CHAPTER FIVE: THE DYNAMICS OF SURVIVAL

And whereas ideological systems view the 'distortions' which are a part of realism as, quite literally, crimes, realism views the distortions which are a part of the ideologies with the same interest with which it looks on all things that affect and are a part of the real world. Moreover, realism has at its disposal that relatively disinterested form of insight known as irony (necessarily and notoriously lacking in the ideologies), which enables it to enlist the critical awareness of its own distortions in the portrayal of life in the real world.

J.P. Stern in On Realism
CHAPTER FIVE
THE DYNAMICS OF SURVIVAL

The Quiet American, The Comedians, Travels with My Aunt and The Honorary Consul form a unit since they have a common theme. In these novels there is a repeated reference to the rise and fall of Hitler. It appears as though Hitler's rise and fall not only brought a devastating war but also affected the global atmosphere. The horror that gripped Europe during the war years has infected the under-developed parts of the world where the Nazi attitude towards history has become commonplace. The Quiet American presents Indo-China torn by internal factions. York Harding's book, The Role of the West, which became Pyle's Bible, symbolises the damage that callous idealists are capable of doing to the harassed community. In the novels written during the 60's Greene takes us to those parts of the globe which have imbibed the spirit of Hitler. Haiti, which is the scene for the comedy of Mr Brown, Mr Jones and Mr Smith, in no way differs from the Indo-China of Mr Fowler. The Honorary Consul presents one of the Latin American states in which the conflict between the rebels and the dictator makes Doctor Flarr lose his life for trying to survive as a human being in a waste land. These novels build up a situation in which man exists, a world in which everything exists but nothing has value. Man, travelling lawless roads, finds that he can neither reject reality which reason cannot
justify nor embrace it as absurdity which man has created for himself. There seems to be no other way out of this situation than to aim at survival, because survival itself is a part of the absurdity. The Quiet American, The Comedians, and Travels with my Aunt employ limited point of view while The Honorary Consul employs omniscient narration. In the first three novels we find that the narrators themselves are bewildered and undecided, but they present the action in a sympathetic way. Mr Fowler, Mr Brown and Mr Fulling are on the verge of retirement. Mr Fulling actually retires before he starts his travels with his aunt. These men are in the beginning non-committal in their attitude. Fowler, for example, refuses to comment on the situation in Indo-China. He always deceived himself with the plea that after all he is only a paid reporter. In the same way, Brown is not involved in the politics of Haiti. He returns to Fort-au-Prince without any definite idea of his purpose. In spite of the presence of a few deaths, suicide, murder, prisons and torture, the governing tone in all these novels is characterized not by the tragic sense of human suffering which the Christian myth universalizes but by a serious and muted tone which takes the passing world for a theatre in which various actors play roles which they do not understand and which sometimes they do not like.
The Quiet American

The Quiet American is Greene's subtle statement of the dangers of idealism and its concomitant variation, the ills of cynicism. The novel seems to demonstrate that the quiet American is not after all quiet. One may live in the world of ideals quietly. They have only notional value. When one who is mastered by an ideal acts, the value of his action calls into question the value of the ideal. Viewed from this perspective, Pyle's actions and their impact on his fellow human beings discredit the ideal. The following passage sums up the point:

... Now that we too had settled on the floor, the Vietnamese relaxed a little. I felt some sympathy for them; it wasn't an easy job for a couple of ill-trained men to sit up here night after night, never sure of when the Viets might creep up on the road through the fields of paddy. I said to Pyle, 'Do you think they know they are fighting for democracy? We ought to have York Harding here to explain it to them. '

'You always laugh at York,' said Pyle.

'I laugh at anyone who spends so much time writing about what doesn't exist - mental concepts.'

'They exist for him. Haven't you got any mental concepts? God, for instance?'

'I've no reason to believe in a God. Do You?'

'Yes. I am a Unitarian.'

'How many hundred million Gods do people believe in? Why even a Roman Catholic believes in quite a different God when he's scared or happy or hungry.'

'Maybe, if there is a God, he'd be so vast he'd look different to everyone.'

'Like the great Buddha in Bangkok,' I said. 'You can't see all of him at once. Anyway he keeps still.'
"I guess you're just trying to be tough," Pyle said. "There's something you must believe in. Nobody can go on living without some belief."

"Oh, I'm not a Berkeleian. I believe my back's against this wall. I believe there's a gun over there."

"I didn't mean that."

"I believe what I report, which is more than most of your correspondents do."

This passage, as it usually happens in Greene, draws together two equal and opposite ideas. Fowler's anti-American attitude largely stems from his lucid awareness of the political situation. From the point of view of the two ill-trained men guarding the tower, words like 'democracy', 'God', 'Buddha', 'Berkeleian' have no meaning. The Vietnamese want peace so that they may eat and live without being afraid of the bullet. Since an awareness of this simple fact does not demand a knowledge of various philosophical statements about man and the universe, Fowler, as an absolute positivist, would like to exist only as a reporter. In a way, this is a qualified cynicism, which Pyle takes to be mere toughness. We cannot at this stage disapprove of Fowler's laughter at Pyle and his mentor, York Harding. They are struggling to support something which does not exist. Nor can we totally dismiss Pyle because what he says is not false; nobody can go on living without some belief. Even Fowler believes what he sees: confusion, bombing and the dead bodies of civilians. When he witnesses the

devastation caused by the bicycle bombs among the poor civilians,
Fowler gets involved in the war which results in Pyle's murder.

When he meets his American friend, he feels:

All the time that his innocence had angered me, some judge within myself had summed up in his favour, had compared his idealism, his half-baked ideas founded on the works of York Harding, with my cynicism.¹

He gives him friendly advice: "Pyle, don't trust too much in York Harding." Later the bicycle bombs explode killing a baby and amputating a man's leg. Even Pyle is shocked to find blood on his shoes. He looks at Pyle who is ready to faint and feels:

What's the good? He'll always be innocent, you can't blame the innocent, they are always guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity.²

An influential foreigner cannot be controlled by a mere reporter. Hence Fowler gets involved in trying to eliminate him. Through his Indian assistant, Dominquez, he establishes a hot line with Mr. Heng who arranges for the murder of Pyle. When he is talking to Captain Trouin, who takes him to witness a bomb raid, Trouin tells him,

It's not a matter of reason or justice. We all get involved in a moment of emotion and then we cannot get out. War and love - they have always been compared.³

Fowler reports the war events in Indo-China and when he is off duty he makes love to Phuong, his Vietnamese mistress.

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¹. Graham Greene, The Quiet American, op. cit., p.175.
². Ibid., p.125
³. Ibid., p.170.
Pyle not only disquiets Fowler's quiet, non-committal vocation but also threatens to deprive him of his mistress. War and love, towards which Fowler's attitude is non-committal, bring Pyle into the conflict. What worries Fowler in the initial stages of their acquaintance is Pyle's intruding innocence. As an American with good academic background and dollar security, he thinks he can make Phuong happy by marrying her. It is sense of security that draws Phuong intimately to Pyle. At one point Fowler resigns himself to the loss of his mistress, because youth and security are two things which he cannot give her. The following conversation which takes place between the two rivals in Phuong's presence brings to focus the attitudes of Fowler and Pyle:

'Can't you explain, Thomas, why ...'
'Surely it's obvious enough. I wanted to keep her.'
'At any cost to her?'
'Of course.'
'That's not love.'
'Perhaps it's not your way of love, Pyle.'
'I want to protect her.'
'I don't. She doesn't need protection. I want her around, I want her in my bed.'
'Against her will?'
'She wouldn't stay against her will, Pyle.'
'She can't love you after this ...'
'Love is a western word,' I said. 'We use it for sentimental reasons or to cover up an obsession with one woman. These people don't suffer from obsessions. You're going to be hurt, Pyle, if you aren't careful.'

