

Taking Sides: Graham Greene and Latin America

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“If one takes a side, one takes a side, come what may,” Graham Greene wrote in his memoir *Getting to Know the General*.¹ He was speaking about what he called his “involvement” with Panama’s General Omar Torrijos, but his comment applies equally well to his general involvement with the politics of Latin America. By the time of his death in 1989, Greene’s long-standing, ever-deepening interest in Latin America had developed from the touristic to the analytical to the polemical. It was an interest that had begun with a 1938 visit to Mexico that resulted in a travel narrative and a novel. In the 1950s and 1960s, his visits to Haiti, Cuba, and Paraguay produced four novels and several essays. Finally, his trips to Chile (1972), to Panama (1976 to 1983), and to Nicaragua (1980 to 1986) culminated in one more novel (his last), a series of articles, a book-length memoir, and several letters to *The Times* arguing for the support of governments and causes that he found admirable in Latin America. His visits to Latin America, he said in an interview, “brought with them a political commitment in a number of ways.”² In his later years, Greene had indeed taken a side.

In his work on Latin America, Greene revisited and reworked four major themes: religion, politics, anti-American sentiment, and militarism. A review of these themes reveals the insistent and yet elusive sensibility that informed Greene’s interest in the region. Once taken into account, this sensibility necessarily alters some of the more extreme assumptions of those critics who find in Greene’s fiction a generic, savage landscape (sometimes referred to as “Greeneland”) that is more imaginary than real. Rejecting the implication that his settings were purely fictional, Greene insisted that the world he wrote about was “carefully and accurately described.”³

1. Graham Greene, *Getting to Know the General* (Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 173. Henceforth referred to parenthetically as *General*.

2. Marie-Françoise Allain, *The Other Man: Conversations with Graham Greene*, trans. Guido Waldman (The Bodley Head, 1983), pp. 57–58.

3. Greene, *Ways of Escape* (1980; Washington Square, 1982), p. 62.

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RELIGION

So much has been written about Greene's Catholicism that it seems unnecessary to treat the matter further. Nevertheless, religion was a frequent theme in Greene's writings about Latin America (the countries are, of course, predominantly Catholic), and what Greene had to say about the practice of religion as he found it in the countries of Latin America, particularly the emphasis he placed on the Church's political activism, does add to an understanding of his rather complicated beliefs.

Greene first came to Latin America to study the religious situation in Mexico. His principal concern was the suffering of Catholics under the socialist policies of the Mexican government. But he also discovered something unexpected: a powerful religious passion among the Indians of Mexico. Throughout his account of the journey (*The Lawless Roads*), he registered his admiration for their religiosity. Observing peasants kneeling for Mass, holding out their arms, minute after minute, in the attitude of crucifixion, he concluded: "Perhaps *this* is the population of heaven."⁴

In the intense piety of the Indians Greene saw "flashes . . . of something simple and strange and uncomplicated, a way of life we have hopelessly lost but can never quite forget" (*Lawless*, p. 170). To Greene, Indian religiosity was closer to some elemental form of Christianity than was the European version of the faith, which was "too apt to minimize the magic element in Christianity" (*Lawless*, p. 171). In contrast to the materialism so prevalent elsewhere, Greene found that "life among the dark groves of leaning crosses was at any rate concerned with eternal values" (*Lawless*, p. 207). Watching Indians in "a slow sad procession towards the foot of the cross," he concluded that "like saints they seek the only happiness in their lives and squeeze out from it a further pain" (*Lawless*, p. 44). To Greene, Indian Christianity was tenacious and full of grace, while "Mass in Chelsea seemed curiously fictitious; no peon knelt with his arms out in the attitude of the cross, no woman dragged herself up the aisle on her knees" (*Lawless*, p. 224).

This discovery deeply affected Greene. In Mexico, he told an interviewer, he had "witnessed the fervour of the peasants . . . who suffered for their faith. . . . [T]his endowed the Church with such grandeur, the fidelity of the believers assumed such proportions, that I couldn't help being profoundly moved."⁵

After his trip to Mexico, Greene developed an interest in indigenous religions. In Haiti, for example, he witnessed secret voodoo ceremonies and remarked upon their genuine passion. Ultimately, Greene's interest in indigenous religiosity had a political side. As the French critic Marie-Béatrice Mesnet points out, what Greene hoped for "was the development of indigenous Christian cultures to offset the attractions of communism." He believed that "only Christianity . . . could satisfy the real aspirations of these peoples."⁶

While Greene felt that indigenous Christian cultures were energized by a concern for "eternal values" (*Lawless*, p. 207), he also believed that their practice of Christianity retained political relevance — as for instance in Haiti, where the syncretic mixture of voodoo and Christianity offered people hope even as they suffered under Duvalier's dictatorship. Moreover, Greene saw the potential for political action in the religious fervor of these indigenous cultures. For example, in

4. Greene, *The Lawless Roads* (1939; Penguin, 1982), p. 44. Henceforth referred to parenthetically as *Lawless*.

5. Allain, p. 155.

6. Marie-Béatrice Mesnet, "Graham Greene," *The Politics of Twentieth Century Novelists*, ed. George A. Panichas (Apollo Editions, 1974), p. 113. Greene's interest in indigenous versions of Christianity extended beyond Latin America to other places he had visited, including Kenya, Liberia, and Vietnam.

a crucial scene of *The Comedians*, a voodoo ceremony marks the beginning of a guerrilla movement. This political tendency was at the heart of Greene's own faith: "I know that all too often throughout history the Church has sided with the powerful, but this has happened less frequently in the twentieth century. I think that at the moment, especially so far as Latin America is concerned, she has effectively rediscovered a technique for revolution."⁷

