

Manon Lescaut and the Nature of Marie Rycker's Warning in Graham Greene's *A Burnt-Out Case*

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I. INTRODUCTION

DeVitis has complained that we could consider Graham Greene's *A Burnt-Out Case* a great novel except for one major fault: Querry as an old hand in the matters of women and as a man of the world would never have fallen for Marie's wiles.¹ What I feel DeVitis and other scholars have missed thus far is the fact that Querry — like André Rycker, Father Thomas, and Parkinson — has a problem listening. He is also a myth builder just as his three antagonists listed above are, telling stories, at least on one level, in order to repress his natural sexual tendencies.

For the most part, The entire novel deals with Querry's struggles to come to an end of religion while proclaiming loudly that he has already done so. But his other equally loud declaration is that he has come to the end of love and especially the love of women. If the leprosarium is the arena in which he deals with his spiritual battle, Marie Rycker is the instrument most capable of helping him deal with his inability to love women, an inability which he never comes to grips with and which kills him in the end. This is not to say that he needed to make love with Marie, but he certainly should have listened to her as she warns him to. If he had listened to her, if he had tried to love her as a human being instead of working so hard to repress his natural inclination to have sex with her, she would not have made up the story about his fathering of her child. But Querry does not heed her warning. He does not listen to her. Instead he pretends to himself that she is a prepubescent child and fills the room where they spend the night with avoidance.

This paper will begin in the next section with a discussion of Querry and

his inability to listen which is at the heart of his inability to rediscover his childhood faith in God as well as his inability to love. As his three antagonists — André Rycker, Father Thomas, and Parkinson — are a reflection of his own inability to listen, it will be helpful to examine his relationship with each of them in some detail. We will then examine Graham Greene’s delightful ironic use of Manon in the novel.

II. QUERRY & THE ANTAGONISTS

II. 1. The End of Belief

II. 1. a. Querry’s Case

Graham Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case* is a marvelously designed trap for the unwary reader.² The trap is centered carefully around the protagonist who enters a leper colony from a standoffish even a “superior” position so that the reader is tempted to attribute to him a sense of specialness or even nobility. By designing his protagonist in the way he does, Greene intentionally tests his readers as much as he does every character in the novel. We live in a society which worships individual strength and achievement. For Greene neither of these have any value outside the context of a caring human community.

In Graham Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case*, the protagonist, Querry, is a world famous architect who has built prize winning high rises as well as widely admired cathedrals that for him have no meaning. He has relentlessly seduced women and felt nothing in his relationships with them. In a moment of revelation he sees the futility of his pursuits for financial and sexual satisfaction. His ability to design and construct structures have proven meaningless. In an attempt to escape from the meaninglessness we he wanders out on the furthest tributary of the Congo River. Only in Greene’s heart of darkness, there is a hospital, a leprosarium, where the burnt-out cases, those upon whom the disease of leprosy has spent itself out, must now learn to live with their deformities.

In the leprosarium, Querry is once again called upon to use his skill as an architect, to build utilitarian structures in the form of a hospital.³ As Querry begins to build the hospital for the leprosarium with the intention of meeting the needs of the community around him rather than meeting his own previously self-directed aims, he begins slowly to form an architecture that has

meaning. This meaning is something that Query must achieve in order for him to be able to dwell within the community of this new architecture. This will bring him identity thus allowing him to live with his spiritual deformities. He is hindered from the experience of dwelling, however, by the spiritual illness of others whose own agendas work against his last opportunity and eventually result in his murder.

Query moves from merely occupying what Bernd Jager has called “the space of dwelling” toward inhabitation of the space of dwelling. This space of dwelling is something that Query must achieve in order to give him definition in that it is the dwelling that must name him. But the dwelling must also give him a purpose.

II. 1. b. Query & Dr. Colin : Non-Listeners

Shortly after Query arrives at the leprosarium, Dr. Colin who is an atheist and the Superior of the Catholic run leprosarium are talking. Dr. Colin receives his pay as well as his payments for medical supplies from the State. The two men get together once a month to discuss how the State should be billed. Over the years the two have become close friends. As they are discussing the problems of the leprosarium, the Superior explains that he has recently had a visit from Rycker who had come by to find out all he could about Query.⁴ Through the Superior’s conversation with Dr. Colin, we are given a revealing glimpse of Rycker, another spiritual wanderer very much like Query except that Rycker is unaware that he is a wanderer.

“Rycker seeks information. He never gives it. And he was anxious to discuss his spiritual problems.”

“I would never have guessed he had any.”

“When a man has nothing else to be proud of,” the Superior said, “he is proud of his spiritual problems. After two whiskies he began to talk to me about Grace. I lent him a book. He won’t read it, of course. He knows all the answers six years wasted in a seminary can do a lot of harm.” (21)

We have not yet met Rycker, but we are prepared for a person who does not know how to listen. He is filled with his own problems, yet convinced that

there is no one around qualified to help him find the solutions to them. After six years “as a young man with the Jesuits” (39), Rycker failed out of seminary. He has chosen the life of a palm oil plantation manager and has grown dissatisfied with his life. He spreads this dissatisfaction and his failure like a disease.

What follows between the doctor and the Superior is a discussion of the question of motivation. What Greene seems to be saying is that if one’s relationship to the world (seen through the eyes of a dweller or one who represents some dwelling) is in harmony with dwelling, then one’s motivations will be properly balanced. If one’s relationship is not in harmony with dwelling, then everyone will know soon enough. In any case, it is neither the Superior’s job nor Dr. Colin’s job to judge. Dr. Colin is a suspicious man, protective of his practice. As such he tests Querry’s motives and declares him not a leprophile :

“We don’t want to waste time with neurotics, father.”

“I wish you had a little time to waste. You work too hard.”

But Doctor Colin was not listening. (22)

Dr. Colin is dedicated to relieving suffering. He is a man who tests and retests his faith in his ability to detect the causes of suffering. The Superior is hinting here that Dr. Colin seems to be driven, perhaps even a little neurotic himself. But Dr. Colin, like the antagonists, is lost in his own thoughts. And while the Superior is able to keep an open and flexible mind and cautions Dr. Colin against looking for motives, Dr. Colin — who has rigidly disciplined himself to look for *the* cause of illnesses and assorted problems — misses the fact that there may be more than one simple answer for why people do the things they do. While it is beyond the scope of this brief paper to do so, I believe a full study of Dr. Colin would reveal that in his relationship with Querry, he unwittingly becomes a large part of Querry’s continuing inability to listen.

After a month at the leprosarium, Querry offers his services to the doctor, but refuses to tell the doctor his profession. The doctor agrees to use him on a run to Luc to pick up his new apparatus for detecting leprosy. Querry immediately agrees to go.

Dr. Colin explains to him the difficulty of the task that he is requesting of

him. Query insists that he is willing to go. Dr. Colin repeats the difficulty so that no one would feel that Query had not been properly warned, then

paused a while for Query to answer, but all that Query found to say was, "I shall be glad to be of use." The distrust between them deadened intercourse.... (29)

Both men are trying to protect themselves. Dr. Colin's naturally suspicious nature comes up against Query who insists upon his anonymity, and neither are able to speak.

Dr. Colin is not a member of the Catholic community. He is an outsider. He is a "good" man just as Ida in *Brighton Rock* was a "good" woman. But both are worldly. Though we know nothing about his upbringing, we do know that he is still in contact with his mother who is, at one point in the novel, enjoying a vacation in the Swiss Alps. He has had a happy marriage. Now, like Des Grieux's friend Tiberge, he is a bit of a voyeur. He stands on the outside, judging and making prognoses but without becoming personally involved in anything beyond his science. Having lost his wife to sickness, he worships science as having the possibility of making life worthwhile, and therefore he pours his life into his work with the same devotion and dedication with which he once held to his wife. His ground, while it lacks God, recognizes other gods which he accepts unquestioningly. He is living in the dwelling that he has built with his wife in a community populated primarily with memories.

For Dr. Colin, the best man can hope to do is improve his little corner of the world or try to provide instruments that will do it for him. Query, on the other hand, while he does not believe in God, continues to look for Pendéle, a return to innocence, music, and dancing. For him, the reader senses, there is at least some hope.

Query sets off on his eight day journey to and from Luc with *Deo Gratias*. One night along the way, as he journeys as a representative of Dr. Colin, he has a dream of one of his former lovers who comes to him weeping because she has broken a favorite vase. He, however, is unable to empathize. She slaps his face because of his insensitivity, but he doesn't feel it: "He said, 'I am sorry, I am too far gone, I can't feel at all, I am a leper'" (31). As he identifies

himself in terms of the illness of leprosy he wakes up.

II. 2. André Rycker : Personal Deafness & Tyranny

When Query reaches Luc he discovers that Dr. Colin's apparatus has arrived a long time ago and has been held in crates at the local cathedral. After pressing the priest in charge, Query finally gets the crates. As he is looking for vegetables for the leprosarium, he is trapped by Rycker who informs him : "You must stay a night at my place on your way home. ... I can assure you, you won't like the hotel" (3334). After he establishes that Query is *the* Query of popular fame, within the space of a little more than a half page he uses the personal pronoun twenty times :

I shall respect your incognito. I will say nothing. You can trust me not to betray a guest.... my place... myself and my wife... my wife who said to me... I haven't... I can... I have... I am... But you can trust me, trust me all the way. I have serious enough problems of my own, so I can sympathize... I've buried myself too. ... I assure you, M. Query, you have no choice. (34)

Greene has done this brilliantly. Rycker seems more of a snake oil salesman than a palm oil plantation manager. He is pompous, self-possessed, and obnoxious. Right away, the reader knows that Rycker will betray Query at the first opportunity, and that he will do so in order to elevate himself in some way. And his last sentence, "I assure you, M. Query, you have no choice," shows him to be a manipulative and grasping tyrant as well.

Why then, as an intelligent man of the world and after he has been so defensive with the priests and Dr. Colin, does he go right over to Rycker's house? I believe that the answer lies in Query's identity as a wanderer before he arrived at the leprosarium. What we know about Query thus far is that he is completely wrapped up in his own self and in his own problems. He could just as easily say with Rycker, "I have serious enough problems of my own" (34). As Bruce Bawer (1989 b) has pointed out, "Not even the sight of armless babies can take Query out of himself for very long" (31).

In Chapter Two, Query rides to Rycker's house with Deo Gratias and Rycker's chauffeur following behind in Query's lorry. Query goes with Rycker

because Rycker is a disturbing reminder of himself. The danger for the reader is to think that because Query remains silent that he is somehow more noble and deserving of our respect. There is also a temptation to interpret Query's presence at the leprosarium as noble as well, even though Greene hasn't given us any reason to think in this way. We, like Dr. Colin, are too tempted to look for motives.

Rycker takes Query to his house and factory by the river where he introduces Query to his wife Marie, "a girl in blue jeans" less than half his age and just out of convent school. Rycker boasts, "And here, chérie, is the Query. He tried to deny it, but I told him we had a photograph" (36). Since they first met, Rycker has not ceased referring to him as *the* Query, "as though it were a title of nobility" (35). After greeting Query politely, Marie leaves.