Fowler's motives in his affair with Phuong are blatantly sensual.

But he is alone, away from his too scrupulous wife, and unwilling to forego opportunities of having good time. He also knows that he makes honest attempts to marry Phuong if his wife divorces him, which he finally succeeds in doing. In the meanwhile he cannot withstand successfully the intrusion of the American. Fowler's assessment of his rival's youth, earnestness and idealism is not based on prejudice, but his too pronounced cynical detachment throws into relief his rival's lovable qualities.

One interesting feature of this novel is that it begins with an enquiry about Pyle's death. There is nothing like a plot resolution. Right from the beginning Fowler tells the story of his American from the vantage point of success. He has succeeded in retaining his mistress and saving the civilians from the third force of Pyle. Towards the end we find Fowler reflecting:

I thought of the first day and Pyle sitting beside me at the Continental, with his eye on the soda-fountain across the way. Everything had gone right with me since he had died, but how I wished there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry.

David Fryce-Jones, after summarising the main issues of the book, quotes the above passage and says:

The someone cannot be Pyle, for if it was there would be nothing to be sorry about. Fowler is

Greene's first serious attempt for twenty years to draw a man who is in a moral predicament without religious resources. He is a neutral in a way that Bendrix with his reluctantly accepted love-hate would never be. It is a neutrality that fails. For a man must choose to give some value to his actions and particularly as Greene shows where the actions are violent and destructive of the life which a sceptical man must rate even more highly than a religious, for he has no hope of an after life.

Although this assessment explains Fowler's predicament from the point of view of the dynamics of faith that pervade the Greene-land, it seems to miss the point by a narrow margin. The novel seems more concerned with the American than with his narrator. The above discussion of the novel has suggested the graph of the changing attitude of Fowler from non-commitment to half-hearted protest against devastation innocence can bring into the affairs of men. Cynical detachment is not an unhealthy attitude provided one knows where to stop. Fowler seems to be conscious of the positive results of action urged by commitment. Querry in A Burnt-Out Case hovers between belief and doubt, which kill him. Fowler, on the other hand, fails because of his non-committal attitude and succeeds only when he acts with some conviction. Now the question is whether to think like Pyle that the victims of his cycle bombs were martyrs for democracy or like Fowler to express regret that one who saved his life should come to a violent end. The last sentence of the

novel appears to be the confession of a non-committed individual in assessing the value of what he did. The expression, "I could say that I was sorry", is so muted in tone that it does not suggest the interpretation Pryce-Jones gives. It only implies that no action is without its consequences in a world where events happen in such a way that one cannot always talk in terms of responsibility. The very fact that the novel has for its scene the war-torn Indo-China in which the West and the East are involved unmistakably suggests that here it is not belief or unbelief but a sense of what is human and what is not that is at stake. An analysis of The Comedians would go a long way to clarify this point.
In this novel, *The Comedians*, Greene seems to be exploring the theme of commitment in a world where any kind of commitment appears to be meaningless. Those who are not committed are forced to play a conscious role; they become actors who suit their strategy to the dynamics of living. Alan Kennedy argues convincingly that "Some at least of the post-Modern novelists can be seen to be continuing the tendency of the modern to seek transcendence in action, especially in ritual or dramatic action".1 Discussing Greene's *The Comedians* in terms of the prolific use of the metaphors of drama and dramatic action, Alan Kennedy observes:

It is very difficult to abstract from this novel any clear idea of just what Greene thinks about the question of 'playing a part'. At times it seems to be characteristic of living in bad faith, and at other times it is justified by necessity and love. He seems to be at pains to demonstrate that being a comedian is both good and evil at the same time. 'Playing a part' is a deceptive action, but it is at least action, and action is positive in that it leads to commitment and involvement. Lack of involvement in the struggle against evil is the greatest of sins. But 'playing a part' is in itself a lack of involvement; it is pretence which keeps the personal element hidden behind a mask. There is a circle of confusion surrounding this question of 'play-acting' and 'comedians'. The confusion seems to stem from Greene's Manichean belief that evil is not only inevitable in every human activity, but that is necessary.2

2. Ibid., pp.238-239.
But this assessment seems to be only partly true. The remark that Greene feels strongly about the inevitable necessity of evil is a commonplace of Greene criticism. In spite of the frequent recurrence of the metaphors of drama and role-playing, the central concern of the novel appears to be the relevance of various kinds and degrees of commitment. The ironic structuring of the novel is facilitated by the limited point of view from which the events are dramatised. The first person narrator, Mr Brown, is baffled by the behaviour of Jones and Jones's end seems to be unwarranted by the facts of his career. His death is a kind of suicide which is counter-pointed earlier in the book by the suicide of Marcel, the lover of Brown's mother. Since any valid interpretation of the book should account for the surprising acts of Marcel and Jones, we should concentrate on Brown's understanding of the events he narrates and of his own predicament in relation to those events which constitute the vision of the novel. The vision the fiction sustains provides a sort of interior stitching that unifies the action of the novel. A deft allusion to various literary works which have a bearing on the thematic complex of the novel provides the interior stitching.

Mr Brown, in a restless mood, tries to read in a paperback volume of short stories left by some lodger Henry James's
The Great Good Place. He simply wants to forget the fact that he has to drive Jones the next day to the rebel rendezvous.

Having failed to achieve the required poise, he reflects:

'The wild waters of our horrible times,' James had written and I wondered what temporary break in the long enviable Victorian peace had so disturbed him. Had his butler given notice? I had built my life around this hotel — it represented stability more profoundly than the God whom the fathers of the Visitation had hoped I would serve; once it had represented success better than my travelling art-gallery with the phoney paintings; it was in a sense a family-tomb. I put The Great Good Place down and went upstairs with a lamp.1

What is interesting in this passage is that knowingly or unknowingly Brown does not dwell on the implications of James's story. James's words, 'the wild waters of our horrible times', evoke a very silly response from Brown. Since his thoughts centre upon his hotel and his tottering fortunes in Haiti, Brown may be unaware of the intensity of the Jamesian phrase and the relevance of the tale. James wrote The Great Good Place in 1900. It was during the pre-war years that the idea of Modern emerged in its nascent form. The long established social stability and individual security were put to severe strain by the continual social and political aberrations that made stability and security finally impossible. There was a marked tendency to plunge inward in order to solidify the melting self. George Dane, the successful author-hero of James's story, longs for inner life, for peace, for healthy and stable self. Amidst 'more maniacal extension and

emotion' of social intercourse, he craves for a safe retreat
and after a prolonged world weariness discovers the truth
'that everyone was a someone else'. Some of the characters
in The Comedians seem to illustrate the truth of George Dane's
metaphysical point. Marcel and Jones seem to have some such
knowledge, though they did not state it in so many words.

Marcel is a Haitian and a lover of Brown's mother.
After her death he commits suicide in the hotel which Brown
inherits from his mother. Unable to get along with James's
story, Brown goes round the empty rooms of his hotel and in
his mother's room alights on a box containing her letter to
Marcel.

