1994

Graham Greene, the comedian : comic technique in four novels, 1958-1969

Lowell Hoyt Holway
San Jose State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses

Recommended Citation

Holway, Lowell Hoyt, "Graham Greene, the comedian : comic technique in four novels, 1958-1969" (1994). *Master's Theses*. 921.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.bfmh-v3qu>
https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/921

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Graduate Research at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

**A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600**

**Graham Greene, The Comedian:
Comic Technique in Four Novels, 1958-1969**

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Lowell Hoyt Holway
December 1994

UMI Number: 1361179

Copyright 1994 by
Holway, Lowell Hoyt
All rights reserved.

UMI Microform Edition 1361179
Copyright 1995, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.

This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.

UMI

300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

© 1994

Lowell Hoyt Holway

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Dr. David Mesher, Associate Professor of English

Dr. Donald Keesey, Professor of English

Dr. Scott Rice, Professor of English

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

GRAHAM GREENE, THE COMEDIAN: COMIC TECHNIQUE IN FOUR NOVELS, 1958-1969

by Lowell Hoyt Holway

Graham Greene's novels published from 1958 to 1969—*Our Man in Havana* (1958), *A Burnt-Out Case* (1960), *The Comedians* (1966), and *Travels with My Aunt* (1969)—create comedy using comic techniques that can be broken down into six basic categories: comic figures of speech, farce, comic characterization, satire, the absurd, and black humor. Absurdity and black humor are particularly important because they are philosophically related to the novels' themes.

Each novel uses these techniques in different proportions for different thematic concerns. In *Our Man in Havana* absurdity and satire dominate to make a statement both political and existential. *A Burnt-Out Case* uses farce and absurdity to explore, in Greene's words, "various states . . . of belief and unbelief." *The Comedians* emphasizes black humor and farce to discuss commitment and politics. *Travels with My Aunt* downplays black humor, highlighting the other techniques, in a *carpe diem* defiance of old age and death.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Jodie Kalikow Holway, my wife, for her tireless editorial and motivational assistance. I would also like to thank David Mesher, my advisor, for his guidance and for his patience both when he was deluged with chapters and when he was receiving none.

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Introduction	vii
Chapter One: Comic Technique	1
Chapter Two: <i>Our Man in Havana</i>	24
Chapter Three: <i>A Burnt-Out Case</i>	48
Chapter Four: <i>The Comedians</i>	66
Chapter Five: <i>Travels with My Aunt</i>	88
Works Cited	105
Works Consulted	107

Introduction

Graham Greene's name evokes the seedy, imaginary territory known to some as "Greenland." It is a place of tragedy, a place of betrayed friendships and unhappy love affairs, a place where the possibility of redemption comes only through suffering. But Greenland is also a large territory with room for far more. Greenland is a place of comedy.

This thesis is an exploration of the comic side of Greenland. In particular, it focuses on the four novels Greene published from 1958 to 1969: *Our Man in Havana* (1958), *A Burnt-Out Case* (1960), *The Comedians* (1966), and *Travels with My Aunt* (1969). *Our Man in Havana* is a parody of a spy novel. *A Burnt-Out Case* is a tragic study of the various degrees of religious belief and non-belief. *The Comedians* is a tragicomic novel, part political, part existential. *Travels with My Aunt* is a picaresque, originally conceived as short stories. Despite their disparate natures, each novel reflects Greene's unfolding interest in comedy. Sometimes overlooked in favor of such works as *Brighton Rock* (1938), *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), or *The End of the Affair* (1951), the novels of 1958 to 1969 are nevertheless significant because of the role comedy plays in them and the different comic techniques Greene uses in each.

Comedy in Greene's Early Novels

All of Greene's novels written between 1929 and 1951 contain tragic elements, and his earliest novels are predominantly tragic. However, Greene's proclivity for comedy does not by any means start with *Our Man in Havana*. After his first three essentially

humorless novels—*The Man Within* (1929), *The Name of Action* (1930), and *Rumour at Nightfall* (1931)—comic elements have been present in virtually all of Greene's works, although the comedy appears in a variety of forms.

Stamboul Train (1932), Greene's fourth novel, is a spy thriller; it is the first of Greene's "entertainments." Greene employed the term "entertainment" to distance his less serious works from his other novels. The entertainments are shorter than the other novels—Greene says they are about 20,000 words shorter (Lodge 99)—and have more emphasis on action and melodrama. Although *Stamboul Train* is primarily melodramatic, it contains several comic characters, including Father Opie, a priest more interested in cricket than God; the novelist Quinn Savory, a satirical character originally mocking J.B. Priestley (until Priestley threatened a lawsuit). Greene's fifth novel, *It's A Battlefield* (1934), pokes fun at Middleton Murry and his hypocritical association with the Fabians through the character of Mr. Surrogate. Ferdinand Minty from *England Made Me* (1935) is a comic character who Greene says "came to life and commandeered more than his share of the action" (*Ways of Escape* 25). The eerie gas mask sequence in *A Gun for Sale* (1936), in which the residents of Nottwich prepare for impending chemical warfare, is punctuated by a moment of comic relief in the pompous character "Buddy," whose false bravado is exposed. *The Confidential Agent* (1939) also mixes terrifying scenes with comic ironic comments from the protagonist, a spy known only as "D." Greene claims *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) was going to be a comic novel inspired by Michael Innes, although traces of that ostensible intention to write a comic novel are difficult to find in this phantasmagoric spy thriller. *The End of the Affair* (1951) has light comic characters, Sarah Miles's mother and the private detective Parkis. The funniest line in the film version of *The Third Man*

(1950) was written by Orson Welles¹, but in the novel Greene manages to create his own comic effects in a farcical scene satirizing pretentious literature aficionados. Greene's first primarily comic novel, *Loser Take All* (1955), is a frivolous work, a honeymoon romance set in the casinos of Monte Carlo. These works show Greene's developing interest in comedy, an interest which burgeoned in 1958 with the first novel of this study, *Our Man in Havana*.

Expanding the Study of Greene's Comic Technique

According to Alan Warren Friedman's 1991 "The Status of Graham Greene Studies," there has not been tremendous focus on the comic aspects of Greene's work. Speaking of Greene's shift to humor, Friedman says, "This radical change has received relatively little attention to date" (48). Some of the attention Greene's shift to humor has received includes Karen Rae Moore's dissertation, "The Comic Technique of Graham Greene" (1976), a study of satire, rhetoric, black humor, and the absurd; and Edward Lattinville's dissertation, "Comic Characterization in the Fiction of Graham Greene" (1974).

The following study of comic technique in Greene's novels uses Moore's and Lattinville's terminology in breaking Greene's comic technique into six categories: comic figures of speech, farce, comic characterization, satire, the absurd, and black humor. It examines Greene's use of black humor following Bruce Janoff's and Mathew Winston's critical theories. It also follows Bruce Janoff's connection between black humor and

¹ Welles added the following line to the film version of *The Third Man*: "In Italy for thirty years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed—they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, five hundred years of democracy and peace, and what did they produce? The cuckoo clock!"

existentialism to give a new perspective on Greene's use of the absurd. In addition, it examines comedy in *A Burnt-Out Case*, a subject mostly ignored by studies of Greene's comedy because of the largely tragic mode in which it is written. This study also examines Greene's comic use of satire and figures of speech, two areas which have been discussed before, but not exhaustively. Finally, this study attempts to convey a sense of the delight that Greene's comic technique creates.

Chapter One

Comic Technique

George Eliot wrote in *Daniel Deronda*, “A difference of tastes in jokes is a great strain on the affections.” This is as true in the relationship between people as it is in the relationship between writer and audience. Different tastes in jokes exist, and equally different ways of explaining why something is comic. In order for the reader to understand the terms used in this study of comedy, a mutual vocabulary is vital.

Graham Greene uses many comic techniques in his writing, techniques which various critics call by differing names. Greene’s comic techniques are here broken down into six basic categories: comic figures of speech, farce, comic characterization, satire, the absurd, and black humor. Each of these primary techniques requires further definition. Because black humor has a philosophical element related to Greene’s themes, it must be discussed in depth philosophically as well as technically. The following sections will examine each category of comic technique, giving examples of Greene’s use of that technique.

Comic Figures of Speech

Quintilian once described a figure of speech as “any deviation, either in thought or expression, from the ordinary and simple method of speaking, a change analogous to the different positions our bodies assume when we sit down, lie down, or look back. . . . Let the definition of a figure, therefore, be *a form of speech artfully varied from common usage*” (quoted in Corbett 425). If a figure of speech is a form manipulated to be different from common usage, then comic figures of speech create comedy based on such a

manipulation of words for humorous effect. Figures of speech are subdivided into schemes and tropes. Schemes are “a deviation from the ordinary pattern or arrangement of words,” and tropes “involve a deviation from the ordinary and principal signification of a word” (Corbett 426).

Greene uses a variety of figures of speech, predominantly tropes. Some of Greene’s most common tropes include metaphor, simile, and hyperbole. Other tropes Greene uses are the three types of puns: antanacsis, the “repetition of a word in two different senses”; paranomasia, the “use of words alike in sound but different in meaning”; and syllepsis, the “use of a word understood differently in relation to two or more other words, which it modifies or governs” (Corbett 447-8). For example, in *Our Man in Havana*, there is a bar called “the Wonder Bar,” a paranomasium playing on the similar sound to the German word for “wonderful” (7). He also uses litotes, “deliberate use of understatement, not to deceive someone but to enhance the impressiveness” (Corbett 452) of what is said.

Farce

Farce is comedy designed to “provoke the audience to simple, hearty laughter. . . . To do so it commonly employs highly exaggerated or caricatured character types, puts them into improbable and ludicrous situations, and makes free use of broad verbal and physical horseplay” (Abrams 26). The “physical horseplay” aspect of farce is called slapstick, a word derived from *commedia dell’arte*, where the stock character Harlequin carried a bat, or “a stick made of two limber pieces of wood bound at the handle which made a very loud racket when applied vigorously to an exposed rump” (Oreglia 60)—hence the name slapstick. Slapstick humor in *commedia dell’arte*, called *lazzi*, involved acrobatics,

pratfalls, and similar buffoonery—characteristics that remain part of slapstick today.

Greene uses farce, with or without slapstick, frequently. In *Travels with My Aunt*, a farce occurs when Aunt Augusta's lover Monsieur Dambreuse keeps her, another mistress, and a wife secret from each other while they all live within ten minutes' walk of each other. By coincidence—a typical technique of farce—Augusta and the other mistress, Louise, run into each other in a café. Unaware that they are having affairs with the same man, they exchange stories about their lovers, discovering that they each are involved with a man who works at the same metallurgical firm. Augusta relates what happened next:

“I wonder whether they know each other,” Louise was saying when into the garden walked Monsieur Dambreuse followed by his rather stout wife and two over-grown children. . . . When I think of his expression as he turned and saw the two of us sitting at tea together, I cannot help smiling even today. (85)

The scene is farcical because it is so improbable that Augusta and Louise would meet in the first place. More improbable is that they would talk of their loves, and it is most improbable that M. Dambreuse and his wife would then have a chance encounter with the two women. Furthermore, M. Dambreuse's situation is exaggeratedly embarrassing, as he has been caught simultaneously by three women for infidelity. Because of the sexual overtones of this passage, it could be called a sex farce.

A moment of slapstick takes place in *The Comedians* in which Brown and Martha consummate their affair in Martha's cramped Peugeot:

The back of her neck was against my mouth and one leg spread-eagled across the radio. She shivered and her hand shot out and by bad chance fell on the rim of the wheel and set the klaxon crying. It went on wailing like a wounded animal or a ship lost in fog until the shiver stopped.

We sat in silence in the same cramped position, like two pieces of machinery which an engineer had just failed to fit. (87)

A moment of sexual passion, already ludicrous in that two adults are reduced to meeting in a car like teenagers, is reduced to slapstick when Martha's hand lands on the horn.

Comic Characterization

Character plays an important role in Greene's fiction. Says Edward Lattinville, "character, not philosophy, not apologetics, nor even politics, is central to Greene's fiction. . . . We come to grips with Greene's world picture only through an appreciative understanding of his individual creations" (5). Much of Greene's comedy is also found in his portrayal of character.

Comic characterization is one of the earliest techniques of comedy that appears in Greene's novels. Greene put several comic characters into his fourth novel, *Stamboul Train*, his first novel to use comedy. Greene's comic characters are usually ludicrously distorted in their manner and, sometimes, their appearance. The distortion of the comic character's personality approaches the point of caricature or even absurdity in the sense of Theater of the Absurd. Greene has said, "The truth is seldom tragic, for human beings are not made in that grand way. The truth may be sad but truth is nearly always grotesque as well" (Lattinville 2). Edward Lattinville says that the word "grotesque" is "most significant in understanding Greene's handling of character, for many of his memorable characters have been grotesques. And the grotesque in Greene is usually comic" (2).

An example of Greene's technique of distorting a character's personality to the point of caricature is the teenage girl Tooley, a hippie literature major in *Travels with My Aunt*. She is superficially knowledgeable about art and literature, and makes inapplicable literary comparisons to situations in which she finds herself. She tells Henry Pulling, "I feel I sort of met you in the English Literature course. As a character. We did Dickens in

depth" (100). Though she claims to have studied Dickens "in depth," the most substantial comparison she makes between Henry and Dickens' novels is that they are English. This shallow observation gains further irony in the context of Tooley's earlier statements in which Tooley avows, "I tell him [my father] he sees the world horizontally, I mean that's superficial, isn't it? I want to see the world vertically." Henry replies, "In depth," an interjection that Henry says makes him "proud of catching up with her ideas" (99). The irony is that "in depth" with Tooley proves to mean very little, even less than her meaningless metaphor of seeing the world "vertically" as opposed to "horizontally."

Later Tooley and Henry discover that they are mutually acquainted with Wordsworth, Augusta's lover, a happenstance about which Tooley says, "Now isn't that the wildest sort of coincidence? Like something in Thomas Hardy" (99). Thomas Hardy's coincidences involve cosmic irony in which an uncaring deity plays with humans for sport. For example, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Hardy's closing lines, after Tess's tragic life ends in her execution, are "The President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess" (quoted in Abrams 92). It is therefore particularly fatuous of Tooley to compare their both knowing Wordsworth to something from the novels of Thomas Hardy.

In the above examples and others, Greene emphasizes this aspect of Tooley's character, distorting her literary pretentiousness as a fun house mirror enlarges a face—it becomes her most noticeable feature. Ironically, Henry, who has little interest in literature beyond Walter Scott, innocently assumes Tooley knows what she is talking about and makes admiring comments to her such as, "You seem to know a lot about literature" (99). Henry's innocent comment emphasizes Tooley's inadequacy.

Satire

John Bullit says that satire “mediates between two perceptions, the perception of people as they actually are and the ideal perception of people of people as they should be” (1). In the case of Tooley above, Greene’s satire creates a comic tension between Tooley’s moderately pretentious image of herself, revealed by her literary allusions, and Tooley as she is revealed by the inaccuracy of those allusions.

As Karen Rae Moore points out (v), Greene’s social satire is typically rendered through the satirical portrait of different characters. Thus Greene’s comic characterizations and his use of satire often overlap. When characters make themselves ridiculous through their words and actions, as in the example of Tooley, this kind of satire is called indirect, or narrative, satire (Abrams 169). It is the typical satirical form in novels—as opposed to direct satire in which a speaker addresses the reader or a character within the work (Abrams 170).

Aside from the distinction between direct and indirect satire, David Worcester divides satire into three subsets: invective, burlesque, and irony (49). Invective appears in satire in small amounts, for satire is generally indirect in its criticism. The curses, epithets, and name-calling lack the subtlety of good satire, or as Bullit puts it, “What makes invective poor as satire is the excess of expressed feelings” (43). Greene rarely uses invective.

Burlesque, in contrast to invective, is a frequent satirical device in Greene’s comic writing. Burlesque achieves laughter by comparing something noble to something base; it engages the reader in an extended comparison creating the illusion for the reader that he has drawn conclusions without prompting from the writer (Worcester 42). This comparison of the noble and the base occurs through a juxtaposition of form and style on one hand with

subject on the other. When the subject is noble, the style must conversely be low and the resulting burlesque is accordingly also low. For example, an elevated subject brought low in *Travels with My Aunt* is a priest. Wordsworth, Aunt Augusta's lover, is intoxicated with the anonymity of the apartment intercom and mocks a priest when one comes to call on Augusta. Wordsworth describes the event:

An he [the priest] says in a dear brethren sort of voice, "I wonder, Miss Bertram, if I could come up and have a little chat about our bazaar." "Sure, man," ar say, "you wearing your dog collar?" "Why, yes," he say, "of course, who is that?" "Man," ar say, "you better put on a muzzle too before you go come up here." (24)

This passage is an example of low burlesque because the priest, a high subject, is reduced to terms used to describe a dog, a low subject.

On the other hand, when the subject is base, the style must conversely be high, and the burlesque is accordingly called high. Wordsworth and his intercom speaker from *Travels with My Aunt* again provide an example. Wordsworth is a clownish character who speaks in a comic melange of Biblical phrases from Catholic church services and the English dialect of Sierra Leone

"Man, it's jus that little mike there. Ar wan to make it say all kind of rude things. There ar am up there, and down there ma voice is, popping out into the street where no one see it's only old Wordsworth. It's a sort of power, man. Like the burning bush when he spoke to old Moses. (24)

As a comic character, Wordsworth is inherently a low subject, who is comically elevated when his voice on the intercom system is likened to the voice of God speaking to Moses.

Irony is the third subset of satire postulated by Worcester. In his words, "all irony is satirical, though not all satire is ironical" (81). Irony relates to the tension between what is asserted and what actually is. In other words, an ironic statement is one whose implicit meaning differs from the ostensible assertion (Abrams 90). Irony is one of three subsets of

satire, and irony itself has four subsets used by Greene: structural irony, sarcasm, Socratic irony, and cosmic irony.

First, structural irony assists the duplicity of meaning by introducing a structural feature, such as the naive hero, which carries the irony continuously throughout the piece.

The naive hero exhibits

invincible stupidity or obtuseness [which] leads him to persist in putting an interpretation on affairs which the knowing reader—who penetrates to, and shares, the implicit point of view of the authorial presence behind the naive persona—just as persistently is called on to alter and correct. . . . Structural irony depends on a knowledge of the author's ironic intention which is shared by the audience but unknown to the speaker. (Abrams 90)

Mr. Smith of *The Comedians* is such a naive hero. With the best intentions, he throws money to the impoverished beggars of Port-au-Prince. Brown, the narrator of *The Comedians*, describes the event:

“For God’s sake,” I said. One or two of the beggars gave high unnerving screams. . . . The last money was scattered, and the police began to close in on their prey. Men with two legs kicked down men with one, men with two arms grasped those who were armless by their torsos and threw them to the ground. . . . Mr. Smith said, “Well . . . I guess they won’t squander that any worse than I would have done.” (193)

Smith could not have created more misery if he were a sadist intentionally starting a riot, but naive Mr. Smith goes off under the ironic impression that he has done a good thing for the poor of Haiti.

The second subset of irony, sarcasm, is created by an inversion of meaning, most typically the “crude and blatant use of apparent praise for dispraise” (Abrams 91). Sarcasm is a form of irony that Abrams feels is best left to “dormitory persiflage.” Worcester affirms the notion of sarcasm as second-rate irony: “When we dislike a writer’s irony, we call it sarcasm. The word has unpleasant connotations, and we reserve it for obvious double-

dealing in words, such as appears in conversation or in written jibes and taunts.” Brown, the narrator of *The Comedians*, is frequently sarcastic. For example, when Brown’s lover Martha engineers a fight with her cook so Brown can have him for his hotel, she cites it as proof that she loves Brown:

“Now don’t you believe I love you? My husband will be furious. He said that André was the only cook in Port-au-Prince who could make a proper soufflé.” I stopped myself just in time from saying, “And Angel? He likes his food too.” (92)

Angel is Martha’s fat five year-old son, of whom Brown is irrationally jealous. The comment Brown says he is tempted to make regarding Angel is sarcastic because at face value the comment is agreeing with Martha; she must love Brown to sacrifice both her husband and her son for his happiness. However, the remark is in fact dispraise because Brown is both reminding Martha that she loves Angel more than she loves Brown and reminding Martha that he thinks her son fat.

The third subset of irony, Socratic irony takes its name from Socrates’ manner of argument. Socrates would assume a pose of ignorance and eagerness to be instructed. He would use this pose to ask seemingly innocent questions until such questions pointed out a logical flaw in the victim’s reasoning (Abrams 91). Brown uses this form of irony during a dinner on board the *Medea* en route to Haiti. During the dinner, the captain asks Mr. Smith what he is having for dinner. The Smiths are vegetarians who eat American products with comic names, and Mr. Smith’s answer somewhat disgusts the captain. Brown then asks,

“And what are you eating, Mrs. Smith?” I wanted the captain to taste the full extravagance of the situation.

