The Problem of Motivation in Graham Greene's the Heart of the Matter

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THE PROBLEM OF MOTIVATION IN GRAHAM GREENE'S

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

By

Thomas John Walsh, S. J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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Life

Thomas John Walsh, S. J. was born in Chicago, Illinois, December 6, 1931.

He was graduated from Loyola Academy High School, Chicago, in June, 1950. He attended Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts for one year. The following September he entered the Jesuit Novitiate at Milford, Ohio, and was enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences of Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio. In August, 1955, he entered West Baden College, Indiana, and was enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts Course of Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois, from which school he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in June, 1956. He then entered the Graduate School of Loyola University to begin his studies for the degree of Master of Arts.

Presently he is completing his course in Philosophy at West Baden College, Indiana
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CHAPTER I
THE PROBLEM

Graham Greene, the author of The Heart of the Matter,\textsuperscript{1} was born October 2, 1906, in Berkhamstead, Herefordshire. His father was headmaster of the Berkhamstead school, which Greene later attended before matriculating at Balliol College, Oxford. Sensitive and unhappy as a boy, he made a half-hearted attempt at suicide when he was seventeen by playing Russian roulette. About the book of his youth which influenced him to become a writer, Marjorie Bowen's The Viper of Milan, Greene has said, "Goodness has only once found a perfect incarnation in a human body and never will again, but evil can always find a home there. Human nature is not black and white but black and grey. I read all that in The Viper of Milan and I looked around and I saw that it was so."\textsuperscript{2}

As a student at Oxford Greene edited the Oxford Outlook, managed to have some verse printed in Oxford Poetry, and published

\textsuperscript{1}Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter (New York, 1948).

\textsuperscript{2}Graham Greene, The Lost Childhood and Other Essays (New York, 1952), p. 16. The first essay of this volume is autobiographical and presents a good account of Greene's attitude toward life as it was developing during his early years, as well as his outlook at the time of writing. The other essays deal in literary criticism.
a book of poetry, *Babbling April*. For six weeks at Oxford, as a prank, Greene was a dues-paying member of the Communist party. When he found that party membership would not secure him a free trip to Moscow, he dropped out. After graduation he became sub-editor on the Nottingham Journal, once edited by Sir James Barrie. In 1926 he left this post to become a sub-editor on the London *Times*. It was in 1926 also that he was baptized a Roman Catholic—a fact that was of great influence in his later writing. Greene himself says that his conversion was completely an intellectual one, and that it was not until years later that his religious convictions penetrated the whole man. Some, in fact, would argue that he is still only an intellectual convert, no more.

During his stay with the *Times* he wrote two bad novels which the publishers encouragingly rejected. In 1929, however, he had his first novel, *The Man Within*, published. Important to his novel career was his leaving the *Times* for a position as roving correspondent with the *Spectator*. He traveled as their newsman in Scandinavia, Central Europe, and later in Mexico. Thus he gathered the backgrounds for many of his subsequent novels. At this time too he was subsidized by his publisher and managed to produce two failures, *The Name of Action* and *Rumour At Nightfall*, both of which must have

3 *Time*, "Shocker," LVIII (October 29, 1951), 100.
made his publisher think twice about his investment. His next novel, The Orient Express, a mystery story, was an immediate success, and was turned into a movie by Hollywood. He continued writing novels in the mystery vein. But his critics failed to notice that underlying the mystery of each story was a theme of profound evil and suffering as well as a true artist's viewpoint on life.4

In 1940 Greene convinced the critics and the literary world that he really had something to say. It was in that year that he published The Power and the Glory, a novel describing the hunted existence and death of a priest in Mexico under the government's persecution. Themes such as the problem of evil, the mercy of God, and the nature of sanctity in weak human nature were deftly handled. Greene was established.

It was in 1948 that Greene published The Heart of the Matter. It had been eight years since The Power and the Glory and many were eager to see what type of novel Greene would produce. Would he return again to the mystery story, or would he attempt to remain on the heights that he had reached in 1940? He preferred the heights. The Heart of the Matter

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4For details concerning Greene's life see Charles A. Brady, "Contemporary Catholic Authors: Graham Greene: Novelist of Good and Evil," Catholic Library World, XVI (December 1944), 67.
was a serious attempt to explore the heart of man. Its theme seemed to be capable of being understood under two completely different aspects: (1) the damnation of a sinful man, or (2) the confused and bitter journey of a man to sanctity. In order to grasp more clearly the problem of the novel it seems suitable to summarize in broad outline its plot.

The scene is West Africa on the coast during the early part of World War II. The action takes place around the small settlement from which the British colony is ruled. The natives are for the most part untrustworthy and the British officials, except Scobie and the commissioner, are not above suspicion. The story opens with Wilson and Harris sitting on a veranda sipping gin. It is Sunday and they watch the natives in their gaudy dress going to Church. Harris is a clerk in the government office and Wilson has been sent out by the government to spy secretly on the conduct of the officials in the colony. Harris points out Henry Scobie, a major of the police, to Wilson. Scobie has spent fifteen years in the colony and is known for his honesty. Even the police commissioner calls him Aristides the Just.

Having learned that he will not succeed the retiring commissioner, Scobie must break the news to his place-conscious wife, Louise. Louise is disappointed. Scobie does his best to give her comfort. He does not seem to care that he is the one who has been passed over for promotion but focuses
his sympathy upon her. We get the impression that Scobie is deeply devoted to his wife though he shows no passion in this love. He seems rather to regard her with pity. His duty is to maintain happiness in the one he loves regardless of what might happen to himself. When the scene is over Louise is resigned to missing the commissionership.

Wilson meets Louise at a club party, and Scobie, noticing that they have struck up a friendship due to their mutual literary interests, encourages them. Louise, he knows, has no friends due to her affectation and shallowness and this only adds fuel to his pity for her. Louise, however, thinks herself above Wilson the clerk and insists later to Scobie that she have a trip to South Africa in order to escape for a time. The depths of Scobie's pity are evidenced when he promises her that he will get the necessary money though he does not see how at the time.

Scobie is finally forced to borrow the money from Yusef, a Syrian trader. This course of action in itself is permissible but one feels that it establishes a relationship that will eventually result in disaster for Scobie. Shortly after the loan Louise departs and Scobie settles down to enjoy the peace for which he has longed.

Some time later the survivors of a torpedoed English ship, brought ashore in French territory, are being sent across the
river to the colony. Scobie watches the victims come in and is deeply moved by their suffering. He wonders why God would allow a five-year-old child to remain alive in an open boat for forty days and then have her die shortly after rescue. This kind of suffering seemed unjust on God's part.

Among the survivors he meets a young widow of nineteen, no more than a child. Her husband of one month had been killed in the sinking. Scobie's sense of pity goes out to her. He is thirty years older than she and believes himself safe from adultery with her. When she has recovered they become friends. This leads, whether from pity or lust, we do not know at first, to an affair.

Scobie receives a telegram from Louise that she is returning. In the meantime he has tried to comfort Helen, now his mistress, by sending her a note in which he says that he loves her more than he does his wife. Yusef intercepts this letter and later blackmails Scobie with it.

Faced with the problem of causing Louise to suffer, Scobie forces himself to receive Holy Communion with her the day after her arrival. At the same time he does not go to confession because he knows that he cannot stop seeing Helen without hurting her either. God becomes the one who must suffer. Scobie reasons that God can only suffer, but never be lost. Furthermore Scobie does not trust God to take care of his creatures. Scobie makes himself responsible for their happiness.
At length he reaches the point where he can not stand to cause any more suffering to God. He concludes that only his death will save both Louise and Helen from suffering. For if he lives he will have to choose between them and that will cause pain in one or the other. Scobie, finally, realizing what he is doing, commits suicide.

The amount of criticism, both favorable and unfavorable that was written on the book was enormous. Most critics were in agreement concerning Greene's literary artistry. For example, Richard McLaughlin wrote in America: "I am firmly convinced that Graham Greene is no ordinary novelist. Not only is he one of our finest craftsmen writing today, but he is so preoccupied with man's inner struggle to save his soul that he is comparable only to our greatest literary masters." 5

After quietly agreeing about Greene's artistry the critics became chaotic. Paul Dinkins expressed the situation thus: "Hardly any other living writer provokes argument of such intensity, or from such a wide variety of sources—the obscure diocesan weekly, the great mass-circulation picture magazine, the esoterically bookish journal." 6 The point of controversy

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5 Richard McLaughlin, "Graham Greene: Saint Or Cynic?", America, LXXIX (July 24, 1948), 370.
was, of course, Scobie's motivation. Put simply it amounted to the question, "Was Scobie a saint or one of the damned?"