There was also another message in the box
written in her hand but not to me. I had
found it in Marcel's pocket when I cut him
down. I don't know why I preserved it, or
why two or three times I had reread it, for
it only deepened my sense of being without
parentage. 'Marcel, I know I'm an old woman
and as you say a bit of an actress. But
please go on pretending. As long as we pre-
tend we escape. Pretend that I love you like
a mistress. Pretend that you love me like a
lover. Pretend that I would die for you and
that you would die for me.' I read the message
again now; I thought it movingly phrased...
And he had died for her, so perhaps he was no
comedian after all. Death is a proof of sin-
cerity.1

Here Brown equates sincerity with readiness to die; or to put
it differently, a comedian or one who plays a role is not

From what Brown says of his mother we can infer that all through her varied career she was 'an accomplished comedian'. No doubt she is versatile in her various roles from heroine to a mistress. Dr Magiot more than once says, 'she was a great woman'. But from what Marcel tells Brown after her collapse, it is obvious that she had an insatiable craving for sensual satisfaction. In the passage quoted above, she accepts the fact that she is 'a bit of an actress'. She acts or pretends to be Marcel's mistress because she can escape from the everasserting reality of her age and her ailing body. But in terms of James's story, 'everyone is a little someone else', and this 'little someone else' wants to feed the insatiable craving for sensual satisfaction. This is amply testified by what Brown has said earlier about her relationship with Marcel:

I had thought of simply as my mother's last extravagance, but it was no gigolo who said to me in tones of anguish, 'It was not my fault, sir. I said to her again and again, "No, you're not strong enough. Wait just a little. It will be all the better if you wait".'

'What did she say?'

'Nothing. She just took off the sheets. And when I see her like that it is always the same.'

Brown's mother exemplifies one aspect of the complex theme of the novel. As an accomplished comedian she played all kinds of roles in order to meet the challenges, 'the busy trade of life', brought in her way. She dies as Madame la Comtesse. She was very well known in Port-au-Prince. When they meet for the first time...

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at the casino, Martha tells Brown, "I knew your mother. I liked her. She was real".\(^1\) Here the word real is not unambiguous. Martha might have been impressed by her successful role-playing and might have seen a real countess in her. But from what her son says we know that she was a bitch and it is her insatiable craving for sex that ultimately killed her. Marcel does not know how to play a role. Brown's mother tells him that "Marcel is very sensitive"\(^2\) and "he is absurdly jealous".\(^3\) Brown tells us that when she was buried "Marcel wept unashamedly by the grave".\(^4\) A person who is sensitive can never be a comedian. With the death of Brown's mother Marcel becomes desperate. In a different context Brown remarks:

> Desperation and truth are closely akin - the desperate confession can usually be trusted, and just as it is not given to everyone to make a deathbed confession, so the capacity for desperation is granted to very few,...\(^5\)

From this it follows that one who is sensitive and sincere is likely to be the victim of despair. Before Marcel vacates his room in the hotel the following dialogue takes place between him and Brown:

> Just before he left the room he spoke to her. 'I pretended not to hear the bell,' he said, 'but she rang again and again. I thought she might need something.'

> 'But she only needed you?'

> He said, 'I am ashamed.'

> I could hardly have discussed with him the

\(^1\) Graham Greene, *The Comedians*, op. cit., p.91.
\(^2\) Ibid., p.79.
\(^3\) Ibid., p.76.
\(^4\) Ibid., p.83.
\(^5\) Ibid., p.90.
powerful influence of my mother's sexual desires. I said, 'You haven't finished your rum.' He drained the glass. He said, 'When she was angry with me or when she loved me she called me "You big black beast." That is what I feel now, a big black beast.'

From this follows the inference that role-playing is possible only when one desensitizes oneself. Thus Marcel's suicide has a compelling logic behind it. When he was asked only to pretend, he loved Brown's mother seriously. In other words, he committed himself to the affair so earnestly that he believed in all its implications. The loss of his partner exposed him to the reality of the situation the horror of which he could not bear.

Brown, on the other hand, never believed in anything. He always distrusted Martha and always teased her, questioning her fidelity. During one of their nocturnal meetings when he is coolly enjoying the warmth of Martha's presence, he thinks:

\[\text{We lay down in a shallow docility under the palms like bodies given a common burial, and I remembered another death, Marcel hanging from the chandeliers. Neither of us would ever die for love. We would grieve and separate and find another. We belonged to the world of comedy and not of tragedy.}^2\]

This passage amply conveys the otruscated kind of comedy that Brown has been playing. It is only after Jones's unexpected death that he realizes that there is only a thin wedge between the world of comedy and that of tragedy and sometimes they overlap. And it is this knowledge that leads him to understanding of his own predicament.

2. Ibid., p.176.
From the perspective discussed in the foregoing paragraphs if we proceed to analyse the character of Jones, we may find an answer to the question Brown poses to himself towards the end of the novel:

When I was a boy the fathers of the Visitation had told me that one test of a belief was this: that a man was ready to die for it. So Doctor Saglot thought too, but for what belief did Jones die?

The progress of Smith, Brown and Jones through the Haitian corridors of power brings once again into focus the theme of commitment. However idiosyncratic Smith appears with his belief in vegetarianism, he believes what he says and Brown feels that before Smith's deep rooted convictions all cynicism appears cheap. The Smiths leave Haiti disappointed but not disillusioned. When Brown receives a letter from Smith thanking him for his hospitality, he feels:

He was an old man with beautiful manners, and suddenly I realised how much I missed him. In the school-chapel at Monte Carlo we prayed every Sunday, 'Dona nobis pacem,' but I doubt whether that prayer was answered for many in the life that followed. Mr Smith had no need to pray for peace. He had been born with peace in his heart instead of the splinter of ice.

Right from the beginning Jones enjoys Brown's sympathy. Since he always distrusts his mistress, Brown becomes jealous of

2. Ibid., p.268.
Jones because Martha likes him. Apart from the political concern, Brown is interested in separating Jones from Martha. He gets his chance when young Philipot and other rebels against Papa Doe's regime request Major Jones to provide leadership and organization to their movement. The comedy Jones and Brown enact in Papa Doe's Haiti may well be the comedy that is enacted all over the world because Brown says:

I wondered whether the world would ever again sail with such serenity through space as it seemed to do a hundred years ago. Then the Victorians kept skeletons in cupboards— but who cares about a mere skeleton now? Haiti was not an exception in a sane world; it was a small slice of everyday taken at random. Baron Samedi walked in our graveyards. I remembered the hanged man in the Tarot pack.1

The context of the above passage is Brown's visit to the Venezuelan Embassy to meet his mistress, the ambassador's wife. Young Philipot joins them. This is one of the crucial scenes in the novel in terms of its theme. The ambassador, Senor Pineda, casually tells Brown that his wife's father was hanged in the American zone during the occupation and she knows it and there is no secret about it. This information makes Brown think of the modern existential situation. The difference between the Victorian and the modern response to the situation consists in the strategy evolved to negotiate with the tyranny of facts. The moderns dramatize facts to reveal the possibilities of being human. The Victorians concealed their tensions and tried to

humanize facts. Therefore Brown feels that all over the world man confronts graveyard atmosphere. Since there is no stability, everything is falling apart. Baron Samedi (nickname for Papa Doc) is not merely a ghost that haunts cemeteries in voodoo mythologies but a living symbol of the inhuman existence; a fact that modern sensibility has gaily absorbed. The hanged man in the Tarot pack has become a part of the modern waste land myth. But the sense of revival and continuity which Eliot's poem suggests is defeated within the framework of the poem because conditions seem unpropitious. Greene's protagonist, on the other hand, seems to take the existential predicament as something that cannot be adequately interpreted in terms of Fraser or Freud. Horror is real. In the great modern writers of the twenties mythic scaffolding was a vantage point to spotlight the ongoing universal entropy. In a post-modern writer like Greene, factual realism seems to offer a clue to grasp the nature of myth. The following passages from the same chapter in The Comedians amply demonstrate the inference. Discussing Jones's involvement in Haitian politics, Brown tells Philipot:

'... I wonder sometimes whether Jones isn't playing the same game. I remember looking at him one night on the boat from America - it was after the ship's concert - and wondering, are you and I both comedians?'