“I don’t know why you should ask, Mr. Brown. You have seen me eat it every evening at the same hour. Slippery Elm food,” she explained to the captain. He put down his knife and fork, pushed away his plate and sat with his head bowed. (33)

Brown poses innocence and asks a seemingly innocent question here to lure Mrs. Smith into revolting the captain.

The fourth subset of irony, cosmic irony, is typically allied with tragedy, but it can be also be used with black humor, a subject discussed below. In cosmic irony, the process that guides the universe deliberately deludes people into thinking that they have some hope of understanding the universal process (Abrams 92). The power that guides the universe can be God or another power, although God is frequently depicted as the cosmic ironist, particularly in Greene. "Cosmic irony is the satire of frustration, uttered by men who believe that however high man's aspirations and calculations may reach, there is always a still higher, unattainable level of knowledge, in the light of which those aspirations and calculations must become stultified and abortive" (Worcester 129). As described above, Thomas Hardy is an inveterate cosmic ironist. In *A Burnt-Out Case* and *The Comedians* God is a cosmic ironist and, moreover, is described in *The Comedians* as a cosmic practical joker:

When I was a boy I had faith in the Christian God. . . . Now that I approached the end of life it was only my sense of humor that enabled me sometimes to believe in Him. Life was a comedy, not the tragedy for which I had been prepared, and it seemed to me that we were all, on this boat with a Greek name (why should a Dutch line name its boats in Greek?), driven by an authoritative practical joker towards the extreme point of comedy. (32)

The idea of God as a practical joker is particularly significant in the context of Greene's use of black humor and the absurd, as will be discussed below.

To summarize, satire, one of the six basic categories of Greene's comic technique, can be divided into the subsets of invective, burlesque, and irony. Greene's use of irony, in turn, can be broken down into structural irony, sarcasm, Socratic irony, and cosmic

irony. Satire can also be created by two of the other basic categories of Greene's comic technique—the absurd and black humor.

The Absurd

Literature of the absurd descends from the expressionist and surrealist movements, as well as the fiction of James Joyce and Franz Kafka (Abrams 1). Abrams says that absurd literature

emerged after World War II as a rebellion against the essential beliefs and values of both traditional culture and traditional literature. Central to this earlier tradition had been the assumptions that man is a rational creature who lives in an at least partially intelligible universe, that he is part of an orderly social structure, and that he is capable of heroism and dignity even in defeat. (1)

Central to absurd literature, therefore, is the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, a philosophy that posited each individual as isolated from all others, lost in an inexplicable and alienating world that has no integral meaning, truth, or value (1). In literature of the absurd, life is a senseless and painful journey from the non-existence before birth to the non-existence after death. From the idea of life as a senseless and painful journey also sprang Theater of the Absurd:

To define the world as absurd is to recognize its fundamentally mysterious and indecipherable nature, and the recognition is frequently associated with feelings of loss, purposelessness, and bewilderment. To such feelings the Theater of the Absurd gives ample expression, often leaving the observer baffled in the face of disjointed, meaningless, or repetitious dialogues, incomprehensible behavior, and plots which deny all notion of "logical" or "realistic" development. (Drabble 3)

Theater of the Absurd and the world of Greene's fiction often share this "fundamentally mysterious and indecipherable" nature. In *The Comedians*, Haiti's secret police, the Tontons Macoute, arrive at the funeral of one of their political enemies, Minister Philipot.

The Tontons Macoute confiscate the coffin and drive away with it after a menacing confrontation with the funeral *cortège*. The narrator Brown wonders where the Tontons Macoute could be going with the body: “What use to anyone was the body of an ex-Minister? A corpse couldn’t even suffer. But unreason can be more terrifying than reason” (126). The motives of the Tontons Macoute are indeed incomprehensible; even in death bewildering events befall the unfortunate Minister Philipot. The fact that the theft of the minister’s corpse makes no sense increases the terror of the event; as the narrator Brown says, “unreason can be more terrifying than reason.” As Camus put it in *The Myth of Sisyphus*,

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. (quoted in Esslin 378)

So the absurd creates terror by making the world alien to humanity.

The world of the absurd is a world without a divine being of any kind. Eugene Ionesco directly addresses the place religion has, or rather does not have, in literature of the absurd, “Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (quoted in Abrams 1). However, Greene’s absurdity never loses sight of the idea of a Catholic God. It is in the “religious sense” of his novels, as Greene calls it (*Collected Essays* 34), that Greene cannot be classified with main practitioners of the absurd—it cannot be said that Greene’s works are “cut off” from their religious roots. Instead, Greene’s absurdity gets its sense of uselessness from a notion of cosmic irony, a notion of God as a practical joker.

The world of the absurd creates comedy as well as a sense of meaninglessness,

through a delicate mixture of farce and pathos. Events in absurd literature can be ludicrously comic as well as frightening. For example, a brief exchange in *Our Man in Havana* typifies the comically absurd. Wormold complains about the name of the vacuum cleaner he is expected to sell, "The Atomic Pile." He says, "yesterday a woman came in and looked at the Atomic Pile and she asked whether a pad that size could really absorb all the radio-activity. And what about Strontium 90? she asked" (10). The silly name of the vacuum cleaner is the occasion for a potential customer absurdly assuming that the device is designed for absorbing radio-activity.

Black Humor

Black humor is important to Greene's comic technique because black humor, along with the absurd, is crucial to the themes of *Our Man in Havana*, *A Burnt-Out Case*, and *The Comedians*. Black humor is related to the absurd in that both often make use of baleful or inept characters living in a nightmarish or phantasmagoric world, playing out their roles in what Ionesco calls "tragic farce" wherein events are comic and horrifying, brutal and absurd all at once (Abrams 2). Simply put, black humor is "the juxtaposition, as in writing or drama, of morbid or absurd elements with comical or farcical ones, especially so as to produce a shocking or disturbing effect" ("black humor," *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*).

Black humor creates a suspension between horror and comedy by manipulating the involvement of the audience, periodically increasing and decreasing the audience's emotional involvement. Black humorists achieve this balance with four methods, according to Winston. First, black humor shifts quickly between threat and amusement,

horror and farce. This prevents the reader from becoming dominated by either comedy or horror.

Second, black humor presents ridiculous scenarios and assures us of the truth of these scenarios. "Its world is often bizarre and surrealistic; motivation and causality are unclear; characters are alienated from us; normality is lost; realistic details, however, are presented with extreme clarity, thereby keeping the work from drifting off into pure fantasy" (Winston, "Humour Noir" 276). Winston quotes Walter Kerr's *Tragedy and Comedy*: "A laugh begins because we see the contradiction between what is happening on stage and what we hold to be true; then it falters, descends into hollowness, because we cannot be certain that what we hold is true and because what is happening on stage has the grim authority of a recorded event" ("Humour Noir" 276).

Third, black humor changes the audience's relationship with the characters. If an audience were emotionally connected to the characters consistently, the horrors befalling them could not be humorous. Alternately, if the audience were always detached from the characters, it would be immune to the horrors the characters endure. "Often we are made to laugh at a character, then suddenly to recognize that we share his dilemma and therefore have been laughing at ourselves all along." Then the audience cannot laugh at the character again until the perspective shifts again, distancing the character once more. "Neither we nor the characters are ever on a firm foundation" ("Humour Noir" 276).

Fourth, the black humorist distances the audience from the work by the post-modern technique of making the audience aware of the fact that the humor is a work of fiction ("Humour Noir" 276).

Although the reader must experience both horror and humor, these effects need not be literally simultaneous. Winston says:

Many critics have insisted that the distinctive effect of black humor and of its related form, the grotesque, is that the reader must feel the humor and the horror simultaneously, but I find this formulation of our response inaccurate. It is indeed necessary that both potentials be present in the text and exert approximately equal claims, but it is unlikely that we respond to both at once. . . . The effect is similar to viewing an optical illusion in which one may see, for example, either a white table on a black background or two facing silhouettes separated by an intervening white space. You see the picture in one way, and then, by looking at it repeatedly or from a different angle, you become able to see the other image. ("To Weep" 256-7)

Because of these two effects of black humor, Winston divides it into two subsets: absurd black humor, in which humor is primary, and grotesque black humor, in which horror is primary. Put another way, it could be said that in grotesque black humor, humor is used to intensify horror, whereas in absurd black humor, horror is used to intensify humor (Heller 212).

In absurd black humor, the characters

belong to the world of comedy, having petty problems, ignoble goals, little psychological depth. Unlike traditional comic characters, there is an incomprehensible aspect to the absurd character in black humor; his motives are mysterious. The characters are unable to communicate clearly with each other. They are ridiculous and pathetic. Despite these flaws, the audience sympathizes with the characters because the characters take themselves seriously" (Winston, "Humour Noir" 278).

Greene's absurd black humor characters come close to matching this description. For example, in *Our Man in Havana*, Wormold fits the above description in that he has rather the petty problem of being able to have enough money to spoil his daughter. He has difficulty communicating with other characters, such as Hawthorne, who will not listen to his protests against joining the Secret Service or Lopez, who will not believe Wormold does not want him to act as a pimp. He is somewhat ridiculous and pathetic, ridiculous in that he allows himself to be pushed into the world of espionage and pathetic in that he has

been deserted by his wife. However, Wormold's motives are hardly mysterious—he allows himself to be involved in the Secret Service because he needs money. Nevertheless, Wormold establishes himself as a character of absurd black humor when there is an assassination attempt on his life.

In grotesque black humor, in contrast to absurd black humor, the audience and the characters are made much more uncomfortable. In addition to the characters and their motivations being incomprehensible, the plot is much more fragmented. The breakdown in communication between the characters is also considerably more serious. The protagonist is treated more harshly than in absurd black humor. Often the protagonist's body is mutilated or distorted in some way; the character suffers physical abuse. The threat of death is omnipresent; suffering is immediate and graphic. Says Winston,

The threat to the body is part of the omnipresent threat of death in grotesque black humor. Death dominates, but it occurs in a ridiculous manner and is never dignified. Death is the final divorce between body and spirit, the ultimate disjunction in a form that dwells on violent incongruities. Often it is reduced to its physical manifestation, the corpse, which is man become thing. . . .
 ("Humour Noir" 276)

An example of grotesque black humor occurs in *The Comedians*, when Brown and Smith go on business to the Post Office, which happens to be a refuge for beggars. Smith is accosted by desperate deformed people:

Two one-armed men and three one-legged men hemmed him round. Two were trying to sell him dirty old envelopes containing out of date Haitian postage stamps: the others were more frankly begging. A man without legs at all had installed himself between his knees and removed his shoe-laces preparatory to cleaning his shoes. Others seeing a crowd collected were fighting to join in. A young fellow, with a hole where his nose should have been, lowered his head and tried to ram his way through towards the attraction at the centre. A man with no hands raised his pink polished stumps over the heads of the crowd to exhibit his infirmity to the foreigner. It was a typical scene in the Post Office except that foreigners were rare nowadays. I had to fight my way to reach him, and once my

hand encountered a stiff inhuman stump, like a piece of hard rubber.
I forced it to one side, and I felt revolted by myself, as though I
were rejecting misery. (156)

Here Brown feels “revolted” by his rejection of the deformed beggars. The comedy of the situation is relatively slight, although the notion of two one-armed men and three one-legged men is unlikely and slapstick. Nevertheless, the grotesque and the horrible dominate in this scene. Note the beggars’ deformities; such deformities imply a “threat to the body” of which Winston speaks. A comic element contrasts with the grotesque of this scene—Smith’s impenetrable conviction that vegetarianism is the solution to Haiti’s problems.

Sometimes horror and humor are present in literary techniques without creating black humor. Winston says black humor is often mislabeled as tragicomedy, satire, and irony. (“To Weep” 261). Black humor is similar to all these, but it is not identical. As in tragicomedy, black humor does use devices of both comedy and tragedy; however, tragicomedy is a moderate form that avoids the extremes of “mirth and killing” (“Humour Noir” 274) that black humor violently juxtaposes.

As in satire, black humor criticizes a subject, illuminating its undesirable qualities. However, black humor assumes a different set of norms, implicit or explicit, against which the reader can contrast the satirized world portrayed by the author—the reader’s decency, humanity, sense of verisimilitude, and familiarity with the conventions of parody. Decency, humanity, and verisimilitude enable the reader to feel shock, horror, and outrage at the black humor, while the reader’s familiarity with parody additionally enables the reader to find the passage funny as well as shocking. These are the only norms the black humorist evokes; beyond a sense of decency, the black humorist does not assume the reader will agree with him that a certain norm ought to exist and does not try to convince

the reader of what should be. The satirist does assume certain norms should exist—the satirist’s comic technique could not work otherwise. To Winston, black humor “challenges not only the standards of judgement on which the satirist relies, but also the very faculties of judgement” (“Humour Noir” 274). Black humor should also not be mislabeled as irony. As in irony, black humor purports to mean one thing while implying another. And black humor is inherently ironic for it portrays a horror while evoking a laugh. However, while irony often “makes the reader or spectator into a detached onlooker who can savor the incongruities presented to him and unravel the various perspectives contained within the work,” black humor does more. It disturbs and disorients its audience by limiting the audience to “the narrow perspective of the characters,” not permitting them to “feel superior to” the characters, and regularly destroying the audience’s “secure detachment” (“Humour Noir” 274).

Thematic Significance of Black Humor

Although many competing ideas have been posited for the origin of black humor, the one most useful in discussing Graham Greene is the notion that black humor can be related to post-modernism deriving from the French, especially the existentialists associated with the absurd, such as Camus and Sartre. Those critics who relate black humor to the existentialists therefore consider the present form of it an offshoot of existential philosophy. Says Alan Pratt, editor of *Black Humor: Critical Essays*,

because we now live in an age when the notion of absurdity is more or less taken for granted, writers have had to keep pace, and the aim of the black humorist is significantly different from the existentialist. Yes, given the human condition, the world is ridiculous, but rather than stoic resignation or heroic struggle, the black humorist tries to wrest laughter from our cosmic plight. (xviii)

Bruce Janoff, although not responding directly to Pratt, attempts to explain why the

black humorist tries to “wrest laughter from our cosmic plight” while the existentialist largely does not. He postulates a philosophical difference between black humor and existentialism:

Only when Camusian man resigns himself to the inevitability of suffering and death does the prospect of living in a plague-ridden world take on a paradoxical aura of hopefulness. Only when he is painfully conscious of the absence of meaning outside this world and the chaos inherent in it, and yet shoulder to shoulder with his fellow man continues the struggle, can he hope to endure. In short, existentialism is a marginally optimistic system which posits that limited meaning, and therefore reason to go on living may be found through the relationship of self and the external world (which includes other men).

In marked contrast to this existential ethic, the black humorists will not even allow the temporary respite of the “hopeless hope” paradox. They see everything external to the individual mind as irrational. . . . (32-33)

Greene’s black humor is not quite the same as the black humor Janoff describes. Greene’s black humor has the same background of existential philosophy, but Greene’s black humor does not reject the “hopeless hope” paradox as Janoff says of other black humorists. For example, *A Burnt-Out Case* suggests that the world is existentially absurd. But it suggests that the world is existentially absurd because God is a cosmic practical joker, and thus offers a possibility for religious belief.

Janoff attributes black humor and existentialism to the same philosophical foundation, but he wishes to give them separate philosophical meaning. He tries to assert on the one hand that the black humorists, lacking the “hopeless hope” paradox, are more despairing than the existentialists, but on the other hand, he does not want say that black humor lacks optimism or “moral voice”:

Ultimately, black humor cannot be described as being pessimistic or simply lacking an affirmative moral voice. Rather, it lives outside these limits in a terrain of terrifying candor concerning the most extreme situations. Yet the black humorist cannot be accused of

being totally nihilistic since he refuses to negate the legitimacy of his art and continues to write. The best conclusion, perhaps, is that within the artistic framework the black humorist is the artist closest to giving it all up. Like his existential forebears, he is obviously enraged by the cul-de-sac of the absurdist metaphysic, but unlike them he is on the verge of acknowledging he is beaten in his feeble literary attempts to combat it. (37)

Janoff defends the idea that black humor is not “lacking an affirmative moral voice” by claiming that black humorists are not so nihilistic as to not write black humor at all. However, assuming that a nihilist would not care to write about nihilism is a slippery slope argument expecting the nihilist to have an integrity and consistency that cannot be guaranteed.

Janoff posits that the essential philosophical difference between black humor and existentialism is that black humor does not offer the paradoxical hope that the existentialists offer. However, as has been mentioned, he is reluctant to call the black humorists “pessimistic” or “lacking an affirmative moral voice.” To put these terms into Janoff’s implied negatives, black humorists must therefore have an affirmative moral voice and some amount of the saving optimism possessed by the existentialists—so are they philosophically different from the existentialists after all?

Perhaps Janoff has confused content with style. The novels he uses to support his point, *Catch-22* and *The Floating Opera*, are novels that, as Janoff says, use black humor and sustain a philosophical message similar to (though not the same as) the existentialist message. However, black humor does not inherently convey this message. Rather, black humor conveys this message in these particular novels. In Greene’s novels, black humor conveys a different philosophical message.

Janoff’s assumption of a link between the black humor medium and a philosophical message contradicts other critics such as Mathew Winston and Andre Bréton, who do not

see black humor as having any inherent meaning. Andre Bréton coined the term “humour noir” in his 1939 *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (Winston, “Humour Noir and Black Humor” 269). Bréton’s original description of “black humor” is different from the current concept of the term. Nevertheless, Bréton’s anthology provided Mathew Winston the grounding for the concept:

Extrapolating from Bréton’s remarks and from the evidence of his selections, it is clear that he did not intend humour noir to designate a genre. Rather, he presents black humor as an attitude, a stance, or a perspective which exists independently of literature but which may be embodied in writing. It uses an ironic and biting intelligence to attack sentimentality, social convention (including literary convention), and an apparently absurd universe. It is opposed to simplistic thinking, and expresses this opposition by verbally yoking disparate concepts without attempting to reconcile them. It scorns the limitations of rational thought, and therefore favors the fantastic, the surreal, and the grotesque. It wishes to break down complacency and to reveal how a man’s unconscious realities belie his harmonious surface, and it consequently employs violent images and shock tactics. Although the black humorist often takes a moralist’s or satirist’s stance, his perception of inseparable complexities and unresolvable antitheses keeps him from advocating or hoping for any reform. Instead, he attempts to bring his audience into the same position he occupies by threatening or horrifying it and then undercutting its fear by some witty or comic turn. This position is seen as a liberating one, as an assertion of human independence, because it acknowledges the pains and fears of life and transcends them. (Winston “Humour noir” 270)

The main notion here is that black humor is not so much a genre as a technique that a writer can use in depicting his material. This technique is based on philosophical implications related to existentialism, but at the same time, the black humor technique is by no means bound to such a philosophy. Winston rephrases the confusion over the thematic significance of black humor in a later essay, “Black Humor: To Weep with Laughing”:

What is black humor? First and foremost, it is a tone in literature and related arts that combines horror and fun, the unsettling and the amusing, or as Gerd Henniger has suggested, pleasure and guilt. . . . A tone is the rhetorical effect of a work or a portion of work on its reader or spectator. Tone is created through the handling of language

and of visual and aural effects in art forms that are not restricted to the printed page, but it is also determined by the treatment of character, of plot, and of structure. (251)

Winston points out the flaw in Janoff's desire to separate black humor from existentialism: black humor does not have to connect to any particular theme or philosophy because black humor is not a philosophy, but a comic technique.

Janoff's connection between black humor and existential philosophy is nevertheless valuable in discussing Graham Greene's black humor because Greene uses a black humor that seems philosophically related to existentialism. But it is vital to be rid of Janoff's suggestion that black humor has a fixed philosophical meaning in all contexts because Greene's black humor is a modification of existentialist thought. While Janoff argues that black humor is philosophically similar to existentialism, but more pessimistic, Winston and Breton contend that black humor is not locked to one philosophy at all. Instead, black humor is a comic technique that can be used to express a variety of philosophical ideas. While existentialism and the black humor of Janoff posit that there is no God to bring meaning to the material world, Greene's black humor posits that there is a God, but He refuses to bring meaning to events in the material world.

Karen Rae Moore observes the shift in Greene's portrayal of God and makes the following conclusion:

That Greene is a black humorist is evident from an analysis of his comic works, and most of them are recent fiction, having been published in the two decades between 1954 and 1974. In fact, to a surface view of his works, especially in the past decade, religion appears to have receded slightly from its once predominant position so that black humor and the absurd are now in the foreground. (xiii)

Moore says that black humor and the absurd replace the Catholic underpinnings of Greene's work. However, it might be more accurate to say that black humor and the

absurd do not replace Catholicism, but rather meld with Catholicism to create a black humor with perversely theological underpinnings. As will be discussed in the relevant chapter, *A Burnt-Out Case* portrays a world in which Querry's desire to reclaim his religious faith ends in a sex farce—with existentially absurd implications—that causes Querry to be unjustly suspected of adultery and shot by the jealous husband. Some priests discuss the situation, saying,

“Sometimes I think God was not entirely serious when he gave man the sexual instinct.”

“If that is one of the doctrines you teach in moral theology. . . .”

