

ENGLISH 132 (previously 211) (ADS) – UNIT 4

Graham Green, additional biographical information:

Graham Green was born in England in 1904. He was educated at the local school where his father was headmaster and attended college at Oxford. He disliked school, which he described as his first impression of hell. When he tried to run away from school, he was sent to London for psychoanalysis, an experience he enjoyed, but afterward, he suffered prolonged bouts of boredom. At the age of seventeen, he occasionally relieved the boredom by playing Russian roulette with a revolver.

Greene was converted to Roman Catholicism in 1926 and married a Catholic woman. He worked four years for newspapers, resigning after the success of his first published novel. He retained his interest in journalism, however, and continued to write film criticism and occasional foreign reports. He worked for the British foreign office in West Africa during World War II. In 1966 he was made a Companion of Honour by Queen Elizabeth II.

Catholicism was a major influence on his work, especially on such novels as Brighton Rock and The Heart of the Matter.

Greene's themes of morality and religion:

Greene's main concern is the struggle between good and evil, and he treats the temporal and spiritual aspects of each. His religiosity is not that of the quiet, childlike trust in God. Instead, a passionate analyst of every nuance of religious feeling, he bares man's tormented soul as he experiences angst and loneliness. Devoid of illusions, Greene shows evil, in often brutal, naturalistic portrayals, as a disease of body and soul, for he seems to consider sickness, poverty, and death as symbols of evil.

Greene was both highly praised and strongly berated by Catholics and Protestants alike for his representation of religion. It was said that he wrote about religion "as if it were a drug addiction." But his themes are of general concern—the insecurity of modern man and his failure to communicate in love.

Analysis of The Heart of the Matter:

Be sure to consider the brief poem at the very beginning of the book. It might be to your benefit to find out what it says and to think about it as you read the novel.

Setting: West Africa - approx. one year passage of time (1942-1943) – WW II is going on – social and political tension as government is trying to clean out diamond smuggling – extreme heat, insects, and infection – obvious difference in classes of people

Point of view: Third person limited omniscient (limited to Scobie)

Characterization: Scobie – protagonist, dynamic, complex;
Louise – static, simple; Helen – dynamic, complex;
Wilson – dynamic due to relationship with Louise (he changes some, she doesn't), complex

Plot: During the exposition, readers are exposed to the above characters and setting, and they become aware of some of the major symbols (vulture, religious items, heat). The causal events (conflicts) occur as the actions proceed throughout the story. The point of climax takes place when Scobie decides exactly what he plans to do to “solve” his problems. The denouement is the conversations after the death.

Theme: “We rarely ever really know one other than ourself, we only think we do.” Secondary theme: “The power exerted over us can be both our savior and our tormentor.”

VARIOUS NOTES ON GRENDEL:

In Grendel, Gardner is exploring the spiritual and psychological slippage of the twentieth century. Bombarded by disaster, by cheapness and falsity, and by corrosive, malignant philosophy, modern man struggles to maintain some kind of rational and physical order. Man is lower than the angels and a little above the monster; he takes three steps up and two steps down, at times rising to the heroic, at other times sinking toward the bestial.

In Gardner's own fictional design, Beowulf emerges as the hero, as the embodiment of the unified medieval soul. He comes as the superman and as the demigod; his mortality is spiritualized by a perfect combination of classic virtues. In contrast stand three configurations of corrupted virtue. There is the demeaned roughness of Hrothgar, whose political gains have been bought with sure brutality and ruthlessness and whose kingdom now shows cracks and sags. There is the foul lust of the dragon, whose materialism has been bred in

a cave and whose viciousness is thorough. And there is the blighted irrationality of Grendel, whose anger and bloody purposefulness are the results of a flawed intellectual system. Grendel's defect is the most important because it is rationality that rules the other faculties (as Plato tells us), and it is this "wrong reason" that has misled twentieth-century man so drastically. As Grendel himself comments, "The human mind fails to notice the world's meaninglessness; it goes on composing and creating, making the world anew with the movement of a finger or the tilt of the head."

Convinced of his rightness and of the madness of Hrothgar's kingdom-building, Grendel "settles his soul" on destroying the king. This killing spirit that pervades the entire kingdom is quelled, however, by the words and the harp-tunes of the *scop*, who re-creates and reshapes Hrothgar's history. This Shaper alters reality. He transmutes the past like an alchemist, mixing truth with lie until a vision emerges, a vision that annihilates pain and exalts human effort. Grendel, even in his monstrousness, feels the magic of the Shaper's art. His image of the universe has been inverted by the Shaper's fiction. Like mankind, Grendel goes "half insane," losing reason in the rush of poetry and rhythm and sound.

In Grendel, the dragon delivers a cynical lecture on humanity's curious debt to Grendel: "You improve them, my boy! ... You stimulate them! You make them think and scheme. You drive them to poetry, science, religion, all that makes them what they are for as long as they last. You are, so to speak, the brute existent by which they learn to define themselves. The exile, captivity, death they shrink from—the blunt facts of their mortality, their abandonment—that's what you make them recognize, embrace! You *are* mankind, or man's condition: inseparable as the mountain-climber and the mountain."

The ironies of "you *are* mankind" are profound. Grendel dwells inside man as much as outside, and the monster's exclusion from the meadhall and the human community it represents is recognizably man's attempt to banish, through the instrumentality of civilization itself, his own baser instincts.

IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO RE-READ THE INFORMATION IN UNIT 3 PERTAINING TO EXISTENTIALISM; THEN APPLY IT TO AN ANALYSIS OF EACH OF THESE TWO NOVELS.