'They can say that of most of us. Wasn't I a comedian with my verses smelling of Les Fleurs du Mal, published on hand-made paper at my own expense? I posted them to the
leading French reviews. That was a mistake. My bluff was called. I never read a single criticism - except by Petit Pierre. The same money would have bought me a Bron perhaps.' (It was a magic word to him now - Bron.)

The ambassador said, 'Come on, cheer up, let us all be comedians together. Take one of my cigars. Help yourself at the bar. My Scotch is good. Perhaps even Papa Doc is a comedian.'

'Oh no,' Philipot said, 'he is real. Horror is always real.'

The ambassador said, 'We mustn't complain too much of being comedians - it's an honourable profession. If only we could be good ones the world might gain at least a sense of style. We have failed - that's all. We are bad comedians, we aren't bad men.'

Brown thinks that he is a comedian because he could get on in England by means of bluff. Since it is not possible to commit himself to reality which is meaningless, he is compelled to play roles suitable to occasions in life. Like Eliot's Sweeney, he is sure of three things, birth, copulation and death as the following passage suggests:

She had drawn up her knees and I was reminded of Doctor Philipot's body under the diving-board: birth, love and death in their positions closely resemble each other.

Brown sees in Jones more of himself than Jones. He takes him to be a comedians because none has called his bluff. But the occasion Brown and young Philipot provide him exposes Jones to the horror of reality. Young Philipot refuses to consider Papa Doc

2. Ibid., p.152.
comedian because 'horror is always real'. The attitude of the ambassador seems to be the right one in the world of Browns and Joneses, in which any kind of commitment is impossible. The only honourable profession is that of playing a role suitable to the occasion. Since most human beings are desensitized, role-playing becomes possible. There is nothing good or bad in playing a role. The question is whether the role is played successfully or not. From this point of view, Jones appears to be a bad comedian but a good man.

One significant detail Brown mentions about Jones is that he can make people laugh. Born in Assam (India) of doubtful parentage, Jones passes for a British national in the post-war Europe. In his confession to Brown in Chapter III of Part III we notice that he is more honest than Brown accepts to record. Jones is more boastful than he intends to be and his whole career is like a charade. He tells Brown:

I came to Europe ... after the war. I got into a lot of scrapes. Somehow I couldn't find what I was intended to do. You know there had been times in Imphal when I almost wished the Japs would reach us. The authorities would have armed even the camp-followers then, like me and the clerks in Naafi and the cooks. After all I had a uniform. A lot of unprofessionals do well in war, don't they? I've learnt a lot, listening, studying maps, watching ... You can feel a vocation, can't you, even if you can't practise it?

The last sentence of the above passage suggests that like many

young men burdened with uneasy existence, Jones wanted to be a soldier. In Europe he satisfied his yearning by playing the role of a major. Whenever he is introduced simply as Mr Jones, he corrects the party concerned by saying Major Jones. He always insists on being called Major Jones. But in playing the role of a 'démobbed' major, he boasts so much about his past that his bluff is easily called. A committed Marxist like Dr Magiot takes advantage of Jones's lack of shrewdness in playing a role. Dr Magiot who hopes that young Philipot and his guerillas would do something to unsettle Papa Doe, tells Brown who does not believe Jones:

He (Jones) was risking a lot when he tried to swindle Papa Doe. Don't underrate him. Just because he boasts a lot ... And you can trap a man who boasts. You can call his bluff.¹

But Jones himself wants peace not war. His ambition is to own a golf-club in the Caribbean and call it Sahib House.

We started the discussion of the novel with the proposition from James's The Great Good Place: everyone is a little someone else. It is a pure and simple accident that threw Jones among the soldiers resisting the Japs in Asia during the war. While he inwardly yearned for a peaceful life, circumstances brought him into contact with hectic life during and after the war, which necessitated his playing the role of a major discharged from the war. He can earn living only that way. But he cannot

by nature face horror. When Concasseeur and his driver got
killed in the explosion, Jones gets sick at the sight of
death and vomits. Then he tells Brown:

I'm sorry, old man. One of those things.
Please don't tell them, but I have never
seen a man die before.¹

This only reinforces the idea that nobody can call anybody's
bluff. It is only the existential horror that can shatter or
put to test all kinds of role-playing which the absurdity of
living generates. Jones has the nerve or folly to face the
consequences of his role-playing because of his capacity to
view life from the vantage position of laughter which Brown
and many others lack. Brown says:

The last words Jones said to me in private
were, 'I'm going to keep it up, old man.'
'And the golf-club?'
'The golf-club's for old age. After we've
taken Port-au-Prince.'²

It is through his attempt to understand Jones that Brown
reaches the following conclusion before he hears of Jones's
death:

We are the faithless; we admire the dedicated,
the Doctor Magloits and the Mr Smiths for their
courage and their integrity, for their fidelity
to a cause, but through timidity, or through
lack of sufficient zest, we find ourselves the
only ones truly committed - committed to the
whole world of evil and of good, to the wise
and the foolish, to the indifferent and to the
mistaken. We have chosen nothing except to go
on living,...³

2. Ibid., p.299.
3. Ibid., p.304.
The passage quoted above brings into focus the entire thematic complex of the novel. Not only Brown but many others suffer from 'the never quiet conscience'. This uneasy conscience may be the result of disparity between the traditional thinking of the Fathers of the Visitation and the world as is encountered and witnessed by Brown. According to the Fathers of the Visitation, the test of belief is that one is prepared to die for it. But Jones never believed in anything worth mentioning; not his narrator, Brown, for that matter. Like Brown, Jones is also rootless. That Brown unconsciously keeps company with Jones is suggested by the pronoun 'we'. Just as Fort-au-Prince is a slice of the world in which we live, Monte Carlo is the ever asserting reality which we have to face. The ideological or humanitarian commitment exemplified in Dr Magiot and Mr Smith suffers from a truncated view of life and reality, and therefore is a partial commitment. A fuller kind of commitment ought to be inclusive-commitment to 'the whole world of evil and of good, to the wise and to the foolish, to the indifferent and to the mistaken'. Given this scope and sweep of reality, the only possible course appears to be role-playing. If we pay attention to the text, it is easily seen that Brown alone uses most of the metaphors of drama and dramatic action. Since there are no 'heights and abysses' in this world, his response to existence is a long tale of improvisation. The only distinction between
him and Jones is one of degree rather than of kind. Because we feel more sympathetic towards Jones, it is easy to see the significance of role-playing or being a comedian. Human existence has never been static. It is only more dynamic than it used to be. Role-playing is neither good nor bad in itself. It only mitigates the horrors of existence. But role-playing which ignores the horrors of life, which ignores Papa Doc, is a bad one.
Travels with My Aunt

