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MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 53, Number 3, Fall 2007, pp. 405-433
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2007.0069>



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GRAHAM GREENE'S AND CAROL REED'S *THE THIRD MAN*: WHEN A COWBOY COMES TO VIENNA

Michael Sinowitz

Introduction

The Third Man appears after the conclusion of World War II and explores the complex world of postwar Vienna, a city fragmented and controlled by the Allied forces. Graham Greene himself had worked as something of an agent for the British during the war, and so he brought a certain amount of first hand knowledge to the project; in addition, Greene did on-site research in Vienna. Eventually, Carol Reed's film was made from a treatment written by Greene in 1948. While Greene knew he was writing a film, he first constructed *The Third Man* in the form of a noir novella; as Greene notes in the preface, his novella "was never meant to read, but only to be seen" (7). There are several important alterations that occurred through the process of transforming the novella, and as Greene admits in the preface to the published version of the novella, most are for the better. Greene explains his process by saying that in order to construct the screenplay and present fully realized characters as well as "mood" and "atmosphere," "[o]ne must have more material than one needs to draw on" (8). Following Greene's own methodology, I will be occasionally going back to Greene's novella as a way of contextualizing

certain scenes from the film, and thus viewing the film almost as an excerpt of a more extensive narrative.

Before focusing on the details of the film itself, let us consider the context of the project's evolution. By the end of the World War II, many of the most prominent writers of the modernist period had died or, at the least, seen the height of their careers pass. In England at this time, it is clear that not only had modernism—or the various modernisms that have since been grouped together under this rubric—moved toward a close, but also an often active distrust of the techniques and methods associated with it began to surface in the work of the writers that dominated this period. As Malcolm Bradbury declares in a chapter on this period, "Modernism was over, even tainted". Bradbury goes on to note that modernism was "already being historicized, defined, monumentalized, given its name and structure" (268). In other words, what might be more precisely called modernisms was being shaped into something more unified and monolithic in retrospect, something authors of the next period could identify and respond against. Attitudes toward the period aside, it is clear from Bradbury's characterization of the critical response to modernism that it was no longer possible to continue writing in this vein and be considered a writer of truly new fiction.

Against this backdrop, it is also important to realize that not only was modernism becoming out-of-date, if you will, but because of the circumstances of World War II—the Holocaust, the birth of the nuclear age, the vast destruction wrought throughout Europe, to be brief—the ideological implications of its methods and techniques raised very serious questions following the War for those viewing modernism in this newly homogenized version. Now, the idea of using radically abstract or experimental aesthetic forms to shape personal and public experience offered very serious ramifications. Frank Kermode, looking back at the work of W. B. Yeats, whose "Second Coming" can be seen as an exemplar of Modernist fears of chaos and its frequent desire to regain control over existence through form, makes a point "more often noticed than explained: totalitarian theories of form matched or reflected . . . totalitarian politics" (108). Likewise, this too is the period in which Theodor Adorno famously remarked "No Poetry after Auschwitz," a phrase Bradbury interprets—I believe rightly—to suggest he was "conscious that the aestheticization of life might breed the evil in history" (269). It is not going too far to say that some modernist literary ideas could easily be associated with political views of the right. After all, Pound had infamously supported Mussolini's regime, Yeats—according to Kermode—dabbled with authoritarian politics (106), Wyndham Lewis wrote his unfortunate book about Hitler, and Lawrence wrote a novel, *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), that, according

to William York Tindall, fascist endorser Rolf Gardiner called "a guide for British Fascists" (180). While most literary modernists were not necessarily fascist, and in fact most fascist regimes were hostile to modernist works, as evidenced by the Nazi's banning and burning of *Ulysses*, it was still possible for these kinds of associations to be made. Thus, in a world in which the devastating realization of these political beliefs had left irreparable damage on human history, one did not lightly return to literary styles that could be so disturbingly connected to such views.

In this postwar world, then, what was the author's mission? Turning away from modernism, American and European writers clearly began engaging the ideas of existentialism. In America, Saul Bellow crafts *Seize the Day* (1956), while Iris Murdoch ventures to Paris to meet Jean-Paul Sartre and eventually writes a study of his work before creating her own literary exploration of existentialism, *Under the Net* (1954), shortly thereafter. In describing the attractiveness of existentialism to writers around the world, Bradbury notes that "its writings bore a similar message: sombre, absurdist, a vision of the emptiness and cruelty of existence, the loss of significance in experience, the inner vacancy of the self" (270). Yet, according to Bradbury, the major champion of this philosophy, and the most influential in England, Sartre, felt that "the writer's task now was . . . nothing less than the recovery of the word itself, the recreation of meaning" (271). Of course, modernism, too, attempted to recover meaning in the world, but it sought to do so through the imposition of an aesthetic vision and systems like myth that stand outside history, such as Eliot's famous call to use myth to control "contemporary history" in "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" (103). Existentialism "expressed a rejection of aesthetic obscurity, a reaction against the view that art was now doomed to silence, a revolt into humanism" (Bradbury 271). While existentialism did not necessarily go hand in hand with realism, the exploration of existentialist themes in both high art—such as those texts produced by Bellow and Murdoch—and in more popular genres—such as film noir—seemed to embrace a more realistic sensibility than some of their more immediate predecessors. Yet, how easily can one return to realism after all that has come before? Can focusing passionately on representing the world as it is return meaning to that world? Amid these paradoxes and conundrums, Graham Greene and Carol Reed created *The Third Man*.

Perhaps Bradbury is correct in suggesting that literary scholars have often too quickly sought to divide all literature of this century into two monolithic categories of modernism and postmodernism, for this division ignores "a sustained, though ever-changing, tradition of realism" (272). Few, if any, have seen Greene as the epitome of the

modernist writer in terms of his aesthetics, nor have critics grouped him among the experimental writers who have come to be associated with postmodernism. His long life and career make him historically difficult to label, and because his writing has tended away from the overt experimentation of modernists like Joyce or postmodernists like Salman Rushdie, most consider Greene outside of these movements. His novels rarely venture away from a fairly traditional aesthetic more akin to realism or naturalism than high modernism.

In the 1930s, however, Greene did experiment with stream of consciousness in *England Made Me* (1935). The experimentation, however, is limited to certain brief passages that do not dominate the aesthetic of this novel and that apparently failed to hold a lasting interest for Greene. In fact, rather than pursuing stylistic experimentation akin to Joyce or Faulkner, Greene continued to write works he referred to as entertainments, as well as, in the case of *The Third Man*, writing for the screen. Unlike the modernist writing that the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset suggested was no longer written for a larger, mass audience, but instead solely for the elite, Greene overtly shaped texts for mass consumption. In his study of English modernism, *A Sinking Island*, Hugh Kenner notes that by "1870 something had changed"; there was now a clear divide between what Kenner refers to as "major novelists" and those writers who produced "best seller after best seller" (12). As the various writers we now associate with modernism emerged over the first half of the twentieth century, the divide increased between writers who, in Kenner's phrase, produced for "readers [who] needed something new to read, every week, every day even" and those writers who produced "Literature" (11). While a writer like Joseph Conrad in particular employed the skeletal remains of popular genres such as romances and adventure tales in his highly challenging and stylistically experimental works, Greene seems to have embraced those popular genres in a much more straightforward way. Simply put, Greene's thrillers are much more recognizable as such than is something like Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907).

