

Erik Fabián, *Relationships of the Principal Characters of Graham Greene's Selected „Catholic“ Novels (Brighton Rock, The Power and the Glory, The Heart of the Matter) to Themselves, Other Characters and God with Respect to the General Features of Greene's Novels and Their Typical Protagonists*

BA thesis

Supervisor's report

Erich Fabian's thesis is an attempt to discuss characteristic features and situations of the heroes of the first three great novels by G. Greene, written in the late 1930s to the mid 1940s, in which matters of religion and faith, among others, are accentuated. This is done with fair knowledge of relevant critical sources, which are frequently yet thoughtfully quoted to back up the author's argument. My objections to the use of these sources only concern those infrequent cases where the quotation seems to be an example of mere embellishment rather than insightful criticism (such as Bergonzi's "Platonic dialogue between opposing views of the world," p. 26).

E. Fabian first tries to define the world of Greene's novels, using the traditional terms "Greenland" and the "Greenean man," and to point out autobiographical moments that decided about the character of Greene's writing. The core of the thesis, however, is a detailed discussion of various aspects of the heroes' positions in the analysed texts. In this respect I consider the attention paid to the typical "Greenean" questions (evil, pity, mercy, redemption, paradox etc.) appropriate and in accord with the demands for a thesis of this kind.

I only have a few partial reservations concerning both the author's arguments and the formal properties of the text:

1. The principal character of *Brighton Rock* is undoubtedly Pinkie; yet ^{the} a character that seems to be more complex is Rose. Pinkie is evil incarnated and he defines himself so but Rose is a seduced character, tossing between Pinkie the seducer and Ida, her guardian angel whose well meant warnings she resists. Her words to the priest confirm that she has finally chosen love instead of mercy even if it could bring damnation: "I wish I'd killed myself. I ought to 'ave killed myself. [...] I'm not asking for absolution. I want to be like him – damned." This ultimate sacrifice of her original goodness is finally confronted with the greatest paradox of the book, Pinkie's wrathful words recorded for her. This is perhaps the most typical Greenean situation in the whole novel and in my view deserves greater attention.

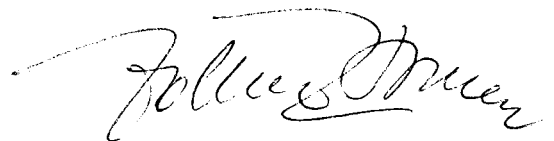
2. The tendency of the argument in Chapter 4 is to take the priest's ideas about himself for granted, more or less. Yet the situation should be discussed with the position of the reader in mind: the reader's sense of true moral integrity is what absolves the priest from his sins. The narrative strategy thus operates on the reader's ability to distinguish between appearance and essence, between what is said explicitly and what is implied between the lines. If we do not view the priest as a product of the conditions of the society to which he feels bound (and the reader is intensely made to realize this, I believe) then all the theological discussions of salvation, martyrdom and canonization are purely academic and abstract.
3. Scobie as a Saviour deserves more comment, especially the fact that he is an improper, inadequate Saviour and thus the whole motif is a travesty of the role of Jesus, one of the elements that undermine Scobie's all too serious view of himself.
4. Minor doubts can be made about such details as the understanding of the word "realistic" on p. 4 or the acceptance of Pryce-Jones's claim that Greene "penetrates the weak spots of the capitalist world" (how does this apply to *The Power and the Glory* with its socialist experiment in one of the Mexican states?), the same page. Why should Ida be seen as "a direct counterpart of Rose"? (p. 16)
5. Occasionally, there appear persistent language errors, such as dropping the definite article before "priest" in Saxon genitives (why?), saying "regard for" instead of "regard as" or the repeated use of "similarly to him" where "similarly," or "similar to him" would be more correct.
6. In the Slovak summary, the translation of *Brighton Rock* as *Brightonská skala* is misleading.

Despite this I consider Erik Fabián's thesis to be successful and recommend it for the defence.

Classification: excellent.



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