The nature of Scobie's motivation was, indeed, puzzling. He seemed always to act for the good of others, sacrificing himself for their happiness. He was driven on by a pity for the human being compelled to live and therefore suffer in this world. It seemed at times that he did not trust God to look after the well-being of His own creatures. Scobie attempted to remedy this by playing the part of God himself. Some critics thought that, ignorant of the objective moral law, he was a kind of allegorical Christ who took upon himself the sins of the world and offered himself as a sacrifice for his fellow human beings.

Yet there was another aspect of his motivation to which the other camp of critics subscribed. Scobie they thought was merely squeamish. He was a weak individual who acted out of lust for a woman and then took the easy way out by committing suicide. Scobie, they maintained, was untrustworthy from the very beginning of the book. His own self-imposed code of justice was no more than mere convention which gave him a kind of security. He was neurotic--unable to give himself in love; rather he sought to maintain an adult stature in himself by reducing those about him to a condition in which he would stand above them, pitying them. Still others thought Scobie
suffered from a guilt complex because he was not present at the death of his nine-year-old daughter five years before. According to them he was afflicted with self-pity.

The problem comes down to this: Scobie was motivated by something called pity; what was this pity? Was it basically selfishness, or was it true love, the sacrifice of oneself for another person? This problem is indeed worthy of investigation because it is the key to a correct understanding of the entire novel. That the novel has been misinterpreted by one or the other camp of critics is obvious, for there cannot be two totally opposite themes arising from the single action of one character. That The Heart of the Matter says something seems obvious. But what it says must yet be determined. To solve this problem it would seem that a thorough analysis of the nature of Scobie's motivation would be suitable. For ultimately it is the motivation in Scobie's heart that will reveal the kind of person he is, good or evil. It is the motives of Scobie that will indicate whether The Heart of the Matter is the account of a cowardly individual yielding to evil, or the brave struggle of a man to sacrifice himself for those he loves. Characteristically of Greene's writing there is no middle-ground on this battlefield, no map which charts a region for safe mediocrity. Scobie commits himself completely as either a coward or a hero.

To determine the motives of Scobie, then, will be the
objective of this thesis. By so doing, it can be hoped, a correct understanding of the novel's theme or meaning may be reached.

The following procedure will be followed. In the second chapter the present writer's solution will be proposed and supported by appropriate evidence from the text. Chapter III will present a survey of those critics who disagree with the solution proposed in the second chapter. An answer, conclusive it is hoped, will be given to each of the positions in disagreement with the present writer's answer. Having solved these objections, a fourth chapter will follow in which those critical positions which support the solution offered in Chapter II will be reviewed. The reasons for their validity will also be offered. Finally the fifth chapter will attempt to present a brief but correct interpretation of the novel in light of the hero's motives hitherto correctly ascertained.
CHAPTER II
THE PRESENT AUTHOR'S SOLUTION

The objective of the second chapter will be to determine the motives of Scobie in light of the text. It is of the utmost importance that the reader keep in mind that no judgement whatever of a theological nature is being passed. The present aim is simply to find out what the book says. Whether what the book says is theologically orthodox or not is of no concern here. Such a question would require another thesis if it were to be handled properly. Furthermore, before one can pass a theological judgement he must first know what is being judged. And that is the aim of the present writer--to determine simply what *The Heart of the Matter* is saying--what does it report of Scobie, of his motives.

What was it that forced Scobie out of the quiet routine of the police major into a turmoil that eventuated in his suicide? True enough there are the external events and circumstances that have a cause in his action. But it is not here that one will focus his attention. His analysis will center, rather, on those qualities within Scobie himself that caused him to react to external events in the way he did. The principle underlying this is that plot flows from character,
and theme flows from plot. It is, therefore, from the heart of man, from Scobie in this instance, that the theme of the work will ultimately flow. The Heart of the Matter obviously says something about life. One cannot know what it says until he knows the source of the message or theme—the source being the heart, the motivation of the character or characters.

One looks at the heart of Scobie and he sees there three very closely united qualities. Put in the abstract they are as follows: (1) responsibility, (2) pity, (3) longing for peace. But simply because these are abstract terms we do not know their precise meaning in the context of the novel. One must see these qualities at work in the concrete before he can accurately define them. Only by tracing them as the sources of Scobie's action will one be able to judge correctly on the character and action of Scobie, and subsequently on the theme of the book itself.

Though responsibility, pity, and longing for peace are intimately united, yet for the sake of clarity an attempt will be made to handle them singly. There will of course be a good deal of overlapping, but the general lines of the discussion should, nevertheless, remain clearly in focus.

We learn of Scobie's sense of responsibility the first time we see him with Louise. Indeed, we could have guessed already that being a policeman he would naturally feel responsible for those about him. He enters his house and calls for his
wife, Louise. We are told: "The less he needed Louise the more conscious he became of his responsibility for her happiness."¹

Louise is upset by Scobie's failure to win promotion to the commissionership. She pleads with Scobie for a trip to South Africa. This is well-nigh impossible since Scobie's financial means are limited. Nevertheless because he feels this deep responsibility for his wife he borrows, against his discretion, from a Syrian trader, Yusef. When he has finally packed Louise off he reflects: "He had done his duty: Louise was happy."²

Shortly after Louise's departure Scobie is called away to an outpost village to assist in caring for the survivors of a British ship sunk by a German submarine. As he watches the victims being carried into the temporary hospital he is deeply moved by their suffering. "The lights were showing in the temporary hospital, and the weight of all that misery lay on his shoulders. It was as if he had shed one responsibility only to take on another. This was a responsibility he shared with all human beings, but there was no comfort in that, for it


²Ibid., p. 106.
sometimes seemed to him that he was the only one who recognized it."³

Scobie returns to the colony. A few weeks later he is startled to see light pouring out from one of the nearby huts during an air raid blackout. He enters the hut and finds one of the survivors of the sinking. It is Mrs. Helen Rolt, a nineteen-year-old widow. To Scobie she appears weak and defenceless. She has recovered from the sinking ordeal and exposure in the lifeboat for forty days, although she is still thin and worn-looking. Afraid to return home because she fears the sea, she decides to remain for a time in the colony. Scobie feels responsible for her because she is like a child forced to live among adults. She does not know how to act among them. Furthermore she is being pursued for her favors by an irresponsible air-force officer. Scobie remained with her listening to her troubles. "Sadly, like an evening tide, he felt responsibility bearing him up the shore."⁴ An affair results between Helen and Scobie but we feel that it is more his confused sense of responsibility that accounts for it on his part than the craving of his flesh.

Louise returns soon after. Scobie finds himself in a dilem-

³Ibid., p. 126.
⁴Ibid., p. 169.
ma. Louise asks him to receive Communion with her. Not wanting
to cause pain either to Helen by leaving her, or to Louise by
giving her the means to find out about his affair, Scobie
decides that God will have to suffer rather than His creatures.
For sincere Confession would mean firm purpose to leave Helen.
After receiving Holy Communion twice, however, he realizes that
he really loves God too much to go on injuring Him in this way.
He decides that he will solve the situation by the lesser of
two evils. He will cause no more pain either to Helen or
Louise or God. Rather than hurt another, the greater evil, in
his mind, he will hurt himself, even if it means damnation,
the lesser evil. As Scobie kneels in Church before the tab-
ernacle we see how deep his sense of responsibility goes. He
tells God: "If you made me, you made this feeling of respon-
sibility that I've always carried about like a sack of bricks.
I'm not a policeman for nothing--responsible for order, for
seeing justice is done. There was no other profession for a
man of my kind. I can't shift my responsibility to you. If I
could, I would be someone else. I can't make one of them suffer
so as to save myself. I'm responsible and I'll see it through
the only way I can."5

Having seen that Scobie has a profound sense of responsibil-

5Ibid., p. 290.
The question one naturally asks is "Why?". The answer seems to lie in his obsession with pity. Because he feels pity for his fellow human beings, he feels responsible for them in some way. Pity complements responsibility. For instance, Scobie sees his wife lying asleep in bed and notices that she is ugly. But instead of being repulsed by ugliness he is attracted by it. "These were the times of ugliness when he loved her, when pity and responsibility reached the intensity of a passion." 6