Rediscovering a technique for revolution: for Greene this was a central purpose of the Church, and no discussion of Greene's faith is complete without considering its political aspects. Greene was not concerned about the apparent incompatibility of political activity and religious faith. He was not only willing to make commitments, but also ready to insist that commitment was absolutely necessary. Greene summarized his own position through the words of Doctor Magiot in *The Comedians*: "I would rather have blood on my hands than water like Pilate."⁸

Commenting on Greene's politicized faith, Anthony Burgess contended that "to a Catholic there can be no real taking of sides." That Greene "lays open his soul to the corruptions of the great world of commitment" apparently was problematic for Burgess, perhaps because Burgess believed that "Christianity can no longer provide appropriate modes of political action."⁹

Burgess made these comments on Greene's politics in 1967. In subsequent years, Greene addressed the question of commitment and Christian political action and effectively answered Burgess's critique. During visits to Paraguay, Chile, and Central America, Greene observed that the Church had taken a side and, in doing so, had rediscovered the technique of revolution. In Latin America, Greene found an approach to Christianity that did provide appropriate modes of political action. Burgess regarded Greene's journeys as Jansenist excursions "to the places where the squalor of sin is exposed in its rawest forms."¹⁰ But this observation was only partially correct. Greene went to such places not only to find the squalor of sin but also to discover how people — especially Catholics — could appropriately respond to this squalor.

As early as 1938, on his journey to Mexico, Greene found hints of a politicized Christianity. First, he witnessed a strike organized by a Mexican priest: "This strike was the first example I had come across of genuine Catholic Action on a social issue, a real attempt, led by the old, fiery, half-blind Archbishop, to put into force the papal encyclicals which have condemned capitalism quite as strongly as Communism" (*Lawless*, p. 28). Such political action reminded Greene of the words of St. James: "Go to now, ye rich men: weep and howl in your miseries which shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh like fire" (*Lawless*, p. 29).

"Those are the words of revolution," Greene concluded. Thereafter, the notion of a revolutionary Christianity became central to his thinking. Years later, while visiting with Fidel Castro, Greene "argued for the possibility, not of a mere chilly coexistence, but of cooperation between Catholicism and Communism."¹¹ He agreed with Castro that "a revolutionary can have a religious belief."¹² The nexus between faith and radical political action became most readily apparent in

7. Allain, p. 166

8. Greene, *The Comedians* (1966; Penguin, 1976), p. 286. Henceforth referred to parenthetically as *Comedians*.

9. Anthony Burgess, "Politics in the Novels of Graham Greene," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2.2 (1967), pp. 96, 98–99.

10. Burgess, p. 95.

11. Greene, "The Marxist Heretic," *Collected Essays* (Penguin, 1981), p. 308.

12. Greene, "Return to Cuba," in *Reflections* (Penguin, 1990), p. 219.

Paraguay, where Greene observed that the Jesuits were the only group resisting a repressive dictatorship. In a magazine article, Greene expressed his disapproval of the apolitical "lotus eaters" who let "the charm of corruption" win over their conscience. Greene made it clear that he saw the Catholic Church as a foil to the indolence of these "lotus eaters": "Only the Church (and the Jesuits in particular) seems sometimes to threaten the surface of the still pool."¹³ The lotus eaters, on the other hand, lived "untroubled by the big questions of human rights which concern the Jesuit fathers."¹⁴

As an antidote to the "charm of corruption," Greene stressed the need for commitment. Against the placid, drugged state of the corrupted lotus-eaters, he extolled the Paraguayan Church as a model of involvement. Against a priest living openly with a woman, he held up as a model Camillo Torres, "the priest shot with the guerrillas in Colombia." Against the prodigious feasts of a rich, steak-eating glutton, he cited the example of a student who, in a lay sermon, "criticized [the dictator, General Stroessner] for spending money on a visit to the United States while children in his own country were dying of malnutrition."¹⁵ A lack of commitment was clearly anathema to Greene.

In 1972, Greene visited Chile, where Salvador Allende's Marxist party had won the elections of 1970. In his essay, "Chile: The Dangerous Edge," Greene again voiced his approval of the Church's commitment to social justice. Calling the Catholic Church in Chile "progressive," he cited the efforts of "eighty priests, nearly all of whom are working in the slums," who had "signed a declaration in support of Socialism."¹⁶ In fact, in cases in which the Church failed to side with the underdog, Greene tended to support non-Christian politicians, such as Panama's General Torrijos, instead of the Church. He emphatically asserted this support in *Getting to Know the General*, a memoir of his friendship with Torrijos. According to Greene, the Catholic Church of Panama was not as progressive as was the church in Chile: "I looked into the village church. It was falling into ruin and there was a chicken run in the aisle. . . . No Priest had visited the place for the last year. The people looked to the General and not to the Church for a measure of help" (*General*, p. 127). In Greene's view, the Church's neglect stood in marked contrast to the direct form of democracy that Torrijos practiced. The Church in Panama did not reach out to people the way the general did; therefore, Greene considered Torrijos more responsible and more moral than the Church.

Greene never hesitated to criticize the hierarchy of the Church wherever it had remained reactionary and unsupportive of the revolution that he wanted the Church to lead. This criticism could extend even to the Pope: while in Nicaragua, he witnessed an "ugly spectacle" unfold as the Pope rebuked Ernesto Cardenal, the poet and leftist priest who served as the Sandinista's Minister of Culture (*General*, p. 225). Greene, in turn, rebuked the Pope as a hypocrite: "I see no logic in the fact that he [John Paul II] is a political pope and yet he refuses to let priests be political priests," he told a reporter for Reuters in 1985.¹⁷

13. Greene, "The Worm Inside the Lotus Blossom," in *Reflections*, p. 264.

14. Greene, "Worm," p. 265. Greene's observations on Paraguay are echoed by Leon, the priest-turned-guerrilla in *The Honorary Consul* (1973; Simon and Schuster, 1983). Leon argues that the gospels "make no sense . . . anyway not in Paraguay. 'sell all and give to the poor' — I had to read that out to them while the old Archbishop we had in those days was eating a fine fish . . . and drinking a French wine with the General" (p. 140).