Travels with My Aunt in many ways resembles The Quiet American and The Comedians. It also reminds us of Greene's earlier entertainments. Henry Pulling and his Aunt Augusta travel by Orient Express. Before they embark on their adventure, they visit Brighton. In Brighton, like Ida Arnold of Brighton Rock, Aunt Augusta takes Henry Pulling to a fortune teller who happens to be her friend. Hatty, the fortune teller, after a close study of the dregs in the tea cup of Augusta, tells her that many adventures are in store for her. The same fortune she predicts for Pulling. Pulling, a retired bank manager, experiences in his aunt's company many things which he never even dreamed of. In this way, the novel dramatizes the initiation of Pulling who also happens to be the narrator. In Aunt Augusta we have a character who combines in herself the virtues and vices of Greene's earlier characters. For instance, we are not wrong if we say that Aunt Augusta is Ida Arnold without the latter's passion for social justice. At the age of seventy-three, she retains remarkable imaginative power. She appears to be a kind of novelist within the novel. She reveals her past in the form of parables which give a significant meaning to many situations that we usually come across in the novels of Greene.
The novel, like most entertainments of Greene, starts with the unexpected meeting between the aunt and her nephew at the funeral of Pulling's mother. Soon he is to realise that the person in whose funeral he participated is not his real mother. Soon after their meeting, Aunt Augusta tells Pulling, "The last time I saw you was at your baptism. I was not asked but I came... Like the wicked fairy."¹ No doubt there is an intentional irony in what the Aunt says. But so far as Pulling is concerned, this is of great significance. Like a wicked fairy, she brings surprises to Pulling who is a static character and whose long conditioning before retirement has prepared him to be always unsurprised. This 'wicked fairy' ultimately provides him with a sixteen-year old bride.

There is a fairy-tale like quality about Aunt Augusta's behaviour and her innumerable stories. But Pulling is honest enough to realise that his 'aunt's stories were always basically true'.² This basic truth about the Aunt seems to emerge not from any preconceived theory about the validity of fictions in general, but from a basic honesty which operates as a commitment to the givens of life. Alan Kennedy observes:

The aunt herself of course believes in adventurous action. Her narratives are not simple accounts, they are enactments. Her method is dramatic. Henry unfavourably compares his father's

². Ibid., p.24.
narrative technique: 'I am sure my father — the admirer of Walter Scott — would not have told the story of the Curlews nearly so dramatically; there would have been less dialogue and more description.' Henry and his Aunt seem to agree that the essence of Art is not to describe but to enact, that is, to mine.1

Alan Kennedy is at pains to fit Greene's novel in his general scheme which tries to present a sociological theory of fiction that is based on the repeated occurrence of the metaphors of drama and dramatic action in the post-war fiction. But the major thrust of Travels with My Aunt seems to be in the direction of the age-old dichotomy between appearance and reality. Aunt Augusta is not so much worried about appearances as to what use these appearances are put. As in Muriel Spark's Memento Mori, the one reality that the Aunt takes seriously is death. This is illustrated by the anecdote about Uncle Jo. Jo Pulling was the uncle of Henry Pulling about whose existence Henry does not know till he is told by Aunt Augusta.

He used to say that one race meeting merged into another and life went by as rapidly as a yearling out of Indian Queen. He wanted to slow life up and he quite rightly felt that by travelling he would make time move with less rapidity.2

He suffered a stroke when he was in Venice. Knowing his wanderlust, Augusta arranged to keep him in an old house in the country which had fifty rooms. Jo shifted from room to room every

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1. Alan Kennedy, The Protean Self, op. cit., p.244.  
week in the year till he reached his sixteenth room. The anecdote suggests human effort to forget the fact of death. When Henry and his Aunt are travelling by the Orient Express, they meet an American girl called Tooley. Henry tells us, "There were moments when she gave the impression that all the world was travelling". He thinks that Tooley is closer to his Aunt because of her ineffable capacity to accept everything that life brings. The same sentiment is echoed by Aunt Augusta when she tells Henry, "A man who fights never survives long, and Mr Visconti was great at survival".

Visconti plays a significant part in Augusta's life. The purpose of her travel is to meet him about whose whereabouts she is uncertain. She tells Henry that Visconti found her a situation in Italy. When Henry questions, "At the theatre?" she replies:

I can't think why you persist in calling it a theatre. "All the world's a stage", of course, but a metaphor as general as that loses all its meaning. Only a second-rate actor could have written such a line out of pride in his second-rate calling. There were occasions when Shakespeare was a very bad writer indeed. You can see how often in books of quotations. People who like quotations love meaningless generalisations.

The passage quoted above is a seminal one in terms of the theme of retarding the progress of time. Many orthodox Shakespearans

2. Ibid., p.140.
3. Ibid., p.127.
may not agree with her unexpected attack on Shakespeare; but what she says is not far from convincing. Taken out of its context, "All the world's a stage" is a meaningless generalization because no generalisation can sum up the myriad facets of life. What is to be noted here is that play-acting is a second-rate calling. It denies the actor a chance to commit himself to the vast concourse of human relationships. Since in life one meets with situations which are dissimilar, there cannot be any unified strategy to negotiate with life. As a metaphysical idea which keeps life within the circuit of birth and death, it undoubtedly helps in developing a kind of stoicism; but as a metaphor it is not very illuminating. But what the Aunt says later —

I despise no one, ... no one. Regret your own actions, if you like that kind of wallowing in self-pity, but never, never despise. Never presume yours is a better morality. —

is undoubtedly Shakespearean in its scope and sweep. Life is to be faced for what it gives and Augusta practises what she says. All the discussion made above will be more relevant if we discuss the predicament of Miss Tooley whom Henry meets in the Orient Express. Miss Tooley, the American girl, familiarises Henry with the unfamiliar contemporary reality. Describing her make-up, Henry observes:

With the strokes of a pencil she had continued her eyelashes below and above the lids, so that the real eyelashes, standing out, had a

false effect like a stereoscopic photograph. Her skirt had two buttons missing at the top as though they had popped off with the tension of her puppy fat and her eyes bulged like a pekinese dog’s, but they were pretty nonetheless. They had in them what used to be called by my generation a sexy look, but this might have been caused by short sight or constipation.1

This passage reveals the narrator’s lack of participation in life. The strokes of pencil which spotlight her eyelashes have a false effect not on the girl’s appearance in general but on Henry’s interpretation of the effect. To his generation everything is sexy. But he is not unfair in concluding that the physical appearance of the girl might be the result of short sight or constipation. She is travelling to Katmandu to meet her father who is a C.I.A. Agent. To Henry, Tooley’s company is something of a novelty. She is majoring in English Literature. Her vocabulary smacks of pure academism because she says, “we did Dickens in depth”.2 Curiously she asks Henry, “Was Macbeth a Catholic?”3 She also tells him that they discuss everything: “Art and sex and James Joyce and psychology”.4 Her talk about culture and human experience mystifies Henry. It is curious to hear him thinking of his responsibility for the girl whom he supposes to be pregnant. What did not worry Tooley herself worries Henry. All this indicates that what Henry all the while knew is only something superficial. His travels with his

2. Ibid., p.117.
3. Ibid., p.118.
4. Ibid., p.122.
Aunt arc educative in the sense that they help him to have a glimpse of reality. Later he learns to cope with it.