There is a strange relationship between Scobie and Louise, his wife. Scobie is devoted to her, but not by the bonds of ordinary marital love. Rather he regards her as an object of his sympathy, compassion, or pity. Just why this is so it will be important to explain. If one works backward through the action of the plot he will discover that Louise is a selfish person in the extreme. She has no moral principles nor has she any sympathy whatever for her fellow human beings. These points are seen clearly in focus only after the book has been finished, for it is on the last pages that one learns of Louise's baseness. When she returned from South Africa Scobie was under the impression that she knew nothing of his affair with Helen. Louise gave him no reason to think otherwise. Yet, to suit her own selfish purpose and curiosity, she asked him to join her in receiving Holy Communion the day after her arrival. "'Oh, Ticki.' She pulled herself quickly up and said, 'Henry, darling,

6 Ibid., p. 16.
you'll think I'm very sentimental, but tomorrow's Sunday and I want us to go to Communion together. A sign that we've started again—in the right way." This seemingly innocent, sincere suggestion is vicious when we learn later that Louise knew the terrible state that Scobie's soul was in. She merely wanted to use Confession and Holy Communion as a means to force Scobie to discontinue his affair with Helen. She actually forced him into the dilemma of either committing sacrilege or confessing his sins with a firm purpose of amendment. This latter point cannot be stressed too strongly. Louise as a Catholic knew that Scobie would have to have a firm purpose of amendment if his confession were to be valid. The dilemma he faced was inescapable. It seems unbelievable to think Louise so base, yet one knows this evaluation to be sound when he reaches the final explanation. "'Did you know all the time—about her?' Wilson asked. 'It's why I came home. Mrs. Carter wrote to me. She said everybody was talking. Of course he never realized that. He thought he'd been so clever. And he nearly convinced me—that it was finished. Going to Communion the way he did.' 'How did he square that with his conscience?' 'Some Catholics do, I suppose. Go to Confession and start over again. I thought he was more honest, though.'"\[8\]

\[7\]Ibid., p. 228.

\[8\]Ibid., p. 301.
Startling as this revelation is, the reader is not totally unprepared for it. There are other ominous indications of Louise's character. Early in the novel a young official named Pemberton commits suicide by hanging himself. He is only twenty-five years old. Alone, the only white man besides the Catholic priest, Father Clay, he has been trying to run one of the colony's small villages. Depression has enveloped him because of his loneliness and mounting debts. He reaches the point where he realizes he will not be able to pay Yusef, the Syrian trader, the money he has lost gambling with him. The result is suicide.

The Commissioner asks Scobie to travel to the village and investigate. Scobie's maturity and length of service make him alone qualified for the job. He does not complain. Rather he feels true sorrow for young Pemberton.

Louise and Wilson are just returning to the house as Scobie is preparing to make his unexpected departure. Louise, not even bothering to ask what has happened to Pemberton, says, "I'll never forgive Pemberton for this." Scobie, however, characteristically replies: "Don't talk nonsense, dear. We'd forgive most things if we knew the facts." Scobie makes it his business both to understand and to love the human heart.

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9Ibid., p. 79
10Ibid.
Louise, however, is selfish. She has no interest in the lives of others. Her only concern seems to be herself. This is evident too when she insists by constant nagging that she have a trip to South Africa in order to escape.

One must, however, retain balance in his judgement of her. She is under great strain. She is not happy on the African Coast and one can hardly blame her too heavily for that. She had been alone when their daughter Catherine died. She had borne the suffering. And Scobie is not without some guilt. He himself reflects: "He knew every one of her faults. How often he had winced at her patronage of strangers. He knew each phrase, each intonation that alienated others . . . This is my doing. This is what I've made of her. She wasn't always like this."\(^{11}\)

Here one finds a fundamental problem. Is Scobie really responsible for Louise's pitiable condition? Was she at one time a more generous, sincere, sympathetic person? Has Scobie really made her pitiable? Greene does not give the reader any explicit information in this important matter. For this lacuna in background Greene has been criticized, and it would seem, justifiably so.

Nevertheless one does find a satisfactory answer in the novel, though it is by no means at once apparent to the casual reader. It has been seen already that Scobie had an extraordinary sense of responsibility for those about him, really

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 28.
for all human beings. This, in part at least, accounted for his being a policeman. Scobie would naturally then tend to impute responsibility to himself where he was not really responsible at all. He does this very thing when he accuses himself of having a hand in the death of his servant Ali. Scobie began to mistrust Ali. He had good reason for this. On several different occasions Ali seemed to be implicated in either spying on Scobie or helping others to spy upon him. Scobie had no definite proof. Yet his suspicion was justified. Yusef told Scobie he could find out whether or not Ali was trustworthy. Scobie had a hazy doubt as to whether or not he should comply with Yusef. After confusedly weighing the matter, he gave Yusef his signet ring so Ali would obey Yusef's servant and come to his headquarters. On the way Ali was murdered. Yusef did not seem to be implicated. Scobie certainly was not. Yet he later told Helen: "'I didn't cut his throat myself,' he said. 'But he died because I existed.'"

Here one finds a clear instance of Scobie's tendency to assume the blame or responsibility where he was definitely not responsible. The same, with perhaps some reservations, might possibly be said of his relationship with Louise. Though she was a pitiable creature, nevertheless her condition could never be

12Ibid., p. 279.
improved by pity. It could only become worse under the power of this destructive kind of love. Yet when Scobie reflects: "This is my doing. This is what I've made of her. She wasn't always like this," one can safely infer that he is exaggerating his share of responsibility. For Louise by nature is an unlikeable character. This has been seen above where her making use of Confession and Holy Communion for her own selfish ends, and her complete unconcern for the suffering of others as in the case of Pemberton, have marked her as a petty, scheming, selfish person. Even when the faithful and devoted servant of fifteen years, Ali, dies, Louise is uninterested: "... she was paying more attention to make-up: her dressing table was littered with the pots and bottles and tubes she had brought back from the south. Ali's death meant little to her." Scobie could have hardly brought Louise to this. Only she herself could have wrung the love and honesty out of her own heart.

Scobie does not love his wife with a normal healthy love. There is no give-and-take in their relationship. He does all the giving. He receives nothing, depends on Louise for nothing. But it is of importance that one keep in mind that no other kind of relationship could have existed unless of course Scobie himself stopped giving. Louise, as has been pointed out,

\[13\text{Ibid., p. 282.}\]
is at heart a base and selfish character. Somehow or other one gets the impression throughout most of the novel that she is a quite respectable person unfortunately treated as a child by Scobie. But one can not love an evil character in any other way. Scobie has done the best he can under the circumstances. His pity does not help Louise, but neither does it hinder her. He gives her as much love as he can manage for her—all it amounts to, unfortunately, is pity.

One sees now why Scobie did not try to point out to Louise her faults. "He knew every one of her faults. Sometimes he longed to warn her--don't wear that dress, don't say that again--as a mother might teach a daughter, but he had to remain silent." 14 Scobie saw that Louise was selfish and mean and petty. He knew her well—well enough to know that he could not improve her.

But there is another reason too why Scobie would not tell Louise. And this leads one back to the discussion of pity in Scobie's character. He would not tell Louise because he did not want to cause her any pain. Fortunately for Scobie he was justified in not correcting Louise on the former point. Pity would never justify such action.

One might term pity as the way in which Scobie saw the world. Driving home one night he begins to think: "Why

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14 Ibid., p. 28.
do I love this place so much? Is it because here human nature hasn't had time to disguise itself? Nobody here could ever talk about a heaven on earth. Heaven remained rigidly in its proper place on the other side of death, and on this side flourished the injustices, the cruelties, the meannesses, that elsewhere people so cleverly hushed up. Here you could love human beings nearly as God loved them, knowing the worst: you didn't love a pose, a pretty dress, a sentiment artfully assumed.\(^{15}\) This passage is a key one. It tells us much about the character of Scobie. One sees that Scobie is a man with a profoundly spiritual outlook—almost something of a mystic. He knows that since original sin the world has been calling to God to look down with mercy and pity upon its suffering. Scobie believes there is no such thing as a heaven on earth. To him the earth is truly a "vale of tears"—a place in which the soul must merit and purify herself for the sight of God.

Scobie is a strong man and he knows it. There is but one character in the entire novel who in any way might challenge the strength of Scobie and that is Usef. When Scobie says he is not a policeman for nothing he means that it is part of his very nature to look after other people. He feels that he is stronger than they are, capable of carrying their burdens for

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 32.
them. He is very Christ-like in this love and sacrifice for others— at least he seems to be. But it is this very love and strength that is his downfall. For he has no trust in God's care for others. He loves God; he does not trust him.

