see Greene trying to have things both ways: the novel was to have "realism" while yet being "funny and fantastic". At this point, we again see the impossibility of separating the world of fictions, of text, from a world beyond the text.

This is not to downplay the fact that conditions in London during World War II were such that one might believe that things which are commonplace in thrillers were actually happening--that one's friend or co-worker was a spy, that

secret information was being passed out of the country, that high-ranking officials were covertly helping the enemy, or that political blackmail and murder were widespread. In a passage that could be describing Rowe's own experience, Paul Fussell notes the sense of life in wartime:

Even more than today, in wartime everything you might hear and read during the day might be false, planted to be passed on to deceive either you or the enemy. Living in wartime thus resembled living in a play, with nothing real or certain. You literally did not know for sure what was going on, and you had to take on faith the public appearance of things, costly as this might prove for perceptual and intellectual life. (Wartime 47)

Given this situation, Rowe's bewilderment at being drawn into the violence around him mirrors the experience of people in London in the early 1940s when anyone might seem a potential enemy: ". . . that little man with the books was in it too. What a lot of them there are", Rowe remarks, and Anna replies, "An awful lot. More every day" (101). For Rowe, however, the stigma attached to him by the killing of his wife exacerbates the common wartime experience:

When he came out of what wasn't called a prison, when His Majesty's pleasure had formally and quickly run its course, it had seemed to Rowe that

he had emerged into quite a different world--a secret world of assumed names, of knowing nobody, of avoiding faces, of men who leave a bar unobtrusively when other people enter. (47)

In a similar fashion, Rowe's view that life is like a thriller is apparently confirmed in the British Handbook of Irregular Warfare (1942): "Never give the enemy a chance; the days when we could practice the rules of sportsmanship are over. . . . Every soldier must be a potential gangster. . . . Remember you are out to kill" (qtd. in Wartime 284). Here, government authorities openly acknowledge the sense that the values of the Newbolt man, "the rules of sportsmanship," no longer apply. Rowe's conception of the world in terms of a fiction receives, in a sense, government acknowledgement of its truth, which again collapses the distinction between fiction and reality.

Yet to think of The Ministry of Fear only in terms of its evocation of a specific period is to ignore a large part of Greene's project in the novel. The novel places an inordinate emphasis upon the nature of texts: issues relating to reading and to the thriller as a form are figured in its plot and alluded to in its self-conscious references. The narrative presents the world as an assembly of texts under the rubric of a master text which follows the structure of the thriller. In this respect, Rowe's entry into the fête can again be read as figuring both his and the

reader's entry into the world of the text. For Rowe, the songs from the First World War mix with the memory of childhood excursions to similar fêtes to push him into a world of remembered experience that finds a correspondence in his present. Since Rowe's past is explicitly associated early in the narrative with his experience of a particular text, The Little Duke, the text of The Ministry of Fear stresses at its outset the role of other texts in both the narrative itself and the mind of Rowe.

While at the fête, Rowe passes over stalls containing, among other things, "second-hand Penguins for the Forces" and "books too shabby for the bookstall," one of which is The Little Duke, which he purchases (14). The scene finds a complement later in the novel when Rowe visits a used bookshop in order to watch the office of the Orthotex detective agency. Both moments give literal expression to the idea that Rowe inhabits a world of texts. Indeed, his purchase of The Little Duke in the novel's opening pages allegorizes not only his entrance into the world of texts but also his commitment to a form whose ideology powerfully influences his beliefs and actions, particularly though not exclusively in the novel's second half:

Rowe repressed for the sake of his companion a sense of exhilaration: he was happily drunk with danger and action. This was more like the life he had imagined years ago. He was helping in a

great struggle, and when he saw Anna again he could claim to have played a part against her enemies. He didn't worry very much about Stone; none of the books of adventure one read as a boy had an unhappy ending. And none of them was disturbed by a sense of pity for the beaten side. The ruins [the bombed city of London] from which they [Rowe and Prentice] emerged were only a heroic back-cloth to his personal adventure . . .

(176)

Certainly, after his loss of memory Rowe accepts the ideology of the pre-war adventure romance with greater ease since he has mentally returned to his adolescence; for instance, he thinks of "Pathfinder" and "Indian" (perhaps alluding to Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales but more generally to a host of adventure stories for boys) as he embarks on his schoolboy's search for Stone in the wing of the sick bay (136). However, even before Rowe is robbed of his past, his character is strongly marked by the ideology of adventure stories. At the fête, part of Mrs. Bellairs' reading describes Rowe as one who sometimes feels that he has "not been allowed a proper scope for [his] gifts. [He] want[s] to do great deeds, not dream them all day long" (16). Although we might not credit these remarks with truth, especially since they come from a fortune-teller at a charity bazaar who turns out to be a spy and, later, the

organizer of a séance at which a murder is faked, some of Bellairs' comments, such as the revelation of Rowe's sensitivity to pain and the statement that he has "made one woman happy" (16), are particularly pertinent given later developments in the narrative. In the first case, we discover that Rowe's highly developed sense of pity makes him acutely aware of others' sufferings; in the second case, it seems possible that Bellairs is referring to his wife, although the seer's remarks contribute to the sense of ambiguity that surrounds the killing of his wife, Alice. The possible confirmation of some parts of Bellairs' reading, in turn, lends credence to her evaluation of Rowe as one wishing to do "great deeds".⁶

Rowe's adolescent desires are also suggested by his sense of "kinship with the detective inspectors, the Big Five, My Famous Cases; he [is] a murderer and old-fashioned, he belong[s] to their world" (70). Similarly, he reserves the hope that his adolescent day-dreams may come true:

He had in those days imagined himself capable of extraordinary heroisms and endurances which would make the girl he loved forget the awkward hands and spotted chin of adolescence. Everything had seemed possible. One could laugh at day-dreams, but so long as you had the capacity to day-dream, there was a chance that you might develop some of the qualities of which you dreamed. It was like a

religious discipline: words however empty repeated can in time form a habit, a kind of unnoticed sediment at the bottom of the mind-- until one day to your own surprise you find yourself acting on the belief you thought you didn't believe in. (73)

The text goes on to tell us that "[s]ince the death of his wife Rowe had never day-dreamed" (73); yet, as the above description makes clear, subconscious desires may continue to have a tremendous influence on an individual's actions.

As a character, Rowe is presented as a figure imbued with the ideology of popular fiction. His sense of a "primitive idea of justice" (88) derives from the popular literature of his youth, typified by "stories of Captain Scott writing his last letters home. Oates walking into the blizzard . . . Damien among the lepers . . . a book called the Book of Golden Deeds by a woman called Yonge . . . The Little Duke" (162); and, in a sense, despite the knowledge gained from experience, Rowe continues to believe at some level in the values of this fiction:

God is good, the grown-up man or woman knows the answer to every question, there is such a thing as truth, and justice is as measured and faultless as a clock. Our heroes are simple: they are brave, they tell the truth, they are good swordsmen and they are never in the long run really defeated.

That is why no later books satisfy us like those which were read to us in childhood--for those promised a world of great simplicity of which we knew the rules . . . (89)

That Rowe continually rereads the books of his youth, such as The Little Duke, The Old Curiosity Shop, and David Copperfield only confirms the presence of their ideology, though it is repressed, within him.⁷ With the loss of his memory, the barriers that prevented him from acting in accord with this ideology are removed, and he openly accepts the role of the adventure hero--something that Hilfe did not count on: "'I thought I could deal with you quite easily until you lost your memory. That didn't work out right. You got so many illusions of grandeur, heroism, self-sacrifice, patriotism . . . '" (205).

The novel shows, however, that despite Rowe's success the romantic adventure hero has no place in the world of the modern thriller. "The Little Duke", with whom Rowe identifies and with whom we identify Rowe (through the epigraphs to the chapters), "is dead and betrayed and forgotten" (89). As the text acknowledges of the world of the thirties and forties (and the same can be said of the thriller in this period), "we cannot recognize the villain and we suspect the hero and the world is a small cramped place" (89).

In this respect, Greene's novel contrasts two kinds of popular literature and finds the one wanting. The old adventure story with its values of "sacrifice, courage [and] virtue" (73) is painfully inadequate as a form because it can no longer be accepted as realistic. As the experience of the war itself makes clear, "Courage smashes a cathedral, endurance lets a city starve, pity kills . . . we are trapped and betrayed by our virtues" (74); and Rowe, too, knows that "[o]ne doesn't necessarily kill because one hates" (132).