15. Greene, "Worm," p. 264.

16. Greene, "Chile: The Dangerous Edge," in *Reflections*, p. 278.

17. "Graham Greene returns to his old haunts," *The Times*, 17 December 1985, p. 5.

Nicaragua provided Greene with further examples of Catholics who were engaged in "appropriate modes of political action." In *Getting to Know the General*, Greene described a visit to two Maryknoll nuns living "in the same conditions as the poor — a tin-roofed hut and a standing pipe for water in the yard" (*General*, p. 226). Greene held the nuns in higher esteem than he held the Pope or Archbishop Obando of Nicaragua, with his "conservative henchmen" (*General*, p. 224); the nuns' commitment to the poor — and to the Sandinista cause — was clearly the reason. They had taken sides. In his writings on Latin America, Greene, too, had taken sides. He did so without concern for the apparent contradictions that worried Burgess. To Greene, "liberation theology" — which argued for the interaction of Christianity and revolutionary politics — was not unorthodox but rather "a natural growth of the gospels."¹⁸

In his nonfiction, Greene suggested that taking sides is not as dangerous for a Catholic as Burgess had argued. In his fiction, however, the issue is more ambiguous. Leon, the failed priest in *The Honorary Consul*, is an example of a priest who has fought for the poor. Unable to tolerate the hypocrisy of the Church, he has joined a guerrilla group, just as the revolutionary priest Camillo Torres had in Colombia. But in so doing he has given up his vocation and, to an extent, he has lost his faith. For Leon, taking sides proves dangerous. Whether Greene approves or disapproves of Leon's actions remains ambiguous. Greene argued that one need not lose one's faith by dedicating oneself to a political cause; but was it better to lose one's faith by getting blood on one's hands — that is, by committing oneself — than it was to remain lukewarm and uncommitted in the faith?¹⁹

To be sure, Greene's faith is not easily summarized. What is clear, however, is that no discussion of his religion is complete without some consideration of its political inclination. In this respect, Greene's visits to and writings on Latin America are absolutely essential to the discussion. In them, Greene was adamant that the Church had a political role and that Catholics must take sides.

POLITICS

Especially in Greene's nonfiction — and most clearly in his articles on Latin America — a definite commitment to revolutionary politics emerged. This commitment, in fact, became the motivation for Greene's later journalism. In articles on Chile, Panama, and Nicaragua, Greene explored more thoroughly the possibilities for what was once called "socialism with a human face," and argued for the survival of maverick socialist governments.

Greene's first encounter with revolutionary politics, in Mexico, was a disappointment. Mexico, he thought, presented a "remarkable tableau" of a revolution that had failed.²⁰ While Greene seemed inclined to believe that all revolutions are inevitably betrayed, this skepticism did not keep him from hoping that some revolutions had the potential to realize their ideals. In those countries of which he wrote favorably, Greene found three particular qualities that helped the leaders he admired work for the benefit of the people rather than serve U.S. neo-colonial interests.

18. "Graham Greene returns to his old haunts," *The Times*, 17 December 1985, p. 5.

19. In a later novel, *Monsignor Quixote* (set in Spain, not Latin America), Greene presented Christianity and Marxism as clashing with each other; Greene clearly favored Christianity, but there was enough gray area for the two to develop a friendship, as it were, like the friendship of the Marxist Mayor Sancho and Monsignor Quixote.

20. Greene, "Return to Cuba," p. 213.

First, Greene frequently cited the charisma of effective socialist leaders. In Latin America, Fidel Castro, Salvador Allende, and Omar Torrijos were all "charismatic" in one way or another in Greene's view (apart from Latin American leaders, Greene also found this quality in Ho Chi Minh). The precise traits of this charisma, however, varied from leader to leader. Castro, for example, had "a charisma of rhetoric"²¹ that helped to keep people involved with the revolution. Greene did not accept the view that Castro's speeches were mere exercises in empty rhetoric. Rather, Castro's rhetorical charisma represented a genuine attempt to communicate the revolution to his audience. His speeches were not harangues, but a form of respect for the people in the true spirit of Athenian democracy: "Those four-hour speeches of Fidel are not made up of evasions and oratorical tricks and big abstract words — they are full of information, down to earth, filled with detail."²²

Salvador Allende's revolution, on the other hand, required not Castro-style charisma, but an "extreme political prudence, a sense of humor, and an unspectacular courage." Allende needed the charisma of "optimism, always optimism," a faith in the revolutionary course that he had undertaken against great odds and against powerful foes.²³ In contrast, Torrijos, leading Panama toward a confrontation with the United States, had "the charisma of desperation."²⁴ This version of charisma seemed to include both the heroism of Castro in the Sierra Maestra ("dreaming, as a soldier, of the simple confrontation of violence") and the optimistic prudence of Allende ("edging slowly towards socialism which requires of him almost infinite patience").²⁵ Charisma, in Torrijos's case, meant suppressing one's instincts for the good of one's cause, yet being ready at the same time to take great risks.