“Nor when he invented moral theology.” (191)

The implication is that God has created the whole farcical situation, which ends in Querry's semi-tragic death, as a joke. In a similar vein, *The Comedians* refers to God as “an authoritative practical joker” who drives humanity “to the extreme point of comedy.” These passages suggest that black humor and the absurd have not supplanted God at all, but rather become part of Greene's vision of God.

Chapter Two

Our Man in Havana

Published in 1958, *Our Man in Havana* came as a surprise to Greene's critics, who were unaccustomed to thinking of him as a comic author, despite his 1955 publication of *Loser Take All*. Previous Greene spy novels had been thrillers, but *Our Man in Havana* was a comedy, specifically a satire, with absurdity taking a role filled by suspense in previous novels.

As a satire, it could be classified in the subset high burlesque, a parody which "imitates the serious materials and manner" of the spy novel (Abrams 18). It could also be characterized as a slapstick farce, for it make use of physical humor such as the pratfalls and similar buffoonery. As in a typical farce, Greene uses "highly exaggerated or caricatured character types, puts them into improbable and ludicrous situations, and makes free use of broad verbal humor and physical horseplay" (Abrams 26). But the novel is also part of what some critics refer to as "Greeneland," a term for the seedy and frightening atmosphere which Greene creates in most of his novels. Havana is part of Greeneland in that it is a sinister place watched by a secret police force, whose Captain Segura carries a cigarette case of human skin. There are several deaths in the novel, disturbing deaths portrayed tragically. In other words, the novel is far from being entirely light-hearted. Furthermore, unlike the frivolous *Loser Take All*, *Our Man in Havana* has a serious purpose as an indictment of Cold War politics and espionage.

As David Lodge has said, *Our Man in Havana* is in many ways a parody of

Greene's earlier entertainments *A Gun For Sale*, *The Confidential Agent*, and *The Ministry of Fear* (87). Each of those novels contains elements of the spy novel; each begins with a hunted man who is eventually turned into the vengeful hunter. *Our Man in Havana* also follows that pattern: Wormold, a vacuum cleaner salesman, allows himself to be pushed into being British Intelligence's man in Havana so he may continue to support his spoiled daughter Milly in high style. Greene subverts his usual spy elements by making them ludicrous, as Wormold makes up phony intelligence reports using *Time* magazine and invents agents (using names out of the Havana country club membership book) with whom to pad his expense account reports. This satire becomes frightening—and existentially confusing—when someone starts to murder real people who seem to be his fictional agents come to life.

Thus the elements of a serious spy thriller exist parallel to the comedy of *Our Man in Havana*. As Wormold's factitious reports are believed by the Secret Service headquarters in London, the unidentified "other side" (often sinisterly referred to as "them") begins to make its presence known. Wormold is detained by the police in Santiago and questioned. Wormold's dear friend Dr. Hasselbacher's apartment is ransacked, and Wormold begins to feel he cannot trust Hasselbacher. Then Raul, Wormold's ostensibly fictitious agent, is murdered. Wormold himself is soon after marked for assassination, and Hasselbacher is murdered for trying to save Wormold. Wormold seeks to avenge the death of Hasselbacher by murdering his assassin. After surviving that threat, Wormold escapes Cuba, but the suspense continues as it is uncertain what the Secret Service will do to Wormold for his treachery. Although the comic mode predominates the novel, the major plot developments are melodramatic, driven by suspense.

Black Humor

Our Man in Havana carefully balances comic and tragic elements. Individual scenes may be dedicated to comedy or to tragedy, but tragedy is never allowed to dominate the novel as a whole. Conversely, comedy is prevented from undercutting tragic scenes or making the tragedy seem inappropriate.

Because this careful balancing act achieves an almost simultaneous effect of the comic and the somber, some critics call *Our Man in Havana* a black humor novel. However, to describe the comedy in the novel as predominantly black humor is, as Mathew Winston might say, to make the common mistake of confusing black humor with tragicomedy. Winston says that black humor “resembles tragicomedy only insofar as it uses the devices of both comedy and, to a lesser extent, tragedy. But the median nature of tragicomedy, which avoids the extremes of ‘mirth and killing’ is at odds with black humor’s violent juxtaposition and combination of such extremes” (“Humour Noir” 274).

Although the majority of the comedy in *Our Man in Havana* avoids John Fletcher’s extremes of “mirth and killing,” there are nevertheless sections of *Our Man in Havana* which embrace those extremes. For example, Greene uses black humor to satirize tourists and Batista’s regime simultaneously. The narrative voice explains the lack of tourists in Havana:

Tourists were sadly reduced nowadays in number, for the President’s regime was creaking dangerously towards its end. There had always been unpleasant doings out of sight . . . which had not disturbed the tourists in the Nacional and the Seville-Biltmore, 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.” (25)

The above black humor serves as narrative satire; the characters are satirized by their words and actions. Note the word “picturesque” used ironically to describe a beggar. Havana beggars are only picturesque to tourists who do not understand the suffering that their appearance represents. Then the narrative voice mocks the fatuous language of travel brochures. Finally, the tourists talking about the event afterward are heartlessly unimpressed by the loss of life a bullet causes, but they are impressed by the destruction of a five hundred dollar camera. One tourist is even bringing a piece of the camera home as a souvenir to show someone with the ludicrous name Humpelnicker.

Black humor also occurs in Wormold’s speech to the European Traders Association. During this scene, Wormold makes a speech directed at the men in his audience ordered to assassinate him. The speech is ironic because it is interpreted by the rest of the European traders as mere talk about trade competition. The speech concludes when a dog accidentally laps up poisoned whisky meant for Wormold.

Wormold lifted Carter’s whisky flask and said, “I don’t suppose Mr. Carter even knows the name of the man who sent him to poison me for the good of the firm.” Laughter broke out again with a note of relief. Mr. MacDougall said, “We could do with more poison here,” and suddenly the dog began to whimper. It broke cover and made for the service door. “Max,” the head-waiter exclaimed. “Max.” There was silence and then a few uneasy laughs. The dog was uncertain on its feet. It howled and tried to bite its own breast. The headwaiter overtook it by the door and picked it up, but it cried as though in pain and broke from his arms. “It’s had a couple,” Mr. MacDougall said uneasily. (177)

Wormold mentions that Carter was sent to poison him, and the audience thinks he is making a bacchanalian joke about Carter getting him drunk, but in fact Wormold is making an accusation of murder. Perhaps the contrast between the light-hearted and the sinister would not be enough justification to call this scene black humor, but the dog who accidentally drank the poison starts his death throes at this moment, while Mr. MacDougall continues to joke. (This scene was apparently rendered so horrifically in Carol Reed's film of *Our Man in Havana*—particularly the dying cries of the dog—that they excised it, fearing it would be too upsetting for general audiences.)

A few paragraphs later, Wormold pursues the head waiter who must have helped poison his lunch. (Ironically, Wormold has told British Intelligence that the waiter is a spy on his payroll.) The waiter denies Wormold's accusation, but is obviously upset that his dog has been accidently poisoned. The black humor of the dog's death is a type of satire, a high burlesque; the base dog is portrayed in high imagery that is normally reserved for a human funeral. The head-waiter, an accomplice in the attempted murder of Wormold, cries at the sight of his dead dog. Wormold looks back at the scene as he leaves the kitchen:

the black figure knelt beside the black dog and the white chef stood above and the kitchen-hands waited, like mourners round a grave, carrying their troughs and mops and dishes like wreaths. My death, he thought, would have been more unobtrusive than that. (178)

The comedy of the burlesque funeral contrasts with the horror of the dog's death. The horror dominates over the comic element, so the scene is more horrible than comic—an example of grotesque black humor.

Shortly after the scene at the European Traders Meeting, Carter murders Dr. Hasselbacher. Wormold intends to take revenge on Carter and thinks about revenge in a scene which ironically intersperses a light conversation between Wormold's daughter Milly and Wormold's love-interest Beatrice. While the two women discuss cosmetics, Wormold

thinks about revenge. The juxtaposition creates the tension necessary for black humor:

He could hear Milly and Beatrice talking in the next room. Although the door was ajar he only half took in what they were saying. He stood on the frontier of violence, a strange land he had never visited before; he had his passport in his hand. . . .

And on this side of the border he heard the voices talking in the language he knew.

Beatrice said, "No, I wouldn't advise deep carnation. Not at your age. . . . Try this light carnation. No, don't smear the edge of your mouth. Let me show you."

Wormold thought, I have no arsenic or cyanide. Besides I will have no opportunity to drink with him. I should have forced that whisky down his throat. . . .

"There. You see what I mean." (184-5)

Wormold feels alienated, like a man in another country, listening to the normal pleasant conversation of Milly and Beatrice. They speak in a language he understands, while he metaphorically visits a country of violence where he cannot speak the language. Despite his reluctance to enter this violent country, Wormold thinks about ways of killing Carter.

There is another major scene in the novel which contains elements of black humor. It occurs somewhat earlier in the novel than the scenes just described; in fact, it establishes the fact that an attempt will be made on Wormold's life at the luncheon described above. Wormold flies to Kingston to meet with Hawthorne. Wormold arrives expecting that Hawthorne has discovered that his reports are spurious, but instead Hawthorne tells him that he used to suspect him of duplicity, but no longer. The reason Hawthorne is sure that Wormold is honest is that he has been marked for assassination by "the others":

"In a way I was relieved when I found that the others have made up their minds to murder you."

"Murder me?"

"You see, that really proves the drawings are genuine. . . ."

"How are they going to murder me?"

"Oh, we'll come to that—a matter of poisoning. What I mean is that next to having photographs one can't have a better confirmation of your reports. . . ."

"How are they going to poison me?"

“First things first, old man. One mustn’t forget the economics of warfare. . . .”

“Please would you mind telling me how they are going to murder me? You see, it interests me personally.”

“Of course I’m going to tell you. I just wanted to give you the background first and to tell you how pleased we all are—at the confirmation of your reports, I mean. They plan to poison you at some sort of business lunch. . . . In a way, you know, it’s a compliment. You are dangerous now.” Hawthorne made a long sucking noise, draining up the last liquid between the layers of ice and orange and pineapple and the cherry on top. (159-160)

The contrast between the grim reality of the situation and Hawthorne’s inability to relate to Wormold’s concern in humane terms is the fulcrum of black humor here. Hawthorne treats Wormold’s impending murder casually because, to Hawthorne, Wormold’s danger is subordinate to other points of discussion. Hawthorne casually mentions his “relief” that Wormold has been marked for death because he thinks it means his job is safe; he does not think of Wormold’s safety. Hawthorne’s lack of concern for Wormold is emphasized by the way he savors his daiquiri; his appetite is unspoiled by any danger Wormold might face. Despite the comedy of the situation, the discussion of Wormold’s murder is also dramatic; it creates suspense on behalf of Wormold as the hero of a spy novel facing danger.

Black humor serves Greene’s purpose well in *Our Man in Havana* because black humor balances comedy and horror. The novel itself balances on another level, between a spy novel and a spy-novel parody. Segments of the novel are so strongly of the straightforward spy novel mode that the comic element of *Our Man in Havana* would have been lost without black humor. One such segment is the series of scenes beginning with the attempt to murder Wormold at the European Traders’ Luncheon. After the luncheon, Segura and Wormold meet, and Wormold discovers the death of Hasselbacher. The next scene is of Wormold contemplating revenge, and the scene after that is of Wormold

carrying out his revenge. These scenes total thirty-five pages, or fifteen percent of the novel; they are driven by suspense. Will Wormold survive? Will he avenge Hasselbacher's death? If it were not for the black humor in the attempt on Wormold's life and in Wormold's contemplation of revenge (both discussed above), the novel would have utterly stopped being comic. Black humor allows Greene to have it both ways; *Our Man in Havana* is both a satire of espionage and a suspenseful spy thriller.

Characterization, Comic and Otherwise

Just as certain scenes balance between the comic and tragic mode, so do certain characters. While some characters are only tragic or only comic, characters such as Wormold must move between the two modes so that the novel as a whole can do so. Wormold appears as a comic buffoon sometimes, such as when he cannot remember the combination to his safe or when he becomes involved in the farce of Professor Sanchez's love life. Other times, he is a tragic character, mourning the death of Hasselbacher or trying to kill the pathetic Carter.

Other characters metamorphose from one mode to the other, without shifting back again. For example, Dr. Hasselbacher is a happy, comic character at the beginning of the novel. He is also a character of the absurd. He exuberantly exhorts Wormold to drink and to avoid his responsibilities and reality in general. He likes to drink and buy lottery tickets; his hobby is an absurd study of the blueness of cheese. But by the time of Raul's death, Hasselbacher is a tragic figure, lamenting the deaths he has caused and his loss of Wormold's friendship.

Still other characters exist in only one mode. Captain Segura, a police officer with a malevolent reputation, leers after Wormold's beloved daughter Milly. Segura, despite

being the butt of a slapstick scene in the Tropicana, is a sinister figure who provides little comedy himself, except for a short black humor exchange between himself and Wormold. He has told Wormold earlier, "there are people who expect to be tortured and others who would be outraged by the idea. One never tortures except by a kind of mutual consent" (151). Segura goes on to tease Wormold about his "agents," who Segura suspects are not real. Wormold teases Segura back, hinting that his assistant Lopez really is an agent.

"Ah, Lopez. Another of your agents." Captain Segura laughed. "Or so it was reported to me."
 "Yes. He supplies me with secret information about the police-department."
 "Be careful, Mr. Wormold. He is one of the torturable."
 They both laughed, drinking daiquiries. It is easy to laugh at the idea of torture on a sunny day. (152)

Here Segura creates comedy without becoming a comic figure; he jokes about torture. ..

Despite Segura's menace, he appears in a comic scene as the victim of Beatrice's assault with the soda siphon. Although he is the butt of a slapstick joke by the end of the scene, the Segura character remains sinister throughout:

"May I sit down?" He inserted himself between Milly and Dr. Hasselbacher without waiting for Wormold's reply. He said, "I am so glad to meet Milly's father." He had an easy rapid insolence you had no time to resent before he had given fresh cause for annoyance. "Introduce me to your friend, Milly."
 "This is Dr. Hasselbacher."
 Captain Segura ignored Dr. Hasselbacher and filled Milly's glass. . . .
 "We are just going, Captain Segura," Wormold said.
 "Nonsense. You are my guest. It is only just after midnight."
 Wormold's sleeve caught a glass. It fell and smashed, like the birthday party. "Waiter, another glass." Segura began to sing softly, "The rose I plucked in the garden," leaning towards Milly, turning his back on Dr. Hasselbacher. (85)

Captain Segura creates a sense of menace immediately, seating himself at Wormold's table without permission, ignoring and eventually turning his back on Dr. Hasselbacher, and refusing to allow Wormold to leave gracefully. Note the use of the word "smashed" to describe Segura's effect on the party. The menace increases a notch as Segura sings, "The rose I plucked in the garden," suggestively to Milly, Wormold's young daughter. The scene continues as Milly stands up to Segura and tells him he is behaving badly. Segura dismisses Milly's complaints, assuming she is jealous because he did not pick her up after school that day. As he continues to take over the party, Milly asks Segura how he can be so vulgar.

"Me? Vulgar?" Captain Segura laughed happily. "She is such a little jester," he said to Wormold. "I like to joke too. That is why we get on so well together."

"She tells me you have a cigarette-case made out of human skin."

"How she teases me about that. I tell her that her skin would make a lovely. . . ."

Dr. Hasselbacher got up abruptly. He said, "I am going to watch the roulette."

"He doesn't like me?" Captain Segura asked. "Perhaps he is an old admirer, Milly? A very old admirer, ha ha!"

"He's an old friend," Wormold said.

"But you and I, Mr. Wormold, know that there is no such thing as friendship between a man and a woman."

"Milly is not yet a woman."

"You speak like a father, Mr. Wormold. No father knows his daughter." (85)

Segura's menace builds as he continues to ignore Milly's protests. He dismisses Milly's discomfort with his cigarette-case of human skin as "teasing." He then suggests that Dr. Hasselbacher lusts after Milly, making fun of the man's old age. The most disturbing suggestion Segura makes, of course, is that of violence to Milly—that he would make an unnamed something out of her skin. Such an image is not consistent with straight comedy or slapstick. The subjects of traditional slapstick and comedy can be odious, but if so, they

are also ridiculous; they do not bear symbols of torture as Segura does.

Segura continues to upset the group around the table, and Wormold considers smashing a bottle of champagne over Segura's head. This contemplation could be consistent with a slapstick scene, but because of the genuine danger Segura represents, the act Wormold contemplates seems more one of genuine violence, not slapstick. Beatrice guesses Wormold's thoughts and nods encouragingly to him. He does not have the nerve to resist Segura, but Beatrice picks up a soda siphon:

The spout of the siphon was aimed upwards at Captain Segura's neck. The girl's finger was ready for action. . . . She triggered the siphon. The stream of soda hissed off Captain Segura's neck and ran down the back of his collar. Dr. Hasselbacher's voice called "Bravo" from among the tables. Captain Segura exclaimed "Coño."

"I'm so sorry," the young woman said. "I meant it for my whisky."

"Your whisky!"

"Dimpled Haig," the girl said. Milly giggled.

With these words, the slapstick element of the scene has been set up and executed, but the sinister elements are continued: "Captain Segura bowed stiffly. You could not estimate his danger from his size any more than you could a hard drink." Even Segura's false smile after the incident seems grotesque and menacing rather than comic: "Captain Segura squeezed out a smile. It seemed to come from the wrong place like toothpaste when the tube splits." Segura compares the siphoning to assassination, "For the first time I have been shot in the back. I am glad it was by a woman." Overall, the scene in the Tropicana is slapstick. However, the threat of Segura is not negated; it is actually increased by the hint of violence inherent in the slapstick.

Segura is a sinister character whose menace remains intact despite the comedy of *Our Man in Havana*, but he is not the most frightening figure in the novel. Far more

menacing than Segura are the unseen spies for whom Hasselbacher has been forced to work. Unknown burglars ransack Hasselbacher's apartment soon after Wormold agrees to spy for Hawthorne. Although Carter is not unseen, he too is somewhat sinister at the European Trader's Lunch. (Carter later becomes a sympathetic character, and Wormold is inclined to spare his life, despite his murder of Dr. Hasselbacher.)

Segura and the unseen spies are not the only characters portrayed in one consistent mode; Hawthorne and the Chief are purely comic figures, satiric caricatures of the heartless bureaucrats who run Cold War espionage in the novel. For example, Wormold dupes the British Secret Service with ease. No explanation is given for his success in doing so because no explanation is needed; the novel postulates the incompetence of the British Secret Service. A traditional spy novel would make no such assumptions of incompetence, as incompetent spies do not generally make frightening plot devices. Hawthorne and the Chief are both frightening only in that they represent the guardians of national security.

Absurdity

The most obvious elements of absurdity in *Our Man in Havana* are the plot elements; the satirical effect of the novel is in part due to those elements. The main action begins when Hawthorne chooses Wormold, a vacuum cleaner salesman, to be British Intelligence's chief spy in Cuba. Wormold decides to fabricate his reports, but no one in British Intelligence notices. This causes the "other side" to believe that Wormold's information must be accurate because, they assume, British Intelligence would not be fooled so easily. The farce continues even when Wormold decides to give himself up. Although Wormold has admitted his fraud to British Intelligence, he receives an O.B.E. because the Secret Service cannot bear to admit to anyone that they were fooled so easily.

So, against all probability, Wormold is hired by the Secret Service to train secret agents. The novel ends happily, as a traditional comedy does, with Wormold's marriage to Beatrice.

In addition to being integral to the plot, the absurd is used to create comedy in the novel. A simple but absurd exchange occurs as Wormold complains about the vacuum cleaner name, "the Atomic Pile," to Hasselbacher. He says, "yesterday a woman came in and looked at the Atomic Pile and she asked whether a pad that size could really absorb all the radio-activity. And what about Strontium 90? she asked" (10). It defies reason to suggest someone would believe the manufacturer's implication that the "Atomic Pile" has some relationship to nuclear technology, but Wormold's customer assumes precisely that.

Hasselbacher, before he stops being a comic character, has a wonderful absurdist exchange with patrons of a bar. The exchange is not only absurd, it reinforces a theme of the novel: the need to escape reality through the creation of fiction or dreams. Every week Hasselbacher pretends he has won the lottery so he can have a little escapist hope. This fantasy leads to confusion when bar patrons of the Seville-Biltmore believe Hasselbacher. He explains that has won the lottery in the sense that,

"I have won them as certainly as you exist, my almost unseen friend, You would not exist if I didn't believe you existed, nor would those dollars. I believe, therefore you are."

"What do you mean I wouldn't exist?"

"You exist only in my thoughts, my friend. If I left this room. . . ."

"You're nuts."

"Prove you exist, then."

"What do you mean, prove? Of course I exist. I've got a first-class business in real estate: a wife and a couple of kids in Miami; I flew here this morning by Delta; I'm drinking this Scotch, aren't I?" The voice contained a hint of tears.