As in his earlier fiction, Greene holds the values of the Newbolt man up to scrutiny and rejects them; and, as part and parcel of this, he rejects the literary form that promotes those values. Although we have seen this as an ongoing project in many of Greene's texts, the narrative of The Ministry of Fear figures this process in Rowe's experience. In the latter part of the novel, Rowe's sense of heroism and adventure is shown to change and with this comes a recognition of how "unreal" the adventure stories of his youth are. We see an indication of this in the description of the night-time journey to Dr. Forester's sanitorium:

their [Prentice and Rowe's] dimmed headlights just touched the near hedge [lining the roadway] and penetrated no farther into the wide region of night: it was like the coloured fringe along the

unexplored spaces of a map. Over there among the unknown tribes a woman was giving birth . . . an old man was dying, two people were seeing each other for the first time . . . everything in that darkness was of such deep importance that their errand could not equal it--this violent superficial chase, this cardboard adventure hurtling at seventy miles an hour along the edge of the profound natural common experiences of men. Rowe felt a longing to get back into that world: into the world of homes and children and quiet love and the ordinary unspecified fears and anxieties the neighbour shared . . . the longing was like the first stirring of maturity when the rare experience suddenly ceases to be desirable.

(178-79)

On one level, of course, "this cardboard adventure hurtling . . . along the edge of the . . . common experiences of men" is a self-conscious reference to The Ministry of Fear itself both as a physical object and as a thriller, which, with its own rapidly moving narrative, is a part of a sub-genre usually thought of as existing on the margins of literature--here defined as those texts that deal with "the profound natural common experiences of men." On still another level, the "cardboard adventure" can be seen as a reference to Rowe's own conception of himself as a hero and to his

growing discomfort with this role and with the adventures he had desired in his youth.

The process of Rowe's maturation is most emphatically stated soon after he and Prentice arrive at Dr. Forester's sanitorium to discover the bodies of Forester, Poole, and Stone:

looking in through the door, [Rowe] grew up--
learned that adventure didn't follow the literary
pattern, that there weren't always happy endings,
felt the awful stirring of pity that told him
something had got to be done, that you couldn't
let things stay as they were, with the innocent
struggling in fear for breath and dying
pointlessly. (180)

Here, Rowe's awakening social consciousness figures Greene's own sense that the thriller, too, must at some level perform a political task. However, for Rowe the realization that his investigation is not "an exciting adventure" and that he is not a hero is bewildering (201) because, with the collapse of his conception of himself as a hero of adventure fiction, he loses his sense of personal identity. The result is that within him a conflict between immaturity and maturity--adventure stories and thrillers (187)--takes place that finally pushes him towards the thriller but not beyond fictions because he is unable to conceive of himself in terms other than those of fictional texts.

At the end of the novel, Greene inverts the romance ending as Rowe opts to continue to live his life in terms of fiction. In the book's penultimate paragraph, he and Anna stand, like Adam and Eve at the end of Paradise Lost, surveying "the enormous dangerous plain" of the future before them. However, unlike Adam and Eve who embark upon a new beginning with "Providence thir guide" (PL 12. 647), Rowe and Anna remain as characters in a thriller: "they must watch each other like enemies . . . They would never know what it was not to be afraid of being found out" (221). They join "the permanent staff" of a "Ministry of Fear . . . as large as life to which all who loved belonged" (220). As the reference to the book's title suggests, The Ministry of Fear itself exemplifies the kind of thriller that, to some extent, replaced and succeeded the romance-adventure story in the popular imagination.

That The Ministry of Fear makes the development of popular literature one of its concerns shows in one way how Greene explicitly engages issues concerning textuality and the experience of texts. Because Rowe conceives of himself as the hero of an adventure story, his story can be read as a cautionary tale of the dangers of adhering to an antiquated ideology; it can also be read as an attack upon a certain kind of popular literature. In any case, we see a conception of Rowe that explicitly renders him as a text; as a character, he is clearly figured as the product of

previous texts. From this perspective, Rowe ceases to represent a human creature and, instead, becomes a particular text existing within a field of texts. Although one might charge Greene with being inconsistent in the way these various readings come together,⁸ each view of Rowe contributes on various levels to the novel's investigation of the nature of literature and of texts.

Also a part of this investigation is the fact that Rowe, like Greene's earlier investigators in Rumour at Nightfall, It's a Battlefield, A Gun for Sale, Brighton Rock, and The Confidential Agent, is someone actively engaged in a process of reading. However, in The Ministry of Fear, the figuring of the act of detection as an encounter with texts is heightened to a degree not found in Greene's earlier novels because scenes of reading are given an importance beyond that which comparable scenes in the other novels receive. The novel, then, while participating in the investigation of reading that all detective novels partake in, becomes a novel not only about reading texts but about reading this text, "this cardboard adventure".

In one sense, the thriller plot of The Ministry of Fear is activated by a specific linguistic moment that, like the formulaic challenge to Kolley Kibber in Brighton Rock, foregrounds the idea of texts as coded language. When Rowe says, "Don't tell me the past. Tell me the future" (16), he accidentally hits upon a code which, because of an error in

reading on the fortune-teller's part, brings him into the world of adventure stories for which he longs. Like Ali Baba's magic spell of admittance, "Open O Sesame", Rowe's request puts him on the threshold of a bizarre and secret world. Significantly, too, Hilfe repeats this formula at the end of the narrative, just prior to his suicide, as a signal of the end of the thriller plot (219). The coded formula Rowe utters to Mrs. Bellairs brings into the text a formulaic narrative that only ends with the repetition of the original utterance. It is as if the text Rowe speaks holds within it a potential narrative that is made manifest by an error in reading and then is withdrawn by a repetition of the original command.

Before Bellairs interprets or reads it, the text, "Don't tell me the past. Tell me the future," stands at the junction of numerous possible readings in a moment of interpretive purity that exists before meanings are closed off. Bellairs' response signals the end of this openness as it determines the course of the narrative. That is, instead of Rowe hearing some harmless information and going home, for instance, he is given another coded text which enables him to win the cake. The thriller plot that follows ultimately is both the result of an error and an attempt to redress this error--a point made clear when the leading conspirator, Hilfe, repeats the originally coded text, though in doing so he opens it to another reading which is

ironic: "'What made you go and have your fortune told? You had no future'" (219).

Between the two occurrences of the code-text lies the narrative of The Ministry of Fear, which acts, in a sense, as a kind of commentary on the code-text since, by the time of Hilfe's repetition of the code, we possess a greater understanding of the context of which the statement is a part and of the error that led to the original misreading: we cannot, however, close the statement's meaning. In this sense, The Ministry of Fear explicitly figures a process of reading that privileges the role of error, or at least indeterminacy, in the creation and continuation of narrative.⁹ Or, to put the matter another way, every reading of a text is shown to be a mis-reading or a "misprision", as Bloom would have it.

The error that Mrs. Bellairs and her fellow conspirators make is the same error that Pinkie makes in Brighton Rock; that is, they assume that one can produce a text which will be read in only one way. Bellairs reads Rowe's request as the linguistic marker, the signature, of a contact within the Nazi spy ring. But the fact that it is Rowe who has uttered this particular formula immediately opens the text to a second reading that is, perhaps, the more literal expression of his desire to know the future. Even a simple statement raises the possibility of multiple readings.

The narrative figures the failure of those who would seek to limit the meanings in texts: Bellairs and the other conspirators are either dead or imprisoned by the end of the novel; Rennit's Orthotex detective agency suffers the loss of Jones, and Rowe as the adventure hero who believes in certainty (89) is replaced by Rowe the duplicitous figure of the modern thriller. Those who survive, like Rowe, Anna Hilfe, and the "surrealist" Prentice (158), do so because they recognize a basic uncertainty at the heart of experience and of texts. Rowe and Anna at the end of the novel are precariously perched on the "summit" where they must "tread carefully for a lifetime" in the perpetual uncertainty of a world where words stand apart from secure meanings: "He tried tentatively a phrase, 'My dear, my dear, I am so happy,' and heard with infinite tenderness her prompt and guarded reply, 'I am too.' It seemed to him that after all one could exaggerate the value of happiness" (221). "Happy", here, has been stripped of its meaning by the novel's final sentence. Neither Rowe nor Anna is genuinely happy. For each, the word is part of an expected response offered according to the rules of a code that governs the discourse of lovers. Both Rowe and Anna realize that they should say they are happy at their reunion, but neither actually believes in "happiness" for their future together. These two survive because they can accept the

illusory, fictional nature of reality wherein words are divorced from certain meanings.