To see more clearly Scobie's view of life one must return to the passage in which the shipwrecked survivors are carried up from the river, past the tortured gaze of Scobie, into the temporary hospital. He watches a young child of perhaps five or six years carried past him on a stretcher. "She was deeply and unhealthily asleep; her fair hair was tangled and wet with sweat; her open mouth was dry and cracked, and she shuddered regularly and spasmodically."¹⁶ As she is carried by Scobie begins to reflect. He wondered how anyone, even God, could ever explain the fact, not that the child was going to die, but that she had been allowed by God to survive for forty days in an open boat, subjected to terrible sufferings. That was the mystery—to reconcile that with the love of God. "And yet he could believe in no God who was not human enough to love what he had created. 'How on earth did she survive till now?' he wondered aloud. The officer said gloomily, 'Of course they looked after her on the boat. They gave up their own share of the water often. It was foolish, of course, but one cannot always be

¹⁶Ibid., p. 124.
logical. And it gave them something to think about. It was like the hint of an explanation--too faint to be grasped." ¹⁷

Scobie characteristically felt somehow responsible for the suffering of his fellow human beings. Their suffering somehow became his suffering. He tried to take their loads and lift them onto his own shoulders. His love for them was overwhelming, we are told. And Satan worked like an angel of light. Surely this self-sacrificing love could have no element of evil mixed in with it. Yet Scobie later admitted a terrible fault to God. The problem of suffering in this world had been too much for him. He could not reconcile it with the love of God. He prayed to God, "No. I don't trust you. I love you, but I've never trusted you." ¹⁸

Scobie, one can see, failed to recognize the place of suffering in the world. He did not see that original sin, as well as every personal sin committed since, not God, had been at the bottom the source of these sufferings. He failed to realize that a loving Father chastises his children too for their own good, because He loves them. His picture of suffering in the world, his pity and compassion for his fellow human

¹⁷Ibid., p. 125.
¹⁸Ibid., p. 290.
beings was, at bottom, misguided. It was precisely his mistrust of God's love for His creatures that caused Scobie's downfall. For if God would not love His creatures in the 'right' way, then Scobie would. Scobie began to play the part of God, the part of Divine Providence. The problem of evil, the problem of the suffering of the weak, helpless, defenceless of this world had overwhelmed Scobie. Blinded and confused he tried to do the best he could to make up for God's negligence. He tried to love them as he thought God should have. His ignorance resulted in a love not unlike that of a saint, and in a course of action one would expect from a devil.

Scobie's love has something wrong with it. One realizes this as the action progresses. The lack of trust in God, of course, is the source of infection. In all his actions in which he is prompted by love, or pity, the motive is good while the action is either unwise or evil. One first finds this in Scobie's borrowing money from Yusef in order to send Louise to South Africa. Willing to go to any limit for Louise's happiness, Scobie goes against his professional discretion and borrows money from Yusef after he finds he can get it nowhere else. The motive, pity or love, is good--the action is in this instance merely unwise.

The second instance of this occurs when Scobie investigates a neutral ship. All correspondence is to be taken off the
ship and handed over to British censors. Any concealed letters are to be reported. Scobie finds a letter in the Captain's cabin. The Captain explains that it is merely to his daughter and has nothing to do with the war. He realizes that if Scobie reports the letter the Captain will be docked for attempting to carry mail against the rules even though not subversive. The Captain "... had lowered his bulk onto the edge of the bath as though it were a heavy sack his shoulders could no longer bear. He kept on wiping his eyes with the back of his hand like a child--an unattractive child, the fat boy of the school. Against the beautiful and the clever and the successful one can wage a pitiless war, but not against the unattractive: then the millstone weighs on the breast. Scobie knew he should have taken the letter and gone; he could do no good with his sympathy here." 19

The Captain, Scobie knew, was innocent of carrying subversive mail. It was truly a mere letter to his daughter. Scobie felt a great pity for the Captain. He did not report the letter. Again one finds a good motive with the wrong action.

But there are three major points of utmost importance to be treated in this right-motive-wrong-action vein: Scobie's affair with Helen, his sacrilegious Communions, his suicide.

19 Ibid., p. 49.
The former instances were at worst violations of a personal code of honor. The last three mentioned are serious moral offenses.

Scobie first saw Helen as she was carried on a stretcher up from the river to the hospital. Thin and worn, ugly from exposure, a stamp album pathetically clutched in her hands, the wedding ring loose on her thin finger, Scobie's compassion goes out to her. Several weeks after her recovery he meets her in the colony. Scobie consoles her by merely listening to her. She is lonely and in need of someone who will understand her. They meet again and Scobie learns from her that she is upset because the loss of her husband has affected her so little. Scobie says, "'You needn't feel that. It's the same with everybody, I think. When we say to someone, 'I can't live without you,' what we really mean is, 'I can't live feeling you may be in pain, unhappy, in want.' That's all it is. When they are dead our responsibility ends. There's nothing more we can do about it. We can rest in peace.'"

Helen explains that she is not happy. She tells Scobie how a flight-lieutenant named Bagster took her to the beach that afternoon, and how her unhappiness scared him. Helen continues to describe herself to Scobie. She is but a

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20 Ibid., p. 167.
child, helpless. Scobie had no sense of responsibility towards the beautiful and the graceful and the intelligent. They could find their own way. "It was the face for which nobody would go out of his way, the face that would never catch the covert look, the face which would soon be used to rebuffs and indifference, that demanded his allegiance. The word 'pity' is used as loosely as the word 'love': the terrible promiscuous passion which so few experience."21

As Helen talks about herself Scobie is deeply moved and his pity continues to grow. In the midst of their conversation there is a knock on the door. Bagster, a little drunk, asks if he can come in. Helen tells Scobie to say nothing. "'Don't answer,' she whispered, 'don't answer.' She put her arm in his and watched the door with her mouth a little open as though she were out of breath. He had the sense of an animal which had been chased to its hold. 'Let Freddie in,' the voice wheedled. 'Be a sport, Helen. Only Freddie Bagster.' The man was a little drunk. She stood pressed against him with her hand on his side. When the sound of Bagster's feet receded, she raised her mouth and they kissed."22 And so their affair began.

21Ibid., p. 172.
22Ibid., p. 173.
Many have thought that it was mere sexual desire on Scobie's part that started the affair. According to what we read in the text, however, and in the consistency of Scobie's character sex is surely not his prime motive. Once again pity lies at the bottom of his action. Again one finds the right motive, a kind of deep love or compassion for the suffering of another, at the bottom of an evil course of action. That Scobie is not repulsed by the enticement of sex pleasure no reader would deny. Scobie admits to himself that there was passion in his action: "He knew from experience how passion died away and how love went, but pity always stayed." But when he was about to receive Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin he expressed another thought. "He was desecrating God because he loved a woman--was it even love, or was it just a feeling of pity and responsibility?" 

One can hardly be unaware also that it is Helen who actually initiates the action. She is first when she puts her arm through his, and then raises her mouth. It would be interesting to speculate on how much force the Freudian idea of "transference" had in this instance. At all events Helen

\[23\textit{Ibid.}, p. 192.\]
\[24\textit{Ibid.}, p. 248.\]
was completely won over to Scobie by his sympathy and kindness. Scobie would have been content to give merely his understanding and pity. Helen, the young, the emotional, the woman, had to give more. Fundamentally Scobie was selfless in his relations with Helen. Pity and mistrust of God's love and care for His creatures brought him to commit an act that he knew to be sinful. Again he wilfully and knowingly does the wrong thing, this time a serious offense, out of a good motive, love for his neighbor. One would not, of course, deny that his motivation is extremely confused, that he suffers from a kind of saving ignorance.

One finds here the dilemma that Scobie continually runs up against. It amounts simply to this: either look after yourself, save your own soul, or allow yourself great suffering, even to fall into sin, in order to prevent someone else from suffering pain. In this instance, either let Helen take care of herself and suffer a bit in the process, or save her from this pain by putting your eternal salvation into danger. Put out of context this proposition seems unreasonable. But when one has met Scobie and understood him, the proposition becomes credible.

Louise's forcing Scobie to receive Holy Communion has been discussed to some extent already. This is the second major
point in this right-motive-wrong-action course that Scobie follows. Here the dilemma becomes this: either cause pain to either Helen or Louise, or cause suffering to God and also to yourself. Scobie knelt at Mass before Communion. He said to God: "You can look after yourself. You survive the Cross every day. You can only suffer. You can never be lost. Admit that you must come second to these others." And myself, he thought, watching the priest pour the wine and water into the chalice, his own damnation being prepared like a meal at the altar, I must come last: I am the Deputy Commissioner of Police; a hundred men serve under me: I am the responsible man. It is my job to look after the others. I am conditioned to serve." 25

Again one finds Scobie choosing what he thinks to be the lesser of two evils—in this case suffering to himself and to God. Objectively of course the choice he makes is the wrong one. Yet in his confusion he cannot see it otherwise. First of all he wonders: "... how can one love God at the expense of one of his creatures? Would a woman accept a love for which a child had to be sacrificed?" 26 Or still later as he kneels

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., p. 203.
in Church trying to prepare for confession he prayed: "'Oh God, convince me, help me, convince me. Make me feel that I am more important than that child. Make me put my own soul first. Give me trust in your mercy to the one I abandon.'