"Poor fellow," Dr. Hasselbacher said, "you deserve a more imaginative creator than I have been. Why didn't I do better for you than Miami and real estate? Something of imagination. A name to be remembered. . . . I really should have done better than that. But

I'll tell you what I'll do," Dr. Hasselbacher said, "I'll go out of the bar for a minute and eliminate you. Then I'll come back with an improved version." (38)

Here the novel raises, for the first time but far from the last, the notion that imagination is the creator of reality. Hasselbacher causes existential doubt in a miserable character he claims to have created by an act of imagination. The irony is increased, in a post-modern sense, by the fact that the person speaking is in fact a created character, although a character created by Greene, not Hasselbacher.

The scene continues, presenting Wormold as a creator of fiction, foreshadowing the role he will play later in the novel.

"Now if my friend, Mr. Wormold here, had invented you, you would have been a happier man. He would have given you an Oxford education, a name like Pennyfeather. . . ."
 "What do you mean, Pennyfeather? You've been drinking."
 "Of course I've been drinking. Drink blurs the imagination. That's why I thought you up in such a banal way: Miami and real estate, flying Delta. Pennyfeather would have come from Europe by K.L.M., he would be drinking his national drink, a pink gin."
 (37-39)

The recurrence of absurdity throughout the novel supports Greene's thematic contention, "Reality in our century is not something to be faced" (10). The world of *Our Man in Havana* is governed by existential philosophy like that found in Theater of the Absurd. It is a world not run on any logical method, but on the whim of lunatics like Hawthorne and the Chief. In such a world, the best thing for one to do is to be mad oneself. The madman preserves himself from other madmen by creating his own reality.

References abound to creating fiction and to the differences between fantasy and reality. Upon meeting Beatrice at his office for the first time, Wormold thinks, "She looks real" (93). For Beatrice's part, she tells Wormold, as he speaks of fictitious agent Raul,

“You talk like a novelist” (108). Hasselbacher also casts Wormold as a novelist, once in the bar scene above and again when Wormold tries to persuade him that Raul and his other agents are made up:

“You invented him too well, Mr. Wormold. There’s a whole file on him now.”
 “He was no more real than a character in a novel.”
 “Are they always invented? I don’t know how a novelist works, Mr. Wormold. I have never known one before you.” (141)

Wormold even describes himself as a novelist when he starts to invent his reports to the Secret Service. Milly asks him, “Are you becoming a writer?” Wormold replies, “Yes, an imaginative writer” (74).

Wormold is thus frequently cast as an imaginative writer. Despite the fact his espionage reports are fictitious, his creations come to life and affect reality. For a time, Wormold’s ability to create fantasy improves the quality of his life. Milly is content with her horse, her peripherals, and her Country Club membership. Wormold has more money, perhaps enough to get Milly out of Cuba, and through his fantasies he meets Beatrice, who provides his life with romance.

Wormold’s happiness cannot last. Dr. Hasselbacher, against his own advice, is drawn into the same world of espionage, and soon Wormold’s peaceful duplicity causes the death of Raul. Wormold and the people for whom he cares are all exposed to danger. What is the thematic purpose for this turn of events? Edward Lattinville suggests,

The madness of the real world takes over; through perverse chance his characters come to a life of sorts. In the end three men die because Wormold had accidentally written a disastrous comedy without realizing that his audience (the British Secret Service and “the other side,” to name two groups) would be able to respond only within the humorless context of an insecure world gone mad with power, a world whose only response is destruction. (212)

Lattinville's analysis is reasonable, but it ignores the fact that madness is portrayed as desirable in *Our Man in Havana*; it is related to the possibility of escaping the absurd world, often by pretending that one's fantasies are reality. As Hasselbacher suggests in early parts of the novel, especially the Seville-Biltmore bar scene discussed above, the only way to cope with an absurd world is to behave in an absurd manner oneself. Milly asks Wormold why he is trying to make himself laugh. He tells her it is because he was feeling "sad and serious." He reminds her of a clown they saw recently. She replies:

"He walked off the end of a ladder and fell in a bucket of whitewash."

"He falls in it every night at ten o'clock. We should all be clowns, Milly. Don't ever learn from experience. . . . It's the scientists who add the digits and make the same sum who cause the trouble. Newton discovering gravity—he learnt from experience and after that. . . ."

"I thought it was from an apple."

"It's the same thing. It was only a matter of time before Lord Rutherford went and split the atom. He had learnt from experience too, and so did the men of Hiroshima. If only we had been born clowns, nothing bad would happen to us except a few bruises and a smear of whitewash. Don't learn from experience, Milly. It ruins our peace and our lives." (32)

Wormold advocates being a clown who avoids learning, so life never worsens for him. He protects himself from the absurd horror of twentieth century life, particularly the risk of nuclear armageddon, by hiding from reality. Wormold is able to hide from reality somewhat, but Beatrice's final thoughts in the novel underline the fact that he cannot escape entirely:

"What are we going to live on?" Wormold asked.

"You and I can find a way."

"There are three of us," Wormold said, and she realized the chief problem of their future—that he would never be quite mad enough. (220)

Beatrice apparently believes that utter madness is the best state from which to view the world. Because Wormold has a practical side, she worries he will not be able to guarantee their happiness.

Farce

In addition to comedy of the absurd, *Our Man in Havana* uses farce. Farce employs “highly exaggerated or caricatured character types, puts them into improbable or ludicrous situations, and makes free use of broad verbal humor and physical horseplay” (Abrams 26). In one instance Wormold cannot get to his code books because he cannot remember the combination to his safe—an occurrence which actually befell Greene as a spy during World War Two (*Ways of Escape* 101). Beatrice asks Wormold what mnemonic he used for the combination:

“It was my great-aunt’s telephone number.”
 “Where does she live?”
 “95 Woodstock Road, Oxford.”
 “Why your great-aunt?”
 “Why not my great-aunt?”
 “I suppose we could put through a directory-enquiry to
 Oxford.”
 “I doubt whether they could help.”
 “What’s her name?”
 “I’ve forgotten that too.”
 “The combination really is secure, isn’t it?”
 “We always just knew her as great-Aunt Kate. Anyway
 she’s been dead for fifteen years and the number may have been
 changed.” (104)

Wormold cannot remember his great-aunt’s telephone number, but to make matters worse, he does not give Beatrice enough information to let her figure out that he has no way of tracking the number down. Beatrice has to find out by asking Wormold increasingly

detailed questions, the answers of which reveal Wormold's poor planning and illogic in picking the combination.

Another farcical scene occurs when Wormold tries to recruit Lopez as an agent. The scene is based on a common farce technique, speaking at cross-purposes. As Wormold tries to convey the secret nature of his espionage work, Lopez assumes Wormold wishes him to procure prostitutes for him. In another scene, a farce ensues when the police who have arrested Wormold in Santiago are suspicious of why Wormold would send a postcard showing Wormold's hotel room window to Hasselbacher. The only excuse Wormold can find is to pretend that Hasselbacher is a woman with whom he is having an affair.

Another bawdy farce occurs when Wormold goes to warn Professor Sanchez that he may be interrogated by the police. When he arrives at Professor Sanchez's home, he finds the professor there with his mistress, apparently one of his students. Wormold is mistaken as a representative of Maria, with whom the mistress seems to be obsessed. Wormold can barely get a word into the conversation between the professor and his jealous mistress. He is finally able to get a little bit of attention from the professor by telling him that there had been an attempt on engineer Cifuentes, but it only causes more confusion—Wormold manages only to convince the mistress that Sanchez has been unfaithful to her. He tells Sanchez that the police have been to the Shanghai Theater, a nude dancing theater and brothel:

“The police have been to the Shanghai Theater too.”

“What have I to do with the Shanghai Theater?”

“What indeed?” cried the young woman melodramatically.

“Men,” she said, “men! Poor Maria. She hasn't only one woman to deal with. She'll have to plan a massacre.”

“I've never had anything to do with anybody at the Shanghai Theater.”

“Maria is better informed. I expect you walk in your sleep. . . .”

Wormold said with desperation—it was his last fling, “This has got nothing to do with Maria—with Señora Sanchez, I mean.”

“What on earth has Señora Sanchez to do with it?” the professor asked.

“I thought you thought that Maria. . . .”

“Young man, you aren’t seriously telling me that Maria is planning to do something to my wife as well as to my . . . my friend here? It’s too absurd.” (131)

By mentioning the Shanghai Theater, Wormold implies to the suspicious mind of the mistress that Sanchez has been engaging prostitutes. When Sanchez denies her suspicion, the mistress sarcastically replies, “I expect you walk in your sleep”—and by implication Sanchez must engage prostitutes in his sleep too. Wormold soon makes matters worse by assuming that Maria is the first name of Mrs. Sanchez. He refers to “Maria,” and then out of politeness, says, “Señora Sanchez, I mean.” Unfortunately, Professor Sanchez’ sex life is more complicated than Wormold realizes—Maria is the name of a second mistress, not the first name of Señora Sanchez. The farce continues on like this, with neither the mistress or Sanchez understanding Wormold, until they finally stalk back into the house to continue their argument without Wormold.

Satire

Satire is one of Greene’s most common comic techniques, and in a satirical novel such as *Our Man in Havana*, he uses it frequently. Most of Greene’s satire has already been discussed above; the biggest satire of the book is, after all, the plot which through its absurdity mocks cold war espionage and politics. The satirical portrayal of Hawthorne and the Chief of the Secret Service reinforces the satire of the Cold War overall. Also the black humor episode, in which a tourist marvels at the destruction of a murdered tourist’s

Leica, satirizes both the violence of the Batista regime and the fatuousness of tourists.

One scene not previously discussed is the satire of American bankers. Wormold goes to the bank to make a deposit:

Drawing a cheque is not nearly so simple an operation in an American bank as in an English one. American bankers believe in the personal touch; the teller conveys a sense that he happens to be there accidentally and he is overjoyed at the lucky chance of the encounter. "Well," he seems to express in the sunny warmth of his smile, "who would have believe that I'd meet you here, of all people, in a bank of all places?" After exchanging with him news of your health and of his health, and after finding a common interest in the fineness of the winter weather, you shyly, apologetically, slide the cheque towards him (how tiresome and incidental all such business is). . . . (23)

Greene conveys the insincerity of the American teller through structural irony; the teller is unaware that he conveys insincerity, insincerity which increases as the satire goes on. After the above passage, the satire continues in that vein, mocking the difference with which the teller treats Wormold and the bank's wealthier clientele.

Our Man in Havana has an obsession with jokes and games, which it uses to satirize the game players. The comparison is frequently made between spies and children. Wormold nearly discusses his childhood with Milly, but shies away from doing so. The narration, possibly implying that these are Wormold's thoughts, says:

Childhood was the germ of all mistrust. You were cruelly joked upon and then you cruelly joked. You lost the remembrance of pain through inflicting it. But somehow, through no virtue of his own, he had never taken that course. Lack of character perhaps. Schools were said to construct character by chipping off the edges. His edges had been chipped, but the result had not, he thought, been character—only shapelessness, like an exhibit in the Museum of Modern Art. (31)

Later, Wormold compares Milly to Hawthorne: "It seemed to Wormold that all she said had a quality of sense; it was Hawthorne who belonged to the cruel and inexplicable world of

childhood” (44). Furthermore, Wormold compares his dealing with Hawthorne to playing with Milly as a young girl.

He thought: I must do something, give them some names to trace, recruit an agent, keep them happy. He remembered how Milly used to play at shops and give him her pocket money for imaginary purchases. One had to play the child’s game, but sooner or later Milly always required her money back. (55)

Later Wormold wonders with frustration why Hawthorne insists that Wormold use his arcane paragraphing system. “All this paragraphing seemed to Wormold extravagant of time and money, but Hawthorne had told him it was part of the drill, just as Milly has insisted that all purchases from her shop should be wrapped in paper, even a single glass bead” (59). Together all these statements make a satirical parallel between cruel children and Cold War spies, implying that spies have no greater wisdom than children and that Cold War espionage is no more than a childish game.

Comic Figures of Speech

Greene often uses figures of speech in his comic technique, including puns, and several puns in *Our Man in Havana* are intentionally conspicuous. Wormold and Hasselbacher drink together in the Wonder Bar, an example of paranomasia, the “use of words alike in sound but different in meaning” (Corbett 447). Wormold sells a vacuum cleaner line called the “Atomic Pile”—a horrible pun on nuclear fission and pile carpeting, which evokes on a thematic level the entire satire of the Cold War and evokes on a minor level a satire of “names picked by PR firms” (10), as the narration puts it. Wormold’s opposite number for “the other side,” Carter, also works for a vacuum cleaner company, a company called “Nuclearners”—a name which of course also suggests nuclear fission and

the Cold War. The vacuum cleaner puns could be called antanaclasses, as they repeat words in two senses, the sense of vacuum cleaning and the sense of atomic war. Another pun is a somewhat silly example of paranomasia, using two words alike in sound but different in meaning:

“Can’t be too careful even in a Gents, when I come to think of it. A chap of ours in Denmark in 1940 saw from his own window the German fleet coming down the Kattegat.”
 “What gut?”
 “Kattegat. . . .” (27)

An example of syllepsis—use of a word understood differently in relation to two or more other words which it modifies or governs (Corbett 448)—occurs concerning the fact that Wormold misses Milly when she is not in the store, “He was aware whenever he entered the shop of a vacuum that had nothing to do with his cleaners” (11). Another example of syllepsis concerning Wormold’s affection for Milly takes place when Wormold and Hasselbacher discuss the need to flee Cuba before the revolution comes. Says Wormold,

“Hasselbacher, you’ve never felt the need of money, have you? But then, you have no child.”
 “Before long you will have no child either.”
 “I suppose not.” The comfort was as cold as the daiquiri. (57)

Here Greene plays on the colloquialism, “cold comfort,” and the cold temperature of the daiquiri.

Greene often likes to use ironic contrast to humorous effect. Hasselbacher, in telling of happier days before World War I changed the world, says to Wormold,

“I know that I am absurd, but I loved those days. Once the Kaiser spoke to me.”
 “What did he say?”
 “He said, ‘I remember you. You are Captain Müller.’ ” (143)

Of course, Hasselbacher was never named Captain Müller, so the Kaiser's statement is ironic because it proves itself untrue. It is also ironic because Hasselbacher remembers being forgotten by the Kaiser so fondly.

Greene also uses cacemphaton, "a scurrilous jest, lewd allusion, or double entendre" (Lanham 20). A Dutch pilot Wormold meets in the Tropicana shows he him a photograph which is supposed to be of his children:

He handed Wormold a coloured card showing a girl in a tight yellow sweater and bathing-drawers adjusting her skates. The sweater was marked Mamba Club, and below the picture Wormold read, "We guarantee you a lot of fun. Fifty beautiful girls. You won't be alone."

"I don't think this is the right picture," Wormold said. (88)

Either the pilot has raised a prostitute, or he has handed Wormold the wrong card.

Comic figures of speech appear frequently in *Our Man in Havana* because they serve a thematic role, supporting the satire of the Secret Service by adding a note of ludicrousness to Wormold's dealings with them. They also help maintain the book's overall comic tone. That comic tone is not always present, however. In the sections of the novel that read more like a straightforward spy novel, comic figures of speech disappear as they would upset the balance of suspense.

Conclusion

Our Man in Havana succeeds as both a parody of a spy thriller and as an actual spy thriller by walking the tightrope between humor and suspense. The overall impression that the novel leaves is that of a comedy. The plot is absurd, and most of the characters are played comically, often satirically. There are scenes utilizing slapstick and farce in the traditional comic manner, as well as various comic figures of speech.

Nevertheless, *Our Man in Havana* satisfies the requirements of a good spy novel.

The scenes of Wormold planning revenge on Carter and discussing his own impending assassination with Hawthorne create not only comedy but suspense through black humor. The beginning of the novel is mostly tilted toward absurd comedy, but by the middle of the novel, starting with the death of Raul, scenes appear which correspond to those from a straightforward spy novel. The brilliance of *Our Man in Havana* is that it performs the function of both kinds of novel: it creates suspense as well as comedy.

Chapter Three

A Burnt-Out Case

Greene had great admiration for Joseph Conrad, but he felt Conrad's influence had a stultifying effect on his style. After writing *England Made Me* (1935), in which he even named his main character Conrad, Greene vowed to stop reading Conrad's novels lest they continue to influence his prose adversely (*Ways of Escape* 23). But Greene returned to Conrad in the 1950s, and in 1960 he published a novel owing much to Conrad, *A Burnt-Out Case*. As in *Heart of Darkness*, Greene's protagonist, Querry, travels up the Congo on a journey that serves as a metaphor for psychological development. In Greene this psychological journey takes on Catholic dimensions. Querry is a renowned Catholic architect (with more than a passing resemblance to Greene) who has lost his religious faith. Unlike Conrad's Marlow, Querry does not survive his trip into the Congo; however, Querry nevertheless grows psychologically before his death. His death itself leaves the possibility of Catholic salvation, "between the stirrup and the ground" as it is put in *Brighton Rock*. The phrase refers to the idea that a dying person has a chance to repent even in the last fraction of a second of life, even in the time it takes to break one's neck falling from the stirrup of a horse to the ground.

A Burnt-Out Case initially received a poor critical reception, particularly from Frank Kermode. Twenty years later in his second autobiography, *Ways of Escape*, Greene asserted that no one—with particular reference to his friend Evelyn Waugh, whose criticisms of the book were harsh—had noticed that "in the course of the blackest book I

have written I had discovered comedy” (231). It is not surprising no one noticed comedy in *A Burnt-Out Case*. The novel’s title derives from medical slang for leprosy patients who have been so ravaged by the disease it can no longer harm them—they no longer have any nose, fingers, or toes left to lose. This term becomes a metaphor for Query, the main character, who has been so scarred by his experiences that he no longer takes pleasure or even interest in life. He is a psychologically “burnt-out case.” The theme and tone of the novel make it unlikely that readers would associate the book with comedy.

Symbolic Laughter in an Absurd Universe

Nevertheless the theme is philosophically related to comedy, and comic elements exist in the novel. Paul O’Prey states:

Laughter, or the lack of it, is a symptom of Query’s “sickness,” that of having “no more interest in life at all.” On his way to the *leproserie* at the beginning of the novel the laughter of others irritates him and he wonders “when it was that he had first begun to detest laughter like a bad smell.” He himself is incapable of laughing, until he slowly starts to move toward “recovery” when he learns like the doctor and the Fathers to “serve other people.” Then at first he makes “an odd awkward sound,” which the doctor interprets as an attempt to laugh, but when finally confronted by the armed Rycker he laughs outright, for the first time—and thus dies laughing, or rather dies because he laughs. (97)

Indeed there are many references to jokes and laughter throughout the novel. As in *The Comedians* and *Our Man in Havana*, the ability to laugh at the absurdity of life is of symbolic importance. The priests he stays with en route to the *leproserie* have “too easy laughter” (14). As he spends the evening with them, he thinks, “he could not tell why—their laughter irritated him, like a noisy child or a disc of jazz” (14). As O’Prey mentions, their laughter makes Query wonder when “he had first begun to detest laughter like a bad smell” (15). The company moves out of the living room into the dining room

and the point is beaten home yet again, “again he felt taunted by the innocence of the laughter. They were not laughing at him, they were laughing with each other, and he was abandoned, as he had been in the living room of the seminary, to his own region where laughter was like the unknown syllables of an enemy tongue” (15).

As Query spends time with the Fathers and Dr. Colin, the physician of the *leproserie*, he begins to find some meaning in the charitable work they do. When Query’s servant, Deo Gratias, becomes lost in the jungle, Query goes out to find him—demonstrating that Query has recovered his ability to care for another human being. Not long after that incident, Colin witnesses another sign that Query is starting to heal. Query comments on a somewhat ridiculous speech by the Superior “with a twitch of the mouth that Colin was beginning to recognize as a rudimentary smile” (80).

The climax of the novel contains the first occurrence of Query’s laugh, a laugh at that ironically causes his death. A ludicrous misunderstanding takes place causing a character, Rycker, to confront Query with a gun. One of the priests tries to calm Rycker, saying,

“Please come to the mission, M. Rycker,” Brother Philippe pleaded. “We’ll put up a bed for you there. We shall all of us feel better after a night’s sleep. And a cold shower in the morning,” he added, and as though to illustrate his words, a waterfall of rain suddenly descended upon them. (195)

The above is a moment of cosmic irony, with a indifferent cosmic power manipulating the universal process to ironic effect (Abrams 92). No sooner has Brother Philippe suggested a cold shower than the deluge falls upon them, making Query’s already comical situation absurd.