During their stay in Turkey, Henry coaxes his Aunt to accompany him to his father's grave in Boulogne. After their visit to Boulogne, his Aunt leaves for Paris. In London, Henry comes to know from Detective-Sergeant Sparrow that Mr Visconti is alive and that the Interpol has circulated a number of details about him. In this connection Detective-Sergeant Sparrow seeks Henry's cooperation to conduct a search of his Aunt's apartment. During his travels with his Aunt, he easily notices her methods of smuggling currency notes and gold. He never took at their face value his Aunt's words:

I have never planned anything illegal in my life... How could I plan anything of the kind when I have never read any of the laws and have no idea what they are?

When the police are searching his Aunt's apartment, he thinks:

All my working life I had been strictly loyal to one establishment, the bank, but my loyalty was now drawn in quite another direction. Loyalty to a person inevitably entails loyalty to all the imperfections of a human being, even to the chicanery and immorality from which my aunt was not entirely free. I wondered whether she had ever forged a cheque or robbed a bank, and I smiled at the thought with the tenderness I might have shown in the past to a small eccentricity.

The passage quoted above conveys amply the change wrought in

2. Ibid., p.818.
Henry. A full awareness of his Aunt's virtues and vices increases his tenderness for her and he feels sad when the Inspector tells him that she might be in some personal danger because of her unfortunate associations. When he thinks that his Aunt might have died and the most interesting part of his life is almost over, he is afraid to return to his own den. Six months later he receives a letter from her informing that she is in Buenos Aires and that she has no intention to return to Europe. She requests him to vacate her apartment and bring with him the photograph of Free Town harbour. He reaches Asunción and meets Wordsworth who escorts him to his Aunt's lodging. All through the voyage Henry has the company of O'Toole, an American C.I.A. Agent and the father of Miss Tooley. His Aunt tells him that she has succeeded in joining Mr Visconti who is not there at the moment to welcome him. She does not forget to ask him whether he has brought the picture safely. After meeting his Aunt Henry tells her of his intention to leave Argentina so that he may marry Miss Keene and settle down, all the while expecting that his aunt would disapprove of it. In fact, Augusta disapproves of his plan and tells him:

Do you know what you'll think about when you can't sleep in your double bed? Not of woman. You don't care enough about them, or you wouldn't even consider marrying Miss Keene. You will think how every day you are getting a little
closer to death. It will stand there as close as the bedroom wall. And you'll become more and more afraid of the wall because nothing can prevent you coming nearer and nearer to it every night while you try to sleep and Miss Keene tends. What does Miss Keene read? 1

As has been pointed out earlier, the only reality his Aunt considers seriously is death. More vegetative existence is likely to cause fear of death. She is not afraid of death because she is deeply involved in and committed to human affairs though these affairs are never judged from the point of view of any rigid moral or metaphysical system. The following advice which she gives Henry may sound whimsical but not untrue:

My dear Henry, if you live with us, you won't be edging day by day across to any last wall. The wall will find you of its own accord without your help, and every day you live will seem to you a kind of victory. "I was too sharp for it that time," you will say, when night comes, and afterwards you'll sleep well. 2

This seems to be the thematic spotlight in the novel and this prepares Henry to identify himself completely with his Aunt's interests. He decides to settle down in Argentina and tells us that he is waiting to marry the daughter of the Chief of Customs when she completes her sixteenth year. He becomes a partner in Visconti's import-export business which takes more and more of his time. Alan Kennedy poses a number of questions about the

2. Ibid., p.271.
ending of the novel. He asks:

Is this marriage to a gentle and obedient child meant then to represent some sort of moral and courageous victory for Henry, who has been able to break out of the static pattern set by his thirty years in a bank? Or does the conclusion show that Henry has been so degraded by his conversion to a life of danger and action that he is willing to submit a child to his lusts? Is he too now, like his Aunt, one of the devotees of the 'incurable egotism of passion'? And if so is that a good thing or not? Henry's own conclusion is the scarcely credible one that there is 'nothing so wrong as thirty years in a bank'. Some of his discoveries, however, make one suspicious about his scale of values.¹

The critic doubts whether Henry Pulling gains any real insight by submitting himself to the physical violence when he says, "Physical violence, like the dentist's drill, is seldom as bad as one fears."² It is not difficult to gather from the novel that Henry himself till he meets his Aunt has no significant scale of values except that of a normal citizen. His vocation is simple and involves least commitment. It never occurs to him that there is something beyond everything that one normally observes. The first jolt comes when his Aunt tells him that the person whom he took to be his real mother was his foster mother. Later he realises that he never showed any tenderness or warmth towards anybody nor participated in the intensity of living. In the company of his Aunt, whom we suspect to be his real mother, he familiarises himself with the unfamiliar

world. Aunt Augusta makes him interesting in himself and interesting to others. The novel does not enunciate any theory about dramatic action and transcendence that could be achieved by ritualistic action. On the other hand, it seems to convey the impression that a mature view of life is inclusive in the sense that it embraces both appearance and reality. As the title itself indicates, as we travel through life we have to negotiate with all kinds of appearance which is a part of reality. The pressure of travelling does not permit the traveller to get himself bogged in ideologies and metaphysics to the detriment of business on hand. This inclusive view of life forms the theme of Greene's next novel, *The Honorary Consul*, in which he tries to present the age-old dichotomy through a tragic story.
In Travels with My Aunt Henry Pulling gets badly beaten
in Asuncion on the National Day Celebrations because he blows
his nose into the red scarf of his Aunt. This incident makes
him realise that "Physical violence, like the dentist's drill,
is seldom as bad as one fears". In The Quiet American, The
Comedians, Travels with My Aunt and The Honorary Consul Greene
seems to familiarise his readers with this aspect of violence.

In The Honorary Consul, Dr Saavedra, the Argentine novelist,
says that in his new book he is concerned with the psychology
of violence. In fact, the novel is full of organised and un­
organised violence represented by the Police Chief, Feres, and
Father Leon, a priest-turned-revolutionary. Doctor Plarr

... had grown up, during the years he spent
alone with his mother in Buenos Aires, to
despise comedy. There were no sentimental
relies in his apartment - not even a photo­
graph. It was as bare and truthful - almost -
as a police station cell. Even during his
affairs with women he had always tried to
avoid that phrase of the theatro, 'I love you.'
He had been accused often enough of cruelty,
though he preferred to think of himself as a
painstaking and accurate diagnostician. If
for once he had been aware of a sickness he
could describe in no other terms, he would
have unhesitatingly used the phrase 'I love
you', but he had always been able to attribute
the emotion he felt to a quite different
malady - to loneliness, pride, physical desire,
or even a simple sense of curiosity.2

2. Graham Greene, The Honorary Consul, Bodley Head, London,
1979, p.176.
Doctor Flarr, the narrative centre of the novel, tries to rescue the Honorary British Consul, Charley Fortnum, when the latter is kidnapped by the revolutionaries who mistake him for the American ambassador. As the action of the novel unfolds, this detached diagnostician, Doctor Flarr, finds himself deeply involved in an absurd situation and loses his life. The situation is absurd in the sense that it all arises out of a mistaken identity. Father Leon and Doctor Flarr are intimate friends from their childhood and Charley Fortnum's young wife is Doctor Flarr's mistress. Though the situation appears to be simple, it is in fact too complex. It is here that Hardy's words prefaced to the novel, 'All things merge in one another - good into evil, generosity into justice, religion into politics...' become relevant. Moreover, the quotation from Hardy sums up the themes of the novel under consideration. Since this kind of theme requires a vast canvas, The Honorary Consul employs omniscient narration which justifies itself. For one thing, the novel has an unusual number of characters. And then, the novel in a way alludes to Greene's earlier novels, particularly to The Power and the Glory.