Nonetheless, Greene could not help be influenced by modernism, and the concerns of modernism outside of style and experimentation—moral decline, searches for meaning, a sense of malaise—clearly permeate Greene's work. In fact, Greene's recurring concern with Catholicism's—and perhaps in a larger sense, faith's—place in the modern world brings us fully back to a continued exploration of the challenges of finding meaning in contemporary experience. Such early novels as *England Made Me* and *Stamboul Train* (1932) record the confusion produced by a world that is growing less and less provincial, in which characters strive to adhere to personal moral codes

in worlds that are becoming more inhospitable to such codes. Such novels as *The Power and the Glory* (1940) and *The End of the Affair* (1951) clearly illustrate this recurring interest in issues of faith.

Greene then remains a fascinating figure, whose work moves between various divisions in art, interrogates those divisions, and raises questions about our desires to impose these distinctions. In my discussion of Greene and Reed's film, I will explore how the film becomes engaged with both high art—in the form of modernism—and low or popular art—in the form of the Western.¹ As the film incorporates and alludes to both the conventions of the Western and high modernism, the film becomes a commentary on both and reveals Greene's difficulties in fully stepping away from the techniques and themes of modernism as well as clearly suggesting his desire—and perhaps the need—to do so. In addition, the film simultaneously offers a critique of both modernism and the Western through the juxtaposition of their seemingly dissimilar aesthetic priorities. While, to a certain extent, my initial claims concerning this film are generic and categorizing, my larger concerns lie in what the film may be saying about modernism and the Western—whether it embraces, critiques, or rejects both the aesthetics associated with each as well as the larger ideological concerns that can be linked to these aesthetics. Ultimately, it seems that we may come to see this work as demonstrating both the challenges of finding a literary home for Greene—besides his own, the often labeled Greeneland—as well as anticipating more fully postmodern interests in the film and novella's self-conscious interest in the constructing and imposing of plots. While I would not call Greene's texts "historiographic metafiction," Greene's works do, as Linda Hutcheon claims of those more clearly postmodern texts, "self-consciously [remind] us that, while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning" (*Poetics* 97). To explore these questions, I will be focusing both on the text of the film as well as the origins of the project for Greene.

Modernism and the Western

Before proceeding with some readings of particular moments in the film that speak to questions of the text's engagement with modernism, the Western, and its possible anticipation of postmodernism, I would like to offer some general comments about the relationship between modernism and the Western. To begin this comparison, we might consider the points of origin for both. In *West of Everything*, Jane Tompkins suggests that "the Western owes its popularity and

essential character to the dominance of a women's culture in the nineteenth century and to women's invasion of the public sphere between 1880 and 1920" (44). The inception of the Western as a genre, then, is historically close to that of modernism, since the pioneers of modernism like Conrad and Ford Maddox Ford are writing predominantly during the early half of this period, while the close of this period encompasses World War I, likely the single most crucial world historical event involved in creating (or reinforcing) a modernist world view.²

Although, in Bradbury's phrase, modernism often strived for a "poetic opening out of the inwardness of narrative," the resulting literature often corresponded with an attempt to retreat from the chaos of the contemporary world (143–44). In his study of Wyndham Lewis entitled *Fables of Aggression*, Fredric Jameson has observed this ironic reversal of intent in modernism: "The most influential formal impulses of canonical Modernism have been strategies of inwardness, which set out to reappropriate an alienated universe by transforming it into personal styles and languages: such wills to style have seemed in retrospect to reconfirm the very privatization and fragmentation of social life against which they protest" (2). To a certain degree, the Western also can be seen as a response and retreat from various elements of the contemporary world (not least of which being the women's movement mentioned previously). The construction of the West, then, resembles modernist "strategies of inwardness," as a place dominated by the individual away from the alienating society. According to Tompkins, "This West functions as a symbol of freedom, and of the opportunity for conquest. It seems to offer escape from the conditions of life in modern industrial society: from a mechanized existence, economic dead ends, social entanglements, unhappy personal relations, political injustice" (4). Essentially, the forces that make the West, as a somewhat imaginary construct, so attractive, mirror those that create the "fragmentation of social life" Jameson observes.

Both modernism and the Western intimate a desire to (re)gain control. In modernism, this desire manifests itself in terms of what Jameson calls "the will to style," imposing an individualized shape on experience. The Western version is, in Lee Clark Mitchell's phrase, "the romanticized image of rugged individualism" (25). Tompkins suggests that the Western acts as a sort of fantasy in which the individual—almost inevitably male—reasserts autonomy, corresponding with the modernist artist's attempts to order his or her world through the aesthetics of literary creation:

Most historians explain the fact that Westerns take place in the West as the result of the culture's desire to escape

the problems of civilization. . . . My answer to the question of why the Western takes place in the West is that the West was a place where technology was primitive, physical conditions harsh, the social infrastructure nonexistent, and the power and presence of women proportionally reduced. The Western doesn't have anything to do with the West as such. It isn't about the encounter between civilization and the frontier. It is about men's fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the Western tirelessly reinvents. (44–45)

It is interesting to note here that Tompkins emphasizes the fact that, in the Western, "losing . . . mastery" would correspond to a loss of "identity." The development of individual style—or the anxiety about achieving it (having one's vision)—serves to parallel this anxiety in modernism. Yet, in the landscape most common to the Western, artistic creation and/or "mastery" may be achieved: "The desert offers itself as the white sheet on which to trace a figure. It is a tabula rasa on which man can write, as if for the first time, the story he wants to live" (Tompkins 74). In both the Western and modernism, we can also see a link to the fascination with primitivism, demonstrated by artists like Lawrence, Gauguin, Picasso, and perhaps even Hemingway, to a time where humanity seemed in greater control of its world or was at least—seemingly—closer to it in a fundamental sense.

While style or vision are the most obvious methods by which modernist writers attempt to assert power or reshape experience, modernists also frequently sought a retreat into myth as a means of combating, in Eliot's famous phrase from his review of Joyce's novel, *Ulysses*, Order, and Myth, "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (103). To a certain extent, the Western also relies on the formations of myth. Mitchell describes how "this negligible history [that of the West] was seized on by writers, who transmuted facts, figures, and movements beyond recognition, projecting mythic possibilities out of prosaic events" (5). This transmutation, however, had serious consequences. Consider, for instance, Richard Slotkin's elucidation of myth from *Gunfighter Nation* explaining the process to which Mitchell alludes:

Myths are stories drawn from a society's history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society's ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness—with all the complexities and contradictions that consciousness may contain. Over time, through frequent retellings and deployments as a source of interpretive metaphors, the original mythic story is increasingly con-

ventionalized and abstracted until it is reduced to a deeply encoded and resonant set of symbols, "icons," "keywords," or historical clichés. In this form, myth becomes a basic constituent of linguistic meaning and of the processes of both personal and social "remembering." Each of these mythic icons is in effect a poetic construction of tremendous economy and compression and a mnemonic device capable of evoking a complex system of historical associations by a single image or phrase. . . . (5–6)