The second quality Greene identified in his articles was a concern for tolerance. It was, in his view, a drastic lack of tolerance that made Mexico's revolution turn disastrous. Likewise, dictators such as Duvalier and Stroessner so stifled their peoples that nightmares had become realities. Greene considered the governments of Cuba, Chile, Panama, and Nicaragua more tolerant and hence more humanistic. Allende's Popular Unity government, for instance, could be "trusted to follow the path of legality even to a bitter end."²⁶ Greene contrasted the "complete freedom of the press" under Allende with the deliberate lies spread by both the extreme right (supported by the United States) and the extreme left. Allende walked a narrow middle ground, but he refused to violate the constitution. Even though the Americans were indoctrinating the military, Allende was "determined not to provoke the American government." Although Greene was skeptical of the policy's success ("I suppose pessimism is the doubtful privilege of an outsider with a return ticket"), he admired Allende's commitment to tolerance.²⁷ Without that tolerance, a revolution would falter. Quoting Castro (and echoing Orwell), he noted that an intolerant revolution inevitably became a "yoke" for "a school of domesticated animals."²⁸

In one of his essays on Torrijos, Greene gave several examples of "the general . . . constantly on the move, listening to complaints" as he traveled around the country meeting with opponents and supporters alike. Torrijos's tolerance and openness stood in marked contrast to the intolerance

21. Greene, "The Country with Five Frontiers," *New York Review of Books*, 17 February 1977, p. 10.

22. Greene, "The Marxist Heretic," p. 309.

23. Greene, "Chile: The Dangerous Edge," p. 280.

24. Greene, "Five Frontiers," p. 10.

25. Greene, "Five Frontiers," p. 10.

26. Greene, "Chile: The Dangerous Edge," p. 275.

27. Greene, "Chile: The Dangerous Edge," pp. 276, 280.

28. Greene, "Return to Cuba," p. 220.

and close-mindedness of Americans in the Canal Zone, for whom "confrontation . . . was a simple affair of flying in reinforcements from Fort Bragg."²⁹ Similarly, a few years later Greene opined to a reporter that "there is a respect for difference of opinion in [Sandinista] Nicaragua [and] a respect for religion."³⁰ In Greene's view, such respect was crucial to the successful establishment of socialism with a human face.

The third essential quality of a humane socialism according to Greene's articles was the ability to act independently and to think beyond dogma. In the first instance, this ability usually meant not bowing to capitalist interests. In the second instance, it usually meant altering Marxist interpretations when necessary. Greene recognized that any Latin American government faced a good deal of interference from the United States. The leaders whom he admired in his writings — those that were attempting to change the status quo — he admired in part because they did not yield to American pressure. Again, Greene's experiences in Mexico provided him with a negative example. In *The Lawless Roads*, he derided the "swagger cabarets" of Socialist Mexico for catering to American pleasure-seekers (pp. 75–76). Worse, by 1963, when he again visited, Mexico's "revolution" had capitulated to American interests: the "golden shower" of American wealth had fallen on the "Danaë of revolution" and corrupted her. Mexican authorities even harassed travelers to Cuba, just "to please the United States."³¹ From what Greene had seen, "Socialist Mexico" had sold out.

Cuba, on the other hand, would not yield to a crippling American blockade. Chile's Salvador Allende, also faced with "the hardly veiled menace" of the CIA, followed Fidel Castro in attempting to effect a revolution in spite of the threats: "A government that has done so much with a minority of seats in Congress — nationalizing the copper mines without compensation, taking control of the principal banks by the purchase of shares, expropriating land far in excess of the timid measures of the Frei government — must wonder sometimes where, when, and how the counterattack is likely to fall."³²

Allende's "prudence," "courage," and "optimism" (aspects of his charisma) in instituting these reforms — despite the menace from both the United States and the Chilean military — marked his independence from traditional controlling interests. Even though "the Pentagon may feel impelled to exhibit its undiminished power in what they consider their own sphere of influence," Allende maintained the optimism that was "a vital necessity for the man who makes the decisions."³³

Castro and Allende impressed Greene, but in Greene's encounters with Latin American leaders, it was Omar Torrijos "who became one of my best friends."³⁴ Many factors contributed to this "love," but certainly one was Torrijos's independence in standing up to the Americans. Panama interested Greene because he "was fascinated to see such a little country holding its own against the Americans."³⁵ Torrijos definitely seemed different from other leaders: "We are too apt to class together the generals of South and Central America. Torrijos was a lone wolf. . . . His dream, as I was to learn in the years that followed, was of a social democratic Central America which would be no menace to the United States, but completely independent" (*General*, pp. 37–38).

29. Greene, "Five Frontiers," p. 13.

30. "Graham Greene returns to his old haunts," *The Times*, 17 December 1985, p. 5.

31. Greene, "Return to Cuba," p. 214.

32. Greene, "Chile: The Dangerous Edge," p. 275.

33. Greene, "Chile: The Dangerous Edge," pp. 279, 280.

34. Allain, p. 56.

35. Allain, p. 58.

Along with his independent actions, Torrijos impressed the English author because he did not think dogmatically. For Greene, who found Marxist philosophy "as dry as Bentham and as outdated as Ingersoll,"³⁶ this ability to reject dogma was essential to good leadership, especially in governments attempting to establish revolutions on socialist principles. Castro, Allende, and Torrijos were admirable for their ability to think creatively when the situation demanded. In his assessment of Torrijos, Greene summarized what to him constituted leadership with a human face: "an idealist without a formal ideology, except a general preference for left over right and a scorn for bureaucrats."³⁷