Rycker tells Query to sit down and says, "Marie is fixing the drinks. You can see I've trained her to know what a man needs." It's as though he is talking about a circus animal which he has trained to perform for his amusement. As he continues to discuss his marriage, it becomes clear that he has no more love for his wife than Query has had for the women he has known. Rycker has married her in order to have someone around who will keep him warm in his old age, a live-in nurse and an instrument of fire protection: "St. Paul wrote, didn't he, that it was better to marry than burn. Marie will stay young long enough to save me from the furnace" (36). He is not building a dwelling with this woman. He is building a prison where he can hold Marie as a nurse and sex slave.

When she returns with the drinks, he commands her: "And now, my dear, you'll change into a proper dress." During dinner, Marie asks questions like someone who has been told what she must ask in order to be a proper hostess. When she appears to step out of the boundaries, Rycker cuts her off sharply.

After dinner, Rycker sends his wife to fetch the copy of *Time* with Query's photograph inside. After Rycker presents the copy with Query's photo on the front: "'You see,' Rycker said, 'We know all.'" Rycker, as the Superior has warned us before, knows all the answers. He has read about Query and so, to his mind, he knows Query as well or better than Query knows himself. Thus, when Query responds, "I don't remember that the article was very accurate," Rycker merely brushes it aside with his own formula-

tions of Query's motivations for being at the leprosarium. After Query claims that he has retired from his position and Marie leaves the table, Rycker takes the opportunity to talk behind her back.

Throughout the narrative from the time we first meet Marie, Query's thoughts about her are as disturbing as Rycker's comments. For example, when she leaves at the beginning of the chapter to fetch drinks for her husband and Query, the text reads: "Now she had said her piece she disappeared as suddenly as she had come; perhaps the schoolbell had rung for class." Since we know that Marie has graduated from high school, the comment seems rather uncalled for. His every observation of Marie not only describes an oppressed young woman but goes even further to make Rycker seem like a pedophile. While Query criticizes in his mind the way Rycker treats Marie like a mindless child, his own observations are clothed in language as condescending as Rycker's. The only difference between them is that, after acknowledging how attractive she is, Query has never ceased trying to convince himself that he would never have married someone as young as Marie... no matter how good she looks her blue jeans.

But neither of them, Rycker nor Query, knows anything about building a dwelling that opens its arms to those within its walls. And neither of them prove willing to listen to anything Marie has to say. We are not surprised that Query could leave his wife so easily. Both are two sides of the same failure.

Just after she had excused herself from the table, Rycker explained that she had probably gone to write in her journal. When Query asks him if she has much to write about, Rycker responds:

"I wouldn't know. At the beginning I used to take a quiet look, but she discovered that, and now she locks it up. I expect I teased her a little too much. I remember one entry: 'Letter from mother. Poor Maxime has had five puppies.' It was the day I was decorated by the governor, but she forgot to put anything about the ceremony." (38)

It never occurs to him that Marie's act of passing over his decoration from the governor is an act of defiance. In truth, it would appear more likely that for her Rycker is merely her jailer, someone to be avoided at bedtime.

“It must be lonely for her at her age.”

“Oh, I don’t know. There are a lot of household duties in the bush. To be quite frank, I think it’s a good deal more lonely for me. She’s hardly — you can see it for yourself — an intellectual companion.” (38-39)

He says: “It sometimes seems to me... that she’s ignorant of almost everything. ... You saw for yourself — she doesn’t even cross herself at meals when I say grace” (40). Whether this is ignorance or contempt is open to discussion, but it strikes me, based upon Marie’s later actions, more as ironic contempt. Rycker and Marie are not building a dwelling together. Marie is in a silent war over her husband’s interpretation of religion.

Further irony comes into play as Rycker attempts to engage Query in a discussion on love. Query at least realizes that he knows nothing about it and attempts to explain this to Rycker, but Rycker again brushes Query’s denial aside. He wishes to see Query as a great Catholic intellect, and he will accept no other definition of Query than his own. Rycker, though not consciously, sees himself, the wanderer unable to dwell among his fellows, in Query. One difference between them is that Query has become famous and Rycker hasn’t. It is important to Rycker that he build up Query in order to control Query and in order to build up the self that he sees in Query at the same time.

Rycker boasts, “In the seminary I formed the habit of thinking more than most men” (39-40). As he forces the subject along, it becomes clear that his idea of love is conjugal “duty,” especially the regular submission of his wife at bedtime. He has attempted to explain to his young wife that love of God equals submission to his sexual appetites. Query responds,

“I wouldn’t talk to her too much, if I were you, about loving God,” Query said with reluctance. “She mightn’t see a parallel between that and your bed.”

“There’s a close parallel for a Catholic,” Rycker said rapidly. He put up his hand as though he were answering a question before his fellow novices....

“You seem to be very well up in the subject,” Query said.

“At the seminary I always came out well in moral theology.”

“I don’t fancy you need me then — or the fathers either. You have obviously thought everything out satisfactorily yourself.”

“That goes without saying. But sometimes one needs confirmation and encouragement. You can’t imagine, Query, what a relief it is to go over these problems with an educated Catholic.” (41)

Not only does Rycker miss the irony in Query’s comments, he accepts confirmation and encouragement where it has not been given. And when Query subsequently tries to explain that he would not call himself a Catholic, Rycker laughs: “What? *The* Query? You can’t fool me. You are being too modest.” Rycker, of course, knows better. He shows Query to his room, and Query goes to bed:

The darkness was noisy with frogs, and for a long while after his host had said good night and gone, they seemed to croak with Rycker’s hollow phrases: grace: sacrament: duty: love, love, love. (42)

Chapter Three begins with Rycker’s first betrayal of Query when he goes to the leprosarium and lets them know who *the* Query is. As Dr. Colin says: “He kept his word for nearly a month. That’s quite an achievement for Rycker” (43). The man clearly has no integrity. But all the signs were there when Query first met him, so it is difficult to feel too sorry for Query. If Query was so eager to see the reflection of his old self again, he can’t be too surprised when it lives up to what he should have expected of it all along.

Chapter One of Part Three opens with Rycker and Marie driving to the Governor’s home for cocktails. As they move along the road, Rycker is drilling his wife on how she is to behave, how much she may eat, and how much she is to speak. No sooner is Rycker at the party than he betrays Query’s presence again, following his betrayal by fabricating a story about how Query spent the night in the bush with his servant Deo Gratias, praying and compelling him to return to continue his treatment. Then, posturing himself as Query’s personal confidant, he further fabricates a story about Query “designing a modern African church” (63).

When the Monseigneur arrives, Rycker tries to get him to answer his

questions about *the* Querry's status as a saint, questions which the Monseigneur parries beautifully. When his tactic doesn't work, Rycker begins to criticize Dr. Colin as an atheist claiming that Dr. Colin knows nothing of the true meaning of charity and suggesting that the Monseigneur have a talk with him. But the Monseigneur simply walks away as though Rycker isn't there, preferring to talk with Marie :

"Your husband seems very taken up with this man Querry," he said.

"He thinks he may be somebody he can talk to."

"Are you so silent?" the Bishop asked, teasing her gently as though he had indeed picked her up outside a café on the boulevards.

"I can't talk about his subjects."

"What subjects?"

"Free Will and Grace and — Love."

"Come now — love...you know about that, don't you?"

"Not that kind of love," Marie Rycker said. (65)

The assumption by both Querry and Rycker is that Marie is a child who does not know what is going on. But what Greene seems to be hinting at here is that she is much more aware of her husband's shallowness than either give her credit for.

By the end of the party, Rycker has drunk himself beyond his usual general criticism of everyone to self-criticism. Marie knows that if he can be induced to take a sleeping pill before he reaches his religious level of drunkenness, "which, like an open doorway in a redlamp district, led invariably to sex," she can get some sleep. Rycker is upset because the Bishop has spoken to her about cards :

"I suppose he knew that I had forbidden you to play."

"He couldn't. I've told no one." (65)

Rycker begins to berate himself for not having taught her "the real values" as he sees them. "His vain yellow face hung like a mask between her and Africa" (66). Soon he is talking baby talk with her, kneading her thigh and calling her

“Mawie.” She tries to get out of sex by claiming that it is the most dangerous time of the month. But he “put his hand below her waist and propelled her gently in the direction he required” (68), claiming that “The Church doesn’t intend us to avoid all risk” (69).

II. 3. Query : Deaf to the Desires of Others

Dr. Colin urges Query to use his skill as an architect for the good of the leprosarium and build a hospital. Query explains that he has given up on his former vocation just as he has given up on relationships with women. At the heart of the confession which follows we find the basis of Query’s *dis-ease* :

“I don’t deny my profession once meant a lot to me. So have women. But the use of what I made was never important to me. I wasn’t a builder of council houses or factories. When I made something, I made it for my own pleasure.”

“Is that the way you loved women?” the doctor asked, but Query hardly heard him. He was talking as a hungry man eats. (44)

Like Des Grieux who makes the same mistakes over and over again, Query repeatedly fails to listen when he should. This inability to listen comes in to play time and again throughout the novel and becomes central to his downfall when he is with Marie, who senses that at least in this sense, he is no different from her husband, Father Thomas, and the most infectious spreader of disease, Parkinson. Query has been building, not as a response to the need to dwell within a community of dwellers, but as a response to groundless pleasure.

“Your vocation is quite a different one doctor. You are concerned with people. I wasn’t concerned with the people who occupied my space — only with the space....” (44)

One senses that had Query been the builder of houses that they would not have been unlike those of the famous Swiss French architect Le Corbusier whose oft quoted notion of a house is “a machine to live in.” Query’s would have been machines too, perhaps less purely utilitarian and maybe even more

creative machines, but machines all the same.

“My interest was in space, light, proportion. New materials interested me only in the effect they might have on those three. Wood, brick, steel, concrete, glass — space seems to alter with what you use to enclose it. Materials are the architect’s plot. They are not his motive for work. Only the space and the light and the proportion....”

“Two of your churches are famous. Didn’t you care what happened inside them — to people?”

Notice here that Query’s notion of *space* is strangely separated from the notion of experience. Dr. Colin is understandably astonished. Yi-Fu Tuan in his excellent book *Space and Place* points out that even “non-human animals” mark off space with a sense of territory. This, as both Heidegger and Jager have shown us, is how dwelling is built within the space of dwelling.⁵

“The acoustics had to be good of course. The high altar had to be visible to all. But people hated them. They said they weren’t designed for prayer. They meant that they were not Roman or Gothic or Byzantine. And in a year they had cluttered them up with their cheap plaster saints; they took out my plain windows and put in stained glass dedicated to dead pork-packers who had contributed to diocesan funds, and when they had destroyed my space and my light, they were able to pray again, and they even became proud of what they had spoilt. I became what they called a great Catholic architect, but I built no more churches, doctor.” (45)

Query is still bound hand and mind in his arrogance and solipsism. He assumes that he understands why the worshipers rejected his work when in actual fact, he hasn’t a clue. He assumes that the worshipers wanted merely to follow the known work of previous cathedral builders, when in actual fact, they only wanted a space where they could feel the presence of God. But since Query had no idea of who God is or what it means to dwell within the presence of God, he was not interested in creating a dwelling for those who wanted to worship God.