As Slotkin goes on to suggest, one can no longer find a kind of historical grounding in the mythic overlay of events, and it creates a façade in which what it suggests becomes inarguable and seemingly natural: "Myth expresses ideology in a narrative, rather than a discursive or argumentative, structure. Its language is metaphorical and suggestive rather than logical and analytical. . . . Although myths are the product of human thought and labor, their identification with venerable tradition makes them appear to be products of 'nature' rather than history—expressions of a trans-historical consciousness or of some form of 'natural law'" (6). Consistently, the Western becomes a place on which we have come to forge a mythical understanding of history. In this way, myths of the West have replaced our understanding of the West, and the Western, through its mythmaking, has come to represent the history of this period for many people, who have, as Slotkin suggests, naturalized these myths. Greene and Reed seem to remind us of this when, after Major Calloway notes that he had begun one of Holly Martins's Westerns, he tells Martins that he was unaware that snake charmers existed in Texas (110). Myths have constructed our understanding of the Western hero, a frontier warrior fighting for civilization; myths have reduced Native Americans to a faceless other, an obstacle to Caucasian (and therefore civilized) progress. Myths take us outside history, to a place of artificial stability—where we know the outcome, where the lines of morality are clearly drawn, and where meaning becomes stable and clear—away from, in Eliot's phrase, "futility" and "anarchy" and ambiguity.

The last matter in this comparison I would like to attend to is the artist as hero. As Greene reminds us in his film treatment, we do not typically associate artists, especially writers, with the Western. As Tompkins points out extensively, Western heroes often stand in opposition to language, seeing it as weakness. Mitchell contends that "the most notable aspect of [the Western hero's] performance is the effort to maintain an inexpressive persona," utilizing "vocal inactivity" or "a sonic stillness." For more than anything, the Western hero, as Mitchell notes, "val[ues] actions over words, marking silence

as the most vivid of actions" (165). Consider the almost parasitic role played in Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) by the writer who urinates on himself when faced with a gun; the writer in revisionist Westerns, such as Eastwood's film and Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* (1970), is seen as the spreader and builder of myth—a liar who silences other voices and simplifies history. Yet, in Greene and Reed's film, we should recall that Martins's literary hero is Zane Grey. Grey himself, like many modernists, saw the work of the artist in terms of his own heroic protagonists. There is a conflation between heroes and artists, both in terms of characters (the hero being an artist or author of some sort) and the author (who is then in some manner a kind of hero or performing a kind of heroic undertaking as his or her character might). Tompkins outlines this conflation in Grey himself, for whom, "[b]eing, acting, and writing formed a perfect continuum: as you were, so would you write. Since his [Zane Grey's] own idea of greatness was modeled on the heroes of adventure stories, he describes the writer as a kind of gallant explorer, who 'looks at things so keenly as to find unknown characteristics, unsuspected points of view, secret depths, the life & soul of natural facts'" (164). Grey's beliefs form a blueprint for Martins's behaviors in the film. Rather than becoming a searcher looking for "secret depths," he becomes a sheriff, or in his urban form, a detective trying to discover secret information and the "unsuspected points of view" of those who did not testify at Harry Lime's inquest. Later, when he asserts to Popescu that he is writing a novel, Martins is making not only a typically modernist claim of transforming lived experience into art, but also a statement typical of his idol Grey.

Modernism and *The Third Man*

To begin my discussion of the relationship between modernism and *The Third Man*, it might be profitable to begin with a scene from the film that alludes heavily to modernism as well as the Western. This scene occurs roughly two-thirds of the way into the film, as the main character, Holly Martins, has grown more and more embroiled in his attempts to discover what exactly happened to his childhood friend, Harry Lime. The scene starts after Martins is forced to retreat from a mob led by a peculiar child who wrongly, but insistently, suggests that Martins has killed Lime's former porter. After Martins and Lime's former girlfriend, Anna Schmidt, elude the mob, Martins and she split up, with Martins heading back to his motel to seek a taxi ride to police headquarters and a visit with Major Calloway. As the cab speeds through the dark streets of Vienna, Martins becomes convinced that the driver has been sent to kill him. Instead, he has been delivered

to the literary lecture on "The Crisis of Faith in the Contemporary Novel" that he had agreed to give earlier in the film.

The lecture proves disastrous, as the unprepared Martins fails to engage the Viennese intelligentsia pestering him with questions concerning modernism. Reed's camera constantly tilts our view of Martins, shooting him at oblique angles and suggesting his continuous imbalance on the stage. After failing to respond fully to questions about stream of consciousness and James Joyce, Martins, to the incomprehension of the audience, instead praises Zane Grey ("Grey? Which Grey?" [72]³). While the audience continues to spill out, Martins is interrupted by Popescu, a Romanian national and member of Lime's circle, who Martins suspects is involved in murdering Lime and who may be after Martins. Martins and Popescu engage in an argument about Martins's search masked as a discussion of writing projects, at the close of which Martins flees the room, skirting up steps as the camera pans upward through the spiral staircase. He encounters an ominous hooting in the dark, which is revealed as a parrot when he turns the light on. As Martins seeks to escape this room, the parrot bites Martins's hand. Martins, nursing his new wound, finally must race through the ruins of Vienna, ultimately eluding his pursuers by hiding in the bombed out remains of a car.

Of the three main allusions in this scene, two, Joyce and stream of consciousness, recall modernism, and the third, Zane Grey, evokes the Western. I will return to the Western connections in the following section, but let us first consider the implications of the allusions to modernism. One of the characteristics of modernism is the emphasis placed on style. In *Dublin's Joyce*, Hugh Kenner explains that "the usual criterion for style, that it disappear like glass before the reality of the subject, doesn't apply to [Joyce's] pages" (12). Following this comparison, then, in modernism, the "glass" itself is as important as what one can see through it. To a certain extent, we can consider the camera's perspective as this glass, our window onto the subject. As language is the reader's window onto the narrative (and the narrative subject), so is the perception granted the viewer by the camera. In this scene, as throughout this film, Reed's primarily formalist camera work makes viewers constantly as aware of how we see things—at angles, up stairs, through bars—as what we see. In effect, like modernist narratives that place a preeminence on language and style, the use of the camera and Reed's framing of scenes creates a kind of metaexperience for the viewer.⁴ We cannot simply watch, but must consider how we watch and what this process says about what we are watching.

The preoccupation with perception inherent in Kenner's description of modernist writing leads us to another predominant motif in

modernism, namely the artist as hero, for these texts frequently center on how the artist can shape his or her experience. I've mentioned this phrase earlier in light of the Western, but we of course more typically connect this organizing conceit with modernist texts. Again and again, modernist works—*To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)—depict the struggles of the artist to first understand experience on its own terms and then to reshape it to create art. In describing Yeats' poetic aims in particular—but in language that can apply to many of these texts—Richard Ellmann states the rationale for concentrating on these struggles: "If we must suffer, it is better to create the world in which we suffer, and this is what heroes do spontaneously, artists do consciously, and all men do in their degree" (xxiv).