This assessment aptly describes Greene's politics as well. In his writing about Latin America, he consistently preferred leftist governments to rightist regimes, and he was adamant about their right to survive. Furthermore, this preference was based on a commitment to certain ideals that prevailed in his work independent of a formal ideology. Mesnet points out that to Greene the writer "must at all costs maintain his independence, taking no orders from the state or from any party or creed." Above all, "his responsibility [was] to 'the establishment of justice,' the 'awakening of sympathy.'"³⁸ Greene's politics were complicated but consistent. His commitments were clear, but he was never narrowly partisan. Greene summarized the point nicely in *Getting to Know the General*:

There were many in the United States, I was sure, who would consider that I was being "used," [because he had received from Panama's President the Grand Cross of the Order of Vasco de Nuñez de Balboa and was to represent Panama unofficially on a mission to Sandinista Nicaragua] but that thought didn't worry me in the least. They could say that I had been "used" too in Cuba in 1958 when I carried warm clothes to Santiago for Castro's men in the Sierra Maestra and, through an Irish MP, a friend of mine, I had been able to question the Conservative government in the House of Commons on the sale of old jet planes to Batista, but I have never hesitated to be "used" in a cause I believed in, even if my choice might be only for a lesser evil. We can never foresee the future with any accuracy. (*General*, p. 221)

ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENTS

One of the salient concerns of Greene's politics in general and his Latin American writings in particular was a consistently virulent anti-Americanism. These sentiments were embodied in the character of Fowler in *The Quiet American*, but versions of them appeared in almost all of Greene's work, starting in the 1930s, when he disparaged the "sinless graceless chromium world" that American capitalism and materialism had created (*Lawless*, p. 184). During his travels in Latin America, Greene came across a wealth of evidence of America's reactionary role in that region. US policies seemed to threaten all that he believed in. By the 1970s and 1980s, as he observed the United States undermining the governments that he supported, Greene's anti-American sentiments culminated in a series of highly polemical articles.

36. Greene, "Return to Cuba," p. 219.

37. Greene, "The Great Spectacular," *New York Review of Books*, 26 January 1978, p. 9.

38. Mesnet, p. 101.

In his early works, Greene expressed a general dislike for American values as he perceived them. As Gwen R. Boardman has noted, he was particularly hard on the superficial values promoted by Hollywood, "an industry dedicated to falsifying life."³⁹ America stood for a world of false values, a symbol of a facile and dangerous ingenuousness: "it wasn't evil, it wasn't anything at all, it was just the drugstore and the Coca-Cola, the hamburger, the sinless graceless chromium world" (*Lawless*, 184).

Greene's journey to Mexico deepened his distrust of American values. In Mexico he met American tourists, such as a police commissioner from a small town in Wisconsin, whose "old, good, pink face disclosed the endless vacancy behind" (*Lawless*, p. 37). These Americans were "very innocent," but "behind that pinkness and that goodness, eternal nothingness [was] working its way through to the brain" (*Lawless*, p. 37). All the innocence added up to nothing in Greene's estimation, nothing but a world without values given over to "Rating for Dating" articles in magazines, talent tests for sub-debutantes, and "all the vacancy of drug-stores and cheap movies" (*Lawless*, p. 77). The basic characteristics of these tourists reappeared in Greene's later fiction, in characters such as Pyle (*The Quiet American*), the Smiths (*The Comedians*), and Dooley (*Travels with My Aunt*).

After Hiroshima and the start of the Cold War, Greene recognized that American innocence was more harmful than he had originally surmised. As a result, Greene's criticism of America became increasingly severe. This criticism was expressed most bitterly by Fowler in *The Quiet American*. To Fowler, Pyle — like America itself — causes a great deal of trouble despite his good motives. He is "the quintessential American abroad . . . bearing the whole burden of Anglo-Saxon failure, 'its muddled morality and irrational sentiment.'"⁴⁰

In Vietnam, Greene could no longer accept the presumed innocence behind the American attitude. When he returned to Latin America, where the United States had long acted with a reckless naïveté, his exposé of American actions took on a harsher tone. In his fiction, comic, idiotic tourists still periodically passed through Greene's pages. For example, in "Cheap in August," obese Coca-Cola drinking retirees wander around in the background. But more and more, the antics of these tourists are presented in an ironic context, as in *Our Man in Havana*:

. . . but one tourist had recently been killed by a stray bullet while he was taking a photograph of a picturesque beggar under a balcony near the palace, and the death had sounded the knell of the all-in tour "including a trip to Varadero beach and the night-life of Havana." The victim's Leica had been smashed as well, and that had impressed his companions more than anything with the destructive power of a bullet. Wormold had heard them talking afterwards in the bar of the Nacional. "Ripped right through the camera," one of them said. "Five hundred dollars gone just like that."

"Was he killed at once?"

"Sure. And the lens — you could pick up bits for fifty yards around. Look. I'm taking a piece home to show Mr. Humpelnicker."⁴¹

39. Gwen R. Boardman, *Graham Greene: The Aesthetics of Exploration* (University of Florida Press, 1971), p. 104.

40. Boardman, p. 102.

41. Greene, *Our Man in Havana* (1958; Penguin, 1979), p. 25.

Irony failed, however, in the nightmare world of Haiti, as Greene depicted it in the novel *The Comedians*. The innocence of the American do-gooders, the Smiths, is more exasperating than anything else, for they are blind to the realities around them. Worse, they are ignorant of the role the American government plays in supporting the Duvalier dictatorship. The Smiths do not understand the extent and power of this influence. Dr. Magiot, a voice of reason (who is therefore doomed) in the novel, tells Mrs. Smith that "in the Western hemisphere, in Haiti and elsewhere, we live under the shadow of your great and prosperous country. Much courage and patience is needed to keep one's head" (*Comedians*, p. 177).