Dr. Colin at least offers an intelligent perspective: "I'm not a religious man. I don't know much about these things, but I suppose they had a right to believe their prayers were more important than a work of art" (45). After all it was not a work of art alone that they were looking for. It was a part of their dwelling where they could feel the presence of God. But Query is adamant:

"Men have prayed in prison, men have prayed in slums and concentration camps. It's only the middleclasses who demand to pray in suitable surroundings. Sometimes I feel sickened by the word prayer." (45)

What utter nonsense! All of this is the totally irrelevant whining of a child who has not gotten his way. The context does not involve a prison, slum, or concentration camp. It involves a middle-class community who has, in good faith, hired (and who is no doubt paying good money for) an architect to perform a task for their needs, not for his self-serving pleasure.

What Greene seems to be saying here is that the community must come before art. Again, for Greene the ultimate community at the edge of dwelling is the Church. And the dwelling place of the Church is in the presence of God who is the Ground of dwelling. It is significant that Query has moved from designing cathedrals to building a hospital.

Query goes on to explain how that he was always married to his work even when he was with women. Dr. Colin responds,

"It sounds a little hard on the woman."

"Self-expression is a hard and selfish thing. It eats everything, even the self. At the end you find you haven't got a self to express. I have no interest in anything anymore, doctor. I don't want to sleep with a woman nor design a building." (46)

For someone who no longer has "interest in anything anymore," Query seems awfully angry to me.

One can only feel sorry for Dr. Colin. His responses are inadequate to the problems set before him. In fact, his comments expose a man who is baffled and a little embarrassed by what he has heard. He asks, "Have you no chil-

dren?” Query responds,

“I once had, but they disappeared into the world a long time ago. We haven’t kept in touch. Self-expression eats the father in you, too.”

“So you thought you could just come and die here.”

“Yes. That was in my mind. But chiefly I wanted to be in an empty place, where no new building or woman would remind me that there was a time when I was alive, with a vocation and a capacity to love — if it was love.” (46)

Self-expression has eaten Query into a corner of the world where space, light, and proportion are lost in the miasmic womb (even Dr. Colin has never “become quite accustomed to the sweet gangrenous smell of certain leprous skins, and it ha[s] become to him the smell of Africa”) of the leprosarium.

Query asks Dr. Colin if he can cure him. Dr. Colin confesses that he is uncertain whether Query’s mutilations “have gone far enough yet.” Any diagnosis is complicated by Query’s overwhelming sense of apathy to everything outside of his own condition. Leaving his hut to visit patients, Dr. Colin asks, “Do you want to come or would you like to sit here thinking of your own case? It’s often the way with the mutilated — they want to retire too, out of sight.”

Dr. Colin leaves with Query following close behind and leads Query through an entire panoply of human horrors and misery. At the end he makes another plea for help.

II. 4. The Deafness of the Reader

As Query begins very slowly to undergo the healing of his neurosis throughout the remainder of this text, he continues to do so from the position of someone looking down from a distance for the most part in an attitude of silent superiority on everyone else. This distance is respected by both the fathers (with the exception of Father Thomas) and Dr. Colin but for different reasons. Query, therefore, is able to remain largely self-protective and defensive in the center of his own universe.

Both Bawer and Dr. Colin interpret this silent standoffishness as deserved or earned superiority. As Bawer writes: “Even Dr. Colin regards Query as a

privileged character” (31). This is true, but Dr. Colin is wrong to do so and Bawer is wrong to assume that Greene wants us to put him on a pedestal.⁶ This is attested to by the fact that Querry is always whining about his inability to feel. And Greene, as we know from numerous examples from other Greene novels — the “whiskey” priest, Scobie, even Monsignor Quixote, and many others — certainly knows the tonal difference between soul-searching and whining.

It seems to be a disease of Western culture that we want stubbornly to enoble those who have achieved a certain measure of financial success in life or those who have achieved a degree of fame from their ability to perform certain tasks. But Greene has given us a study of a person. Querry’s skill and ability are irrelevant. It is the person that matters. And arrogance and silence and standoffishness are never noble characteristics in Greene’s fiction. For example, in Greene’s short story “The Destructors,” Trevor, whose father is also an architect, uses this same sort of standoffish arrogance manipulatively and successfully in order to get his way with the other gang members.

There is an element of deception in referring to Querry as a burntout case. Since Dr. Colin works with lepers, the term comes readily to mind with an aura of cleverness which obscures and the issue.

Once when Querry made a comment on his life — a question brought to his mind by the sight of some pitiable and squalid case — the doctor looked up at him with much the same clinical eye with which he had just examined the patient. He said, “Perhaps if I tested your skin now I would get a second negative reaction.”

“What do you mean?”

“You are showing curiosity again about another human being.”

“Who was the first,” Querry asked.

“Deo Gratias...” (120-21)

Were Querry still in Europe, most would think of him as a passionless despicable individual. But “burnt-out case” sounds less judgmental and ignores the differences between the lepers and Querry. All Querry has done here is make a passing comment on “some pitiable and squalid case” which he has had the in-

sensitivity to use in order to make a comment “on his [own] life.” Of course the blame is not entirely his alone here. Dr. Colin, who has been making these comparisons all along, is partly responsible. But since Dr. Colin is a doctor who deals with burnt-out cases all the time, we let it pass. Greene has done this masterfully well. Query’s insensitivity becomes Dr. Colin’s professional observation (“the doctor looked up at him with much the same clinical eye”: This is almost a Norman Rockwell painting!), and we forget that it was Query who made the original observation and the selfish nature of it.

This is part of the same old trap. And we are led right into it by the good doctor himself. Two paragraphs later, he observes,

“It needs a very strong man to survive an introspective and solitary vocation. I don’t think you were strong enough. I know I couldn’t have stood your life.” (121)

The implication is very strong here that it was the job that was bad. Query is better for not being able to continue in it. Even the good doctor “couldn’t have stood” Query’s life. The narrative structure of this is very complex. In the first sentence “a very strong man” is unnamed. Query did the job for many years and even became quite successful at it, so Query must be the very strong man. On the other hand, the job is bad. Query wasn’t strong enough to continue in a job that was bad. Therefore, Query is strong and/or better for being weak. The doctor’s praise is all the more powerful because it is stated indirectly.

Query knows that this is all nonsense, so he turns the focus back on the doctor: “‘Why does a man choose a vocation like this?’ Query asked” (121). We are tempted, if we aren’t careful, to see this as humbleness because Query does not say that the doctor’s praise is nonsense as he does with Rycker, Father Thomas, and Parkinson. He doesn’t comment on the doctor’s words at all. He merely turns the subject away from himself. This gives the doctor’s praise a certain undeniability, and the trap is closed.

The doctor changes the subject to the suffering too often sought for by doctors in Africa. The reader is reminded of Query’s insistence that he has come to Africa to experience fear and pain so that he might feel alive again.

Finding none and finding only discomfort instead, many doctors have committed suicide :

“Sometimes I think that the search for suffering and the remembrance of suffering are the only means we have to put ourselves in touch with the whole human condition. With suffering we become part of the Christian myth.” (122)

Again, if we look closely enough, it’s difficult not to think of Query as suffering from the inability to recognize his own suffering.

Query’s architecture is a vast solipsistic emptiness which symbolizes himself only. He would eradicate all dwelling. As an architect, he is a dictator/tyrant who would like to be the last man standing in the conflict for space. Unable to do this and unwilling to kill himself, he has taken his talent and leapt off the edge of the world, running off to Africa.

Dr. Colin, on the other hand, believes in a sort of vague evolution of the imagination which somehow ends in love. He sees Christ as “an amoeba who took the right turning.” His ideas aren’t very well thought out, but he appears happy with things as they are.

II. 5. Marie & the Superior : Listeners of the Heart

In Chapter Two, Marie is at the leproserie talking with the Superior. He informs her that all of the rumors that her husband has spread about building a new church are completely false: “Anyway it’s no use having a great church if the people are still living in mud huts” (71). As the two are talking,

A small black child hardly more than two feet high walked into the room without knocking, coming in like a scrap of shadow from the noontday glare outside. He was quite naked and his little tassel hung like a beanpod below the potbelly. He opened a drawer in the superior’s desk and pulled out a sweet. Then he walked out again. (71-72)

This is the purest example of dwelling in the novel, and it is most fitting that it should happen between a child and the Superior. The child is perfectly at

home. He doesn't even hesitate at the door. He knows the territory. He doesn't have to search for the candy. He goes right to it. He knows that if the candy is there, it's his. Not only is he welcome, but his welcome goes without saying. There is an attitude of complete openness and comfort between the child and the Superior. We know this because the conversation continues between Marie and the Superior as though nothing has been disturbed.

Marie brings up the issue of Query praying with *Deo Gratias*, but the Superior exposes that as an improbability as well. Then Marie comes out with the real reason behind her visit. All the preliminaries were apparently her checking up on the truth of her husband's stories. Her suspicions satisfied, she then explains that her husband has sent her to corner Query into coming to visit her husband.

The Superior tries to convince her that it can't be done, claiming that it is working time and Query is too busy, but she remains insistent. But because the Ryckers have provided them with two drums of oil, he goes to Quarry's room :

It was the only one in the place completely bare of symbols, bare indeed of almost everything. No photographs of a community or a parent. The room struck the Superior even in the heat of the day as cold and hard, like a grave without a cross. (74)

Here we have a strong contrast between the two characters. The Superior's space is a place open and welcoming, even inviting people in. Whereas, Query's space is cold even in the heat of day. The Superior gives Query the news about Mrs. Rycker. Query responds, "Oh well, at least it's not her husband" (74). But he is distracted. He has received a letter from a former lover. He tells the Superior : "She was once my mistress. I left her three months ago, poor woman — and that's hypocrisy. I feel no pity. I'm sorry, father. I didn't mean to embarrass you" (74). But the Superior is not embarrassed. He wants merely to get things over with Marie. Finally, Query says, "All right, father, bring her in. It's a great deal better than seeing her wretched husband anyway" (75).

Marie is standing right there on the other side of the door when the Supe-

rior goes to get her. She has heard Querry's comments about her husband, and she has also heard Querry's attitude towards his former lover.

Naturally she leaves. Querry realizes that Marie doesn't love her husband at all. The Superior points out that she is "a very good young woman." In fact, the Superior and the Bishop, who earlier favors her conversation over that of her husband's, are the only ones who seem to realize that Marie is a woman. Querry responds, "Yes, father. And what a desert she must live in out there alone with that man" (76). But while his realization of her dilemma is this clear, he fails to anticipate her ability to do anything about it.

Querry says, "She's been taken a long way from Pendélé." The Superior explains that "most of us make our own complications." But Querry does not listen. He complains that God should not have given us genitals if he had "wanted us to think clearly" (76). This is a startling exclamation from a man who has claimed to feel nothing for women. The reader can hear the voice of Des Grieux, filled with his passion for Manon, in the background :

S'il est vrai que les secours célestes sont à tous moments d'une force égale à celle des passions, qu'on m'explique donc par quel funeste ascendant on se trouve emporté tout d'un coup loin de son devoir, sans se trouver capable de la moindre résistance, et sans ressentir le moindre remords. (91)

[If it is true that heaven helps us with a force equal to our passions, how can we explain the deadly power from which we can find ourselves carried off from our responsibilities completely without power to resist or even any remorse.]⁷

As Singerman has shown, this would seem to be a singular theme throughout Prevost's work ; and Greene, for the most part throughout all of his works also reflects this pessimistic position. Prevost and Greene show us how God would have us to be while also showing us how impossible it is to achieve such perfection.