Scobie, in fact, has become so confused that virtue now appears to him as something evil. It would be too easy for himself to be virtuous, too difficult on Helen or Louise if he were now to become so. As he goes towards Helen's hut one evening he thinks: "... I'd go back and go to bed, in the morning I'd write to Louise and in the evening go to Confession: the day after that God would return to me in a priest's hands: life would be simple again. He would be at peace sitting under the handcuffs in the office. Virtue, the good life, tempted him in the dark like a sin."

The third major crisis is Scobie's suicide. Here one needs no more than to point out the fact that the dilemma was again the same--the choice of the lesser of two evils--at least there seems in Scobie's mind to be two evils, though objectively the reader knows there is only one. Scobie decides that he cannot continue causing God pain by receiving Him in the state of mortal

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27 Ibid., pp. 243-244.
28 Ibid., pp. 202-203.
sin. If he damns himself he will no longer be a source of pain to anyone: neither to Helen nor Louise because they will soon forget the dead: not to God because God will not remember the damned. It is this ignorance, this utter confusion that has resulted ultimately because he could not grasp the idea of suffering of the innocent in the world, that in the end becomes the salvation of Scobie. For if one follows the text as this paper has tried to do, one will see that Scobie's heart held a true love for his neighbor, according to the author at least.

Graham Greene, for better or for worse, is definitely making Scobie a kind of allegorical image of Christ. When Scobie contemplates suicide he reflects: "Christ had not been murdered: you couldn't murder God: Christ had killed himself: he had hanged himself on the Cross as surely as Pemberton from the picture rail." 29 One is not concerned here with whether the speculations expressed in the text are correct. That is a valid problem of course. But this is not the place for it. Here one is concerned with what the text says, as well as what it implies. The similarity of Scobie to Christ is unmistakably set forth in this passage by Greene.

To Graham Greene Scobie, it would seem, is the true Christian. For to Greene Christianity seems to be deeper than the law;

29 Ibid., p. 207.
it includes the law to be sure, but love must be underneath the law. The law without love is mere Phariseeism. In a way the Frenchman Peguy is an ideal Christian to Greene, and Scobie is in a way the literary embodiment of Peguy. At the end of Brighton Rock Greene has a priest say these words about the Frenchman: "There was a man, a Frenchman, you wouldn't know about him, my child, who had the same idea as you. He was a good man, a holy man, and he lived in sin all through his life, because he couldn't bear the idea that any soul could suffer damnation. . . . This man decided that if any soul was going to be damned, he would be damned too. He never took the sacraments, he never married his wife in church. I don't know, my child, but some people think he was--well, a saint. I think he died in what we are told is mortal sin--I'm not sure; it was in the war; . . . . You can't conceive, my child, nor can I or anyone--the . . . appalling . . . strangeness of the mercy of God." And it is no coincidence that Greene writes a quotation at the front of The Heart of the Matter from Peguy. "Le pécheur est au coeur même de chrétienté. Nul n'est aussi compétent que le pécheur en matière de chrétienté. Nul, si ce n'est le saint." This is Scobie. He confused the

rules, Greene is saying, but he was at heart the true Christian, he loved his neighbor. His love was confused, it was not purely love, yet it was the best he could do under the circumstances. And that is all God wants: simply everything; simply our best. Perhaps Greene is thinking of the words of Christ at the Last Supper: "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one can give a greater proof of his love than by laying down his life for his friends."

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There is one final aspect of Scobie's action that must be shown. Nothing has been said yet of Scobie's desire for peace. This desire, as has been stated, together with pity and responsibility, formed the core of Scobie's motivation. To Scobie peace meant freedom from responsibility for suffering in the world. If he could only cut himself off from others, knowing that they did not suffer, or at least being ignorant of their suffering, then he would enjoy peace. Peace was Scobie's greatest desire: "For he dreamed of peace by day and night. Once in sleep it had appeared to him as the great glowing shoulder of the moon heaving across his window. Peace seemed to him the most beautiful word in the language: My peace I give you, my peace I leave with you. In the Mass he pressed his fingers against his eyes to keep the tears of

longing in." And yet Scobie would be willing to sacrifice that object that meant more to him than anything else in life for the love of one of his fellow human beings. For when he beheld the five-year-old child dying he prayed: "Father, look after her . . . . Father . . . give her peace. Take away my peace forever, but give her peace." God accepted his generous offer, for the child quietly smiled, then peacefully died a few moments later.

In the scene immediately preceding the beginning of his affair with Helen, Scobie goes to confession. "I don't know how to put it, Father, but I feel--tired of my religion. It seems to mean nothing to me. I've tried to love God, but . . . I feel empty.' 'That's sometimes the moment God chooses,' the priest said." And it was the moment, for in the very next scene Scobie is confronted with the terrible temptation of his pity. He becomes involved in a sinful affair. And yet one finds here the "hint of an explanation" of which Greene spoke earlier. Scobie was confounded by the problem of innocent human beings suffering in this life. He could not grasp even

33 Greene, The Heart of the Matter, p. 61.
34 Ibid., p. 130.
the hint of an explanation. Yet in his own life, which was by his own admission somewhat mechanical and mediocre up to this time, suffering would be the key to greater love of God. God took away his peace according to the bargain he had made at the child's bedside. But God, Greene is saying, used his lack of peace, his suffering as a road to greater love of Himself by Scobie.

One must make it clear again that the present thesis is not concerned with Greene's theological truth or error in this novel. The investigation is centered upon what the novel says. The present writer hopes that it is now clear that The Heart of the Matter says that Scobie is like Peguy: though he lived in sin he was a good man, a holy man; he was, to put it simply, a saint.
CHAPTER III

A SURVEY OF CRITICISMS: DISSENTING POSITIONS

In the present chapter a survey of critical positions will be presented. These positions will, for the most part, differ with the present writer's solution presented in chapter two. The purpose of this procedure will be, of course, to test whatever weaknesses may be found in that solution. As far as possible each critic's position will be stated accurately and objectively; then it will be evaluated in light of the text. In the fourth chapter a survey of positions agreeing with the present writer's position will be presented and evaluated.

In his book The Vanishing Hero, Sean O'Faolain has a stimulating criticism of The Heart of the Matter. His central point seems to be that Scobie is a selfish person--thinking only of himself, trying to satisfy his lust by using Helen as his mistress. O'Faolain writes: "He (Scobie) cannot stop desiring Helen; his wife insists on his receiving Communion; his priest can give him no loop-hole; rather than go on offending God he kills himself. His only hope is that God will forgive self-murder

because it was done through love of God."\(^2\)

One is somewhat surprised to see the words "He cannot stop desiring Helen" when they are in direct opposition to the text of the novel. It would seem that Scobie had indeed enjoyed his initial relations with Helen. But it would also seem that he is now bound to her only by feelings of responsibility and pity. For Scobie thinks to himself: "I would never go back there, to the Nisson hut, if it meant that she were happy and I suffered. But if I were happy and she suffered—that was what he could not face. Inexorably the other's point of view rose on the path like a murdered innocent."\(^3\) This does not seem to be the thought of a man who is driven on by lust. Nor is it a lustful and selfish man who thinks: "He was desecrating God because he loved a woman—was it even love, or was it just a feeling of pity and responsibility? And myself, he thought, I must come last: I am the responsible man. It is my job to look after the others. I am conditioned to serve."\(^4\)

Mr. O'Faolain assumes that Scobie's affair was simply the case of a middle-aged man giving in to his carnal desires.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 88


\(^4\)Ibid., p. 248.
"I should add here . . . that an intelligent priest should have pointed out his true duty to Scobie: that is, to promise to amend his life and thereafter to go on struggling against the attractions of the flesh."⁵

Yet, this viewpoint seems to misread the book. The text itself would seem to say that Scobie, at least after the inception of the affair, was acting from motives of pity and responsibility. He is thinking, albeit in utter confusion, solely of the needs of those about him. "He thought, O God, I can't leave her. Or Louise. You don't need me as they need me. You have your good people, your Saints, all the company of the blessed. You can do without me."⁶

The present author found it somewhat difficult, in light of the passage just quoted and other similar passages, to understand how this next reflection of Mr. O'Faolain could be sincerely prompted by reading The Heart of the Matter. " . . . [I]f Scobie had to commit any lethal act, why, I asked myself, did Scobie not poison his wife instead of poisoning himself? He could then have married Helen and spent the rest of his life in penance. It would certainly be a frightful deed, and a frightful gamble with salvation, but is murder worse than self-

⁵ O'Faolain, The Vanishing Hero, p. 88.
murder? He cherished his wife too dearly? He did not cherish her so dearly as to be faithful to her."