In this "nightmare republic" (as Greene called the country in an essay), American innocence was not only dangerous and exasperating; it bordered on the absurd: "I little thought then," Greene later stated, "that Nelson Rockefeller would appear on the balcony before the Port-au-Prince mob to shake Duvalier's hand and to hand him a personal letter from the President of the United States."⁴² Anthony Burgess summarized Greene's view: "Americanism is bad in that it is fundamentally hypocritical. Talk of the 'free world' often means an obsession with American security, American trade, the augmentation of an American-led community dedicated to more and more feverish material consumption; it does not necessarily mean the spread of democratic rights."⁴³

Responding to this hypocrisy in his later writings, Greene again and again drew attention to the egregious actions of the State Department, actions that often involved the CIA and thousands of deaths. In his fiction, Greene depicted this hypocrisy through the character of Dooley (*Travels with My Aunt*), an agent who seems more interested in timing his urinations than in contemplating the consequences of his actions on behalf of the CIA.

In the case of Chile, Greene saw the CIA as a "hardly veiled menace to Allende's government." He posited the possibility of an "economic blockade by the United States or a disguised attack engineered by the CIA with the help of the right extremists."⁴⁴ A year and a half later, these possibilities became a reality. After Pinochet's coup and the countermanding of the constitution, Greene blamed the United States. Concerning the inflation that led to Allende's downfall, he asked: "Who caused the high rate? How much of it was caused by the transport strike now admittedly engineered by the CIA?"⁴⁵

The rhetorical culmination of Greene's anti-Americanism was his article for the *New York Review of Books* on the signing of the Panama Canal Treaty.⁴⁶ This article represented a "gentle revenge" for Greene who — once deported from the United States for suspicion of leftist views⁴⁷ — now returned with a diplomatic passport.

In the article, Greene struck hard at all that he did not like in American policies. The scene at what he called the "Great Spectacular" reminded Greene of the worst of Hollywood. Greene lampooned each of the American "actors" in turn. Kissinger was on stage "with his world-wide grin." Nelson Rockefeller acted "strenuously amiable." President Ford was too blond, and President Carter looked "miserably unhappy" making "a banal little speech" that was "almost inaudible." All of the Americans looked "strikingly unimportant," there "only to be noticed, party-goers

42. Greene, *Ways of Escape*, p. 239.

43. Burgess, p. 95.

44. Greene, "Chile: The Dangerous Edge," p. 275.

45. Greene, "Letter," *The Times*, 15 September 1980, p. 13.

46. Greene, "The Great Spectacular," p. 9.

47. Greene relates the incident in *Ways of Escape*, p. 187.

having a night out together, pleased to feel at home with friendly faces — ‘What, you here?’” They came off very badly compared to Torrijos, whose voice had “a cutting edge.”⁴⁸

But if Greene satirized the Americans in this article, he was not always so light-hearted in his criticism. After the Panama Treaty, Greene revisited Central America to observe the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua. These visits led to a section in *Getting to Know the General* that analyzed the actions of the revolutionary government, as well as to a series of letters to *The Times* that criticized the Reagan administration’s attempts to overthrow the Sandinista government. These letters focused on the narrow, ingenuous, and falsifying worldview of the American government. Greene criticized the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, for claiming to have “documentary evidence” of Sandinista oppression, but not showing it. Greene noted that her claims were contrary to his own experience.⁴⁹ In another letter, he pointed out the hypocrisy of Secretary of State George Schultz for claiming that the Sandinistas employed state terror, when the “United States under President Reagan” was “aiding the death squads in El Salvador and the Contras, who include the relics of Somoza’s National Guard.”⁵⁰ Most troublesome to Greene was America’s penchant for simplifying the issues in black and white terms whenever Marxism was involved. Greene pointed out that the Nicaraguan government could as easily be called Catholic as Communist:

How can the Nicaraguan government be classified simply as communist? The key positions of foreign affairs, health and education, and culture are all held by Catholic priests. The official in charge of economic research is a priest. An English priest is organising rural libraries in the countryside.⁵¹

Greene could not tolerate such simplifications. Even though he, as a Catholic, was not a Marxist (elsewhere he called Marxism “dry and outdated”) he was willing to accept what the Americans could not. In the same letter he stated: “There are Marxists in the Government, yes, but Marxism is an economic theory not a heresy.”

Greene’s well-known anti-American sentiments always focused on actions and attitudes; he was not inherently prejudiced against Americans. His criticisms were directed at the sort of narrow-minded and innocent actions that endangered lives. We can find Greene criticizing these actions no matter who committed them, although it was the Americans who were most often guilty in the world in which Greene traveled. For example, Greene never hesitated in his articles to criticize the British government for the very same reasons that he criticized the American government. As Boardman suggests concerning *The Quiet American*, Greene’s “apparent indictment of America might with equal justice be applied to Europe’s failures.”⁵² His “indictment of America,” to use Boardman’s phrase, was really an indictment of something larger of which America was representative: a facile attitude that insisted on seeing the world in narrow, black-and-white terms and that treated people as a means to an end, not as human beings.

