

**Book review**

# Author retraces Graham Greene's steps

By **BARRIE HAYNE**  
The literary biography is, or should be, at least as much a work of art as the novel, the play or the poem. Lytton Strachey, indeed, one of its most brilliant exponents, once described it as "the most delicate and humane of all the branches of writing." One cannot think of very many literary biographies in English that live up to that high standard: Strachey's own, quirky Queen Victoria perhaps, Boswell's Johnson certainly, and, in our own day, Leon Edel's five-volume life of Henry James, which approvingly quotes Strachey's condemnation of the "journeymen of letters" who write most biographies, with "their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design."

At first glance, Norman Sherry's *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume One, 1904-1939* (Lester and Orpen Dennys, 753 pages, \$28.95), fails by all three of these criteria: it gives almost every detail of Greene's first 35 years; it is the work of a biographer who seems to have physically gone over every foot of ground ever traversed by its much-travelled subject; and its very comprehensiveness seems to give it no apparent form beyond that of its subject's life story. It may be of interest to learn that an author as morbid as Greene - "never particularly in love with life," as he described himself - remembers as one of his first experiences having his sister's dead pug thrown into his baby carriage. It may even be relevant to an understanding of the author of *The Heart of the Matter* to learn that, at age six, he was witness to a suicide and that, as an undergraduate, he played Russian roulette.

But must we have Vivien's diary, or need to know the number of turkeys owned by a "sad gentle" breeder whom Greene met on the train to San Antonio? Sherry's first volume brings us only to the writing of Greene's acknowledged masterpiece, *The Power and the Glory*, with at least 50 years and the bulk of his literary career in front of him. Seven-hundred pages for the first 35 years makes it unlikely that only another 700 will suffice to wrap up the next 50 years.

Graham Greene appears in these pages as not the most congenial of people, or writers. His basically withdrawn personality, which Sherry emphasizes, his relentless moralizing, rather at odds with his highly sexed, faintly prurient nature, his unforgiving anti-

Americanism, evident especially in *The Quiet American*, his eye for the sordid and down-at-heel - none of these qualities suggests the large mindedness of the great writer. Regularly rumored for the Nobel Prize, Greene has never received that accolade and one is sometimes reminded of Somerset Maugham in the previous generation, a writer whose longevity somehow became confused with high distinction.

**PROBE WARTS**

However, it must be admitted that to see someone as closely and in such detail as Sherry's method allows us not only to notice the warts, but to lance and to probe them as well. And while to see Greene as a misfit youth growing into a not entirely agreeable young man is to see him unsympathetically, we get to know him so well that eventually to know all is to pardon all - or almost all.

Graham Greene sprang from the upper-middle classes. He was staying, for instance, with his uncle and namesake at the outbreak of the First World War: Admiral Graham Greene was responsible for keeping the British fleet at battle stations in anticipating the coming hostilities (though Churchill took credit for this in his memoirs). Greene's father (like Greene's mother) was a withdrawn personality, sexually repressed, who as the headmaster of Graham's school expelled boys for such crimes as masturbation. His predecessor, who seems to have left his mark on Graham, was an "anal flogger," and the novelist in his own memoirs treats this authority figure of his youth with cruel ridicule, especially after a stroke left him powerless to

retaliate. After school, which Graham ran away from, and thereby precipitated himself into a period of psychoanalysis, approved by his father, Greene went up to Oxford. It was full, in the early 1920s, of a quaintly innocent and rather intellectual homosexuality. He seems to have had little to do there with other young men of letters out to make their names, Evelyn Waugh especially, and also Anthony Powell.

With all this confused sexuality, three main elements were left to make Greene the kind of novelist he became. He set out to be a professional espionage agent, but, this failing, he turned to journalism; and in that profession he met the love of his life, who was a devout Catholic and insisted he become one before they could marry. This is the stuff of his art: international intrigue, and the entertainment of the thrilling; the documentary treatment of the darker side of life; and a tortured Catholicism.

*The Greenes were married* in 1927. Most of the rest of this volume is taken up with Greene's success as a journalist, especially as a reviewer, and his somewhat fitful career as a novelist, which is finally crowned with success in 1938-39 with *Brighton Rock* and *The Power and the Glory*.

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Home Post Scripts



By Glenda Hughes, Sales Rep.

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This market is certainly a test for buyers and sellers alike! Without doubt, the stats are changing, and houses are selling within a reasonable time framework, but it is a very frustrating market to work in. Our buyers are out there looking, and they are eventually buying - so that is good news - but they are taking forever to make up their minds. It seems that if even the slightest thing about a home is not suitable, it puts them off and it's on to the next one. Compromises are almost non-existent. Naturally prices are of utmost importance at present - with buyers looking for extra value for their money. They know that they have the edge at present - and goodness knows how long they will be in this position, so they are making the most of their knowledge about this market. Not a bad position to be in of course, but trying to find the "perfect" house in the exact price range is a task not suited for the sales rep short on patience. Many long and exhausting hours are being spent on the roads by most of us these days - and lots of time we are "spinning our wheels."

On the other side of the coin are our clients that are trying to sell their homes, and are having streams of showings, and still no offer on their home. When we are not spinning our wheels, we are now spending a lot of time on the phone, soothing our vendors who are trying to figure out what to do to get their homes sold. We are trying our best to keep everyone calm, but even in the best of markets, it is always a disruption to have your home for sale, and in this market, it is pretty nerve wracking. Fortunately, nothing goes on forever, and this scene will end, but in order to keep everyone happy, days of the week are non-existent, and hours in the day mean nothing. Instead of "shop 'til you drop," it's now "spin 'til you win," for us.

It's going to take a little while to get the rules straight on how to play this game - for although the buyers seem to have some of the rules in hand, they are missing a page. Lots of purchasers out there seem to think that in a "buyers' market" that gives them license to really "low ball" homes that they wish to buy, even if they are priced for this market.

On the other hand, the vendors somehow forget that we do not have a January/February market on our hands, and they can hold on to prices that were appropriate then. Someone has got to rewrite the rule book - and I think it should be entitled "Compromise."

Really this market is not handled much different than any other market - the same scale still applies. If you sell low, you buy low - if you sell high, you buy high. How come this sort of gets lost in the translation somewhere along the way?

Now, when you are in this profession, and working through all the scenarios, you get the rules straight pretty fast. It is up to your sales rep to help you through this maze, as it is in any other market. Don't get upset if you hear some things that you don't want to hear. If you ask for an honest opinion on buying or selling, we are here to give you an honest answer. Sometimes the truth is painful, but it is a necessity if we are to be of benefit to you.

I have a little hint for you though - before you ask your sales rep about commissions, make sure that they don't carry a gun!

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