The answer to this question has already been stated. The question assumes that Scobie was acting for selfish desires. The present writer has tried to point out places in the text which would indicate this assumption to be incorrect. If Scobie sincerely says to God, "You don't need me as they need me," then to ask why did he not murder his wife seems out of the question.

O'Faolain in general is not sympathetic to Greene and perhaps that accounts for his criticism. He sums up his criticism of The Heart of the Matter by saying: "I now see, however, that Greene was logical and I was not. He did not rig the story as a matter of technique; he rigged it as a matter of principle. Everything he writes is rigged to demonstrate that human nature is rigged against itself. Besides, and this above all, Greene is not in the least interested in finding interim or human solutions to any problem that he poses." 8

Supposing for the moment that Greene does rig the story, a supposition which the present writer would not readily admit, still this would not justify a criticism based on an a priori rather than a textual judgment of the main character's motives.

7 O'Faolain, The Vanishing Hero, p. 88.
8 Ibid., p. 89.
Unfortunately that is precisely what O'Faolain does, for he can see no other motive for Scobie than selfish lust—and the ultimate reason for this is an a priori one: O'Faolain had never before associated in his own mind any other motive with a continued affair than selfish lust.

Donat O'Donnell has little good to say for Scobie. Speaking of Scobie's pity he writes: "Scobie attempted to imitate Christ by assuming responsibility for all suffering. But pity does not equal Christian charity in any sense. Then what is pity? It is Scobie's way of convincing himself he is mature. Pity is a deep sympathy with childhood, inimical to maturity."

Yet it would seem that O'Donnell is making, similar to O'Faolain, an a priori assumption: he assumes that Scobie must act for a selfish reason, to get something out of it. But the text does not seem to say he is selfish. In fact he has to pray to God for even a just love of himself: "O God, convince me, help me, convince me. Make me feel that I am more important than that child."

Furthermore, there seems to be a contradiction in O'Donnell's critique. He writes that "the story of Scobie is the record of an attempt to imitate Christ. Scobie's pity is a simulacrum

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of the Passion. 'Any victim' demanded his allegiance: he saw
the lineaments of Christ in any suffering human being--Pemberton,
Ali, the Captain, Helen, Louise." And yet he implies later
that Scobie is merely selfish in all this because he is merely
trying to bolster his own ego by caring for others. Clearly,
though, one does not strive to imitate Christ to the point of
great personal suffering and eventual death if one is acting
from mere selfishness.

Mr. O'Donnell has achieved a deep insight into the novel,
however, when he writes: "The reader can hardly help reflecting
that not on pity alone is adultery committed, in any climate:
not, that is, unless by pity something more psychologically
complex is intended than The Heart of the Matter admits." One
cannot, as many critics have tried to do, merely look up
the word pity in the dictionary and then conclude that they have
the meaning of the word as it is used in The Heart of the Matter.
The word in the novel is merely a symbol which indicates a kind
of motivation in Scobie. The reader must thoughtfully go through
the book in order to find out the true meaning of the word in
that particular context. For the present writer believes that
the test of The Heart of the Matter does present sufficient

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11O'Donnell, Maria Cross, p. 83.
12Ibid., p. 76.
evidence with which to form a judgement of Scobie's motivation, of the meaning of pity. The preceding chapter of the present thesis should explicate this belief.

O'Donnell, however, continues his critique of the novel by writing: "Something is left out--out of Scobie or out of 'pity'. The reader who feels that a theological-emotional sleight of hand has been practiced on him can hardly be blamed if henceforth he looks for the missing card elsewhere than in the pack dealt by, or for, Scobie."

Perhaps Mr. O'Donnell means that the casual reader will not discern the proper evidence. One hopes that he does ultimately intend the fault to be found in the reader, not in the text. For it would seem that the text, if read with sufficient care, does present evidence, not overabundant, it is true, but sufficient, at least, to form a correct judgement of the book's action and theme. Again, the present writer hopes that the second chapter of this thesis has indicated this.

Morton Zabel has concluded that pity as seen in The Heart of the Matter is a sin of presumption. He does not elaborate on this assertion at any length, but the present writer believes

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13Ibid.
that his position must be distinguished to be correctly understood. Scobie's action is objectively sinful in so far as he does not trust God in dealing with His creatures. But one would think that his utter confusion concerning the problem of suffering in the world would prevent him from falling into subjective sin. Great minds have always faltered at the thought of evil in the world and the knowledge of their loving Father in heaven. One recalls Book V of The Brothers Karamazov and its confusion concerning the problem of innocent suffering. When great minds have failed to reach a completely satisfying solution of the problem, one can hardly blame Scobie for becoming confused. Beyond this point, however, one can not pass judgement on him. Therefore it would seem that a peremptory assertion of his subjective guilt, his sin of presumption, would be out of place.

W.H. Auden has a penetrating remark about pity. "To feel compassion for someone is to make oneself their equal; to pity them is to regard oneself as their superior and from that eminence the step to the torture chamber and the corrective labor camp is shorter than one thinks."{15}

It is evident that to pity someone is to look down upon him. It is a kind of condescension. Yet the present writer

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would question the implied meaning of the statement that pity always implies pride. One must, in this instance, put pity into the context of *The Heart of the Matter*. Once it is placed there, the question of whether or not Scobie was infected by pride may be asked. The present writer thinks he was not. The following passage may be cited as indicative of his character--it reveals the thoughts of a humble, certainly not a proud, man. "Why me, he thought, why do they need me--a dull, middle-aged police officer who had for promotion? I've got nothing to give them that they can't get elsewhere: why can't they leave me in peace? Elsewhere there was younger and better love, more security. It sometimes seemed to him now that all he could share with them was his despair."16

Once again the critic's difficulty seems to be that he is taking an a priori definition of pity and applying it to the text. In this instance, however, Auden is not applying it directly to *The Heart of the Matter*, but to another of Greene's works, an entertainment, *The Ministry of Fear*. He does, however, cite Greene as a novelist of pity, and one may assume that Auden would include this kind of pity in *The Heart of the Matter*.

One finds other instances of Scobie's humility. A proud man would never be able to accept his being passed over for pro-

motion with the equanimity that Scobie manifested. Nor does a proud man understand his fellow human beings as does Scobie. He himself told Louise that if one knew all the facts he would always forgive his fellow human beings. Nor does the proud man feel that he is merely the servant of others as Scobie did. And finally, the proud man does not recognize his guilt as Scobie did, for Scobie knew that he was wrong in committing suicide--thus he could offer up his damnation for others.

Shortly after the publication of Greene's novel in 1948 there was a wave of criticism which was highly emotional. Positions of complete opposition could be found. Indicative of this type of criticism is an article by Jane Howes in The Catholic World. It will be both interesting and instructive to inspect several of the points that she makes. She opens the article by saying: "To my mind, this final chapter makes it (The Heart of the Matter) even more confusing. Mr. Greene should have said in so many words that the gates of hell yawned for Scobie and gulped him down. Or else Mr. Greene should have proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that Scobie did completely change in the last moment of his life, that Scobie made a valid act of contrition and so got off with only about ten million quarantines in purgatory."17

One can only reply to this criticism that it is an invitation to Graham Greene to cease being an artist and to become a pamphleteer. It would seem to the present writer that an artist must be true to his original intuition. An example from the field of music may help clarify this point. A great composer, Beethoven, relates that he once intuited an entire symphony in a brief instant. Afterwards it required several years to write out the score. Yet if he was to be a great artist he had to be faithful to his original intuition.

The same may be said here. The literary artist of true ability probably intuits a character in a fleeting instant. He sees all the major facets of this character's personality. It may require a great deal of time to put this intuition into writing. But the important point is this: the writer must be true to his original intuition, he must not manipulate his characters.