In the opening chapter of the novel, we are told that Doctor Flarr belongs to the country of Dickens and Canon Doyle and that he is also familiar with the novels of Dickens. He also
reads Dr Saavedra's novels and feels that they do not convey a significant view of life. Sometimes he thinks of telling the novelist who is also his patient that:

Life isn't like that. Life isn't noble or dignified. Even Latin-American life. Nothing is ineluctable. Life has surprises. Life is absurd. Because it's absurd there is always hope. Why, one day we may even discover a cure for cancer and the common cold.¹

This passage definitely stands as the most significant in the novels of Greene. What is to be noticed here is that Doctor Flarr is not convinced by Saavedra's psychology of violence. Life is absurd but it is not hopeless. Whether humanity suffers from cold or cancer, it is the hope of discovering a cure that alleviates suffering. How this theme is spotlighted in the successive stages of the unfolding of the narrative will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Leon Rivas and Flarr are friends right from their childhood. Leon who became a Catholic priest turns later into the fearless abogado in order to defend the poor and the innocent, like Perry Mason. In his new role, he becomes an active member of the Juventud Febrerista, which has not achieved any significant success against the General, ruling Argentina. These rebels are mere amateurs and it is their amateurism that had persuaded Doctor Flarr to become involved.

¹ Graham Greene, The Honorary Consul, op. cit., p.16.
He hadn't believed in their plans, and to listen to them was only a mark of friendship. When he questioned them about what they would do in certain eventualities the ruthlessness of their replies seemed to him a form of play-acting.

When the rebels approach him for information about the American ambassador's visit, he does not take it seriously. Instead of kidnapping the American ambassador, Leon and his confederates succeed in kidnapping the Honorary British Consul because his car is decorated with a flag. Later they seek Flarr's help to save their prisoner from what they think to be a major breakdown. When Flarr reaches their hide-out and sees the patient, he draws their attention to their mistake and persuades them to release Charley Fortnum, the Honorary British Consul. Leon refuses to comply with Flarr's request because even to hold an Honorary Consul as a hostage is proof of their existence. Moreover, the British may bring pressure on the Americans who in their turn would bring pressure on the General to open dialogue with the rebels. All this seems not only amateurish but silly to Doctor Flarr whose awareness is more inclusive than that of his childhood friends.

For some reason The Taciturn Heart came back to his mind. To fight for one's honour with knives over a woman, that belonged to another, an absurdly outdated world, which had ceased to exist except in the romantic imagination of writers like Saavedra. Honour meant nothing to the starving. To them belonged the more serious fight for survival.

2. Ibid., p.35.
While Doctor Flarr views the whole episode as an amateurish entertainment, Leon, whom his associates call Father Rivas, views it as God's entertainment in which he has not interfered so far. Throughout the narrative we find a tension created by the juxtaposition of the views stated above. For instance, on Charley Fortnum's release Father Rivas says:

He is not in our hands, Eduardo. He is in the hands of the governments. In the hands of God too, of course. I do not forget my old claptrap, you notice, but I have never yet seen any sign that He interferes in our wars or our politics. 1

Doctor Flarr has already said:

It's really rather comic... when you think of it. That must have been the Ambassador's plane I heard, and he was in it. On the way back to Buenos Aires. I wonder how the Governor's dinner went without an interpreter. 2

Charley Fortnum, the Honorary British Consul, does not enjoy the confidence of Sir Henry Belfrage, the British Ambassador. Dr Humphries, the other British national in the town, always makes fun of the Honorary British Consul because he married one of the girls of the local brothel house called Clara. Doctor Flarr knew the girl even before her marriage to Charley Fortnum and she later becomes his mistress. Since the Consul and his wife are expecting a baby, Doctor Flarr views Charley's kidnapping from her point of view. He does not love Clara not because he is a

2. Ibid., p.37.
cynic but because he fails to know precisely the meaning of the word love. He tells Charley:

I like to know the meaning which people put on the words they use. So much is a question of semantics. That's why in medicine we often prefer to use a dead language.

What the above passage implies is that language lends itself to innumerable games and as a yardstick to measure feeling, emotion and response seems to be an inadequate one. If this is true, it follows that language used to concretise spiritual aspects of life is also imprecise and is subservient to semantics. Earlier in the novel, when Father Hivas evades to answer his questions about Charley Fortnum, Doctor Plarr asks him:

Is killing a matter of semantics to you, Leon? I remember you were always good at semantics. You used to explain the Trinity to me in the old days, but your explanation was more complicated than the catechism.

If language does not help us articulate true feelings, how can one be certain about anything one likes to convey about life in general and his own response in particular? The novel seems to convey the impression that true feeling is conveyed by gesture. The following dialogue between Doctor Plarr and his mistress seems to convey the point:

'Oh no, I know he (Charley) was not going to Posadas. He was coming to see me. He did not want to go to those ruins. He did not even want to go to the Governor's dinner. He was

2. Ibid., p.56.
anxious about me and the baby.'

'Why? He had no reason. You are a strong girl, Clara.'

'I pretend sometimes to be sick so he would ask you to come and see me. It was easier for you that way.'

'What a little bitch you are,' he exclaimed with pleasure.

'And he took my best sunglasses, the ones you gave me. I shall never see them again now. They were my favourite sunglasses. They were so smart. And they came from Mar del Plata.'

'I will go to Gruber's tomorrow,' he said, 'and get you another pair.'

'It was the only one they had.'

'They can order another pair.'

'He borrowed them once before and nearly broke them.'

'He must have looked a bit odd in them,' Doctor Flarr said.

'He never cares what he looks like. And he saw very badly when he had been drinking.' The tenses, present and past, swung to and fro like the arrow of a barometer moving irregularly between settled and unsettled weather.

'Did he love you, Clara?' It was not a question which had ever troubled him. Charley Fortune, as Clara's husband, had never meant more to him than a slight inconvenience when he felt the need to have her quickly, but Charley Fortune, lying drugged on a box in a dirty back room, took on the appearance of a serious rival.

'He was always kind to me'.

The pair of sunglasses to which Clara alludes in this passage is a recurring detail and is a sort of motif that spotlights the convergence of the themes of the novel. When they meet at Gruber's shop, Clara takes fancy for the pair of glasses and Doctor Flarr purchases and gives them as a gift to her. Flarr is not sentimental but he always thinks of the sunglasses which he presented to her. Towards the end of the novel, when Aquino asks him whether

he is not jealous of Charley Fortnum, he says:

I'm jealous because he loves her. That stupid banal word love. It's never meant anything to me. Like the word God... I don't know how to love. Poor drunken Charley Fortnum wins the game.

Then he tells Aquino: "I paid her with a pair of sunglasses".

If he does not love her, why is he interested in liberating her husband from the clutches of his kidnappers? The answer seems to be that Doctor Flarr's sense of human relationship is too exclusively based on biological and human considerations.