The fascination with and the aspirations for the artist to become a heroic figure, capable of (re)shaping experience, is connected to the emphasis on style in modernism as well, since modernist writings represent how the artist perceives the world, which returns us to considering the importance of myth. Recall that in his review of Joyce's *Ulysses*, T. S. Eliot provides his accounting of Joyce and Yeats in terms of the "mythical method." According to Eliot, such methods are "a step toward making the modern world possible for art, toward . . . order and form" (103). Eliot's phrase, besides pointing toward a desire to control the world, suggests how the author can organize chaos through his or her use of aesthetics. In essence, Eliot offers a blueprint for how the artist can become a hero by identifying this "mythical method" in Joyce's novel.

In this particular scene, we can see how Holly's proclamations during his debates with Popescu about his writing a novel come to resemble the desire of the artist to control a chaotic world through art:

POPESCU: Can I ask is Mr. Martins engaged in a new book?

HOLLY: Yes, it's called *The Third Man*.

POPESCU: A novel, Mr. Martins?

HOLLY: It's a murder story. I've just started it. It's based on fact.

POPESCU: . . . Are you a slow writer, Mr. Martins?

HOLLY: Not when I get interested.

POPESCU: I'd say you were doing something pretty dangerous this time.

HOLLY: Yes?

POPESCU: Mixing fact and fiction.

HOLLY: Should I make it all fact?

POPESCU: Why no, Mr. Martins. I'd say stick to fiction, straight fiction.

HOLLY: I'm too far along with the book, Mr. Popescu.

POPESCU: Haven't you ever scrapped a book, Mr. Martins?

HOLLY: Never. (73–74)

Essentially, the language of interrogation and threat transforms into the language of a fan or editor asking after the work of an author. Though Martins is speaking somewhat euphemistically here and in a language appropriate to the scene's setting—a literary lecture—Martins throughout the film attempts to write his world in the much the way he describes above. Earlier in the film, when first confronted with Major Calloway's accusations that Martins's deceased best friend, Harry Lime, has been involved in racketeering of "the worst" kind (26), he seeks to right this wrong⁵ in the manner of one of his novels: struck by the potential for action, Martins asks Major Calloway's assistant, Sergeant Paine, "You ever read a book of mine called *The Lone Rider of Santa Fe*? It's a story about a man who hunted down the sheriff who was victimizing his best friend. I'm gunning the same way for your major" (32). In other words, to act, Martins must conceive of events in terms of a plot, preferably a clichéd one or one he has created (the revenge plot enacted here is a staple of the Western). Later, in order to disillusion Martins, Calloway must resort to entering the language of Martins's plotting so that he can dispel it: "I told you to go away Martins. This isn't Santa Fe. I'm not a sheriff and you aren't a cowboy. You've been blundering around with the worst bunch of racketeers in Vienna" (77). This last phrase seems to be Calloway's attempt to alert Martins that, at best, he has gotten his plots confused, but perhaps more fully to suggest that unlike Martins's fictions, where the plots can be controlled by the artist, people die in the random, uncontrolled world that is postwar Vienna. Nonetheless, Martins continues to try to become an artist-hero as he mixes his desire to know what happens with a desire to rewrite wrongs and ultimately to see justice through.

Before discussing further connections to modernism invoked here, let us consider how this contestation over plotting can be viewed in terms of the ways in which this text seems to prefigure the concerns of postmodernism. In particular, this discussion evokes a term of Hayden White's, namely "emplotment." In his essay, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," White argues that historians

must acknowledge that "historical narratives" are essentially "verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences" (82). Emplotment, in essence, is the process by which the historian constructs a historical narrative or "the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle [a listing of historical facts] as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures" (83). In this essay, then, White suggests that historians come to events already having internalized various kinds of plot structures—ones that derive from or are modeled on various genres—and then use that storehouse of structures to construct a narrative of events that will allow a reader of the present—who is also familiar with the same plot structures—to make sense out of events alien to the reader's experiences. Because, as White claims, events themselves have no significance unto themselves—"no historical event is *intrinsically tragic*," for example (84)—"most historical sequences can be emplotted in a number of different ways, so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings" (85). Although White here is offering a commentary on the need for historians to accept the degree to which their methodology relies on narrative techniques—and hence aligns with other literary undertakings—clearly his ideas also illuminate the depictions of historiography—be it personal or private—within literary texts themselves.

Clearly *The Third Man* is not a historical text. Nonetheless, the film and novella begin with an event, namely Lime's death, which Martins sets out to understand. While this desire to get to "the bottom of things" (47) seems to align with the jobs of one of his heroes or a detective, White reminds us that the historian's use of what R. G. Collingwood calls "the constructive imagination" links the historian to "the competent detective" (qtd. in White 83–84). In Collingwood's phrase, they both seek to arrive at "what must have been the case" (84). Consider then that Martins, like White's historian, encounters an event and wishes to "make sense" of it; to do so, he then uses a plot in his storehouse—here the one from *The Lone Rider of Santa Fe*—in order to translate the chaotic situation into terms he can comprehend and hence to make sense of this event in light of the information—these plots, his memories of Harry—he has brought with him to Vienna. As the text continues, and this central event proves itself to be a fiction—Harry is not dead and the accident was staged—the process of emplotment for Martins transfers to an attempt to understand who Harry Lime is in light of the information provided by Major Calloway. As this process becomes more complicated, and perhaps impossible, the text then begins to resemble Linda Hutcheon's

postmodern historiographic metafiction: although the text "does not deny the existence of the past [,] it does question whether we can ever *know* the past other than through its textualized remains" (*Poetics* 20), or as Hutcheon later argues, "postmodern writing of both history and literature has taught us that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems by which we make sense of the past" and hence are "an acknowledgement of the meaning making function of human constructs" (*Poetics* 88).

I will return to the text's engagement with these concerns towards the conclusion of the essay; however, we might still consider the further evocations of modernist concerns and imagery from this particular scene. While the literary lecture exposes Martins's relation to modernist artist-figures, the exterior shots of Martins fleeing Popescu's men reveal the ruins of Vienna. In this way, the scene and the film as a whole recalls the most central image of modernism, namely T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). In fact, Greene's description of this Vienna from early in the novella speaks to this:

I never knew Vienna between the wars, and I am too young to remember the old Vienna with its Strauss music and bogus easy charm; to me it is simply a city of undignified ruins which turned that February to great glaciers of snow and ice. The Danube was a gray flat muddy river a long way off across the second bezirk, the Russian zone, where the Prater lay smashed and desolate and full of weeds, only the Great Wheel revolving slowly over the foundations of merry-go-rounds like abandoned millstones, the rusting iron of smashed tanks which nobody had cleared away, the frost-nipped weeds where the snow was thin. (14–15)⁶

This wasteland imagery dominates the film, especially its climax, the extended chase of Harry Lime through the sewer system ending with the image of Lime's fingers poking through the grate into an empty street. One might briefly compare Greene's description, the visual shots of rubble spilling away from the streets, the bombed out cars, and the emaciated faces of the Viennese, the dilapidated interiors of what appear to be formerly grand residences, with an excerpt from the opening section of Eliot's poem:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only

There is shadow under this red rock,
 (Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
 And I will show you something different from either
 Your shadow at morning striding behind you;
 Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
 I will show you fear in a handful of dust. (I. lines 19–30)

Even the city itself has become a "heap of broken images." Eliot's poem here also invokes the ominous fears of Greene and Reed's characters, the sense of coming revelation and perhaps answers one doesn't want to hear. When Martins tells Calloway that he wants "to get to the bottom of this," Calloway, in a phrase that thematically recalls Eliot's poem, warns Martins that "Death's at the bottom of everything" (47).