Earlier Querry has equated vocation with sex : "Possibly sex and a vocation are born and die together" (44). He has also confessed to arising immediately after sex and returning to his architectural drawing board (see, page 45). Now we begin to understand why. When the Superior suggests that he does

have some degree of interest in something, Query claims to have gone, “through to the other side, to nothing. All the same I don’t like looking back,” he said and the letter [from his former mistress] crackled softly as he shifted.

“Remorse is a kind of belief.”

“Oh no, it isn’t. You try to draw everything into the net of your faith, father, but you can’t steal all the virtues. ... In the last cooling of the world, when the emptiness of your belief is finally exposed, there’ll always be some bemused fool who’ll cover another’s body with his own to give it warmth for an hour more of life.”

“You believe that? But once I remember you saying you were incapable of love.”

“I am. The awful thing is I know it would be my body someone would cover. Almost certainly a woman. They have a passion for the dead. Their missals are stuffed with memorial cards.” (77)

Query’s misogyny is based upon his fear of the female power to cover and consume. For Query, women carry their dead enclosed, enveloped within them. Those women who are spiritual, carry them about like trophies in their missals. Query does not mind entering the chthonian forest to “the farthest limit of human penetration.” He has done it in the past with a sense of curiosity and interest. But actually to give a part of himself terrifies him. He fears “looking back” too far. He rescues Deo Gratias, not out of some noble cause, but because the idea of sinking into the water terrifies him. He fears submergence. He fears being covered. The “awful thing” is that he knows it would be him that someone would cover. And then he admits the more difficult truth, that it would be “Almost certainly a woman” and this is unbearable to him.

The Superior stubbed out his cheroot and then lit another as he moved towards the door. Query called after him, “I’ve come far enough, haven’t I? Keep that girl away and her bloody tears.” He struck his hand furiously on the table because it seemed to him that he had used a phrase applicable only to the stigmata. (77)

Fear of Marie as a woman and fear of Mary as Mother overwhelms him, and he strikes his table with the frustration and perhaps confusion which the fear causes.

II. 6. Father Thomas : Deafness of the Spirit

At lunch Father Thomas, while fasting, follows the Superior around as he is looking for a place to eat his food. The Superior does not feel comfortable with Father Thomas. In fact no one at the leproserie does. Like Rycker, he is the kind of person who attaches himself to people and sucks the life out of them with his problems :

he still seemed to carry with him the strains and anxieties of the seminary. He had left it longer ago than any of the others, but he seemed doomed to a perpetual and unhappy youth ; he was ill at ease with men who had grown up... (83)

The Superior tries to turn another way when it seems that Father Thomas will choose a particular direction, but Father Thomas dogs his heels complaining about the school. Father Jean tries to rescue the Superior by changing the subject. It seems that Rycker has telephoned and “threatened to be over one day soon” (84), he has a message about an Englishman. When the Superior expresses his reservations about Querry’s presence, Father Thomas speaks up with the same type of nonsense that Rycker expressed : “he’s a man of profound faith” (85). When Father Paul points out that he wasn’t at Mass, Father Thomas claims,

“Oh yes he was. I can tell you his eyes never left the altar. He was sitting across the way with the sick. That’s as good a way of attending Mass as sitting up in front with his back to the lepers, isn’t it?”

Father Paul opened his mouth to reply, but the Superior stopped him with a covert wink. (85)

Like Rycker, Father Thomas has all the answers. He consistently refused to listen. He will not be reasoned with. Later, as the Superior suggests that per-

haps Father Thomas might be happier in Liège or at some other mission since he is unable to adjust to this particular culture, Father Thomas changes the subject back to Query, claiming that Query prayed all night with *Deo Gratias*, and he will accept no argument to the contrary from the Superior no matter how hard the Superior tries. Father Thomas has made up his mind. The Superior tells him :

“I can well understand why you are attracted to Query. You are both men of extremes. But in our way of life, it is better for us not to have heroes — not live heroes, that is.” (87)

But their similarities are stronger than even this. Father Thomas and Query are both wanderers unable to find comfort in the process of building a dwelling among others. Both of them are busy about separating themselves from others. Father Thomas does it, just as Rycker does, with moral theology. Query is doing it by wandering off to an African leprosarium.

Not long after his discussion with the Superior, Father Thomas sees Query walking along the road and draws him into his room where he proceeds to pour his heart out to Query, referring to Query as a man of “great understanding” and as “a man of humility” (90-91). Again, Father Thomas will not accept any arguments to the contrary, not even from Query. He has all the answers and does not need to be told anything by anybody. Query replies :

“You mustn’t use me to buttress your faith, father. I’d be the weak spot. I don’t want to say anything that could disturb you more — but I’ve nothing for you — nothing.” (91)

He explains that he wouldn’t even call himself a Catholic. He only puts that designation on legal forms. He tries to explain that he is a complete nonbeliever. He no longer even has doubts. But Father Thomas interprets it all as the “grace of aridity.” He thanks Query excitedly for all the encouragement he has given him — in spite of the fact that Query has given him none — and suggests that they get together and go over “the philosophical arguments” to help each other. Query tries to explain how useless it would be :

"They wouldn't help me, father. Any sixteen-year-old student could demolish them, and anyway I need no help. I don't want to be harsh, father, but I don't wish to believe. I'm cured."

"Then why do I get more sense of faith from you than from anyone here?"

"It's in your own mind, father. You are looking for faith and so I suppose you find it. ... If you feel pain because you doubt, it is obvious that you are feeling the pain of faith, and I wish you luck."

"You really do understand, don't you?" Father Thomas said, and Query could not restrain an expression of tired despair.

"Don't be irritated. Perhaps I know you better than you do yourself." (92-93)

Father Thomas and Rycker are two sides of the same coin: insecure, arrogant, rigid. Both suffer from an overdose of moral theology. And Father Thomas's last comment is reminiscent of Rycker's: "You see," Rycker said, "we know all" (38). Both Rycker and Father Thomas claim Query for themselves.

We encounter his stubbornness in creating a hero of Query again after Query's encounter with Parkinson which will be covered below. Father Thomas wakes him from his sleep:

"I have brought you messages from a friend of yours," Father Thomas said.

"I have no friends in Africa except those I have made here."

"You have more friends than you know. My message is from M. Rycker."

"Rycker is no friend of mine."

"I know he is a little impetuous, but he is a man with a great admiration for you. He feels, from something his wife has said, that he was perhaps wrong to speak of you to the English journalist."

"His wife has more sense than he has then."

"Luckily it has all turned out for the best," Father Thomas said, "and we owe it to M. Rycker."

"The best?" (131)

Father Thomas's blind enthusiasm is sickening to Query. Against Query's

wishes Father Thomas reads the lies that Rycker and Parkinson have conspired to write about him in *Paris Dimanche* : “The Article is called : ‘An Architect for Souls. The Hermit of the Congo’” (132).

Query tries to point out that the article is filled with distortions and intentional lies. But Father Thomas brushes his objections aside with “These are trifles,” and “Never mind small details.” Father Thomas is no more concerned with the truth than Parkinson is. All through the reading of the article Query tries to reason with Father Thomas, but Father Thomas, like Rycker, can only hear his own voice. This being the case, Query’s next act seems to be an exercise in futility from the beginning. Father Thomas explains that there is to be a followup article the following Sunday. Query takes the article and rips it up, then asks :

“Is the road open?”

“It was when I left Luc. Why?”

“I’m going to take a truck then.”

“Where to?”

“To have a word with Rycker. Can’t you see, father, that I must silence him? This mustn’t go on. I’m fighting for my life.”

“Your life?”

“My life here. It’s all I have.” He sat wearily down on the bed. He said, “I’ve come a long way. There’s nowhere else for me to go if I leave here.” Father Thomas said, “For a good man fame is always a problem.”

“But, father, I’m not a good man. Can’t you believe me? Must you too twist everything like Rycker and that man? I had no good motive in coming here. I am looking after myself as I have always done, but surely even a selfish man has the right to a little happiness?”

“You have a truly wonderful quality of humility,” Father Thomas said. (135)

As Bawer has pointed out above, Query’s sins are mostly proclaimed. This is true except for his arrogant and stubborn failure to listen. This we see demonstrated with regularity. But besides these at times lengthy proclamations that Bawer refers to, we learn what kind of person Query is only through the cold-

blooded things he says, his terseness and coldness to others, and his unwholesome thoughts scattered throughout the text.

Here in the above narrative, Father Thomas's bullying insistence on hero worship is clearly demonstrated. As a result, our sympathies lean strongly toward Query as he prepares to meet Rycker. And, from demonstrated experience, we expect Rycker to act in the very same way as Father Thomas.

II. 7. Parkinson : Deafness of the Soul

In Chapter Two of Part Four, as Query and Dr. Colin are relaxing in the evening, Query inadvertently remarks, "You know I am happy here" (94). And immediately afterwards he is sorry he has spoken. It's as though he has betrayed himself. And almost in response to this, a boat arrives around the bend in the river. As it arrives, Dr. Colin says somewhat prophetically, "The great world comes to us" (95).

There is a sick passenger on board who speaks only English. All they know about him is that he has an introduction to the Bishop from Rycker. On the table next to the body are a camera and a typewriter with a sheet of paper and a single part of a sentence which reads: "The eternal forest broods along the banks unchanged since Stanley and his little band" (97).

Query knows a little English, so he offers to translate. As they are trying to find out who he is, the man is a steady stream of fabrication, constantly writing his next newspaper story out loud. Every time he comes up with a new distortion of the facts, Query corrects him. The man's response is always the same: "They won't know the difference."

The man's name is Parkinson. If the press is the nerve center of the Western media, than Dr. Colin's "great world" has come to Query in the form of Parkinson's disease, a disease which attacks the nervous system. He is extremely fat, but they must carry him out of the boat. According to Pisano (1991), "He brings disease, literally and figuratively" (179). Father Thomas offers to allow the man to sleep in his room: "and he squeezed Query's arm as if he wished to convey to him, 'I at least have learnt your lesson. I am not as my brothers are'" (101).

In Chapter Three, overwhelmed by the heat of the day, Dr. Colin leaves his work early: "But he felt some of the shame of a deserter as he walked

away from his tiny segment of the world's battlefield" (105). On his way across the leprosarium, he stops in at Father Thomas's where Father Thomas is talking excitedly to Parkinson. Father Thomas explains to Dr. Colin that Parkinson has come explicitly to talk with Query, but Dr. Colin explains that Query will not want to speak with Parkinson. At the sound of Query's name, Parkinson responds :

"Query, that's right. Query," Parkinson said. "It's stupid of him to pretend to hide away. No one really wants to hide from Montagu Parkinson. Aren't I the end of every man's desire" Quote. Swinburne." (105)

The quote from Swinburne's "L'Envoy" couldn't be more appropriate :

For life is sweet, but after life is death.
This is the end of every man's desire.