Query then makes, “an odd awkward sound which the doctor by now had learned to interpret as a laugh.” Rycker shoots Query. He then tells the priests it is Query’s fault

for laughing at him. A mortally wounded Query tries to explain:

“Not at Rycker,” Query said. The doctor leant down closer: he could hardly hear him. He said, “Don’t speak. We are going to lift you now. You’ll be all right.” Query said, “Laughing at myself.” They carried him on to the veranda and laid him down out of the rain. Rycker fetched a cushion for his head. He said, “He shouldn’t have laughed.” “He doesn’t laugh easily,” the doctor said, and again there was a noise that resembled a distorted laugh. “Absurd,” Query said, “this is absurd or else. . .” but what alternative, philosophical or psychological, he had in mind they never knew. (196)

Rycker is obsessed with the fact Query should not have laughed, but ironically Query hardly ever laughs; furthermore, his laugh is so alien that it is strange that Rycker recognized it as such. Query dies, leaving his existential plight largely unresolved. Dr. Colin discusses Query’s fate with the Father Superior. The Superior says, “You spoke just now as though he had been cured,” and Dr. Colin replies:

“I really think he was. He’d learned to serve other people, you see, and to laugh. An odd laugh, but it was a laugh all the same. I’m frightened of people who don’t laugh.” The Superior said shyly, “I thought perhaps you meant that he was beginning to find his faith again.” “Oh, no, not that. Only a reason for living. You try too hard to make a pattern, father.” (198)

So while Query’s last words might be ambiguous, his ability to laugh offers the possibility, if Dr. Colin can be believed, that he has been cured of his metaphoric leprosy.

Paul O’Prey emphasizes that, unlike in Greene’s other Catholic novels, “there is no mention here of God’s mercy nor any invitation to the reader to speculate on the hero’s fate after death” (101). But of course Query’s last words do invite speculation, like the following by David Lodge:

Query dies murmuring, "This is absurd or. . . ." "This" presumably refers not only to his tragi-farcical death, but to his whole life, in which the public appearances of success and fulfillment have been hollow and deceptive. Either this life and death are "absurd"—i.e., meaningless—or (we may tentatively complete the thought) they acquire meaning only in some transcendent pattern: the pattern offered by religion, or the less orthodox pattern expounded by Dr. Colin.

The idea, deriving from existentialist thought, of human life as "absurd" is a familiar one in contemporary literature, where its effect has been to break down traditional genre categories and to displace potentially tragic materials toward disquieting forms of comedy. (116)

Accepting David Lodge's position, one could conclude that Query's death embraces the notion of existentialist philosophy. Like Sartre and the existentialists, Greene here suggests that life is essentially absurd and meaningless. Like Sartre and the existentialists, Greene suggests that acceptance of the absurdity and service to others is the only alternative to despair. Unlike Sartre and the existentialists, however, Greene does not postulate a world without God or religious faith of some form. As Lodge puts it, one can accept "the pattern offered by religion, or the less orthodox pattern expounded by Dr. Colin."

A Black Humor Sex Farce

Lodge's comments, together with the phrase, "disquieting forms of comedy," put in mind the notion that Query's death is a scene of black humor—an appropriate thought in light of Bruce Janoff's discussion of the link between existentialist philosophy and black humor. For the circumstances under which Query laughs are comic for more than just the cosmic irony of the rain falling at an inopportune moment. The situation is created by a sex farce that dominates the end of this otherwise tragic novel. Part of Query's burnt-out condition is his loss of interest in his vocation, architecture, but another part of his burnt-

out condition is his inability to love. Query insists to Dr. Colin that he has given up architecture:

“I told you I’ve retired.”
 “One never retires from a vocation.”
 “Oh, yes, make no mistake, one does. One comes to an end.”
 “What are you here for then? To make love to a black woman?”
 “No. One comes to an end of that too. Possibly sex and a vocation are born and die together. Let me roll bandages or carry buckets. All I want is to pass the time.” (44)

Query has come to an end of sex because of a string of adulteries he has had without enjoyment. He thinks himself incapable of loving any of his past mistresses; he has not given his mistresses his love, but rather taken theirs.

It is therefore ironic that Query comes to befriend Marie Rycker, a pathetic young woman trapped in a loveless marriage with a Catholic zealot, Monsieur Rycker. Query pities Marie, taking her to see a doctor while her husband lies ill. Rycker finds out and suspects that they are having an affair, and Marie lets him think so, hoping to escape her unhappy marriage. Thus, the end of the novel develops into the pattern of a sex farce, with the lover Query chased by the cuckolded husband. The farce is ironic because the former adulterer Query is no longer interested in sex and has not had sex with Marie:

“What a grotesque situation it is,” Query said. “That this should happen to me. The innocent adulterer. That’s not a bad title for a comedy.” His mouth moved in the effort of a smile. (193)

The plot, having become a sex farce, next becomes black humor when Rycker, rather than engaging in the comic buffoonery of a sex farce, instead murders Query. V. V. B. Rama Rao describes the situation:

Though the recipe for a tragedy is all too evident in the Rycker affair, Greene holds it under the comic light by pulling it out into melodrama, with a mixture of farce thrown in. Query's tragic end is subtly blunted by the grotesque smile that looms on his face in the end. His death in a melodramatic situation helps to bring out the unmistakably absurd and comic in the nature of things. (143)

Thus black humor, absurdity, and farce come together in the final sequence, suggesting that the actions unfold in the world like scenes on a stage, controlled by a divine practical joker. Greene's variation on existentialist philosophy postulates the same absurdity that Sartre and Camus do, but Greene adds cosmic irony to existentialism, suggesting that there is a divine practical joker who makes sport with humanity.

Comic Characterization

The idea of laughter, already discussed above with regard to Query, is mentioned in connection with other characters as well. Several characters attempt to make jokes without success. Monsieur and Madame Rycker both try and fail to make jokes on several occasions (36, 72, 40). Their failure is probably indicative of their spiritual similarity to Query. Query at one point says to Rycker,

I begin to think we are not so different, you and I. We don't know what love is. You pretend to love a god because you love no one else. But I won't pretend. All I have left me is a certain regard for the truth. It was the best side of a small talent I had. You are inventing all the time, Rycker, aren't you? There are men who talk about love to prostitutes—they daren't even sleep with a woman without inventing some sentiment to excuse them. You've even invented this idea of me to justify yourself. But I won't play your game, Rycker. (145)

So Query is not the only burnt-out case in the novel; Rycker is a burnt-out case too, and he, too, is incapable of laughing or making a successful joke.

Comic characterization is limited in *A Burnt-Out Case*. The Ryckers' comic

portrayal is predominantly in their role in the sex farce; otherwise, they are mostly tragic figures. Madame Rycker does have some comic aspects. She is thought by Monsieur Rycker to carry Lejeune's *History of the Wars of Religion*, but she reveals to Querry in a moment of comic irony that Lejeune is merely the cover she has pasted onto *Manon Lescaut*—the story of “an amoral young girl . . . who resists attempts to make her a nun and becomes instead the unfaithful mistress of Des Grieux, who loves her ardently” (Hoskins 239).

Monsieur Rycker also has some comic aspects. His subconscious association of Catholicism and sex becomes the occasion for satirical black humor. Marie Rycker finds her husband drunk and rambling about various subjects. She hopes she can give him a sleeping pill before he starts talking about religion, because if she can, “he would probably reach unconsciousness before he reached religion which, like the open doorway in a red-lamp district, led invariably to sex” (65). Poor Marie's luck is not with her that evening, and she finds herself reluctantly heading to bed where a priapic Monsieur Rycker awaits her:

she walked along the veranda to their room, where Rycker was stretched naked inside the mosquito tent of the double-bed under the wooden body on the cross. He looked like a drowned man fished up in a net—hair lay like seaweed on his belly and legs; but at her entrance he came immediately to life, lifting the side of the tent. “Come, Mawie,” he said. A Christian marriage, how often she had been told it by her religious instructors, symbolized the marriage of Christ and His Church. (69)

The grim humor of the analogy places the members of the Catholic church as reluctant recipients of Christ's sexual violation.

Another comic portrayal is Parkinson. He is an arrogant man, comically afraid of dying from a mild case of malaria. The captain who brings the ill Parkinson to the

leproserie has tried to calm Parkinson about his illness, "I said to him, 'Finitum est,' but I think he believed that I meant he was dying" (97). The captain was merely trying to tell Parkinson, who does not speak any language but English, that the illness was almost over. Parkinson is grossly fat and frequently misquotes famous writers. He is the latest in a long line of Greene's satirically portrayed journalists, starting with Mabel Warren from *Stamboul Train* (1932). Parkinson cares nothing for the truth, perversely exploiting Query as a living saint, dedicating himself to the lepers. When Query corrects Parkinson's misquoting, the latter replies, "Nobody notices things like that" (112). Despite the mildly comic tone of Parkinson's character, he is also a sinister figure who exploits Query's story for his newspaper.

Father Thomas is a satirically comic character. Robert Hoskins describes him as "a young, relatively inexperienced priest who attempts to overcome his own doubts and uneasiness in his missionary role by seeing Query as a saintly hero" (226). Father Thomas's conversations with Query use the device of misunderstanding to comic effect. Father Thomas comes to Query hoping their conversation will bolster Thomas's faith. Query tries to explain that he no longer believes in God:

"What I would say to you wouldn't help you at all. You must believe that. I'm not a man of—faith. . . ."

"We both of us have our doubts," Father Thomas said. "Perhaps I have more than you. They even come to me at the altar with the Host in my hands."

"I've long ceased to have doubts. Father, if I must speak plainly, I don't believe at all. Not at all. I've worked it out of my system—like women. I've no desire to convert others to disbelief, or even to worry them. I want to keep my mouth shut if only you'd let me."

"You can't think what a lot of good our conversation has done me," Father Thomas said with excitement. "There's not a priest here to whom I can talk as we're talking. One sometimes desperately needs a man who has experienced the same weaknesses as oneself."

“But you’ve misunderstood me, father.”
 “Don’t you see that perhaps you’ve been given the grace of
 aridity?” (91-2)

Every time Query tries to explain to Father Thomas that he no longer believes in Catholicism or God, Thomas perversely refuses to take him literally. Query tries to be tactful at first, but when Father Thomas does not understand, he “speaks plainly.” But Father Thomas hears only what he wants to hear. Query cannot deny being saintlike to Father Thomas because by so doing he allows the priest to praise his humility or aridity. In fact, Thomas and Rycker both refuse to believe in Query’s lack of faith, ironically due to their own crises of faith.

In contrast to the satirically comic portrayals of Rycker, Father Thomas, and Parkinson, the Father Superior is a gently comic character, addicted to cheroots. The Superior is always portrayed as smoking a cheroot, except when he is giving a sermon. Even during a sermon, Query notices that the Superior “twisted his mouth from habit as though he were dispatching a cheroot from one side to the other” (81). The Superior naively thinks bidets are for bathing feet and wishes to buy some for the *leproserie*. This mistake leads to a comic scene in which the Superior tries to subtly ask Madame Rycker for money, but Madame Rycker does not notice his increasingly less subtle hints. Finally, the Superior becomes distracted by “a feature of the foot-bath which he did not fully understand” and asks Madame Rycker, “What do you think of that?” Madame Rycker blushes in embarrassment and tries to explain the Superior’s error:

She was confused, remembering the ambiguous jokes of her more dashing companions at the convent. “It’s not really a foot-bath, father.”

“What else could it be for then?”

She said with the beginnings of humor, “You’d better ask the doctor—or M. Query.” (72)

Marie Rycker of course is one of the characters who cannot properly laugh or execute a joke, so she is unable to achieve more than the “beginnings” of humor, but the scene itself does achieve comic effect.

Greene says of his characters and their portrayal, satiric and otherwise, that

I wanted to give expression to various states or moods of belief and unbelief. The doctor [Dr. Colin], whom I like best as a realized character, represents a settled and easy atheism; the Father Superior a settled and easy belief (I use easy as a term of praise and not as a term of reproach); Father Thomas an unsettled form of belief and Query an unsettled form of disbelief. One could probably dig a little of the author also out of the doctor and Father Thomas. (*Ways of Escape* 228)

Comic Figures of Speech

A handful of scenes contain comic figures of speech. There are several examples of cacemphaton, a “scurrilous jest, lewd allusion, or double entendre” (Lanham 20). Arguing with the Father Superior, Query states, “If your god wanted an adult world he should have given us an adult brain. . . . Why did he give us genitals then if he wanted us to think clearly? A doctor doesn’t prescribe marijuana for clear thought” (76). Dr. Colin, observing a leper with testicles swollen from elephantiasis, comments that he wants to get wheelchairs for the worst patients. Then he asks Query if he could build a wheelchair for the man. “He would need a special one, of course. Could a famous ecclesiastical architect design a chair for swollen balls?” (80).

Greene also uses puns in *A Burnt-Out Case*. There is possibly a French language pun in the form of a woman named Madame Guelle, intended as a pun on the French word “gueule,” which means “literally an animal’s mouth, but is used pejoratively for people’s mouths or faces” (Geneviève, *Merde* 12). Query, as he regaining some of his ability to laugh, makes use of syllepsis, the “use of a word understood differently in relation to two

or more other words, which it modifies or governs" (Corbett 448). Father Thomas offers to give Querry confession. Exasperated with trying to explain to Thomas that he is no longer a Catholic, Querry says "The only confession I am ever likely to make . . . would be to an examining magistrate" (92). Querry uses syllepsis again when Parkinson begins uncovering secrets of Querry's past life using the newspaper morgue. Querry reflects that Parkinson cannot find out all his secrets, thinking, "the morgue of the Post was not big enough to hold all possible bodies" (117).

Aside from the above examples, Greene limits his use of comic figures of speech for comedy fits only in certain parts of the novel. The predominant tone of the novel is tragic. Thus when comedy is not being discussed as part of Greene's existential variation of Catholicism or when it is not being used to satirize a form of belief or unbelief, Greene does not use comic figures of speech (or any other comic technique) because they would disrupt the tone of the novel.

Conclusion

A Burnt-Out Case can hardly be called a comedy, but the novel discusses humor extensively. The ability to laugh takes on symbolic significance, suggesting the return of the ability to cope with life. Life itself is suggested by the climax of the novel to be comically absurd, and the symbolic significance of laughter and the concept of life as absurd return in Greene's next novel, *The Comedians*.

There is relatively little humor in *A Burnt-Out Case* aside from comic character sketches, which Greene uses to satirize different "moods of belief or unbelief," to borrow Greene's phrase. There is also the thematic use of farcical black humor and the absurd in the climactic scene. There are some incidents of comic rhetoric, sprinkled through the

novel to provide comic relief, but these are mere flourishes that any book could have; they are not part of the overall tone or theme of the novel. In other words, comic techniques are used sparingly in *A Burnt-Out Case* to avoid diluting the novel's tragic overtones. Most of the comic technique appears at the climax of the novel to reinforce the novel's theme.

A Burnt-Out Case is in a sense diametrically opposed to *Our Man in Havana* in that overall it has a tragic rather than comic form. Nonetheless both novels work a similar balance: *Our Man in Havana* carries tragic elements in a comic story, and *A Burnt-Out Case* carries comic elements in a tragic story. What is the comedy Greene claims to have "discovered" in *A Burnt-Out Case*, and how is it different from Greene's earlier comedy as he suggests in his comment in *Ways of Escape*? In one sense, Greene's use of comedy is no different. Greene uses no comic devices in *A Burnt-Out Case* that he did not previously use in *Our Man in Havana* (and many of the comic techniques Greene used in *Our Man in Havana* he had used in earlier works as well). On the other hand, the tragi-farcical death of Querry was completely new to his work in 1960. Before that Greene's comic novels (*Our Man in Havana* and *Loser Take All*) ended like classical comedies: with a marriage or reunion of lovers. Greene's other novels were tragedies resulting in the death of a major character (with the exceptions of *The Confidential Agent* and *The Ministry of Fear*, thrillers in which the protagonists survive). Perhaps Greene overstates the case in claiming he discovered comedy as late as this, but he does make unprecedented use of comedy in *A Burnt-Out Case*.

Chapter Four

The Comedians

The Comedians (1966) weaves together several somewhat fragmentary story elements; Greene previously emphasized the importance of telling a story and having an exciting plot, so *The Comedians* is a step in a new direction. The protagonist and narrator is Brown, owner of the Hotel Trianon, a once-prosperous hotel which has been ruined by the death of the tourist trade, a direct result of the terror inflicted on the Haitian population by François “Papa Doc” Duvalier. Brown remains tied to Haiti despite the horrors inflicted by Duvalier and his secret police, the Tontons Macoute (French for “bogey men”) for two main reasons. First, he longs to have roots, and his hotel is the closest thing he has had to a home. Second, he longs to have a commitment to something, and his affair with Martha, though unhappy, is the closest he has come. Brown’s sense of detachment is central to the theme of faith and commitment which recurs throughout the novel. The plot is complicated by independent characters: Jones, an enigmatic con artist who is dealing with the Haitian government; the Smiths, a pair of Americans who wish to establish a vegetarian center in Port-au-Prince; and the late Secretary of Social Welfare, Dr. Philipot, who commits suicide in Brown’s swimming pool to escape the Tontons Macoute. All the story lines mix, giving *The Comedians* a fragmentary plot and an opportunity to view the Haitian government from various perspectives.

Like *A Burnt-Out Case*, *The Comedians* does not at first seem to invite analysis of its humorous content: the novel portrays assassinations, state-sponsored terrorism, guerilla

warfare and torture. Despite the violence of the novel, there is a kind of humor operating alongside the suicide and murder; the title is more ambiguous than the dark tone of the book at first suggests. As in the previous two books, comedy is injected into the usual sinister elements of Greeneland. *The Comedians* is a comic novel, although its dark tone often dominates the comedy. The central characters, Brown, Smith, and Jones, are all in certain ways comic figures, and much of the novel's action takes place in the comic mode. The reader is never far from Greene's comic technique—yet the novel is not dominated by the comic as is *Travels with My Aunt* and, to a lesser extent, *Our Man in Havana*. Death abounds in *The Comedians*; it comes in almost every chapter, befalling major and minor characters alike. Mutilated victims of Duvalier's secret police, the Tontons Macoute, writhe, crawl, and limp in the background of every public scene. *The Comedians* is a comedy but, to borrow from Sanford Sternlicht, a sad comedy (65).

The juxtaposition of comic characters and forms with those of tragedy invites the suggestion that *The Comedians* is a tragicomedy. But as John Fletcher wrote in his Preface to *The Faithful Shepherdess*, tragicomedy “wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy” (quoted in Abrams 205). Or as Mathew Winston puts it, tragicomedy is a moderate form that avoids the extremes of “mirth and killing” (“Humour Noir” 274). Greene's technique in *The Comedians* uses precisely those violent extremes, so, following Winston's definition, it is safe to call black humor the dominant mode of the novel. In fact, black humor is so dominant that it melds with the other major comic techniques in the novel: comic figures of speech, farce, comic characterization, satire, and the absurd. In addition to being part of other comic techniques in *The Comedians*, black humor also appears independently of them.

Comic Figures of Speech

Like *A Burnt-Out Case*, *The Comedians* blends comic elements in a story with tragic overtones. Yet it does not use the same prose style as *A Burnt-Out Case*, perhaps because Greene's narrative technique in *The Comedians* is first person narration. While this novel mixes the comedy and tragedy as do the two novels previously discussed, its style is somewhat different from the style in those novels. The comic effects must come from the cynical voice of Brown the narrator, not from the third-person narration of the previous two novels. For example, Brown uses litotes, deliberate understatement, to describe a situation in which he tries to hide a corpse from Mr. Smith: "I didn't want the Presidential Candidate to see a corpse coiled up under the diving-board—not on his first night. It was not my idea of hospitality" (55). Of course, the horror of seeing the corpse of a suicide with its wrists slashed is so gruesome that "hospitality" does not adequately describe the kindness Brown does Smith in sparing him the sight. The element of the gruesome qualifies this figure of speech as black humor. Another use of litotes related to black humor is made by Brown's mother, who explains why she does not want to sit still during her last days of life: "I don't see any point in my anticipating death. It lasts a long time" (72).

Another figure of speech Greene uses frequently is the pun. One kind of pun is syllepsis, a pun that uses a word with different senses in relation to two or more other words, which it modifies. For example, Brown plays on the uses of the word "discords":

I remember thinking, "I am going to make this the most popular tourist hotel in the Caribbean," and perhaps I might have succeeded if a mad doctor had not come to power and filled our nights with the discords of violence instead of jazz. (60)

Here “discords” modifies jazz in the sense of an inharmonious combination of simultaneous notes and violence in the sense of a disagreement or clash between people. A second kind of pun Greene uses is antanaclasis, “repetition of a word in two different senses” (Corbett 447). Martha writes to Brown of her husband’s supposed enthusiasm to see Brown: “Luis will be pleased. He thinks a lot of you.” Brown, who fears that Luis knows of his affair with Martha, describes the comment as a “phrase which could be interpreted two ways” (115). On another occasion, Brown is fuming because Jones has, inaccurately, told him that he has been sleeping with Martha. He recovers from his anger by thinking of how innocent Jones is: “Anger soon left me: the child had broken a dish, that was all—yes, a dish, I thought, is just how he would have described her” (260). (In addition to being something off which one eats, “dish” is also a slang word, meaning “an attractive woman.”) On another occasion, Brown and Jones are hiding from the Tontons Macoute in a cemetery. Brown says, “You couldn’t do better than to dig in here tomorrow” and then realizes, “it was not a happily chosen phrase to use in a cemetery” (263).