These wasteland images that permeate *The Third Man* correspond to other aspects of modernism. As in Eliot's poem, many modernist writings allude to myths of regeneration, which offer the author a means of bringing this world back to life. Again, the artist becomes an integral force in offering order in response to chaos and destruction. While Martins doesn't believe that he can literally resurrect Lime, he somewhat ironically and figuratively does so for the rest of the characters in the film—in that his discovery that Lime is still alive brings, if you will, Lime back from the dead. In fact, Lime's coffin is even dug up, revealing his absence (of course, he was never there in the first place, not transfigured). Throughout the film, Martins's desire to reconstruct events (played off somewhat ambivalently against his desire to author events) suggests an urge to recover, or return to, a lost wholeness, as well as his desire as a detective or a historian to know the whole story. Even his attempts to make things right again suggest an optimism that what has been laid waste can somehow be reconstituted. Like Eliot's poem, *The Third Man*, as we shall discuss further, offers a somewhat ambiguous answer to the question of whether a kind of spiritual resurrection is possible.

Mixing the High and the Low: *The Third Man* and the Western

In addition to these allusive and substantive connections to modernism, we can also see how the film juxtaposes with humor and irony high and low or popular art—namely the works of modernism and the Western. Martins has no knowledge of the techniques or authors of Modernism—he stutters in wonder at the phrase "stream-of-consciousness," has no knowledge of who James Joyce is, let alone into "what ca-ta-ga-ree" he should be put, and has little sense as

to why he is being asked to speak about the "Crisis of Faith" in contemporary novels (71–72); similarly, the crowd responds in wonder to his proclamation that his own literary hero, Zane Grey, has been his chief influence. This scene in the novella is even more explicit in drawing the contrast. In it, Crabbin the organizer of the event seeks to dismiss Martins's (Dexter's in the novella) answers to the audience. Crabbin quickly informs the audience that Martins/Dexter must mean the poet Gray, "a gentle, mild, subtle, genius" and that Martins's/Dexter's mention of Zane Grey was clearly a "joke," for "Zane Grey wrote what we call Westerns—cheap popular novelettes about bandits and cowboys." Not satisfied with this quick dismissal, Crabbin goes on to degrade Martins's/Dexter's hero entirely: "In the strict sense I would not call him a writer at all. . . . He was just a popular entertainer" (93).

As I've noted earlier, Greene himself divided his writings into two categories—Entertainments and Novels. He called this a Thriller, and I suspect he would place those under Entertainments. Yet, Greene's own preface questions this categorization and provides a similarly provocative juxtaposition of high and low, and, as I have mentioned earlier, Greene's novels were most certainly contemporary novels that recorded a "crisis of faith." He first proclaims that, in making this film, he and Reed "had no desire to move people's political emotions; we wanted to entertain them, to frighten them a little, to make them laugh." However, Greene then tells the story of how the film had encouraged two men who had sold penicillin on the black market in the manner of his character, Harry Lime, to realize "the possible consequences of their act"(10). He ends the preface on this much darker note, suggesting the sobering power of this "entertainment." These juxtapositions raise questions about the desire to draw strict lines between high and low or popular art; in this way, we may begin to see that Greene's work in its blurring of these categories begins a move, transitionally, away from modernism toward the postmodern, for, as Fredric Jameson observes in the postmodern we see "the effacement . . . of the older . . . frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture" (*Postmodernism* 2). Hutcheon, too, sees this juxtaposing as particularly postmodern, noting that postmodern texts "paradoxically use and abuse the conventions of both popular and elite literature, and do so in such a way that they can actually *use* the invasive culture industry to challenge its own commodification processes from within" (*Poetics* 20).

This relationship between high and low literary forms and these movements has been discussed elsewhere, most notably by Brian McHale in his study, *Postmodernist Fiction*, in which he argues that detective fiction can be considered the "'low art' double" of modern-

ism in part because of their shared interest in questions of knowing (59). While not disagreeing with McHale—in fact, the noir and detective elements of the film further his argument—I think, as we begin to consider the relationship between Greene and Reed's film and descriptions of the Western, which echo in the film, we might be able to consider how the Western can also be considered a low-art double of modernism, raising questions about both drawing the lines between high and low, as well as the ideological implications of the Western. In fact, hard-boiled detective fiction—the starting place for noir in both film and literature in many ways—grows out of a similar place as the Western, namely the dime novel, and many have convincingly argued that hard-boiled detective novels of this sort have shifted the frontier boundary of the Western to the seemingly civilized locale of the city.⁷

Previously, I have been discussing, in part, the relation between modernist conceptions of the artist as hero with the representations and aspirations of Holly Martins. To frame this discussion, one needs to observe that there is certainly a difference between calling Martins a writer and an artist. In fact, in the novella, Martins/Dexter is a *writer* confused with an *artist*—apparently based on E. M. Forster—and, to a certain extent, the implications are that such phrases are comparable to the divisions between novels and entertainments or high and low art. If Westerns are low art, then their creators—in this cynical and elitist manner of labeling—are simply writers (with only the further adjective, "hack", needed to truly dismiss their worth).

Along these lines, the construction of the Western hero becomes a seeming counterpoint to the construction of the artist hero in this film—one based in high art and language and one based in low art and, to some extent, silence. In discussing the Western and *The Third Man*, James W. Palmer and Michael M. Riley provide a solid, if slightly narrow, stereotype of the Western hero: "Living a solitary existence, lonely but free, [he] is above all, independent, self-reliant, pure in his devotion to his own private code of honor. The repository of American dreams and virtues, he dominates a world in which good and evil are clearly defined and easily understood. Characteristically a man outside the law (though not an outlaw), his alliance with the community is only temporary" (15). If Martins isn't all of these things, it is fair to say that he wishes to be. As Martins arrives in Vienna, he discovers that the one person he knows there has died, and so he must continue on alone. In accord with Palmer and Riley's definition, Martins finds himself badgered by Major Calloway, the head of the British Military Police, while working toward an end only Martins sees. His code of honor leads him to defend his friend, attempt to rescue Anna (Harry's girl, as she is frequently called), and eventually to turn against his

friend in an attempt to exact justice. In fact, as the film moves towards its conclusion, we see Martins struggling to fully conceive of his own definition of justice and what exactly justice would be in this case. Seeking—or in this case perhaps stumbling—to bring justice to this situation, Martins, like a traditional Western hero, will even need to use a gun, though not exactly in a traditional shootout: his enemy—his best friend—Harry Lime, immobilized, already injured and likely dying, nods plaintively toward the hesitating Martins, asking him to complete the task begun by Calloway's bullet. Like Ford's classic shootout between the Ringo Kid and his brother's murderers in the seminal film, *Stagecoach*, the actual shot is only heard, not seen, but unlike Ford's film, Reed has essentially already drained the suspense and tension out of the moment. The memorable shot of Lime's fingers unable to push open the grate transform this shootout into something like a mercy killing or the death of a caged, dying animal.