For Parkinson does represent death, in more ways than one.

Predictably, Father Thomas explains that he has been confirming Rycker's reports about Query. Dr. Colin is openly enraged. First the Superior, then Query himself, now Dr. Colin tries to explain that Rycker's stories are lies. But Father Thomas will not hear it. Looking at Parkinson's letter, Dr. Colin sees that it begins with lies about Parkinson as the great African reporter, suffering to bring his readers a story of heroism. But for Parkinson, it's more than true. It's history.

For Parkinson, history is all story with perhaps a dash of truth here and there. Parkinson argues that Caesar probably never really said "Et to Brute?" but that history is better off for having it as a part of history. But Parkinson's rejection of "historical truth" goes deeper than his reactions to oft quoted phrases. His disrespect for history is a repudiation of his childhood dwelling.

As Father Thomas explains how Parkinson happened to arrive there, Parkinson asks dejectedly : "Have neither of you... heard my name Montagu Parkinson? Surely it's memorable enough... My name is writ in water. Quote. Shelley" (107). Here Parkinson is paraphrasing Keats' own epitaph and crediting it to Shelley. He is obsessed with his own fame, which is the disease that

mutilated Querry. His quotations all touch upon death in some way. He carries his quotes and misquotes with him like his name.

Father Thomas is excited by the fame which Parkinson's story will bring the leprosarium, but Dr. Colin explains that Querry is a burnt-out case and that the limelight is "not very good for the mutilated." But this is all "non-sense" to Father Thomas, who again, knows better.

Querry shows up then, and the two men recognize one another. Querry shows Parkinson the new hospital site, and explains: "This is not architecture. ... It's a cheap building job."

Parkinson suggests that Querry might be a saint, but Querry denies it.

"Then what are you? What are your motives? I know a lot about you already. I've briefed myself," Parkinson said.

The reader can hear Rycker with his copy of *Time* declaring, "we know all." Parkinson has read all there is to know about Querry, significantly, from the newspaper's "morgue." The text reads,

There is a strong allurement in corruption and there was no doubt of Parkinson's; he carried it on the surface of his skin like phosphorus, impossible to mistake. Virtue had died long ago within that mountain of flesh for lack of air. (109)

Querry recognizes himself in Parkinson and turns the questioning around, trying to discover the depth of Parkinson's disease. Parkinson tries uselessly to deny his similarity to Querry, but it is too obvious. Querry suggests that people like them should all have the same Masonic sign. Both are sensualists and opportunists. Both are filled with themselves to the exclusion of all others. Both are wanderers without moorings. Neither of them know how or even care to listen.

The difference is that Parkinson doesn't know that he's a wanderer yet. He is still infectious. Querry challenges him with this realization:

"Would you write the truth, Parkinson, even if I told it to you? I know you

wouldn't. You're still infectious."

Parkinson looked at Query with bruised eyes. He was like a man who has reached the limit of the third degree, when there is nothing else to do but admit everything. "They would sack me if I tried," he said. "It's easy enough to take risks when you are young. To think I am farther off from heaven, etc., etc. Quote. Edgar Allan Poe." (111)

Again, the quote is not from Poe. It's from Thomas Hood, "I remember, I remember":

Now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heaven
Than when I was a boy.

And the misquote underlines the fact that, like Query, Parkinson is cut off from dwelling just as he is from heaven. One can imagine that, just as the Superior found no family photographs in Query's room, the same would be observed about Parkinson. Both are severed from the innocence of their boyhood. There is neither Pendélé nor heaven for either of them. Again, when Query points out, "It wasn't Poe" Parkinson can only reply "Nobody notices things like that" (112). The fact that if Query noticed it others might does not occur to him. Parkinson is completely buried in the eighteen stone (252 pound) mountain of himself. He is interested in nothing outside the border of his flesh.

Father Thomas, Rycker, Parkinson, and Query represent a common disease that can afflict anyone from the clergy, to the pious laity, to the secular professional, to the burnt-out case. All four men are isolated from community. None are dwellers. All have serious problems with listening. None of them feel that they need to be taught by anyone else. While Query has asked Dr. Colin if Dr. Colin can cure him, he never listens to anything more than the most superficial observations.

When Parkinson reminds Query about Marie Morel whom Parkinson mistakenly refers to as Anne (possibly because of Marie Rycker's slight resemblance to Anne-Marie Demassener's situation in Greene's earlier novel *The Name of Action*; thus, making this error a foreshadowing of Query's ultimate de-

struction)⁸ Querry tries to tell him that Marie, committed suicide in order to escape Querry, not because she loved him.

Since Querry does not know what love is, he is an unreliable judge as to whether she loved him or why she committed suicide. But from his own narrative, he seems clearly to have taken a sadistic pleasure in making her suffer, inventing new ways of holding on to her so that he could torture her for a longer period of time. Furthermore, he is not sorry that he did it. He makes it clear to Parkinson that he has not come to the leprosarium “in expiation.”

His relationship with Marie Morel had been fifteen years before. Since that time, Querry has had several other similar relationships. He had no more respect for his latest, whom he refers to sarcastically as “toute à toi.” After a while he simply became bored. He tells Parkinson :

“It was only a question of time before I realized that I didn’t love at all. I’ve never really loved. I’d only accepted love. And then the worst boredom settled in. Because if I had deceived myself with women I had deceived myself with work too.” (113)

Parkinson complains that he doesn’t understand what Querry is talking about. He starts talking about Querry’s fame. Querry sees both of these issues woven together as well, so Parkinson’s confusion is easily dealt with. Parkinson says, “Sometimes you talk like Rycker” (113). He’s right, of course. They are all very much the same. Querry responds, “Do I? Perhaps he has the Masonic sign too...” (113)

Parkinson can’t get Querry’s fame and money out of his mind. Querry tries to explain that along with his realization that he did not love, he realized that his structures were meaningless, and more, that they were indecent. He says, “nobody could mistake a Querry for a Corbusier, but which one of us knows the architect of Chartres?” (114) He tries to explain that those churches were done in love by people who believed in God. Since he didn’t believe in God, he tried to make government buildings. But he didn’t believe in politics either. Querry tries to draw this back to the issue of love where he lost Parkinson :

Perhaps it's true that you can't believe in a god without loving a human being or love a human being without believing in a god. They use the phrase "make love", don't they? But which of us are creative enough to "make" love? We can only be loved — if we are lucky." (114)

Querry is hoping that by telling Parkinson all this that he can persuade him to ignore all that Rycker has said about him. After all he has admitted, Querry says: "My God, he almost tempts me to seduce his wife. That at least might change his tune" (114). After all his talk about love, Querry still thinks of sex as a form of violence, a weapon to be used against Rycker. Parkinson (we can almost see him rubbing his fat oily hands together with childish glee) says, "Could you?"

Querry, then, goes into an elaborate explanation about how the famous can always get what they want. Even Parkinson recognizes that after all Querry's self-righteous talk, "What you are talking about doesn't have much to do with love, does it?" (115) Querry, whose mind is now completely lost in his own boasts, says "Love comes quickly enough with gratitude, only too quickly. The loveliest of women feels gratitude..." (115). He has already forgotten what he has just said about receiving and not giving. Love has been reduced to sex, an "effective instrument" for receiving what he wants.

"What a coldblooded bastard you are," Parkinson said with deep respect, as though he were talking of the *Post's* proprietor.

"Why not write that instead of the pious nonsense you are planning?" (115)

But Querry has been unwise. He has been so wrapped up in his own arrogance that he has failed to listen to and hear the depth of Parkinson's arrogance. He feels so much contempt for Parkinson that he even taunts him:

"I've been waiting for you, Parkinson, or someone like you. Not that I didn't fear you too."

"Yes, but why?"

"You are my lookingglass. I can talk to a looking glass, but one can be a little afraid of one too. It returns such a straight image." (116)

Query feels that Parkinson is at least capable of giving a correct account of his motives as he understands them and has attempted to convey them to him. Father Thomas, he explains, would most certainly distort everything he would hear. Rycker would too. For a moment, Parkinson mistakes this for a "good opinion" of him. But Query cannot resist setting him straight :

"A good opinion? I dislike you as much as I dislike myself. I was nearly happy when you arrived, Parkinson, and I've only talked to you now so that you'll have no excuse to stay. The interview is over, and you've never had a better one." (116)

Parkinson cannot resist Query's arrogant scorn, so he decides to give Query a dose of his own scorn. He begins asking Query questions about his greatest spiritual influences and his opinions about the "future of Christianity." He makes it clear to Query that he plans to turn him into a saint :

"Next Sunday's instalment: 'A girl dies for love.' I don't like you any more than you like me, Query, but I'm going to build you up. I'll build you up so high they'll raise a statue to you by the river. ... I don't mind you being a religious fake, Query, but I'll show you that you can't use me to ease your bleeding conscience. I wouldn't be surprised if there weren't pilgrims at your shrine in twenty years, and that's how history's written, believe you me. Exegi Monumentum. Quote. Virgil."⁹ (117)

Query goes back to his room and thinks back on "toute á toi" and how he had coldly seduced Marie Morel from a former student. For Query, only women are capable of love: "Unlike Marie Morel the former student was probably alive, building in some suburb his bourgeois villas — machines for living in" (118).

III. MARIE RYCKER & MANON LESCAUT

III. 1. The Nature of Marie Rycker's Warning

Greene scholars have done a number of things with Marie. Enn and Ingersoll both see Marie as another Helen Rolt character in their works as does

Erdinast-Vulcan who then tries to explain his comparison with what are in my view a list of mis-readings. In point of fact, the nineteen year old character from *The Heart of the Matter*, bares little resemblance to Marie other than the fact that they are both about the same age. McAllister equates Marie to the Virgin Mary though she never makes it clear why such a parallel exists. Of course the parallel does arise from Querry's point of view when he pounds the table in front of the Superior ; however, other than that brief situation, I can think of no other reason to make such a parallel. Sharrock sees Marie as merely a "mischievous" (190) child. Both Kunkel and Sharma see her as so unimportant that she is barely mentioned in their extensive studies of this novel ; and this in spite of the fact that it is Marie who sets in motion the machinery that will bring about the death of the main character. What all this leads up to is the reader's tendency to underestimate Marie and overestimate Querry. Greene is playing with our modern tendency to recognize status and position and ignore, pass over, and devalue the words of those who do not hold recognized status and position.

Marie Rycker and Manon Lescaut are background figures to Querry and the Chevalier Des Grieux.¹⁰ Nevertheless, they are centrally important figures who are integral to the outcome of both novels. What we do know about both young women is that they are both very young, but Manon is even younger. Des Grieux is seventeen at the beginning of his tale, making Manon about fifteen, perhaps sixteen. Both Marie and Manon are very physically attractive, though no specifics are ever given about either. Both are vibrant sexual human beings.¹¹ Both are quick minded, intelligent, and find it necessary to become ruthless opportunists when it comes to their survival. Both become entangled with lapsed Catholics while continuing — after their own fashion — to maintain their religious faith.