The Comedians has comic figures of speech on virtually every other page, more comic rhetoric than any of the novels previously discussed, although it might seem more logical for *Our Man in Havana*, a more overtly comic novel than *The Comedians*, to use more comic rhetorical technique. However, *The Comedians* is told through the narrative voice of Brown. Because Brown is the narrator, many of these figures of speech originate with him. They round out the picture of his character as a sardonic commentator who feels so disconnected from events happening around him that he finds them occasions for humor. Furthermore, the black humor of the novel relies on Brown’s ability to make the reader feel alternately connected and detached to events taking place. Brown’s sense of

humor reestablishes his good will after he has alienated the reader with his heartless descriptions of the grotesque.

Farce

According to Alice Weymouth, Greene wrote of Haiti,

A reign of terror . . . has often about it the atmosphere of farce. The irresponsible is in control. The banana skin is a deadly one, but it remains a banana skin. From the moment you land from an airplane in Port-au-Prince—that city of ruined elegance where the houses belong to the world of Charles Addams and the door may well be opened to you by a Boris Karloff. . . . (136)

Greene makes explicit his association of Haiti and farce. His allusion to the “banana skin” refers to the slapstick element of farce. The juxtaposition of Charles Addams and Boris Karloff metaphorically implies juxtaposition of comedy and horror: *The Comedians* intertwines black humor into its farce and slapstick.

A common technique of farce utilizes the concealed lover; hence, such a situation is sometimes called a sex farce. Typically, the protagonist must hide a lover from someone, usually an gullible spouse who keeps accidentally discovering the hidden lover—almost. At the last moment, the protagonist distracts the spouse from making the discovery.

Brown is the protagonist in such a scene, but in keeping with the black humor of the novel, Brown’s farce is not conducted to hide a lover from a spouse, but to hide a corpse from Martha and the Smiths, who have just arrived at Brown’s hotel. The comedy of the farce is enhanced by Brown’s ironic comments. The scene opens with a grim metaphor portraying the corpse of Dr. Philipot, a refugee from Duvalier’s regime, as “a middle-aged foetus ready dressed for burial in his neat grey suit.” The contrast between a foetus and a corpse sets the mood for the black humor which is to follow.

The Smiths and Martha arrive before Brown has a chance to move the body; an element of irony is added to the scene in that Philipot is a minister of the Haitian government to whom the Smiths have a letter of introduction. As in a sex farce, the Smiths immediately observe the swimming pool that contains the corpse. They comment on the pool, and Martha obligingly begins to “move the ray of her lamp towards the diving-board and the deep end” of the pool (which at the moment contains no water) where the corpse lies. Brown takes the lamp “quickly from her and [turns] it up towards the fretted tower” of the hotel. Brown’s action is visual slapstick; he snatches away the flashlight and diverts attention to the tower of the hotel. While they stand by the pool, Brown tries to bring conversation around to another topic, resulting in an exchange of shallow remarks. As narrator, Brown makes a dry aside:

If a spirit hovers, as some believe, for an hour or two over the cadaver it has abandoned, what banalities it is doomed to hear, while it waits in a despairing hope that some serious thought will be uttered, some expression which will lend dignity to the life it has left. (54)

The presence of a dead body is ostensibly the occasion for profound and somber thought, but Dr. Philipot’s corpse is witness to only small talk. Brown implies that such banalities are the fate of most corpses. Soon the banalities end and the farce moves forward: the Smiths retire upstairs to their room—overlooking the pool.

Brown worries that the electricity may come back on after the nightly blackout too soon, revealing the corpse in the floodlights surrounding the pool. Soon enough Brown’s fears prove founded. The lights blaze on, and Brown hurries Martha away from the scene. Inevitably, the Smiths soon appear on the balcony to look at the view, and Brown rushes off to turn out the lights in the garden. Just as he gets to the switch, Mr. Smiths sees the corpse but mistakes it for a sleeping beggar. Mr. Smith replies,

“The poor man. I’ve a good mind to take him down some money.”
I was tempted to call up, “Take him your letter of introduction. It’s
the Secretary for Social Welfare.” (57)

The black humor of the scene is created by the tension between the sex farce convention (of trying to hide something from innocent characters) and the grotesque reality of a cadaver lying in the empty swimming pool.

As Greene implied in his journalistic account of Haiti, he saw slapstick as a metaphorical component of Haiti’s “reign of terror.” As he put it, “The banana skin is a deadly one, but it remains a banana skin.” Greene uses slapstick after Martha, Brown’s mistress, has made an impassioned speech about her love for her son. After her speech, Martha begins to cry. The dramatic moment is shattered, however, when Martha leaves the room: “She turned and left us, but her heel came off on the edge of the carpet and she stumbled and nearly fell in the doorway” (134). The slapstick here is tragicomedy rather than black humor because Martha’s fall is not sufficiently horrifying or grotesque to create black humor. Rather, Martha’s concern for her son is mingled with slapstick humor.

In a similar vein, Brown and Martha make love in her Peugeot in a slapstick manner; their arms and legs flail about, and Martha’s hand hits the horn. Their sex becomes slapstick, and their love affair ludicrous. Brown implies that the violence of Haiti renders their attempt to live normal lives comic. After the farce of Dr. Philipot’s corpse, Martha begins sexual overtures to Brown. But he cannot respond:

the corpse in the pool seemed to turn our preoccupations into
comedy. The corpse of Doctor Philipot belonged to a more tragic
theme; we were only a sub-plot affording a little light relief. (57)

It is impossible, Greene implies, for a normal life to exist in the terror of Haiti without being reduced to comedy.

Comic Characterization

Most of the characters—with the exception of the most heroic figure, Magiot, and the most villainous figure, Duvalier—are comic figures in some sense. Mr. and Mrs. Smith, while ultimately honorable figures, are satirized for their innocence, their Americanism, and their vegetarianism. Brown and Martha's affair, while tragic in their inability to care for each other, is the occasion for farce and slapstick. Jones takes part in a classic slapstick routine, among other comic devices, by dressing as a woman to escape the police. Various minor characters also have comic roles. In a sense, *The Comedians* is truly about comedians in the primary usage of the word—funny people.

A subtle joke is present in the main character's name—Brown—itself. The name appealed to Greene's sense of humor for two reasons. The more obvious reason is that the name "Brown" is in some sense a logical alias for someone named Greene. So even while he denies a relationship between himself and his main character — says Greene in the dedication to *The Comedians*, "I am unlikely to bring an action for libel against myself with any success, yet I want to make it clear that the narrator of this tale, though his name is Brown, is not Greene"—Brown's name invites comparison to Greene more than the ordinary first-person narration might. The name "Brown" appeals to Greene also because it is such a common name it seems absurd and therefore humorous. By naming other characters in the story Smith and Jones, this absurd humor is compounded. As Brown in *The Comedians* puts it, "Smith, Jones, and Brown — the situation was improbable. I had a half-right to my drab name, but had he? I smiled at his predicament, but Jones's sense of humour, as I was to find, was of a simpler order" (11). Brown comments, after discussing Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones with the captain, "Again I was aware of the three names, interchangeable like comic masks in a farce" (23).

Mr. and Mrs. Smith provide a thematic contrast to Brown's inability to commit to anyone. They are dedicated pacifists and vegetarians who are determined to bring their vegetarian centers to Port-au-Prince to help the Haitian people. Their idealism is a contrast to Brown's cynicism. Ultimately, the book portrays them as more heroic than Greene's protagonist. At the same time, the Smiths's naivete is used to comic effect as Duvalier's corrupt bureaucrats try to bilk the Smiths out of money.

Smith is a satiric character, an example of structural irony. His invincible naivete leads him to persist in "putting an interpretation on affairs which the knowing reader—who penetrates to, and shares, the implicit point of view of the authorial presence behind the naive persona—just as persistently is called on to alter and correct" (Abrams 90). This naivete is almost wilful; the Smiths are bombarded with evidence of the brutality of the Haitian government, but they are reluctant to think ill of the government. When the purser of the *Medea* warns them of the Tontons Macoute, they refuse to believe they exist:

Mr. Smith laid a hand on his wife's knee. "The gentleman is trying to scare us, my dear," he said. "They told us nothing about this at the tourist bureau." (15)

Mr. Smith's confidence that a tourist bureau would faithfully report the actions of a totalitarian regime is typical of his simplicity.

Smith believes that eating meat causes people to develop what he calls "acidity," a condition that he believes "excites the passions," thereby causing all violence. The irony of bringing vegetarianism to Haiti is that the majority of the population cannot afford to eat meat in the first place. Another irony is that, despite their de facto vegetarianism, the Haitian beggars nevertheless exhibit "passion" and violence when Mr. Smith imprudently throws money around to crowds of beggars. At the Port-au-Prince post office, the beggars attack each other, rioting to get as much money as possible. Despite the

unpleasantness of this scene, described in detail in the black humor section of this chapter, Mr. Smith clings to his beliefs. Brown is bewildered:

I listened to him with astonishment. The dream was intact. Reality could not touch him. Even the scene in the Post Office had not sullied his vision. The Haitians freed from acidity, poverty, and passion would soon be bent happily over their nut cutlets. (156)

No aspect of poverty or corruption discourages Mr. Smith's quest to bring vegetarianism to Haiti.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith dine with Dr. Magiot and show the doctor a copy of the ballot upon which Mr. Smith's name appeared. Brown says of the ballot that Smith's name is "clearly printed under a big black square containing an emblem, which, I think, must have represented a cabbage" (175)—a ludicrous symbol for a political party. Vegetarianism is further satirized as Doctor Magiot discusses it.

"Vegetarianism is an interesting idea," Doctor Magiot said. "I am not sure it is suited to all mammals. I doubt for example whether a lion could flourish on green things."

"Mrs. Smith once had a vegetarian bulldog," Mr. Smith said with pride. "Of course it took some training."

"It took authority," Mrs. Smith said and her eyes challenged Doctor Magiot to deny it. (175)

The image of Mrs. Smith forcing a bulldog to become a vegetarian is a ludicrous one, the hyperbole of which mocks Mrs. Smith's forceful personality.

The Smiths' vegetarianism is satirized still more over dinner with the captain aboard the *Medea*. The Smiths consume ridiculously-named products in preference to the Dutch captain's heavy meat dishes, much to the captain's horror. The names of the products add to the comedy of the scene. As Brown later refers to them later, "some strange beverage chosen by a public relations firm" (98). "Barmene," the Smiths' substitute for alcohol, is a pun on "bar man." "Nuttoline," one of their main courses, sounds like a combination of

nuts and gasoline. Another beverage the Smiths drink is called “Yeastrel,” a name that suggests a concoction made of yeast and petrol, dubious ingredients at best for a drink. “Slippery Elm Food,” presumably made from the wood of a slippery elm tree, is unappetizing enough even without considering that it could also be food *for* slippery elm trees.

The Smiths are American and therefore used by Greene as a vehicle to satirize Americans in general. American commercialism is mocked by the fact that the Smiths use three distinctly American products. They drink Coca-Cola (15), Mrs. Smith keeps Kleenex in her purse (175), and Mrs. Smith swears by Listerine, “Mr. Smith and I never travel anywhere without a bottle of Listerine” (187). When Brown is beaten by the Tontons Macoute, she cares for Brown with Listerine. Later, when she fails to express disapproval of his affair with Martha, Brown alludes to this incident, wondering, “I had been shriven perhaps by the Listerine” (190). In other words, to Americans, the commercial product Listerine is a substance like holy water.

While Brown initially considers the Smiths ridiculous, by the end of the novel Brown comes to respect Smith. He tells the Smiths they are “heroic” and calls Smith, “an old man with beautiful manners. . . . He had been born with peace in his heart instead of the splinter of ice” (246).

Brown also is a source of comedy. He is an ironic commentator on all he observes. Of the signature on the postcard he receives from his mother, he says “not recognizing her hand I read it first not unsuitably as ‘Manon’ ”—the name of the “amoral young girl in Abbe Prevost’s novel *Manon Lescaut* who resists attempts to make her a nun and becomes instead the unfaithful mistress of Des Grieux, who loves her ardently” (Hoskins 239).

Brown comically associates his mother with a woman who rejected the convent for adultery.

There are quite a few other characters in *The Comedians* portrayed comically.

Ambassador Pineda is mocked for his use of the possessive pronoun:

I have never heard a man use the word "my" more frequently.
 "Have one of my cigars." Please let my chauffeur have a drink."
 We spoke of the coming elections. "My opinion is the doctor will
 succeed. He has American support. That is my information." He
 invited me to "my next cocktail party." (88)

Pineda is also parodied by his son Angel, who Brown dislikes as much as he dislikes

Pineda himself:

it seemed to me that month by month the son grew more to resemble
 the father. He had a way now of saying "my" mother, and once I
 saw him with a long chocolate cigar in his mouth. He was putting
 on weight rapidly. (89)

Mr. Baxter bores people with his stories of the war and with his bad poetry, but he appears only briefly. Also comically portrayed are the purser and the captain of the *Medea*. The purser is a man described as "untidy and ebulliently gay with a great liking for Bols gin and Haitian rum" (15), and he is responsible for inflating condoms into ersatz balloons for the farewell party (30). Brown visits the captain late one evening. He finds the captain dressed for bed:

"Mr. Brown," he exclaimed in surprise, like an old lady disturbed in
 her hotel room, and like an old lady his left hand went instinctively
 to the neckline of his nightshirt. . . . He balanced shyly on the edge
 of the bunk like a *hausfrau*. (212-14)

The captain is comically compared to an old lady, modestly keeping his neckline from drooping too low.

Satire

Satire, like black humor, mingles with other comic techniques in *The Comedians*. Satire is implicit in much of the black humor because the violence in the black humor is a result of Duvalier's oppression of Haiti. Satire is also inherent in the comic characterization of various characters. Nevertheless, Greene uses satire that is distinct from other comic techniques.

Greene rarely used invective satire in his writing, but he does put invective in the mouth of the late Dr. Philipot who "recently under the influence of rum was said to have laughed at Papa Doc's medical qualifications" (115). Greene is thus able to add subtlety to this blatant form of satire; Duvalier's anger implies that Philipot's invective is maddeningly close to the truth.

Burlesque also appears in *The Comedians*. When Mrs. Smith saves Brown from a beating and possible murder at the hands of the Tontons Macoute, she appears in a burlesque light. She declares Brown's oppressors to be "Dégoutant, tout à fait dégoutant," meaning that she finds their behavior disgusting. So far, Mrs. Smith is a heroic figure in the process of rescuing Brown, although she intimidates the Tontons Macoute with a French accent described as "atrocious." Brown then says that she says her words with "all the glow and vigor of Mrs. Julia Ward Howe's *Battle Hymn of the Republic*" (185). The grand evocation of the American Civil War and the abolitionist movement is too hyperbolic; Mrs. Smith and her beginner's French are too base to sustain such a high comparison. The scene thereby becomes a high burlesque, elevating Mrs. Smith to a level she does not deserve.

Another high burlesque is Mr. Smith's letter to his supporters in Wisconsin, about which Brown says,

In reading Churchill's prose works one is aware of an orator addressing an historic chamber, and in reading Mr. Smith I was conscious of a lecturer in the hall of a provincial town. I felt surrounded by well-meaning middle-aged women in hats who had paid five dollars to a good cause. (117)

Here Greene is satirizing Smith with high burlesque, putting him and his small-town politics in the august company of Winston Churchill.

Greene satirizes the deplorable condition of human rights in Haiti by showing the Haitian government officials and police to be unfamiliar with the very vocabulary of a democratic criminal justice system. Mr. Smith asks the Haitian Secretary of State what the charge is against Jones:

"Charge?"
 "Charge."
 "Oh—charge."
 "Exactly," Mr. Smith said. "Charge." (108)

Mr. Smith then offers to stand bail for Jones.

"Bail?" the Minister said, "Bail?" He turned to me with a gesture of appeal from his cigar. "What is bail?"

Finally Mr. Smith asks,

"You've heard of Habeas Corpus, I suppose,"
 Mr. Smith said.
 "Yes. Yes. Of course. But I have forgotten so much of my Latin. Virgil. Homer. I regret that I no longer have time to study." (108)

Showing cause for the imprisonment of a prisoner is so utterly alien to the Minister that he assumes Smith is quoting from a Latin classic. (Furthermore, the Minister thinks Homer wrote in Latin, but that fact pokes fun at a different kind of ignorance.) The corruption of Haiti is also satirized by the way Brown finally enables the minister to understand the concept of bail—he implies that it is another word for "bribe."

Later in the novel, the Tontons Macoute beat Brown after searching his hotel. Mrs.

Smith arrives on the scene and chases away Brown's attackers. The scene is discussed in detail above, but it is worth noting it again here because of the use of a certain word:

she demanded their warrant to be here at all—warrant and again warrant: but here Hugo's vocabulary failed her—"montrez-moi votre warrant"; "votre warrant où est-il?" The mysterious word menaced them more than the words they understood. (186)

Of course the Tontons Macoute do not understand Mrs. Smith's insertion of an English word into her poorly pronounced French, but it is comically appropriate that the word they are menaced by is the word "warrant"—a term that totalitarian regimes cannot recognize in any language.

The Absurd

A hint of the absurd exists in many of the comic techniques previously discussed. Farce lacks the existential implications of Theater of the Absurd, but nevertheless, farce is related to the absurd on a simpler level: farce is humor based on nonsensical situations, and so is the absurd. Furthermore, the black humor that pervades the novel is connected to the absurd through their mutual association with existential philosophy. Much of the black humor previously discussed could also be characterized as absurd.

The following scene also could be described as black humor, but it contains strong elements of the absurd. At the beginning of the scene, Brown and the Smiths are talking in his hotel when the funeral of Dr. Philipot passes by the hotel. The funeral has already passed a road block on the route past Brown's hotel. The Smiths join the funeral procession against Brown's advice—he knows the Tontons Macoute are likely to appear at the funeral. As the funeral party progresses, a second roadblock refuses to let the hearse carrying Dr. Philipot pass. The hearse turns around and attempts to return to Port-au-

Prince. But, in a situation reminiscent of *Catch-22*, the first roadblock will no longer let the hearse through.

“We have been to the lower roadblock, Madame Philipot. They say we cannot return with the coffin. Not without the authorization of the authorities.”

“What authorities?” I asked.

“The Secretary for Social Welfare.”

We all with one accord looked at the handsome coffin with its gleaming brass handles.

“*There* is the Secretary for Social Welfare,” I said. (121)

Neither roadblock will let the Dr. Philipot’s hearse pass, and the only authority who can resolve the situation is the Secretary for Social Welfare—who happens to be Dr. Philipot.

Black Humor

Black humor, with its historical relation to absurdist humor and existential philosophy, is an appropriate vehicle for Greene’s thematic exploration of commitment and faith (not necessarily religious faith). The black humor of *The Comedians* is a black humor of absurdity, philosophically related to the existentialism of Sartre and Camus. The message of Sartre’s and Camus’s existentialism is that, while the universe is meaningless and absurd, people can find satisfaction in accepting meaninglessness and then struggling against it regardless of their inherently hopeless situation. The existentialist message is paradoxical, strongly pessimistic, but with a tone of optimism.

Greene’s absurd black humor in *The Comedians* is connected to existentialism, but it is also connected to faith. Sometimes this faith is explicitly Catholic, other times it is not. One of the Catholic connections to absurd existentialism is made by Brown, who laments “the confused comedy of our lives.” He speculates,

Surely there must be a power which always arranges things to happen in the most humiliating circumstances. When I was a boy I

had faith in the Christian God. Life under his shadow was a very serious affair; I saw Him incarnated in every tragedy. He belonged to the *lacrimae rerum* like a gigantic figure looming through a Scottish mist. Now that I approached the end of life it was only my sense of humor that enabled me sometimes to believe in Him. Life was a comedy, not the tragedy for which I had been prepared, and it seemed to me that we were all driven by an authoritative practical joker towards the extreme point of comedy. (32)

Brown invokes in this passage cosmic irony, postulating that there is a power in the universe which deliberately causes events to happen in ludicrous and humiliating circumstances. Brown can only believe in the Christian God through his sense of humor. To Brown life is absurd, but unlike the absurdity of Camus and Sartre which postulates that the universe is meaningless because there is no god, Brown's absurdity postulates that the universe is meaningless because there is a God—an authoritative practical joker driving humanity toward the extreme point of comedy. As in the existential world of Camus, events in the novel are tragic, though infused with comedy. As in the existential world, there is hope to be gained from struggling against the meaninglessness. But unlike in existential works, that hope is gained from having faith in the face of meaninglessness. Brown's statement above suggests that this faith is a Catholic faith, but the climactic words of the novel suggest that this faith is just faith in something; Dr. Magiot states the case:

Communism, my friend, is more than Marxism, just as Catholicism—remember I was born a Catholic too—is more than the Roman Curia. There is a mystique as well as a politique. . . . Catholics and Communists have committed great crimes, but at least they have not stood aside, like an established society, and been indifferent. I would rather have blood on my hands than water like Pilate. . . . I implore you . . . if you have abandoned one faith, do not abandon all faith. There is always an alternative to the faith we lose. Or is it the same faith under a different mask? (286)

Magiot's words emphasize faith, not faith in the Catholic church, but faith in something. In terms of the masks of the comedian, Magiot asks, if the "alternative to the faith we lose"

is really “the same faith under a different mask.” In other words, the mere act of belief is worthwhile in the face of an absurd universe—or is Greene implying that the Christian God lies behind all forms of belief? The “different mask” statement leaves the possibility of either meaning, but the statement, “there is always an alternative to the faith we lose,” unambiguously advocates faith in general, without religious connotations. The idea of faith in something, religious or otherwise, is also implicit in the symbolism of the comedian. So Greene’s black humor departs from Camus and Sartre in its suggestion that there is a God and that the universe is absurd because God is a practical joker. But then his black humor returns to Camus and Sartre in saying that the only thing to do in the face of absurdity is to have faith in something and to take action on that something’s behalf.