In some ways, this closing sequence resembles a pattern of physical positioning in the Western identified by Mitchell. His analysis of the Western centers on its struggles to define and construct masculinity, and he considers that one of the ways this gets played out is in the "oppositions between those who stand and those who fall down"; thus, "the central plot conflict therefore involves those who try to act like men, with villains distinguished from heroes by being compelled to stretch out on the ground" (168). Reading the closing sequence in this light suggests that Martins's heroism is revealed in his physical presence relative to that of the crouching, dying Lime. However, one must also note that this entire sequence takes place under the ground, in a sewer system. The nature of this scene, then, recalls Hutcheon's comments on parody, which she says "paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (*Poetics* 11). Where this gunfight would speak to heroism and masculinity in a conventional Western, as this film takes on these motifs and plot patterns, it draws attention instead to the limits of such aspirations and possibilities.

Besides the structure of this closing sequence, other elements also bear some typical traits of the Western. Although I have associated Martins's desire to impose order through a plot with modernism, the plot he wishes to authorize is initially that of one of his old Westerns. Tompkins notes that "Often, death makes a sudden, momentary appearance early in the [Western] story, as if to put us on notice that life is what is at stake here, and nothing less" (24). This is also common to some other related genres, such as hard-boiled detective fiction and film noir. Within minutes of the film's start, Martins finds himself at the funeral of Harry Lime. Here, we are again reminded of Calloway's warning that "Death lies at the bottom of everything."

Traditionally, we may see this warning in the Western as connected to the hostility of the landscape—its desert barrenness—but here the landscape, though urban, is equally hostile, and we might also see the sudden death as a reminder of the predominance of primitive, basic laws of survival superseding humanity's more civilized, intellectualized ideas of law.

If early death signals a warning as to "what is at stake," the relationships the hero makes also inform us how the hero may cope with his situation. As Tompkins points out, "In the course of these struggles the hero frequently forms a bond with another man—sometimes his rival, more often a comrade—a bond that is more important than any relationship he has with a woman and is frequently tinged with homoeroticism" (39). Undeniably, the central relationship of the film is that between Lime and Martins, with perhaps that between Martins and Calloway being second (I will return to the question of Martins and Anna in a moment). In the case of Martins and Lime, they are both rivals and comrades. However, there is clearly a form of false consciousness about their relationship. Over the course of the film and the novella, we are reminded several times that Martins loves Lime; however, it is also clear that Martins has been used again and again by Lime. In the novella, Calloway wonders if Martins was summoned to Vienna as a means of setting up Martins: "I wouldn't be surprised if he [Lime] had meant to give you the baby to hold" (31). Nonetheless, it is their relationship that forms the pivotal crux of the film—even if Lime remains off screen for much of it.⁸ As for Martins's apparent love for Anna, Lime's former girlfriend, I would suggest that this falls in line with the sort of masking common to Westerns, described by Tompkins as an "alibi function": "Female 'screen' characters, who are really extensions of the men they are paired with, perform this alibi function all the time, masking the fact that what the men are really interested in is one another" (40). Both of these descriptions can be applied to the film. Anna is as often as not referred to as Harry's Girl; Martins's sudden love for Anna is so abrupt that one can easily read it as an attempt to deal with his longing to replace Harry. There would be no relationship between Anna and Martins without Lime, and yet there can be no relationship, ironically, because of Lime and the mythical versions of Lime they both construct (although Lime suggests Martins can proceed in a relationship with her when the two men meet on the Prater Wheel). To a certain extent, Anna's role between the men can also be read in terms of René Girard's ideas of mimetic exchange and the triangulation of desire, where the woman simply becomes a form of exchange between male protagonists. Ultimately, this becomes a story of male relationships, masculine space—though admittedly the construction

of Anna is both complex and poignant, and perhaps, if there is a triumph in this film, it belongs to her.

Revising Modernism and the Western in *The Third Man*

Up until now, I have largely been discussing the elements of the Western and modernism that appear in or relate to the film and how these elements relate to one another. However, at this point, I would like to more fully discuss the attitude towards these elements in the film. To do so, I will again concentrate primarily on a representative scene that allows us to begin to see how Greene and Reed's visions of modernism and the Western begin to take shape as the film moves towards its climax.

The scene I will focus on is the one featuring Lime and Martins on the Prater Wheel. As the scene begins, Martins has entered the Russian Zone where he believes Lime is hiding. Martins, after the discovery that Lime is not in fact dead, manifests a rare show of authority and confidence as he shouts up to the apartment of Lime's business partner and co-conspirator, Baron Kurtz,⁹ demanding that Kurtz send Lime out to meet Martins by the Prater Wheel. Martins's bravado early in this scene suggests that he is shaping himself into a man of action, a hero, perhaps even a Western hero (the Lone Rider)—yet, this transforms into passivity quickly enough as he must sit and await Lime.

The scene shifts quickly to Martins watching the jaunty step of Lime—in his only lengthy appearance in the film, outside of being chased through the sewers—followed by a carefree greeting as if Lime were picking Martins up at the airport (as he originally failed to do at the film's start). In this immediate reversal, Lime comes alive, moving quickly and fluidly in and through this long shot, while Martins returns to stasis, awaiting Lime's approach. They proceed to the Prater Wheel, where they engage in a largely hostile debate over what Lime has been involved in—his racket of selling diluted penicillin—and his seeming unconcern with Anna (in fact, there is a clear suggestion that Lime is responsible for turning in Anna to the Russians). At one point, Lime appears to be on the verge of killing Martins—or, at the least, letting him know that he can by throwing up the cabin's door and telling Martins, "I carry a gun" (98). However, Lime retreats from this position to a more conciliatory one when he learns that the police are fully aware of who is buried in "Lime's" tomb. At the conclusion of the ride and as the wheel comes full circle, things are left unresolved, though Lime leaves Martins with an offer to cut him

in, a warning to keep the police away, and with a parable about the Borgias and the Swiss, which I will return to shortly.

The scene, especially in the course of the dramatic confrontation on the wheel, demonstrates the attempt of Martins, as artist, to order the world: to be a hero, impose his vision on things, and, as Western hero, to confront his rival and set matters aright. However, this scene also sets about a series of reversals, undermining both Martins and Lime, who also wants to reassert artistic control. Lime quickly attempts, as Calloway frequently does throughout the film, to disillusion Martins: "Oh, Holly, you and I aren't heroes. The world doesn't make any heroes outside of your stories" (97). Throughout their dialogue, Lime tries to employ rhetoric that separates his pragmatic rogue capitalism from Martins's Western fictions (although Lime is the one who proclaims "I carry a gun"); however, both are attempting to impose a plot, a fiction on the other, to order events from their own perspective. Lime seeks, however, to again make Martins distinguish between the storehouse of plots he used to understand the world and some notion of a reality outside of those sense-making procedures.

This scene, therefore, calls into question authorship, the ability of one to author events, control plots and others—as if they were characters—construct meaning, and make sense. After Lime has challenged Holly's misrepresentation of events in terms of one of his fictions, Martins, in turn, deflates Lime by pointing out that his attempts to *plot* his own death have fallen through: "They've dug up your grave" (98). This struggle for authorship and control has permeated the entire film, and again reminds us of White's conception of emplotment. However, there is clearly an anxiety surfacing about how much actual control such plots may provide. The parrot that bites Martins at the end of the first scene I discussed speaks to this as well. The parrot's actions symbolize the uncontrollable and the absurd, that beyond the human artist's ability to manipulate and order. When Martins tries to explain how he got the cut on his hand, no one believes him.