To ask Graham Greene to explain whether or not Scobie went to heaven or hell is a completely irrelevant question. Unless Greene's original intuition told him so, he has no more right to judge on Scobie's salvation than his readers do. He can be merely faithful to his intuition and record in writing what he sees. But that is all. Once he begins to judge his character's actions beyond the evidence his intuition has afforded, he then begins to manipulate and ceases to be an artist.
Many Catholics besides Jane Howes have done the same thing. They have judged The Heart of the Matter first as a theological thesis—and many neglected to give it any literary judgement at all. Greene himself, however, lends the final word in this discussion: "He himself confesses, in a prefatory letter to Paul Rostene's Graham Green Témoin des Temps Tragiques, that it would embarrass him to discuss the ideas underlying his books, for he was driven by the destiny of his characters, while writing, and not by the desire to express his thoughts about the problems facing man. His books are not meant to be edifying but to give a picture of human nature."18

Howes bases the rest of her criticism on the following statement: "Many people have said, and insisted, that Mr. Greene's book shows the mercy of God and the power of love, because when Scobie said 'I love . . .' all his sins were forgiven and his soul filled with grace."19

The answer to this seems to be that Scobie did not merit his salvation by merely saying "I love . . ." The assumption made by Howes, however, is that he did. The truth seems to be that Scobie, laboring under great confusion as to right


19Howes, 36.
and wrong, and choosing what seemed to be the lesser of two evils, had been procuring his salvation throughout the book with the possible exception of his first adulterous meetings with Helen.

Jane Howes is a convert and is most indicative of the type of militant Catholic who took the book as a theological treatise on grace and mercy. Assuming that Scobie was saved by merely saying "I love . . ." she goes on to write: "And while conversion looks easy, let me tell you that it isn't. We know, who have fed the swine and eaten the husks and walked the long road home, we know that mercy is not cheap, grace is not cheap. We know, who were lost in the cold and the dark, felt the lash of the sleet and the cutting winds, we who caught sight of one gleam of hope and crawled miles on our bleeding knees praying for another gleam to guide us. We know that we shan't get out until we have paid the last farthing. I don't think it can ever have occurred to Mr. Greene that anyone could think Scobie was saved. It did not occur to me, as I read the book." One can only wish he could invite Jane Howes to re-read the book from an objective viewpoint, find out what the book itself says, and after this has been done to pass judgement once again. Her case, it would seem, like many others, was an instance of judging the book without knowing exactly what the book had said.

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20 Howes, 36-37.
The present writer would venture to suggest that *The Heart of the Matter* cannot be capably criticized without at least several complete readings of the text. What seems to be obscure after one or two cursory readings may begin to clear up on the third. Unlike many current novels, *The Heart of the Matter*, in the opinion of the present writer, is worthy of such attention.

A fine critical evaluation of Graham Greene has been written by Marie-Béatrice Mesnet.\(^1\) The book deals not only with *The Heart of the Matter*, but combining it with *The Power and the Glory* and *Brighton Rock*, treats these three novels as a trilogy. Mesnet has made many fine points of criticism concerning *The Heart of the Matter*. The present author has selected those which pertain more closely to the particular problem of this thesis.

Concerning the affair between Helen and Scobie she writes: "A mutual craving for security leads to her and Scobie becoming involved."\(^2\) This statement does not seem, however, to be quite accurate in view of the fact that Scobie's concept of peace and security was to be alone, away from those who could suffer. Peace was the great goal of his life, not security through companionship. "Peace seemed to him the most beautiful word in

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\(^2\) Ibid., p. 34.
the language: My peace I give you, my peace I leave with you: O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace. In the Mass he pressed his fingers against his eyes to keep the tears of longing in."23 What Scobie desired was not security from another human being, but rather an escape from the sense of responsibility, from the sight of suffering. He longed for peace which was away from the sins of the world.

Mesnet adds a little later that: "Pity is the easy way, an escape for the weak, who cannot face truth directly or tolerate any impediment to their self-centered peace."24 Again it seems difficult to hold such an evaluation of pity in light of Scobie's words: "'Father,' he prayed, 'Give her peace. Take away my peace forever, but give her peace.'"25 This is not the prayer of a weak or sentimental man. A weak man could never give up his dearest possession for another and for purely selfless reasons. That is the action of a strong man. Only the strong are willing to make great sacrifices--that requires courage.

Speaking of Scobie's relationship with Louise, Mesnet writes:

24Mesnet, pp. 64-65.
"He dismisses the possibility of improving her or of bringing out her good qualities; instead he pretends that he still loves her as much as ever and makes a show of satisfying all her immediate demands. She suffers from his pity; she would have needed strength and real love to develop her true self."\textsuperscript{26}

As was pointed out in the preceding chapter, Louise was a basically selfish person. She might not appear to be so, but her actions condemned her—forcing her husband to Confession for her own selfish ends, being unconcerned about either Ali or Pemberton. A warm and personal love of such a person is asking the near impossible; charity and pity would require an effort. But one must admit that pity would help no one in the long run. Indeed, Scobie is at fault here. For true charity would have helped Louise, it would have corrected her. It would not have condoned and flattered her.

Mesnet points out a very interesting fact. Scobie's love or pity, and his sacrifice of himself did not seem to be in vain. "The dying child in Pende for whom he offers his peace will find eternal rest as she repeats after him the word of trust and comfort: 'Father'. After his death, Helen, who is little more than a child, too, is left with a vacant place in her heart that needs to be filled. 'Do you believe in a God?' she asks Bagster, and exclaims: 'I wish I did . . . I wish I did.' And

\textsuperscript{26}Mesnet, p. 65.
later: 'She was alone again in the darkness behind her lids, and the wish struggled in her body like a child: her lips moved, but all she could think of to say was, 'For ever and ever, Amen.'." This would seem to be a kind of indication that because of Scobie's selfless action, confused as it was, God granted graces to both the child and Helen. Nothing here, however, can be proved--the novel can only speculate--one can only point out that the novel does speculate, and no more.

Evelyn Waugh had some interesting statements to make about The Heart of the Matter in a review printed in Commonweal. Waugh, a novelist himself, recognized the literary value of the book. Unlike Jane Howes, mentioned above, he realized the nature of the artist's intuition. "I believe that Mr. Greene thinks him (Scobie) a saint. Perhaps I am wrong in this, but in any case Mr. Greene's opinion on that matter is of no more value than the reader's. Scobie is not Mr. Greene's creature, devised to illustrate a thesis. He is a man of independent soul." 28

Waugh has succinctly stated in his own review what it has been the objective of the present thesis to prove--what the

\[27\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp.} \, 106-107.\]

\[28\text{Evelyn Waugh, "Felix Culpa," Commonweal, XXXVIII (July} 16, 1948), 324.\]
novel has stated about Scobie. "We are told that he is actuated throughout by the love of God. A love, it is true, that falls short of trust, but a love, we must suppose, which sanctifies his sins. That is the heart of the matter." Waugh then poses the theological problem involved in the book and then very wisely states that at this point "the literary critic must resign his judgement to the theologian." And such has been the aim of this thesis--to interpret *The Heart of the Matter* by determining what the book says: by no means to give a theological evaluation of the problem presented therein.

One can find a theological criticism of the novel written by Canon Joseph Cartmell. It seems, however, that the theologian has not first understood the problem of the book before judging it in regard to the moral value of Scobie's course of action. Cartmell writes: "Scobie was in fact a very bad moral coward. He could have escaped from his entanglement by a comparatively simple resolution. He would not take it. His attempt to give an air of moral respectability to his sins and his suicide, as though they were helping others, was, objectively, pure sham."31


This position is not a new one. Fundamentally it comes down to Scobie's motivation by selfish lust. One has seen this appear and re-appear several times in the course of the present chapter. Its inaccuracy, in light of the text, has, it is hoped, been satisfactorily demonstrated.

In this chapter a survey has been presented of those positions which the present writer has found to be, at least in part, in disagreement with his own reading of the text. In the next chapter a review will be made of those criticisms which generally, at least on the fundamental issue of Scobie's motivation, agree with the solution offered by the present writer.
CHAPTER IV

A SURVEY OF CRITICISMS: AGREEING POSITIONS

The present writer will attempt to solidify his position stated in the second chapter by citing the opinions of various critics who happen to agree with him. This will not only support the conclusion of the present thesis, but it will offer a more complete picture of the various types of criticism which The Heart of the Matter stimulated. The following critics agree, in general, that Scobie's course of action was the result of worthy motivation, albeit subjectively and not objectively good.

Frances Leggett said: "In each case he (Scobie) did what seemed to him the good--that is, what in the heart of it seemed good. And if the line of least resistance for Scobie was to protect others from their miseries, it was not out of his weakness that he did this. The line of least resistance is not necessarily weakness. It can be the line most in accord with one's own nature. With Scobie this was one of inherent goodness--if thought for others more than for oneself is goodness."¹

The author goes on to pass a kind of theological judgement on the novel, but that, as has been stated before, is beyond the scope of this thesis. The present writer, however, heartily agrees with the author when she says: "And what Mr. Waugh calls 'mad Blasphemy' in the offering of his damnation at the foot of the altar was but the offering of his dilemma."² It is hoped that the same idea of Scobie's dilemma, his choice of what seemed to be the lesser of two evils, has been clearly brought out in the present thesis.