Black humor is not just a vehicle for an existential discussion; it also provides the satirical ground for criticizing the totalitarian Duvalier regime and the Cold War politics which causes the United States to ignore—and even aid—Duvalier.

The nightmare land of 1960s Haiti is an ideal setting for black humor. It is a beautiful tropical island—once a tourist’s paradise—with white sand beaches lapped by the azure Caribbean tide. In contrast to its idyllic appearance, Haiti is a terrifying police state controlled by Duvalier and his secret police, the Tontons Macoute. The black humor of the novel is well suited to its overtly political aspect, enabling Greene to mock the Duvalier regime while portraying the horrors it perpetrates. The black humor condemns both Duvalier’s regime and the United States for supporting that regime as a safeguard against communism and Haiti going the way of Cuba. In a moment free of black humor, Dr. Magiot and Brown discuss the fate of Haiti. Magiot tells Brown that Duvalier is the United States’ “bulwark against Communism. There will be no Cuba and no Bay of Pigs here.” He adds that there is an American congressman profiting from Duvalier’s regime, and

concludes that Haiti is “an evil slum floating a few miles from Florida, and no American will help us with arms or money or counsel” (232).

Greene suggests that the political element goes beyond Haiti; the whole world is filled with evil. To illustrate this point, Greene continually harkens to the relative peace of Victorian times as well as the extension of the Haiti metaphor to the rest of the twentieth century world. The following passage typifies this comparison:

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. (130)

Brown’s words here are triggered by the thought of Nazism and World War II, further evidence that the world is irrational.

Greene often compares the twentieth century with the nineteenth, suggesting that terror and misery have increased to a scale inconceivable to the likes of the Victorians. On reading Henry James’s *The Great Good Place*, Brown comments: “ ‘The wild waters of our horrible times,’ James had written and I wondered what enviable break in the long enviable Victorian peace had so disturbed him. Had his butler given notice?” (251).

Brown cannot believe that Henry James was bothered by a legitimate concern. Whatever problem troubled James, Brown is confident it would be a trifle to the twentieth century.

In another scene, Greene uses black humor in a juxtaposition of nineteenth-century calm and twentieth-century violence. Brown dines at Dr. Magiot’s house, a place filled with nineteenth-century books by authors such as Victor Hugo and Karl Marx. Brown describes Dr. Magiot’s sitting-room as “Victorian” (247). Brown has recently learned that an acquaintance of his, Hamit, had been murdered by the Tontons Macoute, the body discovered in a sewage drain. Soon after his arrival in Dr. Magiot’s sitting room, Brown

juxtaposes this death with placid Victorian images: "I felt after dinner we should have joined other members of the Browning Society for a discussion of the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Hamit lay in his drain a very long way from here" (248). Not only does Brown mention Victorian literature, he mentions a particularly gentle kind—love poetry. Hamit not only lies in "his" drain, he lies in another world—"a very long way from here."

Another violent juxtaposition is that of Mr. Smith's idealism and the brutal conditions in Haiti. Mr. Smith's naive persistence is several times the occasion for black humor contrasting Smith's desire to help the poor of Haiti with the grotesque circumstances of their existence. Greene maintains the tension between horror and comedy through the cynical voice of Brown, who describes the horrors he witnesses without much, if any, emotion. The beggars of Haiti are deformed creatures, mutilated, it is implied, by the secret police of François Duvalier. Deformed characters are a common feature of black humor. According to Winston, they help create black humor by confronting the reader "with the disparity between their own grotesque shapes and the individuals contained within those forms" ("To Weep with Laughing" 261). Mr. Smith's encounters with the beggars become increasingly comic as he tries harder and harder to help them and, ironically, he causes them more and more misery. There are several incidents of grotesque black humor in which Mr. Smith is accosted by beggars. These incidents intensify in both the comic and grotesque dimensions as the novel progresses. The final scene of Mr. Smith's destructive innocence creates a riot. Mr. Smith gets out of his car at the Post Office, where beggars congregate and where Smith has encountered them in earlier scenes. Brown describes the scene:

he got out, carrying his wife's handbag, and the beggars approached from all directions—there was a low babble of half-articulated phrases. . . . Mr. Smith opened the handbag and began to scatter notes—gourdes and dollars indiscriminately. "For God's sake,"

I said. One or two of the beggars gave high unnerving screams. . . . The last money was scattered, and the police began to close in on their prey. Men with two legs kicked down men with one, men with two arms grasped those who were armless by their torsos and threw them to the ground. As I hustled Mr. Smith back into my car, I saw Jones. . . . He looked bewildered, worried, for once in his life lost. Mr. Smith said, "Well, my dear, I guess they won't squander that any worse than I would have done." (193)

As soon as Smith begins his act of would-be charity, Brown cries out in dismay, and even the beggars make "high unnerving screams" as if they too realize the horror Smith is about to cause. Smith could not have created more misery if he were a sadist intentionally starting a riot. Slapstick violence begins, but the slapstick is grotesque black humor, violence committed by and against the deformed. Ironically, Mr. Smith goes off under the impression that he has done a good thing for the poor people of Haiti. The black humor emphasizes the plight of the Haitian people. It can also be seen as a satire of American aid to Haiti. Other parts of the novel refer to the cars the secret police drive, big Cadillacs "from the days of American aid to the poor of Haiti" (123) and to the corrupt Congressmen who profit from American aid to Haiti (232). Here Mr. Smith's distribution of money to the beggars becomes an allegory, satirically symbolic of the damage American good intentions do to Haiti.

Conclusion

Comedy is technically and thematically at the center of *The Comedians*. From a thematic perspective, the novel's major concern is defining the comedian—essentially as someone unable to commit to a particular faith—and posing the alternatives to being a comedian—one extreme alternative is becoming a horror like Papa Doc, the other extreme is committing to a belief like Dr. Magiot and the Smiths. Both the committed and the

comedian act in response to the absurd, existential horror that twentieth-century life has become. The laughter of the comedian gives him the ability to avoid the horror. Jones is a successful comedian; he is able to make people laugh. Brown is not a successful comedian; he cannot even laugh himself.

At the same time the novel discusses the absurd comedy that is twentieth-century life, the novel also utilizes the comic mode to create humor of its own. Absurd situations, black humor, slapstick, satire, comic figures of speech, and other comic techniques thus serve a dual purpose of creating comedy (an end in itself) and reinforcing the theme of comedy. Thus every comic technique in *The Comedians* becomes a post-modern commentary on comedy and the comic theme Greene has created.

Chapter Five

Travels with My Aunt

Greene's comic technique generally parallels other techniques. In *A Burnt-Out Case*, comedy is essential to the tragi-farcical death of Querry; comedy in the abstract is often part of scenes in the tragic mode. In *The Comedians*, comedy combines with horror in the death of Minister Philipot to create a particularly bleak form of black humor; horror and comedy are never far apart in this novel. In *Our Man in Havana*, the comedy is absent when Wormold decides to kill Carter; comedy disappears for whole chapters written in the style of a straightforward spy thriller. However, in *Travels with My Aunt* (1969), comedy is dominant to everything else. Greene says of the novel,

Travels with My Aunt is the only book I have written for the fun of it. Although the subject is old age and death—a suitable subject to tackle at the age of sixty-five—and though an excellent Swedish critic described the novel justly as “laughter in the shadow of the gallows,” I experienced more of the laughter and little of the shadow in writing it. (*Ways of Escape* 257)

The story centers on Henry Pulling, a retired bank manager with conventional manners whose great passion in life, if it can be called a passion, is raising dahlias. He is liberated from this life by his septuagenarian Aunt Augusta, who takes him traveling with her. Their adventures together form a series of vignettes set in the present interspersed with a series of vignettes from Aunt Augusta's past, giving the effect of “a rather loosely arranged picaresque,” as Paul O'Prey puts it (122).

The light humor and occasional slapstick comedy of this novel surprised many critics who had allowed the prevailingly gloomy mood of Greeneland to color their expectations. Unlike *Our Man in Havana*, there are not many sinister elements underlying the novel. The story opens with a funeral and ends with a murder, but these do not undercut the comic tone of the novel the way events in *Our Man in Havana* do.

Despite the lighthearted tone of the novel, Greene did not name *Travels with My Aunt* an entertainment, as he named his earlier light novels such as *Stamboul Train*, *The Confidential Agent*, and *Our Man in Havana*. Several factors contributed to this decision. By the late 1960s, Greene's reputation as a novelist was no longer in danger of ruin from being associated with popular literature—the reason he had started using the classification. Furthermore, the label “entertainment” had become unclear. *Brighton Rock*, one of the novels for which Greene is famous—began as a detective novel. Although this element of *Brighton Rock* falls into the background as the story progresses, Greene did not stop calling it an entertainment until after the first edition of the novel had been published. In addition, the connotation of frivolousness implied by “entertainment” seemed inappropriate for the satirical attack on Cold War politics implicit in *Our Man in Havana*. On the other hand, Greene never put the label “entertainment” on the novella *The Third Man*, although it is commonly and somewhat accurately regarded as an entertainment. Finally, with the possible exception of *Loser Takes All*, none of Greene's entertainments is so frivolous as to preclude serious critical consideration, so the label “entertainment” had become not only difficult to apply, but misleading. When he published the collected editions of his novels in the 1970s, Greene eliminated the distinction between “entertainments” and the other novels.

Characterization and Theme

Travels with My Aunt would have been hard to classify as an entertainment even if Greene had not been on the verge of abandoning the classification. While the novel's tone is light, it displays serious concern with the development of Aunt Augusta and Henry Pulling. The two are presented as

opposing attitudes to life engaged in a truly hilarious dialogue. Augusta's tireless pursuit of love and amusement, and her determined "liberation" of Henry, constitute a celebration of individualism, as opposed to dull conformity, and of vitality, laughter, and the power of the imagination to transform life. (O'Prey 122)

Moreover, the "dialogue" between Augusta and Henry takes place in the context of growing old. Henry, though only in his mid-fifties, has already retired and at the beginning of the novel foresees no major changes in his life. Augusta, on the other hand, nearly twenty years older than Henry, wants to experience as much as she possibly can. She has led a rich wonderful life through her travels, and she hopes Henry can learn to escape from his sedentary existence. Augusta says,

The Pullings have all been great travellers. I think I must have caught the infection through your father. . . . He travelled from one woman to another, Henry, all through his life. That comes to much the same thing. New landscapes, new customs. The accumulation of memories. A long life is not a question of years. A man without memories might reach the age of a hundred and feel that his life had been a very brief one. (55)

In addition to her belief in the need to enjoy life as much and as long as she can, Augusta also believes in compassion and tolerance. When Henry makes remarks condemning the crimes of her lover Visconti, she lashes out at him:

"I despise no one," she said, "no one. Regret your own actions, if you like that kind of wallowing in self-pity, but never, never despise. Never presume that yours is a better morality. What do you suppose I was doing in the house behind the *Messaggero*?"

I was cheating, wasn't I? So why shouldn't Mr. Visconti cheat me? But you, I suppose, never cheated in all your little provincial banker's life because there's not anything you wanted enough, not even money, not even a woman." (111)

Augusta joins the ranks of Brown and Wormold as characters whom Greene portrays as creators of fiction. Augusta, as O'Prey says, embodies "the power of imagination to transform life." She continually tells Henry stories of her past life, and the novel abounds with references to her story-telling ability. Henry describes her extravagant rhetorical style:

I wish I could reproduce more clearly the tones of her voice. She enjoyed talking, she enjoyed telling a story. She formed her sentences carefully like a slow writer who foresees ahead of him the next sentence and guides his pen towards it. Not for her the broken phrase, the lapse of continuity. (56)

Henry wonders if her stories are true, but he decides that "my aunt's stories were always basically true—only minor details might sometimes be added to compose a picture" (21).

On another occasion he wonders,

Was my aunt a little imaginative? Perhaps the stories of Jo, of my father and of my mother were not entirely true. . . . What did the truth matter? All characters once dead, if they continue to exist in memory at all, tend to become fictitious. Hamlet is no less real now than Winston Churchill, and Jo Pulling is no less historical than Don Quixote (62).

Unlike Brown and Wormold, who cause destruction with their fictional creations, Augusta enriches life, adding meaning to it.

If Augusta is a creator of fiction, then Henry is a consumer of fiction, and he is transformed by it. Henry speculates that "one's life is more formed . . . by books than by human beings," and Aunt Augusta's stories form him as books do. Henry was never interested in romance because his reading as a child was restricted to his father's library,

which “had not contained the right books” (141). Greene confesses in *Ways of Escape* that he made a private joke about the influence of books, naming Augusta’s unsavory lover Mr. Visconti after a favorite book from his own childhood: “The name ‘Visconti’ . . . was adapted from my favorite character in Marjorie Bowen’s *The Viper of Milan*, which I had loved as a boy, and it gave me an innocent amusement when I heard Detective Sparrow describing him as a viper” (258). An early symptom Henry evinces of Aunt Augusta’s weening him from his sedentary life is his wistful desire to become one of her creations:

I thought of Curran and Monsieur Dambreuse and Mr. Visconti—they lived in my imagination as though she had actually created them. . . . She was one of the life-givers. . . . Perhaps if she ever talked about me to another—I could well imagine what a story she could make out of my dahlias and my silly tenderness for Tooley and my stainless past—even I would come to some sort of life, and the character she drew, I felt sure, would be much more vivid than the real I. (159)

After several trips with Augusta, Henry initially longs to escape his aunt’s frenetic lifestyle, but once Henry is back to his home and his unimaginative hobby of raising dahlias, he finds he misses the adventurous life he shared with Augusta and realizes the emptiness of the life he had led. As a child, Henry had been

afraid of burglars and Indian thugs and snakes and fires and Jack the Ripper, when I should have been afraid of thirty years in a bank and a take-over bid and a premature retirement and the *Deuil du Roy Albert*. (163)

The “*Deuil du Roy Albert*” is a type of dahlia Henry raises, symbol of a dull hobby far more dangerous to Henry than his childhood fears.

Henry, after several trips with Aunt Augusta, quarrels with her and she parts from him for many months. Without her he finds life at home during the Christmas season particularly lonely. He has a few acquaintances, such as “Major Charge,” a comically-named retired military man and political extremist who wants to reclaim the British Empire;

the aptly-named Miss Truman, who is an ex-officer in the woman's navy who likes to be called "Peter"; and a former client of Henry's bank, known as "the admiral," who abusively treated Henry "like a sub-lieutenant" when he worked at the bank (102). These odd comic characters increase Henry's sense of loneliness because they are so eccentrically unpleasant.

Karen Rae Moore says that the theme of loneliness is

not so prominent as in earlier works. The characters who mention their loneliness have an alternative and seek it out, thereby circumventing their loneliness. Augusta and Henry pursue their travels. Henry's long-time female friend, Barbara Keene, moves to South Africa with the hope of preventing loneliness. (199)

There are good reasons to reject Moore's reading. First, even the normally irrepressible Aunt Augusta complains of loneliness after her lover Wordsworth has left. Second, Henry agonizes over loneliness; he longs for news of his aunt (and chafes at his predictable routine) as soon as he returns from his trip to France with her. Henry is so desperate for company he considers going to a political meeting with Major Charge, describing it as "a possible relief to my tedium" (165). Henry has a comically unpleasant Christmas dinner at the Abbey Restaurant because he does not want to be alone. His loneliness is what conclusively cures him of his sedentary life of dahlia growing. Henry, as Moore says, may have refuge from loneliness that other Greene characters have not had, but the other novels were never primarily about loneliness. Third, Miss Keene is not quite as Moore describes. There is no reason to believe that Miss Keene has gone to South Africa to escape loneliness; to the contrary, Henry states that Miss Keene is lonely *in* South Africa and suggests that her letters are pleas for him to rescue her by proposing to her. Loneliness is a significant theme of *Travels with My Aunt*, if subordinate to the themes of living life to the fullest and coping with old age and death.

Black Humor

Although the themes of old age and death lend themselves to black humor, there is surprising little in *Travels with My Aunt*. However, there is some black humor present in the novel. The novel opens with Henry describing the difficulty he has filling his time: “I have never married, I have always lived quietly, and, apart from my interest in dahlias, I have no hobby. For those reasons I found myself agreeably excited by my mother’s funeral” (9). Henry’s view of his mother’s funeral as a diversion is an example of black humor. Henry’s statement that he was “agreeably excited” by his mother’s funeral is startling and inappropriate, but the shock of the statement is softened by Henry’s lengthy explanation of how little he has in his life and creates sympathy for him. As an example of black humor, it is mild, but it is useful thematically, by quickly establishing Henry as a man bored with life.

The first story Augusta relates during the novel is about an important funeral of the wife of “a famous man of letters who had not been the most faithful of husbands” (20). The story mixes elements of slapstick with black humor as Augusta, having arrived first at the cremation, accidentally touches a button that sends the coffin into the flames. At that moment in walks a group of people prominent in 1920s London including Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells. Augusta says that none of the grand personages present noticed the absence of the coffin and adds, “The widower certainly didn’t [notice], but then he hadn’t noticed his wife for some years” (21). This is an example of syllepsis that plays on two senses of the word “notice.” The widower literally didn’t notice her absence at her own funeral, but as an unfaithful husband, he had not noticed his wife romantically for some time either. The ceremony was secular, and the eulogy was given by Dr. Havelock Ellis—ironically, a well-known sex psychologist (Hoskins 252). Augusta says the eulogy

was “about the dignity of a funeral service conducted without illusions or rhetoric. He could truthfully have said without a corpse too” (21). The black humor thematically introduces the idea of death. Henry, who doubts the truth of the story, suggests for the first time that Augusta is a creator of fiction.

Black humor is most thematically significant in *Travels with My Aunt* in Augusta’s reason for wanting to live the life of a smuggler in so vile a dictatorship as General Stroessner’s Paraguay. Henry is on the verge of proposing to Miss Keene and returning to England, but Augusta predicts a life of boredom will result.

Do you know what you’ll think about when you can’t sleep in your double bed? . . . 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. . . . [If you live in Paraguay] you may be shot in the street by a policeman because you haven’t understood Guarani, or a man may knife you in a *cantina* because you can’t speak Spanish and he thinks you are acting in a superior way. . . . Perhaps it [our airplane] will crash with you over Argentina. . . . 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 seem to you a kind of victory. “I was too sharp for it that time,” you will say, when night comes, and afterward you will sleep well. (225)

The tension here is created between the images of the agreeable life with Miss Keene that Henry desires and the images of danger evoked by Augusta. The passage is an example of grotesque black humor because the comedy is relatively slight and dominated by death.

Greene uses black humor to bring levity to the thematic discussions of death and old age, somber subjects that could spoil the comic tone of the novel if not handled properly. However, too much black humor, with its existential implications and use of horror, could be just as somber as aging and death themselves. Greene therefore does not use black humor in the novel, other than in the examples given above, because it would

have damaged the light comic tone of *Travels with My Aunt*. While the tone of *The Comedians*, with its existential view of life, was compatible with black humor, the sunny view of life presented in *Travels with My Aunt* would have been smothered by too much of it.

The Absurd

As in the case of black humor, Greene seems to have decreased his use of the absurd in this novel. Unlike *Our Man in Havana*, *A Burnt-Out Case*, and *The Comedians*, the theme of the novel has nothing to do with existential philosophy, a fact that accounts for Greene's decision to employ these techniques sparingly. After all, black humor and literature of the absurd tend to create a comedy of despair, and *Travels with My Aunt* is a comedy of hope.

Two incidents occur in the novel that could be considered absurd comedy. The first is the story of Henry's Uncle Jo, who can no longer travel due to a stroke but who believes that he will prolong his life through travel. To solve this problem, Uncle Jo buys a house with fifty-two rooms and plans to live one week per year in each room, "travelling" from room to room with a suitcase and a nurse he calls his "travelling companion." After fifteen weeks of living this way, Jo feels that he has already lived several years. The ludicrous story finally ends when Jo suffers a second stroke. He can no longer walk and his doctors tell him not to move, but Jo gets out of bed and tries to crawl to the fifty-second and final room of the house. He dies in the hallway—Augusta prefers to say, "He died on his travels" (62)—saying it was all worth it because the crawl did extend his life; Jo says it "seemed like a lifetime" (62). "Seemed like a lifetime" is typical hyperbole that people use to describe an unpleasant experience, but from Jo Pulling the phrase gets a different

meaning because he believes traveling from room to room gives him the sensation of living longer. Thus Jo ludicrously enjoys his painful crawl because it enables him to continue his travels.