48. Greene, “The Great Spectacular,” p. 9.

49. Greene, “Letter,” *The Times*, 15 October 1983, p. 9.

50. Greene, “Letter,” *The Times*, 13 April 1984, p. 13.

51. Greene, “Letter,” *The Times*, 20 March 1986, p. 13.

52. Boardman, p. 102.

MILITARISM

There are as many military men in Graham Greene's fiction as there are priests, but for whatever reason, Greene's colonels, lieutenants, and captains have not received as much critical attention as his religious characters. Perhaps it is too easy to assume that these military men are the villains of Greene's novels and to leave it at that. For example, in the film version of *The Power and the Glory* (John Ford's *The Fugitive*), the lieutenant is portrayed as completely dissolute — to the extent that the lieutenant is even made the father of the priest's child. But Greene clearly intends these characters to be more than two-dimensional villains. In fact, Greene's use of military men as characters in his fiction and his frequent analysis of militarism in his nonfiction makes this one of his major themes. He first addressed this theme in *The Lawless Roads*, in an account of his meeting with General Saturnino Cedillo, a minor force in Mexican politics who interested Greene because he had managed to resist the authority of the central government in allowing churches and parochial schools to operate in spite of laws prohibiting their existence. The theme of militarism was then developed in characters such as the lieutenant in *The Power and the Glory*, Captain Concasseur in *The Comedians*, and Colonel Perez in *The Honorary Consul*. Greene's nonfiction about Latin America provided a coda for this theme in its depiction of generals who have ruled Latin America as dictators.

More than anything else, Greene's military men were typified by their commitment to violence, to "useless cruelty," to an "ideal lost and the violence just going on" (*Lawless*, p. 47). The best example of a military man losing idealism is the lieutenant in *The Power and the Glory*. He engages in the "mysticism" of an atheistic revolution: "He was a mystic, too, and what he had experienced was vacancy — a complete certainty in the existence of a dying, cooling world, of human beings who had evolved from animals for no purpose at all."⁵³ But this purposelessness renders null the ideals of the revolution. He tries to convince himself that the violence of his office is for a cause:

... it was for [the children] he was fighting. He would eliminate from their childhood everything which had made him miserable, all that was poor, superstitious, and corrupt. They deserved nothing less than the truth — a vacant universe and a cooling world, the right to be happy in any way they chose. He was quite prepared to make a massacre for their sakes — first the Church and then the foreigner and then the politician — even his own chief would one day have to go. He wanted to begin the world again with them, in a desert. (*Power*, p. 58)

The lieutenant is not troubled by the likelihood that in a moral desert the children would have a hard time exercising their "right to be happy in any way they chose." But even if his ideals made sense, the violence he perceives as necessary to effect those ideals does not accomplish what he thinks it will. The killing of the whiskey priest proves unsatisfying to him. The child who earlier had admired his gun now feels deceived and sees the priest and not the lieutenant as the hero. Dedication to violence, Greene suggests, becomes an end in itself — a dead end predicated on false ideals.

53. Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (1940; Penguin, 1977), pp. 24–25. Henceforth referred to parenthetically as *Power*.

The lieutenant's motives were at least rooted in a revolution, albeit a now corrupt revolution. In Captain Concasseur of *The Comedians*, on the other hand, we encounter a representative of the military who rules by a violence that is rooted in nothing so rational. Concasseur, perhaps the cruelest character in all of Greene's Latin American work, emerged from Greene's own experiences in Haiti. Greene had observed officers in Mexico, and he knew of the "notorious police chief Captain Ventura" in Cuba;⁵⁴ but not until Greene experienced the terror of having a Tonton Macoute (Duvalier's military police) stare at him through dark glasses while Greene waited for hours at a police station could he conceive of a cruelty and violence so pure. Unlike the Mexican lieutenant, Concasseur has no ideals whatsoever. Describing the Tonton Macoute in "Nightmare Republic," Greene wrote: "... never has terror had so bare and ignoble an object as here — the protection of a few tough men's pockets."⁵⁵

Despite the captain's evil, Greene saw the same pathos in Concasseur that he saw in the lieutenant of *The Power and the Glory*. There comes an inevitable moment in Greene's fiction when the military man exposes this pathos. In one of his confrontations with Concasseur, Brown observes "a hint of weakness. I could understand why it was these men wore dark glasses — they were human, but they musn't show fear; it might be the end of terror in others" (*Comedians*, p. 125). Greene suggests that the attempt to frighten and terrorize others is really an indication of weakness on the part of the military.

In his nonfiction, Greene turned his attention to the generals who ruled Latin America and submitted them to a scathing critique. In "The Great Spectacular," for example, he observed the generals gathered in one room for the signing of the Panama Canal Treaty:

The real character actors were all up on the platform — an unpleasant sight but more impressive than the stars below: General Stroessner of Paraguay whom I had last seen in uniform one National Day in Asunción saluting the cripples of the Bolivian war as they wheeled by and the colonels stood stiffly upright in their cars like ninepins in a bowling alley (he had reminded me then of some flushed owner of a German *Bierstrube*, and in civilian clothes he looked more than ever the part); General Videla of Argentina with a face squashed so flat there was hardly room for his two foxy eyes; General Banzer of Bolivia, a little frightened man with a small agitated mustache — he would have looked more like a dictator if he had worn a uniform, he had been miscast and misdressed; there too was the greatest character actor of them all — General Pinochet himself, the man you love to hate.⁵⁶

In an article that satirized everyone (except Torrijos), Greene saved his most brutal sarcasm for Pinochet, who "like Boris Karloff" had "really attained the status of instant recognition." At the treaty ceremony, Pinochet so dominated the scene, in Greene's view, that "he didn't need to have a speaking part — he didn't even need to grunt." Greene was sure that Pinochet "knew that he dominated the scene — he was the only one people were protesting about with banners in the streets of Washington."⁵⁷ Despite the satire, Greene saw real, Concasseur-type evil in Pinochet:

54. Greene, *Ways of Escape*, p. 218.

55. Greene, "Nightmare Republic," in *Reflections*, p. 224.

56. Greene, "The Great Spectacular," p. 9.

57. Greene, "The Great Spectacular," p. 9.

... he was one who could look down with contempt at the highly paid frivolous Hollywood types below him. His chin was so deeply sunk in his collar he seemed to have no neck at all; he had clever, humorous, falsely good-fellow eyes which seemed to tell us all not to take too seriously all those stories of murder and torture. (A week before I had listened in Panama to an Argentine refugee. She broke down as she described how a bayonet had been thrust into her vagina.)⁵⁸

Pinochet represented in one man the worst of militarism in Latin America. The last image of the passage thus became symbolic in a way, with the bayonet as metonymy for the military. Greene saw these generals as violent rapists of their own countries.