Prentice, too, despite being a skilled detective, accepts a fundamental indeterminacy. In response to Rowe's story of the fair and the cake and the attempt by Poole on Rowe's life, Prentice advises Rowe that "'Life can be very odd. Oh, very odd. You should read more history'" (160). As readers of the novel, however, we recognize that history is explicitly figured in terms of texts and not in terms of a past reality. "[T]he history of Contemporary Society," Rowe dreams, is "in hundreds of volumes, but most of them are sold in cheap editions: Death in Piccadilly, The Ambassador's Diamonds, The Theft of the Naval Papers, Diplomacy, Seven Days' Leave, The Four Just Men . . ." (66). This conception of history, of course, forms part of the dream's argument that "[t]he world has been remade by William Le Queux" (65), but it also prefigures Rowe's later encounter with history in his discussions with Johns and in the newspapers he sees. As Anna remarks to him:

"It seems so strange," she said. "All these terrible years since 1933--you've just read about them, that's all. They are history to you. You're fresh. You aren't tired like all the rest of us everywhere."

"1933," he said. "1933. Now 1066, I can give you that easily. And all the kings of

England--at least--I'm not sure . . . perhaps not all."

"1933 was when Hitler came to power."

"Of course. I remember now. I've read it all over and over again, but the dates don't stick."

"And I suppose the hate doesn't either."

"I haven't any right to talk about these things," he said. "I haven't lived them. They taught me at school that William Rufus was a wicked king with red hair--but you couldn't expect us to hate him." (116)

For Rowe, as Digby, history is a text he reads in the newspapers that he believes impinges little upon his life--despite the fact that history contains the stuff of thrillers:

On the tray lay always the morning paper. Digby had not been allowed this privilege for some weeks, until the war had been gently broken to him. Now he could lie late in bed, propped comfortably on three pillows, take a look at the news: "Air Raid Casualties this Week are Down to 255", sip his coffee and tap the shell of his boiled egg: then back to the paper--"The Battle of the Atlantic". The eggs were always done exactly right: the white set and the yolk liquid and

thick. Back to the paper: "The Admiralty regret to announce . . . lost with all hands." There was always enough butter to put a little on the egg . . . (119)

However, Digby does not realize, though the narrative makes it clear, that he is a part of history, of this text, and for him to pretend otherwise is a gross mistake. Digby cannot say, as Rowe discovered earlier that "It's not my war" (77).

That the war exists only as a series of texts for Rowe enables him to gain insights of which others, because of their involvement, are incapable. On the other hand, Rowe, who has as it were fallen out of battle, is able to freely interpret these texts and see in them the possibilities of multiple readings. This is particularly evident in his discussion with Johns about both Fifth Columnists and the newspaper's account of questions in Parliament concerning secret plans that were allegedly missing:

". . . there seem to me [Rowe] to be so many holes in the statement."

"It seems quite clear to me."

"The M.P. who asked the question must have been briefed by someone who knew about those plans. Somebody at the conference--or somebody who was concerned in sending or receiving the

plans. Nobody else could have known about them. Their existence is admitted by the Minister."

"Yes, yes. That's true."

"It's strange that anyone in that position should spread a canard. And do you notice that in that smooth elusive way politicians have the Minister doesn't, in fact, deny that the plans were missing? He says that they weren't wanted, and that when they were wanted they were there."

(121-122)

Rowe's reading reminds Johns of a similar story involving missing plans and leads Johns to suggest that Rowe, who speculated that he might have been a detective before he lost his memory (121), was not a detective but a "detective writer" (123) which, again, explicitly figures Rowe's engagement with the world as an engagement with texts.

As a detective, Rowe stands alongside the other investigators in the novel, Rennit and Jones of the Orthotex detective agency and Graves and Prentice of Scotland Yard. In a sense, each of these characters exemplifies a different approach to the reading of texts while representing different types of the fictional detectives found in various forms of detective fiction. Rennit, for instance, seems a parody of the hard-boiled detective found in Hammett's or Chandler's texts. His offices, like those of Spade or Marlowe, possess "an air of abandonment," and Rennit,

himself, in the hard-boiled fashion, keeps a bottle of whiskey in his filing cabinet (30). He also tells Rowe, following the conventions of the detective story, that "Life ... isn't like a detective story" (35). As a detective, he deals mostly in divorce cases and is clearly out of his depth when confronted with Rowe's story.

Despite his bravado and his declared preference for a hard realism, Rennit's attitude towards crime is singularly conservative:

"Life, you [Rowe] know, isn't like a detective story. Murderers are rare people to meet. They belong to a class of their own."

"That's interesting to me."

"They are very, very seldom," Mr Rennit said, "what we call gentlemen. Outside of story-books. You might say that they belong to the lower orders." (35)

Unlike Hilfe, who draws on international events to assert that "[t]here's no longer a thing called a criminal class" (46), Rennit's view of crime is rooted in the nineteenth century. While claiming not to be Sherlock Holmes (32), his approach to detection, to reading, is that of the classical detective who believes in the certainty of causal chains leading to and from the origins of a crime. He possesses an "extraordinary . . . ability to reduce everything to a commonplace level" (34) and admits his preference for "the

Straightforward" (35). Rennit considers Rowe's story "odd", but he also believes that solving the case involves only "a simple matter of tracing" (39). Like Mrs. Bellairs and the conspirators, Rennit and Jones believe that texts can be made to yield a single authoritative meaning. As members of the Orthotex bureau of inquiry, they are able to ignore differences:

" . . . I [Rennit] know all the beginnings. I've been in this line of business for thirty years. Thirty years. Every client thinks he's a unique case. He's nothing of the kind. He's just a repetition." (31)

That Rowe's story is radically different from the narratives to which Rennit and Jones are accustomed substantially reduces Orthotex's chances for success: Jones to his cost is easily spotted by Hilfe, "'He [Jones] sticks out a yard'" (49), which sharply undercuts the efficacy of the agency.

Unlike Rennit, Hilfe finds Rowe's story "fascinating" (44); and, in a sense, the contrast between Rennit's views and Hilfe's figures, in part, the contrast between the ideology of the classical detective story and the thriller. Whereas Orthotex represents certainty and a conservative belief in a criminal class, Hilfe reflects the ambiguities of the thriller in at least three ways: (1) he believes that crime is not the province of a specific class but a pervasive force at all levels of society; (2) he prefers to

think of conspiracy as a "game" one can play (45); and (3) he possesses a "nihilistic abandon" that allows him to accept the fundamental uncertainty implicit in the belief that there is no difference between the criminal and non-criminal worlds (48). Each of these beliefs is given credence by the fact of the war. As Hilfe notes,

There's no longer a thing called a criminal class. We [Willi and Anna Hilfe] can tell you that. There were lots of people in Austria you'd have said couldn't ... well, do the things we saw them do. Cultured people, pleasant people, people you had sat next to at dinner. . . . in these days it really pays to murder, and when a thing pays it becomes respectable. (46)

Ultimately, in the world of the thriller, Orthotex fails and Rennit himself is obliged to call in the police (74).

The police investigators fare slightly better than Rennit and Jones. Graves is typical of the unimaginative, plodding investigator, like Lestrade in Doyle's stories, who distrusts the brilliant, eccentric and Holmesian detective, Prentice.

"Poor Graves--the passionate crimes of railway porters are his spiritual province. In this branch our interests have to be rather more bizarre. And so he distrusts us--really distrusts us." (161)

Prentice stands as the master sleuth who, though erratic in his behaviour, seems able to penetrate the deepest of mysteries; however, like Rennit, Prentice is also associated with the pre-World War I era and an Edwardian methodology. He is a figure comparable to Holmes, and the sections of the novel in which Prentice appears are highly reminiscent of aspects of Conan Doyle's stories.

The way in which the The Ministry of Fear's narrative structures the action of Prentice's investigation parallels the structure of Doyle's stories. There is an initial interview at which the detective displays his acumen. He then arrives at an hypothesis which he seeks to test either on his own or in the company of a bewildered companion. When this hypothesis is confirmed, the detective offers a partial explanation to his companion, often given on the way to some confrontation with the criminal. Finally, the detective summarizes the case and explains his conclusions.