The other incident of absurdity comes when the CIA agent, O'Toole, confesses to Henry that he has an unusual hobby:

“I’ve never told anyone about this, Henry,” he said. “It would seem kind of funny to most people, I guess. The fact is I count while I’m pissing and then I write down how long I’ve taken and what time it is. Do you realize we spend more than one whole day a year pissing?” (198)

The scene goes on to describe the charts and data O'Toole has collected over the years. The absurdity of O'Toole's habit serves as a satire on the CIA. When Henry asks O'Toole what conclusions he has drawn, O'Toole, a CIA researcher, says “That’s not my job”—a mild commentary of the bureaucratic nature of espionage in which thinking and drawing conclusions are not in an agent's job description.

Absurdity is more prevalent in *Travels with My Aunt* than black humor. Although both black humor and the absurd have their roots in existentialism, absurdity does not inherently have the horrific side that black humor must have. Thus it is easier for Greene to use absurdity without damaging the light comic tone of the novel.

Farce

Travels with My Aunt makes considerable use of farce in the many vignettes that occur to Henry or are narrated by Augusta. Perhaps the best example of farce in the novel is the story of Visconti's escape from Rome before the imminent Allied capture of the city during World War II. Visconti, disguised as a monsignor in case the Allies capture him, is stopped by a prostitute in the company of a German soldier. The prostitute, fearing she

will die in the imminent invasion, wants to make confession. Visconti is in a hurry to flee the city, but he does not dare risk ruining his disguise. However, as the woman talks, Visconti develops a lecherous interest in her confession.

“How many times, my child?” That was a phrase he remembered very well from his adolescence.

“How can you ask that, Father? I’ve been at it all the time ever since the occupation. After all they were our Allies, Father.”

“Yes, yes, my child.” I can just see him enjoying the chance he had of learning a thing or two, even though his life was in danger. Mr. Visconti was a very lecherous man. He said, “Always the same thing, my child?”

She regarded him with astonishment. “Of course not, Father. Who on earth do you think I am?” (120)

Visconti asks the prostitute lascivious questions, but she does not become suspicious. He does get a reaction from her by asking if she always performs the same sexual act—an insult to her professional pride. The scene continues in this vein until the adulterous wife of a German general demands to make confession as well. The wife wants absolution desperately enough to delay her flight from the Allies and seek out a priest, but she is then insincere and impatient, wishing only to receive absolution. After going through a farcical and incomplete confession, she threatens, “Unless you give me absolution at once, I shall have you arrested. For sabotage” (122), an ironic threat for an ostensibly penitent woman to make. Instead, Mr. Visconti persuades her to give him a space in her car so she may receive absolution later, though she refuses to abandon her dog, Wolf, in order to make space for Visconti.

“I cannot leave Wolf behind. He is all I have in the world to love.”

“I would have assumed that with three adulteries—and a husband. . . .”

“They mean nothing to me.”

“Then I suggest,” Mr. Visconti said, “that we leave the general behind.” And so it came about. (122)

The farce continues after they abandon the General, when it turns out that Wolf cares more for him than for the General's wife and leaps out of the car. "Wolf jumped right in the path of the following tank. It flattened him. Mr. Visconti looking back thought that he resembled one of those biscuits they make for children in the shape of animals." Augusta concludes, "So Mr. Visconti was rid of both dog and general and was able to ride in reasonable comfort to Florence" (123).

Karen Rae Moore comments on this scene, stating "The passage underplays the emotion of the scene, which serves to intensify the reader's reaction. The subtlety of the scene is epitomized in the way it ends. Augusta simply and unemotionally states that Visconti had a fairly pleasant ride out of the danger zone into the safety of Florence" (217). The scene could also be characterized as slapstick for it uses physical humor, such as the dog's being squashed by a tank. (Or the dog's death could be considered absurd black humor because the dog is squashed into a shape resembling an animal cracker—a ridiculous description lacking verisimilitude. The lack of verisimilitude distances the dog's death from the reader, emphasizing the comic over the horror.)

Another brief example of slapstick occurs when Henry and O'Toole, the CIA agent, arrive to talk to Augusta about Mr. Visconti. They believe Visconti is in prison, but he has actually been released and joined her. O'Toole says,

"I know how anxious you must be about Mr. Visconti."
 "I'm not in the least anxious about Mr. Visconti."
 "I thought perhaps . . . that not knowing where he was . . .
 all this long delay. . . ."
 "I know perfectly well where he is," my aunt said. "He's in
 the lavatory." The flush of water could not have come more exactly
 on cue. (235)

This sort of slapstick appears more frequently in television situation-comedies than in literature, but it does amusingly punctuate the conversation.

Misunderstanding or speaking at cross purposes is a comic technique often used in farce. Often the misunderstanding is based on some form of pun, as in the following exchange between Henry and Wordsworth:

“What on earth did you mean, Wordsworth, by sending me away with cannabis in my mother’s urn?”
 His mind was elsewhere, brooding perhaps on the travel allowance.
 “No cannibals,” he said, “in England. No cannibals in Sierra Leone.”
 “I’m talking about the ashes.”
 “Cannibals in Liberia, not Sierra Leone.”
 “I didn’t say cannibals.”
 “Leopard Society in Sierra Leone. They kill plenty people, but not chop them.”
 “Pot, Wordsworth, pot.” (78)

The pun here is an example of paranomasia, the use of words phonetically similar—here “cannabis” and “cannibals”—but different in meaning. The exchange also satirizes ignorant Europeans who think there is cannibalism in Sierra Leone (where Greene lived for a long time, including much of World War II) and the violent political situation in Sierra Leone in the late 1960s. There is also a touch of absurd black humor in the notion that Wordsworth mixes marijuana in Mrs. Pulling’s remains.

There are many other farcical scenes in *Travels with My Aunt*, including the sex farce discussed in Chapter One, in which Augusta’s lover, Monsieur Dambreuse, kept her, another mistress, and a wife all secret from each other while living within a very short distance of each other.

Farce is more common in *Travels with My Aunt* than it is in the other four novels. *Our Man in Havana* uses farce, but because it is also a spy novel, it uses fewer farce scenes. *A Burnt-Out Case* has the climatic farce scene ending in Querry’s death, but this scene is not purely farcical, and the novel otherwise makes little use of farce. In *The Comedians*, the most striking use of farce combines it with black humor by substituting a

corpse for a lover; the tone of *The Comedians* is too dark to use pure farce often. In *Travels with My Aunt*, however, farce fits perfectly with the theme and tone. It serves both as entertainment, an end in itself in the novel, and as reinforcement of the idea of living a wild and exciting life, one of the novel's main precepts.

Satire

Satire, though a common technique of Greene, does not appear often in *Travels with My Aunt*. As with black humor and the absurd, there is an edge to satire that, if used too frequently, would upset the exuberantly joyful tone of the novel. The best examples of satire from *Travels with My Aunt* are thus mild. The teenage girl, Tooley, tells Henry that she is worried that her boyfriend Julian will think she is trying to trap him if she turns out to be pregnant.

I guess Julian won't believe all that. He'll feel trapped. He often feels trapped. He was trapped first by his family, he says, and then he was nearly trapped by Oxford—so he went away without a degree. Then he very nearly got trapped by the Trotskyists, but he realized just in time. He sees traps a terribly long way ahead. But, Henry, I don't mean to be a trap. (116)

The satire is executed using structural irony, in which a naive narrator, here the girl Tooley, recounts a story. Tooley exhibits naivete that leads her “to persist in putting an interpretation on affairs which the knowing reader—who penetrates to, and shares, the implicit point of view of the authorial presence behind the naive persona—just as persistently is called on to alter and correct” (Abrams 90). Julian's apparent inability to complete anything is satirized simultaneously with Tooley's innocence.

Comic Figures of Speech

Greene often uses figures of speech in his comic technique in *Travels with My Aunt*. The most common technique in this novel is cacemphaton. Henry says of his father, who liked to take frequent naps, "He was a very sleepy man." His aunt replies, "He needed bedrooms for more than sleep" (11). Later Henry, commenting on Wordsworth's bedside decorations, says, "I wouldn't like to wake up to them." Augusta lets Henry know they are lovers by replying, "He seldom does," implying that Wordsworth normally sleeps with her. In Brighton, Augusta's friend Hatty reads Augusta's tea leaves. In Augusta's future she sees,

"a knife—or it might be a syringe."
"Or it could be something else, Hatty—you know what I
mean?" (41)

Augusta's double entendre on the phallic shape of the objects Hatty describes turns out to be the correct prediction—Mr. Visconti returns to Augusta's life. The many double-entendres fit well into the mood of sexual adventuring created by Aunt Augusta and her stories, many of which are sex farces (as discussed above).

Greene, always a fan of the pun, uses several types of pun in the novel. Already mentioned above is the example of paranomasia that relies on the phonetic similarity of "cannabis" and "cannibal." In another instance, Henry describes how his father would tease his mother playing *Sortes Virgillianae*, the "technique of looking at random into the works of the poet Virgil to divine the future or otherwise obtain wisdom" (Hoskins 245). There is an elaborate setup for a syllepsis in the passage that follows.

I sometimes suspected my father had dog-eared various pages so that he could hit on a suitable quotation to tease and astound my mother. Once, when he was suffering severely from constipation,

he opened *Rob Roy* apparently at random and read out, "Mr. Owen entered. So regular were the motions and habits of this worthy man. . . ." (142)

The phrase "so regular were the motions" takes on new meaning in the context of the earlier mention of constipation.

Comic figures of speech are more common in *Travels with My Aunt* than in the other novels. The episodic nature of the novel permits Greene to digress merely for the sake of using comic figures of speech without distracting from the momentum of the novel. Similarly the purely comic tone of the novel permits Greene to inject comedy; the tone of *A Burnt-Out Case*, for example, would have been destroyed by frequent use of figures of speech, so they appear less frequently in that novel.

Conclusion

Travels with My Aunt is a different sort of Greene novel; in none of his other novels is he so purely comic. Nevertheless, *Travels with My Aunt* does retain elements that Greene typically has in his novels. For example, he creates suspense in the police searches for Aunt Augusta and in the sinister aspects of Paraguay. But rather than using them to create a melodrama parallel to the comedy, as he does in *Our Man in Havana*, Greene instead uses these melodramatic elements to reinforce the idea that danger is fun, enhancing the value of one's life.

Greene's other obsessions are also used somewhat differently here. For example, there is the usual sex and infidelity—every other novel he wrote from *The End of the Affair* (1951) through *The Human Factor* (1978) has a character involved in adultery with tragic overtones. In *Travels with My Aunt*, this tragic presentation of adultery is abandoned, and Augusta's affairs are comic intrigues. Catholicism is mentioned only briefly in a few one-

line jokes. There is none of the existential angst of the previous three novels, no sense that life is tragically absurd, or that God (who is hardly mentioned in the novel) is a practical joker.

So in *Travels with My Aunt*, Greene seems to have abandoned his early themes. There are myriad scenes lacking profound underlying meaning, which appear simply for comic entertainment. But taken as a whole the comic scenes become thematic, exhorting one to face aging and death by ignoring them, exhorting one to celebrate life by seeing the world, by having new experiences, and by living with gusto.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

- Greene, Graham. *A Burnt-Out Case*. New York: Penguin, 1977. London: Heinemann, 1960.
- _____. *The Comedians*. New York: Penguin, 1976. London: The Bodley Head, 1966.
- _____. *Collected Essays*. New York: Penguin, 1988. London: The Bodley Head, 1969.
- _____. *Our Man in Havana*. New York: Penguin, 1971. London: Heinemann, 1958.
- _____. *Travels with My Aunt*. New York: Penguin, 1977. London: The Bodley Head, 1969.
- _____. *Ways of Escape*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1982. London: The Bodley Head, 1980.

Works Cited

Secondary Sources

- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Fourth ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981.
- Bullitt, John M. *Jonathan Swift and the Anatomy of Satire*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1953.
- Corbett, Edward P.J. *Classic Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. Third ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1990.
- Esslin, Martin. "The Absurdity of the Absurd." *The Play and the Reader*. Eds. Stanley Johnson, Judah Bierman, and James Hart. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966.
- Friedman, Alan Warren. "The Status of Graham Greene Studies." *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas at Austin* 20.4 (1991): 37-66.
- Hawtree, Christopher, ed. *Yours Etc. : Letters to the Press 1945 - 1989*. London: Penguin, 1989.
- Heller, Terry. "Notes on Technique in Black Humor." *Black Humor: Critical Essays*. Ed. Alan R. Pratt. New York: Garland Publishing, 1993. 197-214.
- Highe, Gilbert. *The Anatomy of Satire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1962.

- Hoskins, Robert. *Graham Greene: A Character Index and Guide*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1991.
- Janoff, Bruce. "Black Humor, Existentialism, and Absurdity: A Generic Confusion." *Black Humor: Critical Essays*. Ed. Alan R. Pratt. New York: Garland Publishing, 1993. 27-40.
- Lanham, Richard A. *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968.
- Lattinville, Ronald Edward. *Comic Characterization in the Fiction of Graham Greene*. University of Southern California, 1974.
- Lodge, David. "Graham Greene." *The Novelist at the Crossroads and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism*. Ed. David Lodge. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1971. 87-118.
- Moore, Karen Rae. *The Comic Technique in Graham Greene*. Georgia State University, 1976.
- O'Prey, Paul. *A Reader's Guide to Graham Greene*. New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1988.
- Oreglia, Giacomo. *The Commedia dell'Arte*. Trans. Lovett F. Edwards. New York: Hill and Wang, 1968.
- Patt, Alan R. *Black Humor: Critical Essays*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1993.
- Rao, V.V.B. Rama. *Graham Greene's Comic Vision*. New Delhi: Reliance Publishing House, 1990. 218.
- Sherry, Norman. *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume I: 1904 - 1939*. 2 (projected) vols. New York: Penguin, 1989.
- Spurling, John. *Graham Greene. Contemporary Writers Series*. Ed. Malcolm Bradbury. New York and London: Methuen, 1983.
- Sternlicht, Sanford. "The Sad Comedies: Graham Greene's Later Novels." *Florida Quarterly* 1.4 (1968): 65-77.
- Winston, Mathew. "Black Humor: To Weep with Laughing." *Black Humor: Critical Essays*. Ed. Alan R. Pratt. New York: Garland Publishing, 1993. 249-268.
- Winston, Mathew. "Humour Noir and Black Humor." *Veins of Humor*. Harvard English Studies. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972.
- Worcester, David. *The Art of Satire*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1940.

Works Consulted

- Adamson, Judith. *Graham Greene and Cinema*. Norman, OK: Pilgrim, 1984.
- Adler, Jacob H. "Graham Greene's Plays: Technique Versus Value." *Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations*. Ed. Robert O. Evans. Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1963.
- Allot, Kenneth and Miriam Francis Allot. *The Art of Graham Greene*. Second ed. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963.
- Bergson, Henri. "Laughter." *Comedy*. Ed. Wylie Sypher. Trans. Presses Universitaires de France. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956. 61-255.
- Brennan, Neil, and Alan R. Redway, ed. *A Bibliography of Graham Greene*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Cassis, A. F. *Graham Greene: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1981.
- Cassis, A.F. "Graham Greene: View-Points and Self-Revelation." *The Dublin Magazine* 10.3 (1973): 69-73.
- Cheney, Lynn. "Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and Graham Greene's *It's a Battlefield*: A Study in Structural Meaning." *Modern Fiction Studies* 16.2 (1970): 117-131.
- Consolo, Dominick P. "Graham Greene: Style and Sylistics in Five Novels." *Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations*. Ed. Robert O. Evans. Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1963.
- Couto, Maria. *Graham Greene: On the Frontier*. New York: St. Martin's, 1988.
- Creese, Richard. "Abstracting and Recording Narration in *The Good Soldier* and *The End of the Affair*." *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 16.1 (1986): 1-14.
- DeVitis, A. A. *Graham Greene, Revised Edition*. *Twayne's English Authors Series*. Ed. Kinley E. Roby. 1986 ed. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986.
- Erdinast-Vulcan, Daphna. *Graham Greene's Childless Fathers*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.
- Esar, Evan. *The Comic Encyclopedia*. Garden City: Double and Company, 1978.
- Esar, Evan. *The Humor of Humor*. New York: Bramhall House, 1952.

- Feibleman, James. *In Praise of Comedy*. Third ed. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962.
- Gaston, George M. *The Pursuit of Salvation: A Critical Guide to the Novels of Graham Greene*. Troy, NY: Whitson, 1984.
- Grandsen, K.W. "Graham Greene's Rhetoric." *Essays in Criticism* 31 (1981): 41-60.
- Haber, Herbert R. "The Two Worlds of Graham Greene." *Modern Fiction Studies* 3.3 (1957): 256-268.
- Hoggart, Richard. "The Force of Caricature: Aspects of the Art of Graham Greene, with particular reference to *The Power and the Glory*." *Essays in Criticism* 3.4 (1953): 447-462.
- Holman, C. Hugh. *A Handbook to Literature*. Third edition ed. New York: Odyssey Press, 1972.
- Johnson, Stanley, Judah Bierman, and James Hart, ed. *The Play and the Reader*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966.
- Kearns, Edward A. "Greene's Fictional Treatment: An Experiment in Storytelling." *Film and Literature: A Comparative Approach to Adaptation*. Ed. Wendell and Michael Schoenecke Aycock. *Studies in Comparative Literature*. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1988.
- Kelly, Richard. *Graham Greene: A Study of the Short Fiction*. *Twayne's Studies in Short Fiction*. Ed. Gordon Weaver. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992.
- Kunkel, Francis. *The Labyrinthine Ways of Graham Greene*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959.
- Lewis, R.W.B. "The Trilogy of Graham Greene." *Modern Fiction Studies* 3.3 (1957): 195-215.
- Lodge, David. "The Novel Now: Theories and Practices." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 21.2 and 3 (1988): 124-38.
- Meredith, George. "An Essay on Comedy." *Comedy*. Ed. Wylie Sypher. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956. 3-57.
- Meyers, Jeffrey, ed. *Graham Greene: A Revaluation: New Essays*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- Mills, John. "The Dog in the Perambulator." *West Coast Review* 23.2 (1988): 77-91.
- Miriam, Allot. "The Moral Situation in the Quiet American." *Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations*. Ed. Robert O. Evans. Louisville, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1963.
- Nehring, Neil. "Revolt into Style: Graham Greene Meets the Sex Pistols." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 106.2 (1991): 222-37.

- Olsen, Lance. *Circus of the Mind in Motion*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990.
- Olshanskaya, Natalya L. "Rythmic Patterns of the Narrative in Modern English Prose." *Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 34.2 (1986): 137-144.
- Patten, Karl. "The Structure of The Power and the Glory." *Modern Fiction Studies* 3.3 (1957): 216-224.
- Potts, L.J. *Comedy*. *Hutchinson's University Library*. Cheltenham: Cheltenham Press Ltd., 1948. 41: 174.
- Rai, Gangeshwar. *Graham Greene: An Existential Approach*. New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1983.
- Salvatore, Anne T. *Greene and Kierkegaard: The Discourse of Belief*. Tuscaloosa & London: University of Alabama Press, 1988.
- Scott, Carolyn D. "The Witch at the Corner: Notes on Graham Greene's Mythology." *Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations*. Ed. Robert O. Evans. Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1963.
- Silverstein, Marc. "After the Fall: The World of Graham Greene's Thrillers." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 22.1 (1988): 25-44.
- Slate, Audrey Nelson. *Technique and Form in the Novels of Graham Greene*. University of Wisconsin, 1960.
- Smith, Grahame. *The Achievement of Graham Greene*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1986.
- Spier, Ursula. "Melodrama in Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 3.3 (1957): 235-240.
- Stratford, Philip. "Graham Greene Master of Melodrama." *The Tamarack Review* 19 (1969): 67-86.
- Thomas, Brian. *An Underground Fate: The Idiom of Romance in the Later Novels of Graham Greene*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988.
- Turnell, Martin. *Graham Greene: A Critical Essay*. *Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective*. Ed. Roderick Jellema. William B. Erdmanns, 1967.
- Walker, Ronald G. "Seriation as Stylistic Norm in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*." *Language and Style* 6.3 (1973): 161-175.
- Walker, Ronald G. "World without End: An Approach to Narrative Structure in Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 26.2 (1984): 218-41.

- Webster, Harvey C. "The World of Graham Greene." *Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations*. Ed. Robert O. Evans. Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1963.
- Wobbe, R. A. *Graham Greene: A Bibliography and Guide to Research*. New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1979.
- Wolfe, Peter, ed. *Essays in Graham Greene Studies*. Greenwood, FL: Penkeville, 1987.