Although Pinochet dominated the scene in one sense, the general who was at the center of the treaty ceremony was Torrijos of Panama. If Pinochet represented one extreme of militarism, Torrijos was the rare exception representing the opposite extreme. Truly a "lone wolf" among generals, Torrijos had "no political prisoners and unobtrusively . . . [gave] aid to many political refugees from Chile and Argentina." Furthermore, this general was "popular in the countryside (especially with the children)."⁵⁹ In contrast, the lieutenant in *The Power and the Glory* longed to be popular with the children, but succeeded only in having them spit at him. Torrijos was the kind of military man not found in Greene's fiction: the lieutenant (*Power and the Glory*), Concasseur (*The Comedians*), Segura (*Our Man in Havana*), and Perez (*The Honorary Consul*) all had more in common with Pinochet than with Torrijos.

It is noteworthy, therefore, that in this last article Greene brought together these two generals who stood at opposite ends of a spectrum. The article ended, in fact, with the curious image, no doubt disappointing to Greene, of the two generals caught in an embrace:

After the signing of the treaty Carter and Torrijos set off down the platform in opposite directions to greet the heads of state. An embrace is the usual greeting in the southern hemisphere, and I noticed how Torrijos embraced the leaders of Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru ["the more reputable leaders"] and confined himself to a formal handshake with Bolivia and Argentina as he worked his way down the row toward Pinochet. But Pinochet noticed that, and his eyes gleamed with amusement. When his turn came he grasped the hand of Torrijos and flung his arm around his shoulder. If any journalist's camera had clicked at that moment it would be thought that Torrijos had embraced Pinochet.⁶⁰

Choosing to end the article with this image, Greene clearly saw this as a symbolic moment. He seemed to be suggesting the power of Pinochet-style militarism, a power so overwhelming that it dominated those who attempted to rule differently. As Greene's last comment on the military in Latin America, it is an intriguing, disturbing image.

58. Greene, "The Great Spectacular," p.9.

59. Greene, "The Great Spectacular," p.9.

60. Greene, "The Great Spectacular," p. 9.

CONCLUSION

Because the world that Greene "carefully and accurately described" was a rather complicated one, Greene's involvement with Latin America — most specifically his taking of political sides — was likewise rather complicated. In evaluating the wisdom of Greene's involvement in Latin American politics, it is clear that Greene most often sided with those dedicated to genuine change and fundamental upheaval. From the standpoint of history, his support of Allende is difficult to fault: the democratically elected leader was deliberately targeted for overthrow by the CIA. General Pinochet subsequently turned the Chilean government into one of the worst violators of human rights in the world.⁶¹

Greene's support of Torrijos is perhaps a little more dubious. The Panamanian general has been criticized as an authoritarian dictator whose regime was marred by corruption. Nevertheless, in retrospect Torrijos is credited — even by the foreign government that opposed him — as being "a unifying force in Panama's political system." Moreover, his regime accomplished "far-reaching reforms" in health care and education, while pursuing an "ambitious program of public works." Given that Torrijos brought together "various sectors of society that had been objects of social injustice at the hands of the oligarchy," one can understand why Greene was attracted to him.⁶²

Greene's support for Castro and the Sandinistas, however, is likely to invite more severe criticism. In his writing, Greene was consistently supportive of Castro, although he had little to say after the 1960s, when the repressiveness of the Cuban government became increasingly apparent. Perhaps his enthusiasm dimmed somewhat. In a 1983 interview, he said that he was "very much of two minds" about Castro. "I admire his courage and his efficiency, but I question his authoritarianism."⁶³ Even though he recognized that Castro was dictatorial, he remained reticent in judging him: "I wish that the word 'dictator' didn't necessarily imply a pejorative. Let's say that Castro is necessarily an authoritarian statesman."⁶⁴ Such rationalization, however, would provide cold comfort for the political prisoners — including writers and artists — in Castro's jails.

After considering Greene's nonfiction on Latin America, we may well recognize a sensibility — different from what critics sometimes call "Greeneland" — that navigates between the perception that humanity is corrupt and the belief that taking the side of justice for the underdog is a necessary step if humanity is to ameliorate its condition. This sensibility is disturbing because it challenges some basic Western notions, such as the beneficence of capitalism. It is sometimes elusive, especially in Greene's fiction, in which we are often left with paradoxes and anomalies. It is always compelling, for it emphasizes responsibility and urges action. Above all, it is insistent, for it permeates all of Greene's work. Ultimately, and this is the most important point, it addresses the world we live in — whether Latin America or Europe or Africa or Asia — and challenges us to stop going around "blinking." The sensibility we find in Greene's work does not exist in his imagination alone; it confronts a very real world, and to Greene that fact was crucial. In *Ways of Escape*, he

rejected the critics' reference to "Greeneland" and asserted that in his writing the world was "carefully and accurately described." He concluded, "I have been a newspaper correspondent as well as a novelist."⁶⁵ His work on Latin America represents the highest achievement in both genres.

61. The US Government's "Country Study" series — produced under the sponsorship of the Department of the Army — acknowledges that "at the covert level the United States worked to destabilize Allende's Chile. . . . Most scholars . . . agree that the CIA was instrumental in the fall of Allende." The study also notes that under