Even Anna figures into this as she too wars with Holly about who is creating Harry, telling Martins: "For Heaven's sake, stop making him in *your* image" (83–84). In part, Martins's crisis in this film is trying to understand how the Harry of his memory, the one he has constructed, could be the racketeer and murderer Major Calloway asserts that he is. Anna, in contrast, seems to insist that Harry is some kind of misunderstood romantic, who is victim not victimizer. Anna tries to undermine the grounds for Martins's entire crisis spurred by his need to know; she argues that "a man doesn't alter because you find out more" (84). Here, Anna and Martins are playing out some of

the issues and procedures of the historian as described by White. On the Prater Wheel, Harry's reference to how long the Russians can use him seems something of an attempt to play the same card, that he is misunderstood, a victim himself. His complaints about heartburn and his inability to get any more antacids mocks his own penicillin racket, as he is now the sufferer due to post-war shortages. In addition, early in this scene the camera pans out of the Prater Wheel, offering the viewer a bird's eye angle on those below while Lime, through his power to author his plots, speculates on his power to gain a profit at the expense of a few "dots" (97). Of course, here, Lime's reference to the Russians suggests a further alternative to authorship, namely that there are larger forces beyond these players—despite Lime's attempts to model his behavior on governments ("They have their five-year plans and so have I" [98])—that ultimately dictate the course of events, exposing the powerlessness of the individual to impose his own order and stability through an individualized vision.

It should also be noted that this notion of authorship extends beyond this contest on the screen: the famed closing parable to Lime's speech was written not by Greene or Reed but by Orson Welles himself, so in seeking out the construction of this scene we get somewhat lost on the way to origins (perhaps in the manner of Roland Barthes's "death of the author"). Harry's vision—with its echoes of capitalism, communism, and fascism—of humans as dots remote from his lofty place recalls not only the horrors of the war, but the sentiment that these horrors may in fact continue onward. In this way, Greene and Reed anticipate the views of others, such as the postmodern author, Thomas Pynchon, who, in *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), suggests that the war will continue, if by other means, and the death total will not stop. Lime's closing speech links this attitude with art, as Harry seems to contend that strife and human suffering are necessary sacrifices to foster art and progress: "In Italy for thirty years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed—but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock." (100). The implications here clearly recall the critics of modernism—in its monolithic post war construct—who feared that the championing of aesthetics by figures like Eliot and Pound may have implied a willingness to sacrifice others for the sake of art. I should add that Welles later told Peter Bogdanovich in *This Is Orson Welles* that the Swiss promptly informed him that they did not make cuckoo clocks. Welles, too, has mixed fact and fiction in his art (221).

As a Western hero, Martins fails on the Prater Wheel as well. He cannot persuade Lime to care for Anna, to reconsider his actions, or

even to feel morally accountable. After all, Lime explains, "I'm not hurting anybody's soul by what I do. The dead are happier dead. They don't miss much here, poor devils" (99). Martins cannot impose his will on Lime linguistically or otherwise. It is Martins who clutches the post in the open doorway, after Lime menacingly throws open the door, with the ironic explanation that "I never feel quite safe in these things" (97). Although the scene closes with Lime still offering to cut Martins in, Martins is alive only because his death would serve no purpose or only draw further suspicion to the Russian section of Vienna where Lime has hidden himself. Later, when Martins will kill Lime, perhaps in the cause of justice, it will not be a gallant gunfight. He shoots, off-camera, an injured, now unarmed man seemingly begging for a mercy killing. In *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912), Grey's most popular Western, characters—no matter how they may have behaved—are seemingly essentially good or essentially evil. Experience of the world has often left this morality muddled, but the novel moves to restore them to one of these essential categories, and this resolution is achieved by the end—we know who is good, and they have prospered, while the wicked have been punished. Even within the film noir tradition, there is often this sense of a kind of morally correct justice—although it cannot necessarily be found among humans—that steps in seemingly to prevent those who have committed crimes—such as the "heroes" of James M. Cain's novels adapted into film—from prospering. *The Third Man* offers no such fixed answers, no easy resolutions, no restorations of wasted lands or fallen morality (its ending feels more, in this way, like that of a neo-noir film like *Chinatown* [1974] than say *Double Indemnity* [1944]).

If one looks back to the origins of *The Third Man*, it is clear that both the Western and modernism—at least in the form of allusions—were there from the start in one way or another. Even before the protagonist became an American, a change caused by the casting of Joseph Cotten, Greene had envisioned that he be a Western writer, albeit an English one (Rollo Martins/E. M. Forster/ Buck Dexter). Modernism, too, was there more or less at the outset. In Norman Sherry's biography of Greene, he includes the following letter Greene wrote to Catherine Walton (dated September 28, 1947), concerning his breakthrough in developing *The Third Man*:

I believe I've got a *book* coming. I feel so excited that I spell out your name in full carefully sticking my tongue between my teeth to pronounce it right. The act of creation is awfully odd and inexplicable like falling in love . . . Tonight I had a solitary good dinner where I usually go with My Girl and afterwards felt vaguely restless (not sexually, just

restless) so I walked to the Café Royal and sat and read *The Aran Islands*, and drank beer till about 10 and then I still felt restless, so I walked all up Piccadilly and back and went into a Gent's in Brick Street, and suddenly in the Gent's, I saw the three chunks, the beginning, the middle and the end, and in some ways all the ideas I had—the first sentence of the thriller about the dead Harry who wasn't dead, the Risen-from-the-dead story, and then the other day in the train all seemed to come together. I hope to God it lasts—they don't always. (242)

In this letter, there are three important things to note. First, there is his romantic simile concerning the writing process, "The act of creation is awfully odd and inexplicable like falling in love," which recalls Stephen's erotic visions that accompany the writing of his "Villanelle" in Joyce's *Portrait*. Second, he sees what he calls "the Risen-from-the-dead story" as integral to the narrative. Such a phrase clearly evokes the modernist fondness for regeneration myths (see Hemingway, Eliot, and Lawrence, for instance). Lastly is the postscript that follows what I have quoted above: "Today I read in an article which said 'Unlike such writers as James Joyce and Graham Greene . . .'—damn it. I'm not played out yet" (243).

The postscript to Greene's missive draws the development of this film into a fuller context. Besides indicating Joyce's connection to the inception of Greene's novella/film treatment, we also see a desire to distance himself from Joyce, and, by implication, writers of Joyce's generation, and, perhaps in turn, the modernists. Greene wants to prove that he is still vital, and one of the ways he can do that is by drawing a distinction between his writing and those of the modernists. Nonetheless, Greene admired some of the modernists—Joyce and Eliot—but disliked "stream of consciousness," and he saw in Forster someone who had "a very superior attitude to the story," an attitude that Greene rebelled against, and as I've discussed here at some length, the modernists have very clearly left a mark on this film ("Getting" 444).