Querry catches a hint of Marie's warning when he asks her for her name, and she replies,

"Marie." It was the commonest woman's name of all, but it sounded to him like a warning.

But he doesn't hold on to it. He is too wrapped up in himself to listen, just as

he had been with Marie Morel. Not long after he has learned her name, Marie asks Query,

“Have you read *Manon Lescaut*?”

“Years ago.”

Marie is clearly warning Query that unless he learns to listen, she can be as cunning and ruthless as Manon. The name Manon is a French diminutive of Marie.¹² Query is right. Her name is a warning though not exactly the warning that he, as a “registered” but lapsed Catholic, might have expected if he were willing to listen. However, Query is no more interested in listening to Marie’s warning than is her husband or Query’s other antagonists.

III. 2. Marie & Passion

When Des Grieux first meets Manon she is being sent to a convent :

C’était malgré elle qu’on l’envoyait au couvent pour arrêter sans doute son penchant au plaisir qui s’était déjà déclaré et qui a causé, dans la suite, tous ses malheurs et les miens. (68)

[Notwithstanding, she was clearly being sent to a convent against her will probably because of her pleasure-loving tendencies which had already shown themselves to me and which would eventually bring such suffering to us both.]

In the same way, Marie has been given to Rycker in marriage by her father who works for the same Belgian company that employs Rycker. Marie has been raised a *colon* and educated in a Belgian convent. Nevertheless, she reads Marie-Chantal on the sly and takes great pleasure in the pleasure loving Manon. One can easily imagine, as Des Grieux does of Manon’s situation, that her father feels much relieved at having his daughter thus hidden away with Rycker where she will be unable to disgrace him with her “pleasure-loving tendencies.”

Just as Manon is in a constant struggle to control the passions and expectations of those around her, Marie is in an equal battle to contain the passions

and rages of those with whom she is in constant conflict. Part Six and Chapter One opens with Marie Rycker sitting in bed next to her husband. She is holding a copy of *The Imitation of Christ* in her hands and wondering if she should dare try to move out of the bed and risk waking her husband, “and of course there was always the possibility of a trap.” In other words, this pitiful petty man may be just testing her. He may not be asleep at all :

She could imagine how he would reproach her, “Could you not watch by me one hour?” for her husband was not afraid to carry imitation to great lengths. ... She felt ashamed of her fear and boredom and nausea. (137)

She felt guilty about her disgust for Rycker. Her father, she knew, would not approve.

Once a month she received a copy of *Marie-Chantal*, but she had to read the serial in secret when Rycker was occupied, for he despised what he called women’s fiction and spoke critically of daydreams. What other resources had she than dreams? They were a form of hope, but she hid them from him as a member of the Resistance used to hide his pill of cyanide. She refused to believe that this was the end, growing old in solitude with her husband and the smell of margarine and the black faces and the scrap-metal, in the heat and the humidity. She awaited day by day some radio signal which would announce the hour of liberation. Sometimes she thought that there were no lengths to which she would not go for the sake of liberation. (139)

Marie-Chantal is probably a conflation of Marie Rycker’s name and Mlle Chantal from *The Diary of a Country Priest* by Georges Bernanos, a favorite of Greene’s.¹³ In Bernanos’s Novel, the governess at one point tells the priest that,

“Chantal is a queer, unbalanced girl. I shouldn’t say she was *really* wicked. Young people of her age nearly always give way to the wildest fancies. And, of course, it was some time before I could bring myself to tell you to be on your guard against a child that I’m very fond of and awfully sorry

for, too. But really, you know, she might do anything..." ...she concluded in a manner I disliked. (56)

Marie is a woman clinging to hope in the face of overwhelming odds: fear, sexual and psychological abuse, isolation, and suffering far deeper than anything Query has been exposed to.

When Query arrives to confront Rycker accompanied by Deo Gratias, Marie first thinks that he has come on a friendly visit, but Query's attitude quickly dismisses this notion. When she suggests that he give her his message, he replies, "I can hardly strike a woman" (140), and Marie feels the antagonism in the atmosphere around him. Interestingly, in his rage he has let his guard down and acknowledged that she is a woman, not just a child or little girl. He exudes rage, but she cunningly draws it away from him through cautious questioning and learns that it began with the collusion between her husband and Parkinson: "That man," she said with distaste. "Is he still around?"

Query explains his anger. Rycker and Parkinson have betrayed him and are "persecuting" him, and Query means to put a stop to it.

Marie tries to explain, "When he's excited by something he wants to possess it. Like a child." This is the only thing about him that she can even tolerate. Query asks,

"Can't you persuade him to stop talking about me?"

"I have no influence. He doesn't listen to me. After all why should he?"

Query completely misses the irony here and says,

"If he loves you..."

"I don't know whether he does. He says sometimes that he only loves God." (14142)

Query has no more understanding of true sacrificial love than Rycker does, so his misunderstanding is not surprising. Marie finally tells Query that she doesn't want to disturb her husband because she doesn't want him angry. This he will be able to understand. She thinks she is pregnant by her husband. And

the news, she knows, will make him angry enough as it is: "He doesn't want one, but he won't allow me to be safe" (142).

The last time they had sex together was after the governor's party, and Rycker has not inquired about it: "I think he's forgotten that we did anything since the time before" (142). On the basis of this and her physical appearance, Query pulls his defenses back up and draws the same types of conclusions about Marie as Rycker does:

He was moved unwillingly by her humility. She was very young and surely she was pretty enough, yet it seemed never to occur to her that a man ought not to forget such an act. (142)

"pretty enough" for what? for realization or understanding? What does her attractiveness (or her youth, for that matter) have to do with anything? And how does he arrive at the conclusion that "it never seemed to occur to her"? It certainly can't be from anything she has said.

Nevertheless, in all of this we begin to see Query's interest increase:

"I've missed twice."

"My dear, in this climate that often happens." He said, "I advise you — what's your name?"

"Marie." It was the commonest woman's name of all, but it sounded to him like a warning.

"Yes," she said eagerly, "you advise me...?"

"Not to tell your husband yet. We must find some excuse for you to go to Luc and see the doctor. But don't worry too much. Don't you want the child?"

"What would be the use of wanting it if he doesn't?" (142)

Query is won over. He's willing to take her to Luc to see a doctor. He was planning to go there anyway to get some things for the doctor at the hospital and "I was going to buy some surprise provisions for the fathers too." He is beginning to take an interest in the fathers now that the Superior is gone. Query agrees to tell Rycker that Marie is going into Luc with him. He tells

Marie : "I'll treat him as gently as I can. You've drawn my sting" (143).

In Marie's management of this situation, we are reminded of Manon who is in charge of everything. As Des Grieux admits, "Je lui avait laissé la disposition de notre bourse, et le soin de payer notre dépense ordinaire" (76). [I left the full management of our finances and daily expenses to her.] Rycker, we sense, is often sick or drunk, leaving it up to Marie to handle more responsibility, running errands as we often find her doing or handling the business of the household.

She said, "It will be fun — to go to Luc alone. I mean with you." She wiped her eyes dry with the back of her hand ; she was no more ashamed of her tears than a child would have been. (143)

Again, Querry compares Marie to a child. He does this over and over again like a magic charm to scare away the demons of his own passion and to keep the wolf at bay.

Querry's intentions of talking to Rycker about his wife fall apart as he tries once again to convince Rycker that he is no saint : "Rycker sat under the crucifix, wearing a smile of understanding." Rycker explains that Father Thomas told him that Querry is suffering from aridity and Parkinson has told him that Querry is feeling remorse. He refuses to hear Querry's denials :

"We have taken you up, Querry. You don't belong to yourself any more. You lost yourself when you prayed with that leper in the forest."
"I didn't pray. I only..." He stopped. What was the use? (145)

This is the same reaction that Marie has toward Rycker when he later accuses her of having sex with Querry.

Marie decides to go to Luc with Querry even though neither have told Rycker of their intentions. Like Des Grieux and Manon who are always creeping off together unannounced, Rycker and Marie head off. Along the way Querry explains to Marie how he came to leave his old life and end up at the leprosarium :

He said abruptly, "How I wish I'd never met your husband."

"So do I."

"It's done you no harm, surely?"

"I mean — I wish I hadn't met him either." (148)

Query knows what she meant. He merely wants to avoid being too intimate with her. She asks to borrow enough money to return to Europe, but he refuses to give it to her. In the next lines, Greene emphasizes the sloppiness of Query's thinking with regard to Marie :

He thought rashly : poor frightened beast this one was too young to be of great danger. It was only when they were fully grown you couldn't trust them with your pity. (149)

III. 3. Query's Last Chance to Listen

It's late at night before they finally reach Luc. Query gets them adjoining rooms at a hotel. As they settle in Query is listening intently to Marie as she is preparing for bed :

Every movement was audible from the neighboring room, and Query could follow every stage of the girl's retirement — the zipping of the all-night bag, the clatter of a coat-hanger, the tinkle of a glass bottle on a porcelain basin. Shoes were dropped on bare boards, and water ran. (150)

But why? Why does he choose to follow every movement of her retirement? Here we see Query voyeuristically paying keen attention to the pretty young woman as she prepares for bed. He waits outside her door wondering how he ought to comfort her the next day if she discovers that she is pregnant. Again, one has to wonder what he thinks his options are. He waits there listening intently to her slightest movements until he hears her go to bed. Only then does he get ready for bed himself.

As though to emphasize the illusions that Query is under, he imagines that he hears her crying. At first he is selfishly irritated because he is afraid that she is going to keep him awake. But this soon passes, and he takes the

bottle of whiskey to her door and knocks. He discovers that he had been mistaken. She is sitting up in bed reading a novel, and she had been laughing.

Instead of excusing himself, going back in his room, and shutting the door that separates their rooms, he offers her a glass of whiskey. He decides that, “It was absurd to consider that anyone so immature could be in any way a danger” (151), so he decides to tell her a story: “He found it impossible not to treat her as a child” (151). This repetitious chant — She’s a child! She’s a child! I’m not interested! She’s just a child! — rises to a frenzy of ludicrous denial as we move closer to the end of the novel.

Des Grieux and Querry are, of course, enormously different people. But as we mentioned before, Des Grieux is only seventeen. One can imagine that at the same age, Querry may very well have been the same way. Querry is Des Grieux forty years later. In fact, Segal has predicted that “Manon dead will haunt Des Grieux and leave him hollow” (192). After all, both are equally driven by selfish passion. Querry has been driven to the dead end of it. When Des Grieux first sets eyes on Manon, the text reads “je me trouvai enflammé tout d’un coup jusqu’au transport” (68). He is carried off [almost against his will — a consistent theme in *Manon Lescaut*] by an inflaming passion. Singerman argues that “La révolte du chevalier, intimement liée au thème de la Passion” and integrates naturally within a theological perspective. That is that Des Grieux is in revolt against his father in preferring Manon just as man is in revolt against God in preferring life on earth.¹⁴ And Querry is no less caught in the tail fire of his former passion. He has become a victim of it, *burnt-out* by it.