For Prentice, Rowe's story represents "a beautiful problem [that] . . . could almost [be] put into algebraic terms" (160). As is often the case when Holmes meets his clients, Prentice is able to open his meeting with Rowe by summarizing the circumstances that brought Rowe to him (161-162). The performance is not as startling as some of Holmes's, but it is nonetheless surprising both for Rowe and the reader, who have been unaware of police involvement in the case. Then, as Rowe continues to respond to questions,

Prentice forms an hypothesis that, as in Conan Doyle's stories, is kept from both the detective's companion (in this case, Rowe) and the reader until the detective is ready to explain his actions.

Mr Prentice closed his eyes; it was perhaps an affectation, but who could live without affectation?

"Why do you [Prentice] ask about the Regal Court?"

"It's a shot in the dark," Mr Prentice said. "We have so little time."

"Time for what?"

"To find a needle in a haystack." . . .

He had dropped his enigmatic statement into the air and was out of the room almost before the complete phrase had formed, his long legs moving stiffly, like stilts. Rowe was left alone with Beavis and the day slowly wore on. (164-165)

Prentice's final comment could easily find its place in Holmes's speech.

A number of places in the text hint at the fact that Prentice is modeled on the classical detectives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He is, we are told, "always ready to abandon the particular in favour of the general argument" (162) while yet being very attentive to detail. Also, like Holmes in "The Copper Beeches", Prentice

responds with derisive bitterness to the beauty of the English countryside seeing only the potential for monstrous crime taking place under the noses of incompetent county police who are unable to recognize murder when it happens (177). Similarly, the text tells us that Prentice is an affected character possessing the "air of Arthur Balfour, but you felt that he knew it. . . . He had chosen a physical mould just as a writer chooses a technical form" (164). Here, the mention of Balfour links Prentice to the period before World War I,¹⁰ while the simile suggests that the "mould" for Prentice is a textual one. Given the numerous indications of Prentice's Holmesian character and the fact that the plot Prentice works to uncover is similar in kind to plots Holmes uncovered in at least three separate stories ("The Second Stain," "The Naval Treaty," and "The Bruce-Partington Plans"), this textual "mould" is undoubtedly that of the master sleuth, typified by Holmes. And, like Holmes, Prentice possesses a faith in rational thought that leads him to assume an air of authority which borders on arrogance and, in Aydelotte's view, a fascist frame of mind (Aydelotte 92ff.).

As Greene presents him, Prentice exhibits the dark side of the Holmesian type that, though hinted at in Conan Doyle's stories, is there tolerated and even admired as the expression of confidence in the ability to read into the heart of any mystery. In the world of the 1930s and '40s,

however, this confidence can no longer be justified both in terms of how one reads and in terms of ideology. Prentice's authority shows itself to be allied with a tendency towards fascism expressed in a nihilistic urge to efface the past or, in Prentice's case, the mistakes of the past (178).

Elsewhere we see a similar urge in Rowe, who welcomes the destruction of the blitz because he sees it as freeing him from his past (22), and in Johns, who explains and comments on the temptation of nihilism for idealists in terms of a desire to erase the past:

"The scrapping of all the old boundaries, the new economic ideas . . . the hugeness of the dream.

It is attractive to men who are not tied--to a particular village or town they don't want to see scrapped. People with unhappy childhoods, progressive people who learn Esperanto, vegetarians who don't like shedding blood."

"But Hitler seems to be shedding plenty."

"Yes, but the idealists don't see the blood like you [Rowe] and I do. It's all statistics to them." (120)

Later still, Rowe senses the attraction of nihilism as he gazes upon the sleeping Hilfe (203); but, unlike Hilfe or the idealistic Forester, Rowe resists this temptation because of both his growing love for Anna and his restored

but adolescent faith in the adventure-story values of the Newbolt man.

Prentice, on the other hand, not only finds himself, like Holmes, admiring those he pursues (159) but also participating in a legally sanctioned brand of authoritarianism that, as in Greene's earlier novels, sharply undercuts distinctions between England, representative of an ideological good, and Nazi Germany, the representative of an ideological evil." Like the idealists who think in terms of statistics, Prentice thinks of the case as an algebraic problem and of the possible results in terms of numbers:

"It's really serious," Mr Prentice said. "I don't know quite how serious. But you might say that we all depend on it. . . . You know there are always weaknesses that have to be covered up. If the Germans had known after Dunkirk just how weak . . . There are still weaknesses of which if they knew the exact facts . . ." This [the ruins of London are being indicated by Prentice] would be nothing to it [the devastation that would result if the Germans are successful in getting the microfilm]. Nothing. . . . It's worth--oh, a thousand lives to them." (166-167)

Equally indicative of the authoritarianism he represents is that Prentice threatens both Davis and Rowe with jail if

they refuse to cooperate with him (167) and then orders them to help him trap Cost:

"You had no right to bring me [Davis] into this."

Mr Prentice turned sharply. "Oh yes," he said "every right. Nobody's got a right to life these days.

My dear chap you are conscripted for your country." (168) Similarly, in his interrogation of Mrs. Bellairs, Prentice reveals a measure of cruelty and violence that suggests that he thinks of himself as above the authority of law:

He said sharply, "Is this your best tea service, ma'am?" wincing ever so slightly at the gaudy Prussian blue.

"Put it down," Mrs Bellairs implored, but he had already smashed the cup against the wall. He explained to his man, "The handles are hollow. We don't know how small these films are. You've got to skin the place."

"You'll suffer for this," Mrs Bellairs said tritely.

"Oh no, ma'am, it's you who'll suffer. Giving information to the enemy is a hanging offence."

"They don't hang women. Not in this war."

"We may hang more people ma'am," Prentice said
 . . . "than the papers tell you about." (176)

In this context, the detective genius, Prentice, shows himself to be a dictator of sorts whose power stems from his capacity to punish rather than from the rule of law.

The suggestions that women are also hanged and that hanging occurs more often than one might realize--two things which imply the use of measures outside the prescriptions of the law--seemingly confirm Hilfe's later judgment that there is no difference between the society Prentice serves and defends and the one Hilfe serves. When trapped by Rowe, Hilfe confesses to an adolescent horror of being beaten.¹²

"We don't beat up our prisoners here."

"Oh no?" Hilfe said. "Do you really believe that? Do you think you are so different from us?"

"Yes."

"I wouldn't trust the difference," Hilfe said. "I know what we do to spies. They'll think they can make me talk--they will make me talk."

(215)

Hilfe's argument makes us aware of the parallels that exist between Rowe and D. of The Confidential Agent; both men must choose a side. In The Ministry of Fear Rowe must believe in a difference, which the narrative itself denies, because he finds it "impossible to go through life without trust: that is to be imprisoned in the worst cell of all, oneself" (43).

Rowe realizes that communication with anything outside the self--the very process of reading--is only possible through an acknowledgment of difference.

Rennit, we saw, accepts a fundamental distinction based upon an orthodox belief in there being two classes, one of which was criminal and the other of which was not. However, his sense of difference lacks the subtlety that would make it valuable so that, paradoxically, Rennit's ideology pushes Orthotex into a position wherein difference disappears. Rennit and Jones cannot deal with Rowe's story because they see it as a repetition of earlier stories easily reducible to a simple matter. In this sense, their plight is that of those readers or critics who read a text according to a single preconception. The text, then, is either reductively assimilated to a preferred paradigm of some sort--romance, tragedy, novel, Bildungsroman, lyric, or even literature (to suggest a few labels that can function in this way)--or else it is dismissed as unclassifiable or as a disappointment or as unreadable and, consequently, is neglected.

Prentice is in a more difficult position than Rennit since, with Edwardian faith, he would like to believe both in the existence of clear differences and in the ability of the reasoning mind to detect and correctly read these differences. However, in the modern period this is no longer possible when it is realized that, although metaphor might erase difference, the same sign can mean in differing

ways. The situation of wartime, paradoxically because the propaganda of wartime emphasizes difference, subverts the very structures of difference upon which Prentice relies. Not only are his actions indistinct from those of the enemy against whom he fights, but he is thwarted by the uncertainties and the vicissitudes of experience. He lays a trap for Cost but does not foresee the possibility of Cost's suicide since Prentice, prejudicially, does not associate great courage with tailors (172). Similarly, he is too late getting to Forester's sanatorium because he is forced to rely on the county police despite not having any confidence in them. As well, he cannot anticipate Johns's own investigative activities which lead to the deaths of Forester and Poole. Hence, circumstance itself undermines Prentice's Edwardian faith.