But as a young practising doctor, he is not without commitment and responsibility. The following passage seems to support the inference:

Doctor Flarr went to the lavatory. As he washed his hands he thought: I am like Pilate, a cliche of which Doctor Saavedra would not approve. He washed his hands scrupulously as though he were about to examine a patient. Raising them from the water he looked into the glass and threw a question at the worried image there - if they kill Fortnum will I marry Clara? It would not be a necessary consequence; she would never expect him to marry her. If she inherited the camp she could sell it and move elsewhere - home to Tucuman? Or perhaps she would take a flat in B.A. and eat sweet cakes like his mother? It would be more satisfactory for all of them if Fortnum lived. Fortnum would make a better father for the child than he would - a child needs love.

'A child needs love' once again brings us to the point whether love is a part of the felt experience or a question of semantics.

2. Ibid., pp.313-314.
3. Ibid., p.196.
Towards the end of the novel, it becomes obvious that Doctor Plarr is shot by the police when he attempts to initiate a dialogue between the rebels and the police. When he is about to leave the door into the open, he tells Aquino:

> There was something she asked me before I left home... I didn't bother to listen.¹

Clara dominates Plarr's mind like an obsession and however much he tries to avoid verbalization of his feelings, he is committed to their relationship purely on human terms. The point becomes more clear if we compare his attitude with those of the rebels and a novelist like Saavedra.

One of the rebels called Aquino whose fingers were damaged by electric shock learns writing poetry in the prison. Most of his poems deal with death. According to him, "Death is a common weed: requires no rain"; "When death is on the tongue, the live man speaks".² This obsession with death could be explained in terms of semantics or as a brutal fact. Aquino's line refers to it as a common weed but what is more interesting is "When death is on the tongue, the live man speaks". Since the world that is presented in the novel is under the stress of death, most of the characters seem to be vibrating with astonishing feeling of life. But this feeling seems to have a false note when we analyse the character of Father Rivas. When

². Ibid., p.161.
Aquino quotes the line, "I see my father only through the bars," Father Rivas says,

So here I sit on the floor of my prison cell... and I try to make some sense of things... In my first prison - I mean in the seminary - there were lots of books in which I could read all about the love of God, but they were of no help to me. Not one of the Fathers was of any use to me. Because they never touched on the horror - you are quite right to call it that. They saw no problem. They just sat comfortably down in the presence of the horror like the old Archbishop at the General's table and they talked about man's responsibility and Free Will. Free Will was the excuse for everything. It was God's alibi. They had never read Freud. Evil was made by man or Satan. It was simple that way. But I could never believe in Satan. It was much easier to believe that God was evil.

Aquino thinks that Father Rivas has come to his senses and says that he would be a good Marxist, to which the Father replies:

I believe in the evil of God,... but I believe in his goodness too. He made us in his image - that is the old legend. Eduardo, you know well how many truths in medicine lay in old legends. It was not a modern laboratory which first discovered the use of a snake's venom. And old women used the mould on over-ripe oranges long before penicillin. So I too believe in an old legend which is almost forgotten. He made us in His image - and so our evil is His evil too. How could I love God if he were not like me? Divided like me. Tempted like me. If I love a dog it is only because I can see something human in a dog. I can feel his fear and his gratitude and even his treachery. He dreams in his sleep like I do. I doubt if I could ever love a toad - though sometimes, when I have touched a toad's skin, I am reminded of the skin of an old man who has spent a rough poor life in the fields, and I wonder...

What Father Fives says is the theme of many of Greene's Catholic novels. Even sound theological insight like this seems to be useless because Father Fives tries to keep the Honorary Consul as his hostage purely from political and ideological considerations. The following passage illuminates the point:

'I don't understand a word you say, Leon. You used to explain things more clearly. Even the Trinity.' (says Doctor Flarr)

'Forgive me. It is such a very long time since I read the right sort of books.'

'You haven't the right audience either. I feel no more interested in the Church now than I feel in Marxism. The Bible is as unreadable to me as Das Kapital. Only sometimes, like a bad habit, I find myself using that crude word God. Last night...

'Any word one uses from habit means nothing at all.'

'All the same, when you shoot Fortnum in the back of the head, are you sure you won't have a moment's fear of old Jehovah and his anger? 'Thou shalt not commit murder.' If I kill him it will be God's fault as much as mine.'

'God's fault?'

'He made me what I am now. He will have loaded the gun and steadied my hand.'

'I thought the Church teaches that he's love? Was it love which sent six million Jews to the gas ovens? You are a doctor, you must often have seen intolerable pain - a child dying of polio. Is that love? It was not love which cut off Aquino's fingers. The police stations where such things happen... He created them.'

'I have never heard a priest blame God for things like that before.'

'I don't blame Him. I pity Him,' Father Fives said, and the time-signal struck faintly in the dark.

Father Rivas known as Leon among his friends is a priest who broke the sacraments in order to help the poor. He appears to be a slightly different version of the priest in *The Power and the Glory*. In that novel, the priest tries to perpetuate the presence of God in his own way and in the process loses his life. Leon, on the other hand, tries to justify his actions which are secular in terms of a theology which is turned upside down. He believes in a God who has both the bright and the dark aspects. Therefore, he tells his friend, Doctor Flarr:

> When you speak of the horror, Eduardo, you are speaking of the night-side of God. I believe the time will come when the night-side will wither away, like your communist state, Aquino, and we shall see only the simple daylight of the good God. You believe in evolution, Eduardo, even though sometimes whole generations of men slip backwards to the beasts. It is a long struggle and a long suffering, evolution, and I believe God is suffering the same evolution that we are, but perhaps with more pain.¹

But this priest-turned-revolutionary could not act decisively as his ideological commitment required. He could not kill the Honorary Consul. When he is about to die, he tells his friend, "I was never made to be a killer".² In terms of Aquino's line, "When death is on the tongue, the live man speaks", the priest vibrates with insight and life in the moment of death. Ideology has not wiped out his sense of truth. While the rebels turn theology upside down in order to justify a political act, a novelist like Doctor Saavedra unhesitatingly exploits art to

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² Ibid., p. 316.
serve baser ends. When he is asked to draft a letter requesting
the British Government to interfere on behalf of the Honorary
Consul, he says:

I want to begin the letter with a character
study of the victims,... but somehow Senor
Portnum refuses to come alive. I have had to
cross out almost every other word. In a novel
I could have created him in a few sentences.
It is his reality which defeats me. I am
hamstrung by his reality.¹

This seems to be the kind of art that Saavedra practises without
a sense of commitment. Among characters like these, Plarr comes
alive because of his constant awareness of the issues at stake.

When the rebels are thinking whether to surrender or to fight,

Doctor Plarr thought: the desperadoes. That is
what the papers would call them. A failed poet,
an excommunicated priest, a pious woman, a man
who weeps. For heaven's sake let this comedy
end in comedy. None of us are suited to tragedy.²

'None of us are suited to tragedy', because heroic action has
no meaning in an absurd world. What is needed is not heroism
but a commitment to survive.

² Ibid., p.293.
Ever since Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, there has been a steady decline in the value of human dignity. Man-made substitutes to fill the vacuum created by God's death have become inadequate and sometimes diabolical. The idea of the Absurd - "a world deprived of a generally accepted integrating principle, which has become disjointed, purposeless"¹ - has emerged as a modern creative element to see some sense in the cosmic nonsense. Although Greene does not toe the line of the practitioners of the Absurd, his novels written during the sixties and the seventies seem to convey the impression that a commitment to survive, however abject the survival may be, is the only way for man to emancipate himself from the Sisyphean toil and anguish.

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