Querry proceeds to tell Marie a story to cover over his natural desires for the young woman. The story that Querry tells Marie is about a farm boy who is raised to believe in the King “who lived in a city a hundred miles away” (152). As the boy grows older he gets married and becomes a famous jeweler. After the death of his son, he argues with his wife and takes many lovers. While he is raised to believe that the King punishes evil and rewards good, he doesn’t see any punishment in his own life, only rewards. He concludes that the punishment must be invisible. He continues to have many lovers and continues to grow in financial success and fame, and people justify his adulterous behavior by saying that the King has bestowed a greater ability to love upon him than upon others.

“It was quite a shock to him when he discovered one day that he didn’t love at all.”

“How did he discover that?”

“It was the first of several important discoveries which he made about that time. Did I tell you that he was a very clever man, much cleverer than the people around him? Even as a boy he had discovered all by himself about the King.” (154)

The reader can hear Rycker’s voice boasting: “Even in seminary I formed the habit of thinking more than most men” (39-40). Although the story is primarily about Query, The reader is not surprised to find Rycker in the same story. Both men are wanderers. Both are incapable of dwelling as attested to by both of their marriages. As Query continues his story he tells how the man proved the historical existence of the King and laughed at his parents for believing that the King was still alive.

Marie becomes impatient with his story. She doesn’t like the hero; he reminds her of her husband. She tries to change the subject by telling Query something of herself which he really should hear, something which might even alter the illusion of Marie that he has in his mind, if he would only stop long enough to hear it, just as others have illusions of Query in their minds.

“Have you read *Manon Lescaut*?”

“Years ago.”

“We all loved it at the convent. Of course it was strictly forbidden. It was passed from hand to hand, and I pasted the cover of Lejeune’s *History of the Wars of Religion* on it. I have it still.” (155)

Wrapped up in his own story, Query misses the irony of PrWost’s novel being covered over with André Lejeune’s *History of the Wars of Religion*, especially since it is Marie who owns and is hiding it from her husband, another André in a marriage that her husband has turned into a religious battlefield. That is, within this outward André cover, is another Manon fully capable of managing the situation and utterly destroying him in the process if necessary. Refusing to hear, just as Rycker and Father Thomas had refused to listen to him,

Querry says, “You must [with the same insistence that André Rycker had used with him and her] let me finish my story” (155). And again, we can hear Rycker’s voice in the background: “You have no choice!”

So then, just as Marie has been doing in bed with her husband silently for the last two years: “‘Oh well,’ she said with resignation, leaning back against the pillows, ‘if you must’” (155).

Querry continues the story, telling about an egg which, fertilized by the artist’s imagination, opens into illusion, into illusion, into illusion, “...I needn’t go on” (155). At the end of this original fertilization, Querry even has an orgasm: “He took another long drink of whisky; he couldn’t remember how long it was since he had experienced the odd elation he was feeling now” (155). While both Thomas and Pisano both note that this egg imagery seems to point to Marie’s fertilization, neither of them examine it in any detail. And beyond the great spiritual imagery that many other scholars are fond of giving it, this egg opening from illusion into illusion, is also the fertilization of the book inside of the book, the Manon character inside of Marie. From this point on in the chapter, Marie is no longer referred to by name. She is referred to as “the voice under the sheet,” “she,” or simply “the girl.” She becomes every other woman Querry has ever sexually and psychologically abused. She is Manon escaping under cover (and from under the covers) from the Hôpital.

Marie begins to challenge him as the story progresses, something that she could never have done before with Rycker:

“Why do you keep on calling him a jeweler?” the voice said from under the sheet. “You know very well he was an architect.”

“I warned you not to attach real characters to my story. “You’ll be identifying yourself with the other Marie next. Although, thank God, you’re not the kind to kill yourself.”

“You’d be surprised what I could do,” she said. “Your story isn’t a bit like *Manon Lescaut*, but it’s pretty miserable all the same.” (158)

Querry’s fate is sealed. He has behaved as boorishly and rudely as Rycker, Father Thomas, and Parkinson altogether, panting and thrusting furiously through his paces at Marie’s expense. When he is finally finished with his

story in which he imagines that he has come to the end of God, vocation, and women :

She giggled under the sheet. "I could almost say to him, couldn't I, that we'd spent the night together. Do you think that he'd divorce me? I suppose not. The Church won't allow divorce. The Church says, the Church orders..."

"Are you really so unhappy?" He got no reply. To the young sleep comes as quickly as day to the tropical town. (159)

After having verbally spent himself on her, these continued references to her youth seem more annoying now than anything else.

IV. THE END OF THE RIVER

IV. 1. The Deception

As Chapter Two begins, Query finds himself near the wharf at midday after doing what he set out to do and heads up into the Bishop's boat in search of the Captain: "It was the first time for a long while that he had voluntarily made a move towards companionship" (160). The Captain, that he was looking for has been sent to teach moral theology at the seminary.

Back at the hotel bar, he runs into Parkinson who is gloating over the article he has written. Marie returns from the doctor and refuses Parkinson's invitation for a meal. After Query and Marie have lunch together, she goes to the cathedral and he walks to the river and back. Upon his return, Parkinson hurries up to him to tell him that Rycker is in the hotel, checking out Query's and Marie's rooms. Parkinson has helped him find evidence of adultery. He says, "I told you I was going to build you up, Query. Unless, of course, as now it seems likely, I find it makes a better story if I pull you down" (167).

Rycker is hysterical when he comes down stairs. As usual, he has his mind made up. There is no question of what has happened between his wife and Query in his mind. Marie has set everyone up, leaving her long hair in Query's comb and her make-up smeared on his bathroom towel, and writing "Spent the night with Q!" in her diary which she leaves open so her husband can read it.

Before Query and Deo Gratias head back for the leprosarium, Query decides to stop at the cathedral and warn Marie that her husband is at the hotel. Inside the cathedral, Query tells her,

“You’re husband’s at the hotel.”

“Oh,” she said flatly, looking up at the saint who had disappointed her.

“He’s been reading a diary you left in your room. You oughtn’t to have written what you did — ‘Spent the night with Q.’”

“It was true, wasn’t it? Besides I put an exclamation mark to show.”

“Show what?”

“That it wasn’t serious. The nuns never minded if you put an exclamation mark. ‘Mother Superior in a tearing rage!’ They always called it the ‘exaggeration mark.’”

“I don’t think your husband knows the convent code.”

“So he really believes...?” she asked and giggled.

“I’ve tried to persuade him otherwise.”

“It seems such a waste, doesn’t it, if he believes that. We might just as well have really done it.” (171)

Marie has succeeded in planting jealousy in Rycker’s heart. It’s no surprise to her that he has read the journal entry. She has caught him at it before. And when she didn’t want him to read it, she locked it. She also knows that once he has made up his mind that something is true, it is useless to talk to him. He doesn’t listen any better than Query does.

In Marie’s mind, her marriage is over. As she discusses her discouragement that Rycker is the father of the child and her own questions of belief and disbelief, Query tells her, “You mustn’t think your marriage has failed yet.” And she responds, “Oh but it has.” Marie, who is used to remaining quiet until the opportune moment, is beginning to weave her own myth.

Frank Pisano claims that “of all the characters who use Query, none is more selfish, more reckless, or more skilled at mythologizing than Marie” (178). I wouldn’t be this harsh toward her. As I have pointed out, I consider her a victim of sexual and psychological abuse; however, I do agree with him that her skill at mythologizing may be superior even to that of who he calls

“the professional myth-builder,” Parkinson.

IV. 2. The Performance

Father Thomas announces that they really should toast the person most responsible for the new hospital. Dr. Colin tries to convince him that he should just leave Query alone and that thanks are unnecessary. He tries to explain that Query seems to be nearly healed.

Predictably, Father Thomas brings up his old line: “The better the man the worse the aridity.” Only Dr. Colin tries to talk sense to Father Thomas. The other fathers have given up trying. Father Thomas tells him:

“You are a very good doctor, but all the same I think we are better judges of a man’s spiritual condition.”

“I dare say you are — if such a thing exists.”

“You can detect a patch on the skin where we see nothing at all. You must allow us to have a nose for — well...” Father Thomas hesitated and then said “...heroic virtue.” (178)

As they are talking, the phone begins ringing. It is a phone call from Mother Agnes. Marie Rycker is with the sisters, and she claims to be pregnant by Query. In spite of warnings by the other fathers, Father Thomas is the first to condemn Query. As Query comes back in through the door, Father Thomas confronts him asking him if he drove Marie into Luc in the leprosarium’s truck. Query replies that “Of course,” he had. This is enough for Father Thomas:

“I must ask you to come with me, M. Query. We will discuss what has to be done next with the sisters. I had hoped against hope that there was some mistake. I even wish you had tried to lie. It would have been less brazen. I don’t want you found here by Rycker if he should arrive.”

“What would Rycker want here?” Father Jean said.

“He might be expected to want his wife, mightn’t he. She’s with the sisters now. She arrived half an hour ago. After three days by herself on the road. She is with child,” Father Thomas said. The telephone began to ring again.

“Your child.” (180)

Query tries to deny it, but like Rycker, Father Thomas has made up his mind. At the nun’s house, Father Thomas and Query are shown into the room where Marie is lying in bed :

Marie Rycker turned in the bed and looked up at them. Her eyes had the transparent honesty of a child who has prepared a castiron lie. (182)

Query refuses to accept that this young woman is anything more than a mindless child. He is convinced that he can talk her around. He says,

“Just tell them whose baby it is.”

“I have told them,” she said. “It’s yours. Mine, too, of course.” (182)

Query denies it, but,

It would have been easier if he had felt anger, but he felt none : to lie is as natural at a certain age as to play with fire. He said, “You know this is all nonsense. I’m certain you don’t want to do me any harm.”

“Oh no,” she said, “never. Je t’amie, chéri. Je suis toute á toi.” (182)

This is obviously not a man with children of his own whom he has watched grow into young adulthood. As Pisano has pointed out, “Marie... is no child ; she pursues a calculated plan in her attempt to be liberated from Rycker... to an audience selected for its naiveté” (179).

When Query wishes to speak to her alone, Father Thomas leaves the decision up to Marie :

“Of course I wish it,” she said. “I came here for that.” She put her hand on Query’s sleeve. Her smile of sad and fallen trust was worthy of Bernhardt’s Marguerite Gauthier on her deathbed. (183)

When they leave, she positively taunts him, saying things like, “I do love you.”

Query is completely bewildered. He's flailing around in his mind trying to discover when she might have fallen love with him. Then, she changes her story until she has him spinning in circles. He has completely forgotten Manon because he was only barely listening both times Marie mentioned her. This together with the romances and serials she reads have helped her create a character for herself. And her private meeting with Query while the others wait outside is like the egg within the egg under the cross: illusion within illusion within illusion.

Marie tells Query that "in a way," the baby really is his since after the governor's party she had to fantasize having sex with Query while Rycker was clumsily having sex with her, otherwise she'd,

"...have been all dried up and babies don't come so easily then, do they. So in a way it is your child."