In a situation wherein one "[doesn't] know who are . . . friends and who are . . . enemies" (199), the only way a coherent reading of events can be assembled is if, as Prentice does in assembling the story of Rowe, one "[leaves] out the mysteries" (167). However, to omit the mysteries, the items that cannot be accounted for or else cannot fit into the interpretive narrative--however unavoidable such an omission--is to risk the collapse of the interpretive narrative. When Prentice fails at Dr. Forester's he can only give in to a self-negating despair and the comfort of disappearing into a larger narrative framework in which he,

Rowe, Johns, and Jones will be present only as some of the "mysteries" left out; and, in a sense, they will be denied the difference that makes reading possible when they are subsumed in the larger differential structure of presence and absence:

"We are beaten . . . One must avoid self-importance, you see. In five hundred years' time, to the historian writing the Decline and Fall of the British Empire, this little episode would not exist. There will be plenty of other causes. You and me and poor Jones will not even figure in a footnote. It will be all economics, politics, battles." (187-188)

Such a history will in itself involve an interpretive act that will give way to other interpretations which, since they will look to those things originally omitted, may reassess the importance of Prentice or Rowe or anyone else for that matter; thus, even as it is being offered, the comfort Prentice seeks is denied. If we recall that the record of contemporary history has already been figured as a multi-volume canon of thrillers, then Rowe's story, because it is told in a thriller--The Ministry of Fear--cannot be erased from the narrative of that history though it may drop in or out of the canon depending upon the prevailing critical fashion.¹³

Although Prentice fails to conclude his investigation successfully, his activities are of crucial importance to Rowe who, because of Prentice, is able to continue his own investigation. Drawn into the world of the thriller by accident, Rowe is to Richard Hannay what Prentice is to Sherlock Holmes. As the first part of the narrative unfolds, the text self-consciously echoes the conventions associated with a host of detective novels.¹⁴ The enigmas Rowe and the reader encounter are clearly marked either with explicitly presented questions ("Who had given her [Mrs. Bellairs] instructions? . . . why had she chosen him to win the cake? [17]) or else with diction that raises questions in the reader's mind. (For instance, Poole is frequently referred to as "the stranger" in his first meeting with Rowe [22-28].) Similarly, pronouns such as "we" and "they" are used freely without mention of specific antecedents (25, 27, 99) to draw an adversarial relationship in the narrative while also contributing to the atmosphere of uncertainty that pervades the book and conceals from Rowe and the reader the identity of the enemy.

These obvious indications that the book is a thriller, these marks of genre, are augmented by the deliberate creation of suspense through a strategy of delay based on the episodic practice of placing key information at the end of clearly marked structural units in the text, such as sections, chapters, or books. The surprise of the new

information raises new enigmas which are usually partially answered within the next few pages, although the answers only give way to further enigmas. This is particularly evident at the end of Book One when we read that Rowe "opened the lid of the suitcase" and then encounter an ellipsis. The next chapter begins with Digby, and so what happens in the intervening time remains suspended (105). However, the technique is also seen at many of the other structural junctures in the narrative. For example, at the end of section one, chapter two, in Book One, Rennit and the reader learn that Rowe is a murderer (35). In the next section, Rowe recalls parts of his trial and explains that he killed his wife in what the papers said was an act of mercy (37); yet while the initial enigmas presented at the end of the chapter's first section are answered--whom did Rowe kill? why did he do it?--a new one takes their place: "'Mercy for her or mercy to me. They didn't say. And I don't know myself'" (37). This problem resonates throughout the narrative and is never clearly resolved for the reader or for Rowe. Even when twenty years have been erased from his memory the knowledge of his wife's death, though repressed by the "Freudian censor" (110), remains an "enemy" memory (196).

The frequent and obvious presentation of enigma and suspense, particularly when the enigmas are posed as questions by the text, foregrounds the structure of the

thriller and pushes the text to self-conscious echoes of the genre's conventions. Woodcock and other critics may complain that the thriller elements of The Ministry of Fear are little more than "theatrical devices" indicative of an undisciplined technique (Woodcock 137). However, rather than see these devices as the expression of an "empty virtuosity" (137), I think it better to see them as part of Greene's attempt to invoke the genre's conventions in order to explode those conventions.

Book One of the novel, entitled "The Unhappy Man", making up slightly less than half of the narrative, includes a host of the genre's clichés in a narrative that appears to be a straightforward thriller about an unimportant man caught in a web of mistrust and conspiracy that is imagistically figured in the labyrinth of Mr. Travers's hotel. (Indeed, it is indicative of the movement of Book One that the image of the garden which opened the novel is replaced with the image of the labyrinth at the end of "The Unhappy Man".) Throughout this part of the novel the enemy is hidden, although clues as to his identity abound and are easily detected on a second reading when the ironic aspects of the text become clear. Not only do Anna's reactions to her brother suggest his true role, but almost all of Hilfe's and Bellairs' remarks can also be read in ways that reveal Hilfe and Bellairs to be Nazi agents: Hilfe, whose name ironically means "help" in German, says that helping Rowe

will give him "an opportunity . . . to take a more violent line" (48); Hilfe confesses that he is "used to dropping spies" (49); and he, accurately it turns out, describes himself as an "enemy alien" (62). Similarly, Bellairs calls Cost "our mystery man" (53) and refers to Hilfe and Cost as "the conspirators" when they leave the room for a moment prior to the start of the seance (54). Each of these points hints at a deeper truth than is first realized by either Rowe or the reader.

Similarly, the narrative also provides the reader with clues as to what is really happening: the story of Hilfe's escape from Austria is alluded to and then ambiguously passed over: "That's another story" (44); Hilfe is described as having "an amusing nihilistic abandon" that his sister does not share (48); and Cost's murder is not reported in the next day's newspapers (69). These clues and many others reveal a hidden narrative beneath the narrative that is going on in the present, which only becomes apparent much later in the novel. In this way The Ministry of Fear follows the structural pattern of most detective fiction.

In the first book of the novel, however, Greene loads the text with elements taken from other types of detective fiction, often even alluding to other texts. "Nothing is what it seems" in the world of The Ministry of Fear (Couto 105): the fête Rowe enters at the novel's beginning represents for him a return to the innocence of a paradisa

"vicarage garden" (11, 12). But in the heart of this garden is menace and mystery--a fact the text later reminds us of when Fullove, a student of eighteenth-century landscape gardening, remarks that "in a good garden you weren't safe anywhere" (92). That danger lies in the vicarage garden recalls both the arguments of Auden's essay "The Guilty Vicarage" and the typical situation of the classical detective story. Similarly, the murder of Cost at the séance is presented as a locked-room mystery, in the manner of Christie or Carr, complete with Dr. Forester's cryptic statement that "One of us did it" (59). Indeed, the very fact that the murder takes place at a seance recalls a number of texts including A. E. W. Mason's Murder at the Villa Rose (1910)--a book Greene certainly read by an author he much admired.

When Rowe falsely believes himself wanted for murder he goes underground both in the figurative sense of hiding and in the literal sense of going into the tube shelter during an air-raid. Like Hannay, Rowe becomes entangled in a secret war which he cannot escape while the larger battle goes on all around him. The conventions of the genre would demand that he adopt a series of disguises in order to track down the guilty parties and so clear himself of suspicion while saving England from grave danger, but in The Ministry of Fear this does not happen in quite so obvious a way. After having alluded to a number of forms of the detective

story, any one of which his novel could follow, Greene opts to explode their conventions and set the narrative on another tack. The end of Book One allegorizes this clearly in that the suitcase full of books explodes when Rowe opens it, figuratively signalling the end of the straight thriller of Book One.

The second half of The Ministry of Fear in a general sense mirrors the narrative structure of the first half. Book Two, "The Happy Man", begins, like Book One, in a paradisaical world now represented by Dr. Forester's sanitorium, yet here too there is danger figured in the presence of the sick bay. In a variation of the Buchan convention of disguise, Rowe, a blast victim, is now known by the name of Richard Digby (after the name found on an identity card in his pocket), but he has no memory of who he is.