One of the finest critical works written on Graham Greene is by Kenneth Allott. In his book he treats all of Greene's work up to and including The Third Man. Allott has a particularly keen insight into The Heart of the Matter and the paradox which it proposes; he writes of Scobie's suicide:

Scobie commits suicide fully aware what he is about, but at the end it is left an open question whether he can be regarded as 'finally impenitent'. He has betrayed God because Louise and Helen are the realer victims to him but as he dies he struggles to take responsibility again 'at the cry of a victim'. That God is his victim here recalls an earlier moment when Scobie returns to his empty house after becoming Helen's lover, and thinks wearily of the lies to be told, the multiplied responsibilities: '... he felt the wounds of those victims who had not yet bled. Lying back on the pillow he stared sleeplessly out towards the grey early morning tide. Somewhere on the face of those obscure waters moved the sense of yet another wrong and another victim, not Louise, not Helen. Away in the town the cocks began to crow for the false dawn.' The double reference to Genesis and to Peter's denial of Christ

²Ibid.
is obvious enough. Scobie betrays his job, Ali, Helen and Louise, but the full height of the argument is that he loves where he betrays, and he also loves and betrays God. 3

Allott impresses one as a balanced and a competent critic because he weighs all the evidence before judging. As has been shown, there has been a painful lack of such procedure in regard to The Heart of the Matter. Many have judged it on a priori grounds. Others have cursorily read the book and then judged it on incomplete textual evidence. Allott, however, is guilty of neither of these charges. One might give a good example of his thoroughness and balance by showing how he does not try to bolster his position by rigging the textual evidence or ignoring it. His position, as has been pointed out, is that Scobie "loves where he betrays, and he loves and betrays God." 4 Allott, however, does not try to justify or soften this position by pleading complete ignorance of the law for Scobie. "Scobie is logical--and in this connection a remark by Rostenne is worth quoting: 'Ce qui garde des plus graves péchés et du désespoir les chrétiens médiocres, c'est ... la légereté et l'aisance avec lesquelles ils vivent dans l'illogisme.'" 5


4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., pp. 223-224.
Allott knows that Scobie realizes he is doing evil. But the point always to be kept in mind is that he is doing what he thinks to be the lesser evil. It is not *la légereté et l'aisance* which save Scobie as they might the mediocre Christian. Scobie is too logical for that.

W. Peters maintains that "Charity is closely allied to pity, and however dangerous, cruel and corruptive it may turn out to be, pity always means a heart great enough to forget itself in order to share the sufferings of others. Even more than charity and pity is what for want of a better word we shall call humility that redeems so much blackness in Mr. Greene's sinners. They never judge or condemn others; they do not excuse themselves, they know themselves to be sinners and know God to be just. Scobie's honesty in regarding himself merely as a man in the ranks who had no opportunity to break the more serious rules bears traces of genuine humility." ⁵

One feels that W. Peters has understood the meaning of pity as used by the author of *The Heart of the Matter*, whereas a critic such as Donat O'Donnell has come to the novel with his own idea of pity, imposed that idea on the novel, and then has written his criticism of Greene, "An Anatomy of Pity." To compose such a critique, one feels that he would need scant

reference to the text. Such criticism seems to have been copious. Its common denominator was that it did not ask Greene what he was trying to say—rather it told him what he had said, and then criticized him accordingly.

Bruce Marshall writes: "What the old priest says about Peguy to Rose in the confessional is not, in substance, so very different from what Father Rank says to Mrs. Scobie after the suicide of her husband." This tends to strengthen the theory proposed earlier by the present writer concerning the similarity between Scobie and Peguy. Both were deeply involved in sin, yet both seemed to exemplify the passage included at the beginning of The Heart of the Matter: "Le pécheur est au coeur même de chrétienté. Nul n'est aussi compétent que le pécheur en matière de chrétienté. Nul, si ce n'est le saint."7

Harold C. Gardiner, S.J. has made a very penetrating remark about Graham Greene's personal attitude towards Scobie. "The greatest weakness I detect in the story is that Greene gives the impression, almost inescapably, that he considers Scobie a saint. I'm not saying that Greene seems to condone the man's

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7This point is discussed on pages 35 and 36.
sinful acts; he doesn't any more than Scobie himself does; and Scobie knows without blinking that he has sinned. But Greene's penetration of his character is so intimate and so sympathetic as almost to shade off into admiration. I wonder if Mr. Greene himself has not let his own pity for his character, brought to the very brink of the abyss through pity, become slightly ungoverned.  

Gardiner keeps well in sight the fact that Greene is neither a technically trained theologian nor is he interested particularly in solving theological questions. He does point out that Greene is interested, however, in delineating the terrific impact of theology on human souls.

As a critic Gardiner is to be praised in that he has let the author and his novel first deliver their message, and he has then, and only then, passed judgement in light of what was said.

In the final analysis one must judge The Heart of the Matter by its contents. When a critic does this he is then deserving of a close reading. When one judges the book from an a priori standpoint his criticism, at least on a literary level, is useless. He may have written a fine personal essay. But he has not given an enlightened opinion of a book.

In this thesis the present writer has made an attempt  

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8 Harold C. Gardiner, "Heart of the Matter: Greene's Greatest?," America, LXXIX (July 17, 1948), 351.
to determine what *The Heart of the Matter* has said. No further criticism has been attempted. The lines which further criticism might follow will be briefly pointed out in a final summary chapter.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis has been to determine the nature of Scobie's motivation in light of the text. Taking the three abstract terms peace, pity, and responsibility, the present writer has endeavored to show the precise meaning of these words in the context of The Heart of the Matter. Such procedure, it is hoped, has avoided the pitfall of imposing a priori or dictionary meanings of these terms on the character of Scobie. Further, the present writer hopes that an objectively true and complete view of the text has furnished him with an accurate interpretation of the book.

Many critics, as has been indicated in chapter three, would not agree with the interpretation offered in this thesis. The present writer hopes, however, that he has shown the positions of many of these critics to have been based on a priori notions, not on textual evidence.

The present writer's solution—Scobie, according to the text, was a confused but fundamentally good man—is only the first step toward a literary evaluation of The Heart of the Matter. Many other questions remain, especially the question concerning Scobie's course of action in the light of absolute
moral principles. Judging from what the book says, can Scobie be saved or is he damned? Other problems too present themselves. Sean O'Faolain brings up the question of free will: "'Thy will be done in heaven as it cannot be on earth' is a prayer, and an attitude, that leaves a novelist and his readers very little breathing space or living room."¹

Allott raises the question of Greene's obsessional themes such as guilt and betrayal, as well as the tradition in which he writes. Allott thinks he comes close to being Jansenistic at times.²

Other critics raise the question of the place of faith in Greene's work in general and in The Heart of the Matter. Others question Greene's concept of sanctity in this novel. Others are concerned about a possible lack of artistic balance in Greene--his completely pessimistic view of the world. This point could be the source of profitable investigation. Greene is generally more Russian than the Russian novelists in his gloominess, for even Dostoyevsky portrays a ray of happiness here and there.

The question has been raised as to whether Greene is a

Catholic who writes novels or a Catholic novelist. His attitude toward the Church expressed in his writing, as well as his attitude toward the priesthood—the names of the two priests in *The Heart of the Matter* are Father Rank and Father Clay—would be interesting.

These and other such questions one might profitably ask concerning the writing of Graham Greene. But the point of the present thesis has been to show how necessary it is to first know what a given book is saying before intelligent criticism can be made. *The Heart of the Matter*, like all of Greene's books, says something important. But no one can criticize it until he knows the motives, plot and action of the novel.

*The Heart of the Matter* tells a story. There was a policeman called Scobie. His heart was filled with concern for others. He was confused, for he thought God did not love His creatures enough to take care of them. Consequently Scobie tried to take God's place. In his confusion he seemed to follow God's law to "Love thy neighbor as thyself" but this led to his violation of another of God's laws "Thou shalt not kill." But even when he violated the one commandment he seemed to think he was observing the other.

If this is the action of *The Heart of the Matter*, then on these grounds must it be evaluated.
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C. UNPUBLISHED MATERIALS


The thesis submitted by Thomas John Walsh, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

March 28, 1958

Date

Signature of Adviser