He looked at her with a kind of respect. It would have needed a theologian to appreciate properly the tortuous logic of her argument, to separate the good from the bad faith, and only recently he had thought of her as someone too simple and young to be a danger. (183-84)

Pisano writes :

A theologian indeed! Marie — Mary — learned more than a unique concept of punctuation from the nuns ; versed in scripture, she has cunningly woven a sordid story of her own miraculous conception. Her tale exploits the milieu perfectly. She has done what Rycker has been doing throughout her married life — she has joined the sexual and the spiritual. (179)

Marie explains that when she met her husband, he was out of control :

"He wouldn't believe about the diary. He went on and on all that night until I was tired out and I said, 'All right. Have it your own way then. I did sleep with him. Here and there and everywhere.'" (184)

She had simply given Rycker what he wanted to hear. Then, in the face of his

hysterical rage, she fled. Query tries one last time to urge her to change her statement :

“Is it any use asking you to tell Father Thomas the truth?”

“Well, I’ve rather burned my boats, haven’t I?”

“You’ve burned the only home I have,” Query said.

“I just had to escape,” she explained apologetically. For the first time he was confronted by an egoism as absolute as his own. The other Marie had been properly avenged : as for *toute à toi* the laugh was on her side now.
(184-85)

Incredibly, Gaston attributes Query’s inability to deal with Marie and the situation in general to the fact that “he is trapped by compassion” (82). Nothing could be further from the truth. Query has never listened to her. He imagines that he understands her situation, but he has nothing but his own imagination upon which to base his understanding.

IV. 3. The Desert in the Jungle

The end, of course in large part, is a reversal of *Manon Lescaut*. Manon dies in a desert — laughably, somewhere between Louisiana and Georgia or Florida??? — and Des Grieux returns to a life of luxury, albeit an unhappy one, in Europe ; however, in the end of *A Burnt-Out Case* it is Query who dies and Marie who returns to Europe to live a more comfortable life. But like *Manon Lescaut* where Des Grieux and Manon decide to become formally married, in some ways it seems that Query is also beginning to do things right. Though he has not yet learned to listen, he is taking more of an interest in other people. Much of his earlier nervousness and suspiciousness have fallen away, and he is becoming more of a human being. But just at the point when both Query and Des Grieux seem to be doing things in the right way or at least finally moving in the right direction, God intercedes to destroy them. The universe seems to follow absurd rules of its own. The passions that sweep us irresistibly toward spiritual destruction finish us off just when we decide to fight back and walk the narrow path of righteousness. Here Greene and Prevost seem both to hold to an extreme form of Jansenism.

The novel moves quickly now toward its conclusion. Query confesses to Dr. Colin that he feels pain and suffering. He feels that he must leave. Even if he could remain, his presence would create too much trouble for Dr. Colin thus thwarting his effectiveness. On the basis of his ability to suffer, Dr. Colin pronounces Query cured.

Dr. Colin's notion of being cured is only a superficial one. According to Dr. Colin, "when one suffers, one begins to feel part of the human condition, on the side of the Christian myth" (186). But the rest of this equation is living and moving within a community of dwellers, involved in the activity of love which pulls it all together. While Dr. Colin is a good man, he is also busy about being busy. Before Query arrived, he had only the Superior as a friend. He did not cultivate friendships with the other fathers, even though they didn't pressure him to be a Christian. He did not cultivate community except as it involved the hospital and his patients.

The reader gets the sense that his scope as a dweller since his wife's death has been marginal at best. Thus, his ability to measure the health of the whole patient is greatly limited. While Dr. Colin realizes that the greatest problem with leprosy is psychological, it is dedication, interest, and curiosity which drives him, not love. Dr. Colin, as he has explained, sees love scientifically as something that must be evolved into down the road.

While Dr. Colin and Query are talking, several of the fathers are trying to urge Father Thomas not to leap to any hasty conclusions. But Father Thomas knows the truth of the situation. He is just as firm in his condemnation as he was in his former adulation.

As they are arguing, Parkinson comes in and informs the fathers that Rycker is at large, he is looking for Query, and he is still hysterical :

"I think he wants to believe the worst. It makes him Query's equal, don't you see, when they fight over the same girl." He added with a somewhat surprising insight, "He can't bear not being important." (189)

Rycker is extremely drunk, wandering around in the rain in the dark trying to yell Query's name over the sound of the rain. His tirade is half self-righteous Christian dogma and half drunken self-pity. Marie has turned him into the

young Italian Prince whom Manon humiliates by placing him face to face with Des Grieux and challenging him: “Faites la comparaison vous-même” (169). Go ahead and make a comparison yourself; see how well you measure up.

Father Joseph suggests, “Sometimes I think God was not entirely serious when he gave man the sexual instinct” (191). Father Thomas is outraged by this comment: “If that’s one of the doctrines you teach in moral theology...” (191) But Father Joseph cuts him off: “Nor when he invented moral theology. After all, it was St. Thomas Aquinas who said that he made the world in play” (191).

While Rycker is looking for him, Query is in Dr. Colin’s room. The two men are talking, and Query learns that Dr. Colin’s wife has died of sleeping sickness. Query adds that he had hoped to be buried with the doctor and his wife:

“We would have made an atheist corner between us.”

“I wonder if you would have qualified for that.”

“Why not?”

“You’re too troubled by your lack of faith, Query. You keep on fingering it like a sore you want to get rid of. I am content with the myth; you are not — you have to believe or disbelieve.” (193)

Query is denying that this is true when he hears Rycker’s voice clearly through the rain. Query goes out into the rain and tries to convince Rycker that he has not had an affair with his wife, but of course Rycker does not want to believe him: “Query made an odd awkward sound which the doctor by now had learned to interpret as a laugh, and Rycker fired twice” (195). The doctor goes down on his knees next to Query:

“Not at Rycker,” Query said. ... “Laughing at myself.” (195-96)

Rycker claims that Query laughed at him and that he shouldn’t have.

“He doesn’t laugh easily, the doctor said, and again there was a noise that resembled a distorted laugh.

“Absurd,” Query said, “this is absurd or else...” but what alternative, philosophical or psychological, he had in mind they never knew. (196)

Neither laugh is easy to understand under the circumstances. Several critics have suggested that Query is laughing because he has been guilty of committing adultery in the past and now that he seems finally to be getting his life put back together, it is ironic that he should be blamed for the same thing and actually be innocent for a change.

While this is perhaps a good explanation, I am reminded of something in Query’s story that he tells to Marie about the jeweler :

“Perhaps he had reached the end of his sex and the end of his vocation before he made his discovery about the King or perhaps that discovery brought about the end of everything? I wouldn’t know, but I’m told that there were moments when he wondered if his unbelief were not after all a final and conclusive proof of the King’s existence.¹⁵ This total vacancy might be his punishment for the rules he had willfully broken. It was even possible that this was what people meant by pain. The problem was complicated to the point of absurdity, and he began to envy his parent’s simple and uncomplex heart, in which they had always believed that the King lived — and not in the cold palace as big as St. Peter’s a hundred miles away.” (158-59)

Query’s incomplete sentence, then, may be completed “this is absurd or else... the King’s just response to my refusal to listen, my perpetual arrogance, and my merely ‘fingering’ my parent’s ‘simple and uncomplex’ faith without taking it seriously.”

Notes

1. See DeVitis, 119.
2. Though this paper has nothing to do with my dissertation, this is a point that I made in chapter seven of my doctoral dissertation, titled *The Search for Dwelling and It’s relationship to Journeying and Wandering in the Novels*

of *Graham Greene* and forthcoming from Catholic Scholars Press as *Graham Greene: Wandering and the Failure of Dwelling*.

3. Query's name, because of its peculiar spelling is reminiscent of "query," one definition of which is "doubt." Other more common associations with critics are with the word "quarry" which can either be defined as an open pit from which stone is extracted or a hunted or pursued animal.
4. In describing Rycker, Boardman states that, "Like an earlier 'good Christian' — the yellow-fanged mestizo — Rycker shows little sign of comprehending himself. He spends most of his time insisting that others adhere to Catholicism" (147).
5. See Martin Heidegger's *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) especially his chapter on "Building Dwelling Thinking" pp. 145-161, and Bernd Jäger "The Space of Dwelling: A Phenomenological Exploration." *Humanitas* 12.3 (1976): 311-31.
6. In *Ways of Escape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), Greene writes, "Never had a novel proved more recalcitrant or more depressing. The reader had only to endure the company of the burnedout character called in the novel Query for a few hours' reading, but the author had to live with him and in him for eighteen months" (259). Query was no more pleasant to Greene than he has been to anyone else except those who mistakenly try to attribute noble characteristics to him.
7. All quotations are taken from *Manon Lescaut* by Abbé Prévost, Introduction et Notes par Catherine Langle. (Grenoble: Le Livre De Pouche, 1995). While I owe special thanks to Joël Boudierlique for helping me on a couple of difficult points, all responsibility for the translations from the French text are my own.
8. Anne-Marie Demassener is also unsatisfied in her marriage. She coldly destroys her husband and rejects her lover whom she has merely used to destroy her husband.
9. In *The Comedians*, Brown quotes this line from Horace's *Epistles* xxx.1: "Exegi monumentum aere perennius..." (53). The monument for Brown is the Hotel Trianon. Now that his mother has died, the Trianon becomes symbolic of the dwelling that he has never had and is doomed never to possess. Brown moves from a hotel to a funeral parlor at the end. He is

doomed to wander between tourism and death. In *A Burnt-Out Case* the monument is Parkinson's false story of Querry after whom Parkinson predicts a statue will be raised. For Brown, the focus is home as dwelling. For Querry, the focus is the enshrinement of self as ground of being. See chapters two and seven of my dissertation for a fuller discussion of this issue.

10. As Donaghy points out concerning Marie Rycker, "Only rarely is the focus of narration anyone else, as when we briefly see with Marie Rycker's eyes so that we might understand why her life might motivate her to tell the lies that implicate Querry" (86). Similarly, Gearhart states that "Manon's remoteness is a necessary consequence of the narrative perspective, that of the *homme de qualité*, which privileges des Grieux's voice exclusively" (144).
11. Auerbach complains that "It [*Manon Lescaut*] is concerned entirely with sex, with order or disorder in conducting one's sex life, and hence is itself steeped in eroticism" (400). This sexuality debases the work. While a full discussion of this is well beyond the scope of this paper, I would only comment that it seems to me that Auerbach has completely missed the issue of the spiritual struggle going on inside of Des Grieux.
12. See *Manon Lescaut*, p. 71 n.1.
13. Kurismmootil in discussing the relationship between "A Visit to Morin" and *A Burnt-Out Case* notes that Greene's philosophy is much like that of Unamuno whom he quotes in the introduction to his novel in the Collected Edition. He then points out that, "The words recall to us Georges Bernanos's young women, particularly Mlle Chantal of *Journal d'un Curé de la Campagne* who would do evil to get her own back, 'out of spite'; and the priest's reply is memorable: 'And when you do, you'll discover God'" (183). He does not, however, make the connection between Marie and Chantal.
14. "The revolt of the Chevalier is intimately tied to the theme of passion..." See Singerman, p. 69.
15. In Greene's short story "A Visit to Morin," Morin expresses the same view:

I can tell myself now that my lack of belief is a final proof that the

Church is right and the faith is true. I had cut myself off for twenty years from grace and my belief withered as the priests said it would. I don't believe in God and His Son and His angels and His saints, but I know the reason I don't believe and the reason is — the Church is true and what she taught me is true. (227)

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