In the second half of The Ministry of Fear, Rowe investigates not a Nazi conspiracy but himself. He now grapples with the mystery of his identity, and central to this is the same question that he faced in the book's first half of whether or not he is a murderer. The investigation becomes an inquiry into his past. Again, numerous clues-- Anna calls him "Arthur" (119), he feels a "dizziness" when he considers that one may kill for love (132), he feels fear when he sees Poole (127)--offer him the opportunity to read the story of his past, but he is unable to do so. After

Forester rashly tells him that he is not Digby but Arthur Rowe, a murderer, Rowe leaves the sanitorium with Johns's help--an action that roughly corresponds to his escape from Bellairs' house after the supposed murder of Cost. At this point, Rowe goes to the police where "a stiff consecutive narrative [is made] out of his haphazard sentences" (153). (This, too, finds its correspondence in the narrative he wrote, but did not send, to the police in the book's first half [71].) With Prentice, Rowe first goes to a tailor's shop where he sees Cost and then returns to Mrs. Bellairs' house and to Dr. Forester's sanitorium: Rowe physically returns to the world of his past--just as he had mentally and emotionally returned to his past when he visited the charity fête in Book One. Slowly, his memory returns to him "like [pieces] in a jig-saw puzzle" (169); and, in his final confrontation with Hilfe, he learns the story of his wife's death, the telling of which marks the final recuperation of his past and his reemergence as a "whole man".

Explicitly, Greene makes reading central to Rowe's detection of both Hilfe and his past. Just as books themselves are given importance in the first part of The Ministry of Fear, so is the reading of texts emphasized in the second, making the novel a story of reading. In one sense, Rowe as Digby seems a textually innocent reader, but in another sense the ideal of a textually innocent reader is presented as illusory. Rowe is never free from the

contamination that a reader will normally bring to texts. With twenty years of his past effaced, Rowe reads the world in terms of adventure stories written for young boys and adolescents, and so he sees duplicity in the statements of politicians although earlier he could not see a similar duplicity in Hilfe's or Bellairs' words. As well, because he imagines himself as the hero of an adventure story, he acts heroically when he sneaks into the sick bay and then, later, challenges Hilfe without the help of the police. In whatever he does, Rowe's actions and his reading of experience are determined by what he has read.

The emphasis the narrative places on Rowe's reading of certain books which he finds in the sanatorium underscores the importance of the already-read in the creation of coherent readings. As he so often does in his novels, Greene makes books a central part of the description of particular settings, and, consequently, they comment on the characters associated with those settings. For instance, Poole's room in the sick bay contains "a shabby collection-- Carlyle's Heroes and Hero-Worship, lives of Napoleon and Cromwell, and numbers of little paper-covered books about what to do with Youth, Labour, Europe, God" (138). Here the small library becomes itself a clue, since it indicates that Poole--already a figure associated with menace and danger--has an interest in autocratic political leaders and self-proclaimed demi-gods; and, given this, it is not surprising

that he should be a part of Hilfe's network of spies working for Hitler. Rowe also comes across some volumes from Forester's library--Tolstoy's What I Believe, Freud's The Psycho-Analysis of Everyday Life, and a biography of Rudolf Steiner (131). Since Forester is a psychiatrist, the volume by Freud is understandable, and the Steiner biography reflects a philosophic idealism on the part of Forester that privileges the role of pure thought.¹⁵ Tolstoy's What I Believe, however, is the most important of these three texts for The Ministry of Fear since parts of it are quoted in the narrative.

Thematically, Tolstoy's words offer both an idealistic statement that suggests why Forester betrayed his country and the opportunity for Digby to compare his actions with those of Tolstoy. When he reads Tolstoy, Rowe as Digby realizes the folly of Tolstoy's position and so becomes convinced that he can no longer remain in Forester's care ignorant of the responsibilities and duties he might have had in the outside world.

But important as Tolstoy's actual text is for the novel on a thematic level, the narrative stresses how Rowe comes across the specific passages he reads. When he opens Tolstoy, he finds "faint indentations in the margin where pencil marks had been rubbed out" (131). To Rowe, Tolstoy's words possess a nobility because they so aggressively shatter the dogma of patriotism and love of one's country;

by contrast, Rowe finds "something ignoble in the attempt to rub out the pencil-mark" (131). As a result of this, Rowe loses respect for Forester and, consequently, has the courage to challenge him (146), which forces the action that leads to Rowe leaving the sanatorium for the police. However, because the marks of erasure are mentioned or discussed in at least five places (131, 135, 146, 184, 195), the narrative invests them with an importance that demands they be considered not for Tolstoy's content in the passages nor for what they tell us about Forester, but for their own status as texts that exist, quite literally, under erasure.

When a man rubs out a pencil-mark he should be careful to see that the line is quite obliterated. For if a secret is to be kept, no precautions are too great. If Dr Forester had not so inefficiently rubbed out the pencil-marks in the margins of Tolstoy's What I Believe, Mr Rennit might never have learnt what had happened to Jones, Johns would have remained a hero-worshipper, and it is possible that Major Stone would have slowly wilted into further depths of insanity between the padded hygienic walls of his room in the sick bay. And Digby? Digby might have remained Digby.

For it was the pencil-marks which kept Digby awake and brooding at the end of a day of

loneliness and boredom. You couldn't respect a man who dared not hold his opinions openly, and when respect for Dr Forester was gone, a great deal went with it. The noble old face became less convincing: even his qualifications became questionable. (135)

Rowe's act of reading a text that exists only under erasure distinguishes his method of reading from both Rennit's and Prentice's. The marks of erasure represent the invisible traces of the already-read that, like the memories of the past repressed by the Freudian censor in Rowe's mind, stand behind any text.¹⁶ Forester's erased scoring is, on one level, a meta-text--a commentary on Tolstoy's text--since it provides, in essence, an invisible framework that directs the reader's attention to specific passages and claims for them an importance that the rest of his text is not given. On another level, however, the erasures figure the whole network of prior texts and indeterminate meanings that any text carries with it and that any reader brings to any text. Rowe's experience with Tolstoy's text thus mirrors our own experiences with any text we may encounter. The erasures force Rowe to read Tolstoy in more than one way so that he interprets the marked passages not just as statements of Tolstoy's belief but also as indications of both Forester's beliefs and of his own situation as Digby. Rowe sees a reflection of himself, a vision that is

explicitly figured by the commonalities in the descriptions of Tolstoy and of Rowe when the latter glimpses himself in a mirror (133).

As the product of a text himself, Rowe reads in terms of the already-read--a point that is underscored later in the description of the bombed city of London to which Rowe returns:

The long train stood darkly along number one platform: the bookstalls closed, the blinds drawn in most of the compartments. It was a novel sight to Rowe and yet an old sight. He had only to see it once like the sight of a bombed street, for it to take up its place imperceptibly among his memories. This was already life as he'd known it.

(211)

Here, the already-read--Rowe's experience of the war is at this point an experience of texts--stands as the permanent memory trace of other texts within his mind or, to put it another way, within the text that is himself. Like the Derridian trace that exists in the gaps between structures of stimuli and resistance, the already-read is located in the space between the antithetical senses of "novel" and "old" which, because they exist within a grammatically parallel scheme, are bonded terms describing the same "sight". Although figured as being of indeterminate origin,

the already-read remains present despite the erasure of Rowe's memory; Rowe continues to read in terms of texts.

In this context, the already-read is given an ambiguous status, since it is the means whereby texts are made meaningful because it provides the structures that order texts into coherent narratives and, therefore, into instruments of power. However, it is also the reason for misreading, since previously developed structures are brought to bear upon a text that is at once both unique within a given historical and linguistic moment and the result of a developmental process that makes use of previous texts. This latter property of the already-read is apparent in the errors of Rennit, who sees every case as a repetition of a previous case, and of Mrs. Bellairs, who considers Rowe's request, "Don't tell me the past. Tell me the future," a password because of her previous understanding of the formula.

For Rowe, the already-read is the key to making sense of a world that would otherwise be unreadable; it is the means whereby he understands texts. To attempt to eliminate it or to wish it away, as Rowe wishes "to mislay the events of twenty years" (13), only leads one into a position of mystery and confusion, of destructive nihilism (the desire to eliminate the already-read causes Rowe to welcome the destruction of the blitz [22]), where even the most obvious details become incomprehensible. (Rowe, as Digby, must ask

Johns to explain even the basics of World War II to him [113].) As well, Digby's experience demonstrates that the already-read can never be erased--it can only be repressed and so, in this respect, it becomes a condition of writing (Derrida, "Freud" 226). In this light, it is impossible to read from an objective point of view as an innocent reader considering a text as an isolated artifact. As Rowe realizes before his memory loss, "books are complicated and contradictory with experience; they are formed out of our own disappointed memories" (89). After his loss of memory, Rowe continues to read in terms of an already read, only in this case the texts have changed: he reads in terms of the adventure story.