Nonetheless, Greene also was clearly suspicious of the desire to create or impose order, which Kermode and Jameson, among many others, have suggested can be applied to both the aesthetics and politics of some modernist authors, as well as most totalitarian governments (though both the authors and the regimes may not see the consistency of such logic). Greene and Reed's film can be seen as a part of a struggle to come to grips with their literary (and cinematic) predecessors, the immense consequences of the political implications of their work, as well as an attempt to carve a new place away from

these writers, perhaps, as I've been suggesting, pointing it towards a more postmodern sensibility. Greene claimed that "the only message that I wish to convey is fallibility . . . Doubts" ("Conversation" 370), a view that aligns him with Hutcheon's view of more overtly postmodern texts that highlight the limits of what we can know. It is also clear that Greene was well aware of the shortcomings of trying to impose one's will through fictional discourse. The following comes from an interview conducted with Graham Greene just a few years after *The Third Man* was completed:

the only material the novelist has is what is, human material. What he sees in it, how deeply he sees, are something else again; you can't prescribe for them without imitating Moscow. Do you know what happens . . . when you wish the world to be neat and orderly and precise, a closed untroubled place? You try to make it that way. And when people don't respond (and they don't), you end up with Belsen. ("Interview" 101)

Clearly, these powerful sentiments suggest Greene's concerns with the modernist urge, exemplified in Eliot's review of Joyce, to order the world. Hence, one conclusion I feel we can draw from the film is that Martins's failures to become the author of his story reflect this critique. One might also draw a similar conclusion about Lime's own desire to write the world. The connections between modernism and the Western that the film comes to suggest are, like the tangled morality of the film and its evocation of the "doubts" Greene believes his work conveys, complicated at the least. However, the very juxtaposition of these forms can be seen in terms of what Frank Palmeri has called "satiric leveling," the undermining of the high by comparison with the low (10). Hence, if the Western is a low form, through the very comparison of modernism to the Western, Greene undermines the elitism so common to much of modernism and brings high art to a very human level.

The question of knowing too, while it can have extraordinarily broad implications in terms of the public world and public history, has here very private and very human implications as well. Perhaps its most significant manifestation occurs within the debate between Anna and Martins about Harry. This debate corresponds to White's depiction of the historian coming to a subject with a storehouse of genres, plots, and figurative language and then placing the mysterious or alien within the codes familiar to the historian (or again, perhaps the detective) so these events "are rendered comprehensible by being subsumed under the categories of the plot structures in which they are encoded as a story of a particular kind" (86). Well, for both

Anna and Martins, Harry was a character in a different kind of story. Their discussion of how to construct and understand Lime takes place before Martins's discovery that Lime is still alive, but after the significant and full revelation of the extent of Lime's penicillin racket and crimes to both Anna and Martins. After Anna, too, acknowledges having seen Major Calloway—and hence seen his evidence against Lime—the camera pushes through flowers that overhang the window, revealing the still living Lime through a long shot from a high angle—suggesting the viewer's superior knowledge—as he approaches her apartment, stopping to hide when he sees the light on. Martins says, "I knew him for twenty years, at least I thought I knew him." In the novella, he says, "I feel as though he had never really existed, that we dreamed him" (114). As Martins goes on—in both the film and the novella—Anna then stops him, suggesting that there was a kind of essential Harry that stood outside their constructs: "For G-d's sake, stop making him in your image. Harry was real. He wasn't just your hero and my lover. He was Harry." She challenges his desire to see Harry anew: "a man doesn't alter because you find out more" (84). In a way, they seem to become two different models of historian. Anna's assessment actually suggests two possible interpretations—or modes of historiography. On the one hand, she seems to assert that there are two distinct modes—one the kind of fictionalizing narrative construction that mystifies the historical personage and the other a kind of essential, real, or true version of the personage (she may not be able to locate it, but she is confident that it is out there). Martins's version of this seems to be that he had one understanding of Harry, but, now, faced with new information, recognizes that to be false and must be replaced with another version, a new figure to be encoded, in White's phrase.

Ultimately, Martins's re-encoding of his version of Lime allows him to act on Calloway's behalf and to help capture him. Anna, however, seemingly refuses to let this new information eclipse or undermine her original version of Lime (this is perhaps ironically tied up in her comments about her acting roles: "I don't play tragedy"). If, as Greene claims, he only offers "doubts," we cannot hope to find in the texts a clear indication of which historical moves are appropriate. However, the way in which this process of making sense of the past—in tandem with its gestures toward demystifying as opposed to either a recourse to myth or perpetuating a kind of myth-making project—gets overtly dramatized in this text does begin to suggest the ways in which Greene and Reed point towards more postmodern sensibilities. Hutcheon's description of this process in historiographic metafiction again seems a fairly apt way of thinking about this seemingly unpostmodern text, for, as she asserts of postmodern texts, "the

narrativization of the past events is not hidden; the events no longer speak for themselves, but are shown to be consciously composed into a narrative, whose constructed—not found—order is imposed on them, often overtly by the narrating figure" (*Politics* 63).

The film, too, ends by highlighting the limits of such attempts to impose order. Lime, in his famous speech on the Prater Wheel, tells Martins that "nobody thinks in terms of human beings. Governments don't, so why should we?" (98). Within the darkness of the film's climax and the missed opportunities for connection between Anna and Martins in the still camera shot, with only Anna's movement to disturb the peace of the avenue leading away from Lime's funeral and the city's central cemetery, perhaps Greene and Reed suggest again the hopelessness of the illusions of romance—here embodied by the Western—and the ultimate futility of trying to impose one's desires on others. In the suddenly still camera—a kind of wonderful frozen stability in stark contrast to the electric, jittery camera of much of the film—Anna cannot be contained; instead, she breaks away from Martins's passive desire that she stop and join him and instead walks on, breaking through the hold of Reed's camera—holding at a kind of realistic, eye-level angle—and the frame of the screen, triumphant in her free will.

Notes

I would like to thank Patrick A. McCarthy and Robert Schoch for their help and for reading earlier drafts of this essay.

1. *The Third Man* can perhaps most obviously be categorized as a film noir; however, I will be focusing on the less pronounced genres on which the film draws.
2. See, for example, Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*.
3. Quotes from the film come from the Faber and Faber reproduction of the film's script first published in 1973, but I have made alterations when necessary to conform to the actual language of the film, which is often substantially different.
4. I do not mean to suggest that I am breaking new ground in drawing the link between narrative point of view and the camera. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg distinguish film as "primarily narrative" because "it does not present a story directly, without narration, but always through the medium of a controlled point of view, the eye of the camera" (280).
5. This cliché seems appropriate to describe the ideas of the self-described writer of "cheap novelettes" (25).

6. An edited version of this passage is intoned over a montage of post-war Vienna at the opening of the film, which includes a dead body floating in the river.
7. Lee Clark Mitchell offers another link here between noir or hard-boiled detective fiction in that he notes a kind of Western plot "embedded" in the noir forerunner, Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*.
8. According to Norman Sherry's biography of Greene, David O. Selznick initially objected to the film because "It's sheer buggery" (254); for Selznick, the film was obviously a love story between two men.
9. Baron Kurtz's evocation of one of modernism's most important characters should not be dismissed, as both Conrad's and Greene's Kurtz take dramatic downward turns after confronting unexpected horrors. They are both fallen men by the conclusion of each work. As Kurtz says to Martins early in the film, "I've done things I thought unthinkable before the war."

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