Since the already-read is central to the production of coherent readings, it is also the key to narrative production; and in The Ministry of Fear narrative itself is a force capable of having tremendous effects. Later, in Our Man in Havana, Greene would show how fictions have the power to create reality, but in The Ministry of Fear--although the same thing is implied through Rowe's acting like a romance-adventure hero--the very existence of narratives, of stories, is figured as an instrument of power. The murder at the séance is a fiction designed to push Rowe out of the picture, to halt his investigation. Rowe responds by writing a narrative of his own, and, though he thinks "the story . . . a terribly thin one" (71), its existence --not

its content (since it is not read by anyone)--threatens Hilfe and becomes the motivation behind the attempt on Rowe's life in Travers's hotel room. Later, both Forester (133) and Hilfe (205-206; 216-217) threaten Rowe not with violence but with the story of his past. In this respect, the novel figures the war as something fought not only with bombs and guns but with narratives and texts as well.

The Ministry of Fear is a book about texts, and so it is a book about itself. Rowe, the reader of romantic adventures, stands as both a reader of texts and a text to be read. His investigation, encompassing as it does inquiries into crime and into the self, offers the fullest treatment of Greene's sense of the fictional detective. The Ministry of Fear is his most ambitious and most complex handling of the materials of detective fiction and of the problem of accommodating a radical scepticism to the demands of reading. This novel explores and interrogates the issues of popular literature, of reading, and of writing in a number of ways. On one level, The Ministry of Fear figures Greene's own movement from the classical detective story to the modern thriller, while on another level it continues the examination of English society that Greene began with Stamboul Train and It's a Battlefield. The Ministry of Fear also takes to a greater extreme than any of Greene's other novels the implications of detective fiction as a model for narrative.

In subsequent novels Greene continues to use the detective story as a basis for his narratives, but no later text is as free in its textual play as is The Ministry of Fear. Others like The Third Man, The End of the Affair, The Quiet American, and Our Man in Havana elaborate concerns that first find their expression in Greene's novels from the thirties and then reach their apogee in The Ministry of Fear. For instance, The Third Man, also a detective story, can be read in a fashion similar to that suggested in my discussions of A Gun for Sale, Brighton Rock, or The Ministry of Fear. Of particular interest in The Third Man is the way distinctions between literature and popular fiction are collapsed, especially in the scene where Martins, mistaken for a leading British novelist, speaks to the British Council.¹⁷

Similarly, The End of the Affair, like The Quiet American not labeled as an "entertainment", has also been seen as a metaphysical detective story (Lewis 269; Spurling 45). Here, Bendrix, a novelist who thinks of himself as "probably a little above Maugham because Maugham is popular and [Bendrix has] not yet committed that crime" (148), investigates his former mistress Sarah Miles, who has seemingly broken off an affair with him for no reason at all. As a part of his investigation, Bendrix hires a private detective named Parkis who, with his boy, follows Sarah and, through certain machinations, gets her diary.

Bendrix's investigation concludes when he reads Sarah's diary recounting the affair from her point of view. Again, the figure of the detective, though a writer himself, is explicitly made a reader of texts who, in this case, reads about himself.

The Quiet American, considered an "entertainment" by Greene while he was working on it (OM 148-149), also makes use of the structure of a detective story. At the outset of this novel Pyle is missing, and we soon learn that he has been killed. The investigation of Pyle's death conducted by Vigot leads Fowler, a journalist and the narrator of the story, to consider his responsibility for and his motives behind the killing of Pyle. Most of the story is told in a series of flashbacks that are anchored in the present wherein the investigation of the murder is taking place. As is typical, a series of direct allusions to Lecoq and Gaboriau and to Simenon's stories and Maigret locate The Quiet American in a tradition of detective fiction. However, the novel goes beyond the detective story to develop a strong political critique furthered by the discussion of the issue of commitment that takes place within the novel--Fowler, like D. and Rowe, is forced to choose a side. As Panek suggests, "The Quiet American is the novel which some critics of the thirties predicted: the detective novel as regular literature" (128).

In a sense, the detective novel or thriller is never far from any of Greene's texts, and, although Loser Takes All may be a cautionary tale warning us against the dangers of too rigid an application of systems (O'Prey 110), most of Greene's novels and a number of his short stories can be profitably read as investigations of reading, of writing, of the power of fictions, and of distinctions between high culture and popular culture, literature and genre fiction. Our Man in Havana, A Burnt Out Case, The Honorary Consul, and The Human Factor, for instance, all make use of structures and conventions associated with different aspects of detective fiction, sometimes obliquely as in A Burnt Out Case and The Comedians and sometimes more obviously as in Our Man in Havana, The Honorary Consul, and The Human Factor. However, with the possible exception of Our Man in Havana, no other novel of Greene's is so playful nor so all-encompassing in its treatment of the materials of detective fiction as The Ministry of Fear.

By 1943 Greene's reputation was such that Walter Allen could begin a discussion of Greene's novels by asserting that "it would be generally agreed . . . by his fellow writers that Graham Greene is the leading English male novelist of his generation" (148). This claim is striking in that Greene's work to this point was almost entirely rooted in the popular form of the thriller--a form not much

respected by a critical establishment whose tastes and preferences were tied to the experimental discourse of the high modernists. What Greene had done was respond to the political, social, and cultural crises of the decade of the thirties in such a way as to challenge openly the discourse of the high modernists of the twenties.¹⁸ Central to this project was his use of the material of popular fiction, specifically the thriller, as a means of political and literary interrogation.

Inspired by his love for the melodramatic fiction of his boyhood, Greene sought in his fiction to duplicate and expand on the effects of books by Buchan, Haggard, Stevenson, and others while presenting an ideology compatible with his leftist sympathies in the 1930s. This meant turning away from the literary experiments of writers such as Woolf, Forster, or Proust, and embracing instead an aesthetic that emphasized a renewed form of realism capable of dealing with political and social problems. As Greene has most recently stated,

I think to exclude politics from a novel is excluding a whole aspect of life. Virginia Woolf certainly wouldn't have introduced politics [in her novels]. I began to get a little tired of Virginia Woolf, you know. Mrs. Dalloway going shopping up Regent Street and the thoughts which went through her head. I reacted rather against

her by being a storyteller. You see, my mother was a cousin of Robert Louis Stevenson and I'd like to think that I've followed in his tradition. I've reacted against Bloomsbury Circle.

(MacArthur D5)

Greene's writing turns to an older model to reflect his continual concern for social justice, which, as we saw in discussions of Stamboul Train, It's a Battlefield, and England Made Me, frequently emerges in an ironic assessment of English society under capitalism.

Crucial to his social and political critique is the importance Greene places on reading and interpretation. In the thirties when high-modernist critics such as the Leavises sought to make literature the province of a cultural elite and to treat it as something above political and social concerns, Greene and many other young writers, such as Auden, Isherwood, and Orwell, sought to broaden the reading public for literature by rediscovering and revitalizing popular forms. In this way literature could, it was hoped, awaken in a large audience not only a sense of a shared cultural heritage but also a sense of social justice and the consequent need for social change. It was vital for Greene and the other young writers of the Left that people be able to question the seemingly "natural" state of affairs; people had to be made aware of the governing role of the dominant ideology in their lives. To

this end, Greene comes to see the thriller, a genre that explicitly concerns itself with the reading and interpretation of texts, as best able to present both "the fog-belt of melodrama" inside which he sees "the entire planet gravitat[ing]" (OM 65) and a model for an investigation of the process of reading.

The structure of the thriller, based as it is on the two-story structure of the classical detective story that Todorov describes, figures the interpretive process wherein one text is read and made sense of through the creation of another text. Books such as A Gun for Sale, Brighton Rock, The Confidential Agent, and The Ministry of Fear encourage the adoption of a radically sceptical approach to reading that ultimately undermines both the seeming "correctness" of interpretations offered by designated "authorities" (such as politicians, military spokesmen, religious leaders, or literary critics) and the hieratic structures that maintain those authorities and their political power in their respective realms.

Cognizant of the fact that he cannot substitute his own ideology or interpretations for those he discredits in his texts, Greene locates the authority behind any reading in the individual. However, like D. in The Confidential Agent, the individual must recognize that "heresies" will creep into his or her own particular readings which, consequently, can only be given a provisional status and must be subjected

to the same interpretive rigours as any other reading. Hence, Greene claims that he does not fight injustice in his fiction but, rather, that he "express[es] a sense of injustice: [his] aim is not to change things but to give them expression" (OM 81). Yet the implied argument that one must work to overcome injustice cannot be escaped; as Rowe realizes in The Ministry of Fear, "you couldn't let things stay as they were, with the innocent struggling in fear for breath and dying pointlessly" (180).

In using the thriller and in explicitly remarking on this usage through the "entertainment" label, Greene declares himself opposed to those who would classify literature as high or "serious" art and low or "escapist" work. For Greene conditions of aesthetic value cannot be determined by or imposed upon a work from a critical authority who stands outside the relationship between reader and text. A particular work's value lies not in inherent qualities but in its function for its reader. In this way the hierarchy is dispensed with and individuals are encouraged to think freely for themselves and not to rely upon those who would tell them what is good or bad.

There is no denying that the achievement of these ends demands a great deal of the reader, particularly the reader accustomed to a popular fiction that reinforces the traditional values of the Newbolt man--values that encouraged loyalty to an imperialistic and class-bound

social order. Since Greene and others on the Left saw almost all popular fiction as propaganda for the established order, the detective story had to be restructured so that it exposed rather than reinforced the dominant ideology. Through the late twenties and early thirties Greene worked the formula of the classical detective story in a number of ways in an effort to mould it to his purposes. "[D]riven back to the 'blood'" (Reflections 65), he came to rely, particularly after 1936, on the form of the thriller for the organizing structure of his novels. This allowed him to undermine traditional structures of authority by expressing the paradoxes inherent in the genre and by refiguring the character of the detective.

In Greene's thrillers the investigator is stripped of the kind of confident authority that Dupin, Holmes, and Poirot possess. Because this authority elevates the classical detective above the law and because it is based in the totalitarian desire for a system of universal surveillance, Greene rejects the paradigm of the classical detective, seeing it as linked to a dangerously authoritarian ideology. Greene's investigators are deliberately presented in an ambiguous fashion while their function is often spread over a number of characters, none of whom is able to discover the truth. In A Gun for Sale and The Ministry of Fear, respectively, Raven and Rowe are themselves murderers, though of different sorts. In

Brighton Rock, Ida Arnold is mocked by the narrative and compared unfavourably to the character of Pinkie. In The Confidential Agent, D. wanders in confusion unsure of whom or what to trust. Other investigating figures are no more successful in their efforts to solve the problems of crime and mystery. The Assistant Commissioner of It's a Battlefield, Mather of A Gun for Sale, and Prentice of The Ministry of Fear are all representatives of the official police whose pretensions to certainty are exploded: although they share the methodology of more successful fictional detectives such as Holmes or Dupin, none of Greene's policemen solves the crime which he is investigating. Only Mason in "Murder for the Wrong Reason" manages to uncover the criminal, but then he, himself, is the guilty party, making him the precursor in Greene's early fiction of Raven and Rowe.

In discrediting the authority of their detectives, Greene's novels also cast doubt on the authority of anyone who claims to present the true interpretation of an event or text. The thrillers are all investigations of reading and of narrative that locate themselves within the framework of other investigations and other narratives. In this context, no final conclusions can be drawn, since any interpretation only opens on to further interpretations, which are in themselves further narratives. The textual implications of this are apparent in all Greene's thrillers but especially

in The Ministry of Fear, where the investigation of reading self-consciously turns to an investigation of "this cardboard adventure". In this novel, Greene's treatment of the thriller finds its greatest expression as the genre is wholly remade.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER SIX

1. Lodge ("GG" 105), Spurling (37), Woodcock (126, 137), Webster (113), McEwen (121), and Allott and Farris (194) all tend to condemn The Ministry of Fear. Allott and Farris discuss the novel in terms of Greene incorporating a "greater incoherence" into the novel's "loosely knocked-up narrative", which results in "a certain ungainliness" and a rather "ramshackle look" (194); although, in fairness, they also praise Greene's "fertility of invention, the pinpointing of detail, the reality of the ungrotesque characters . . . and the confidence with which Greene drives the narrative forward at high speed when the emphasis is on action" (194)--all of this, they find, has had an "exhilarating effect on Greene's style" (194). Other critics, such as G. Smith (41), Couto (105), De Vitis (38), Lewis (240), and Wolfe (101, 121), praise the book, although in De Vitis's and Lewis's cases it is a qualified praise.

2. Grahame Smith also notes the highly personal nature of The Ministry of Fear (42-43), as Greene used aspects of his own life for many of the book's details.

3. Spurling comments on all of Greene's novels in a similar fashion: "Their model is the Victorian adventure story--but translated to a world in which the Victorian adventure hero cannot rely on values that once supported him" (65).

4. Greene says in A Sort of Life that he read Yonge's novel in 1916 or so and that he added the epigraphs to the chapters of The Ministry of Fear when he revised the book after the Second World War (SL 38).

5. Also supporting the accuracy of Bellairs' assessment of Rowe is the fact that similar scenes of occult reading in earlier novels by Greene are presented as at least partially revealing of the truth; for example, in England Made Me a palm reader tells Krogh that he "should beware of a man and a woman" (109), and in Brighton Rock Ida's ouija board convinces her of foul play in Hale's death.

6. Indeed, one might see the killing of his wife, on one level, as the expression of his desire to take heroic action; that is, in practicing euthanasia, Rowe courageously violates social conventions.

7. Alan Kennedy criticizes Greene for exhibiting a number of inconsistencies in Our Man in Havana, The Comedians, and Travels With My Aunt; however, if one admits the possibility of a number of things going on at various levels within these texts, the charge of inconsistency becomes irrelevant.

8. Implicitly, any detective story does this since only error allows the narrative to continue. When the detective is free from error, he or she announces his or her final reading, which traditionally closes the narrative. If the detective cannot be free of error, the text will fail to provide a satisfying sense of closure although, as we saw with Trent's Last Case, this does not preclude the narrative from ending.

9. Arthur Balfour served as a Conservative prime minister from 1902-1905 and as foreign secretary from 1916-1919. Early in his career he earned the nickname "Bloody Balfour" because of his severity in suppressing insurrection in Ireland, and so he becomes, perhaps, a suitable figure for Prentice to be compared to.

10. Johns notes as well that he would not be surprised if the British also made use of the same kind of "Ministry of Fear" as the Germans (121)--a point which further obliterates sharp distinctions between the two sides.

It is, perhaps, somewhat paradoxical that Greene should have praised Priestley in 1940 for supplying the British with an ideology: "he gave us the idea of the two orders, the Nazi and our own in simple terms, as moving as poetry" (Reflections 88). However, what appealed to Greene was not so much the simple ideological polarities that Priestley outlined--such polarities are never accepted in Greene's fiction--but the fact that Priestley called for social change after the war: "Surely it was a sign of something that the BBC should allow a speaker to refer to the old false peace, 'the defeat of goodwill', to appeal openly for a new order in England after the war" (88).

11. In this respect, Hilfe is like Davis in A Gun for Sale, Pinkie in Brighton Rock, and K. in The Confidential Agent--all of whom greatly fear having the violence they so easily participate in turned upon themselves.

12. Here, The Ministry of Fear is presented as a central achievement in Greene's use of the thriller because it is a text that most obviously reflects the critical concerns of our present time. However, earlier assessments of the novel, as I have elsewhere noted, have viewed it otherwise.

13. Panek briefly enumerates a number of the texts that are alluded to in Greene's novel (123).

14. Allott and Farris detect "a flavour of wartime highbrow baiting" on Greene's part in the motivations for treason that are given to Forester (204).

15. This same process is figured in A Gun for Sale since Raven confirms his identification of Anne's purse by seeing the marks where her initials had once been. Raven, too, is reading a text that is figuratively erased; and, for him, the result is the retracing of an old experience (GS 90-92).

16. For a fine discussion of Martins's appearance at the literary gathering and of other self-conscious moments in The Third Man see Norman Macleod's "'This strange, rather sad story': The Reflexive Design of Graham Greene's The Third Man".

17. As one would, perhaps, expect, Greene's work was ignored by Scrutiny until 1952 when F. N. Lees' "Graham Greene: A Comment" appeared. Needless to say, Lees' assessment of Greene's work is highly critical, accusing Greene of "regrettable sentimental[ity]" in the thrillers (32), "bad, showy, shallow writing" in The Power and the Glory (35), and "unsureness of technique" in The Heart of the Matter (38).

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