A Study of Graham Greene

Genealogy of Innocence

Shoko Miyano

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The statement "Innocence is a kind of insanity" in *The Quiet American* (1955)[1] expresses how dangerous an innocent character, Pile, is in a political situation. This passage is key for me in opening the world of Graham Greene. An affirmative latency in "innocence" and a negative latency in the expression "a kind of insanity" imply how the behavior of innocent Pile is beyond reality and how it would be excluded from the real world.

The concept of "innocence" is an important criterion in searching Greene's world for figures characteristic of him. In his early novel, *England Made Me* (1935),[2] Greene created an intriguing character, Anthony Farrant, whom he described with the word "innocence" together with inconsistent adjectives, such as "blank innocence" or "depraved innocence," successfully portraying one aspect of people who have no roots. Greene published several novels before *England Made Me*, and now three novels are available. The use of the words "innocence" or "innocent" in three novels, *The Man Within, Stamboul Train*, and *It's a Battlefield*, does not specify or connote any special qualities of the characters on stage. And it seems valid, as one of the ways of researching Greene's figuration, to assume that the genealogy of "innocence" had its start with the birth of Anthony Farrant. In one of his later works, *The Comedians* (1965-66),[3] Greene again defined his

particular connotations of "innocence" as follows: "What could a saint possibly have in common with a rogue? . . . and I thought: innocence perhaps." (241) "Innocence" has gained the extremes of saintliness and roguishness in its connotation. Accordingly, a study of the development of characters vis-à-vis the realm of "innocence," namely their genealogy of innocence, clarifies one of the secrets that make Graham Greene an author of interest.

To understand Greene's concepts of "innocence," especially in the 1930s, the travel book *Journey Without Maps* (1936)[4] is an appropriate and significant journal which details his journey in Liberia in Africa. His reasons for going on an adventurous trek are explained in his biography.[5] In the same year that *England Made Me* was published, he expected that traversing Liberia would surely "provide him with the dangerous, the unknown and the bizarre." (Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol.1, 510) However, through his *Journey Without Maps*, which was published the next year, we know his interest in life is reborn, while he is parted from his stressful days as a writer and a husband in London. During the journey, he searched African nature and the people living there for the origin of human beings. He intended to trace the origin of humans while conversely trying to obtain the meaning of life in modern civilization. In other words, his purpose is to re-discover the human beginning, the state of innocence which is described as his 'lost childhood.' He tries to re-recognize his own self and to determine the meaning of life and death — he tries to discover his identity. While trying to find the origin of his own life, he comes into close contact with people living in Africa, realizing the significance of the impact — of civilization, which is invading and infecting Africa.

During his long and hard trek without benefit of maps, he reaches

his inner bottom self. In the unbearable weather and unsanitary living conditions, he feels, in "the primitive" which "was bearable because it was inescapable," the revelation of a strange happiness; "And suddenly I felt curiously happy and careless and relieved." (142) He also finds an enchantment: "the timelessness, the irresponsibility, the freedom of Africa," spending a night with the cheerful and happy village women dancing "in the starlight to the music of rattles" and having "warm boiled water with whisky and the juice of limes." (151) He finds even cockroaches "in retrospect" to be "only the badge of an unconquered virginity." (164) However, he is unable to feel intimate with the African forests full of unlimited energy, which, to Greene, seemed the same as "the dead forest." (179) The forest, which does not convey any "sense of wildness and beauty, of an active natural force," is "simply a green wilderness, and not even so very green" (180); and because of their flatness and monotones, simple "tangled weeds" do not "seem to be growing round us so much as dying." (181) The forest is not the forest with which civilized people feel intimate, and "no one had ever transferred to *this* forest any human emotion at all." (182) It is "impossible here to think of Nature in such terms of enchantment and nostalgia; it would have been like cherishing a dead weed in a pot, a sign of mental derangement." (182-183) The forest is indifferent to human beings. It never reveals the meaning of life and death in terms that human beings can understand. It only exists. It is just energy going on. Accordingly, "it was even wrong to think of it as dead, for it had never been alive." (183) Greene explains this indifference is "the boredom of childhood," namely, "that agonizing boredom of 'apartness'," which conversely gives him "extraordinary happiness," being nearer "to the racial source." (183) Greene thus infers that without transferring their emotions, people might live "with a lost

objectivity" (183) in such a forest. It is the forest that is not contaminated by the concept of human beings. Its energy is only a sign of beginning; it has no criteria of values based on so-called civilization. The boredom perceived in nature is, therefore, an evidence that nature has lost its precious original meaning and become indifferent toward human beings in the so-called maturity of civilization. It is inevitable that nature in Africa contains no sense of goodness or evil, or other values which human beings cherish. In this sense, to human beings, nature is the same as nothingness. Nature is the world of "apartness" where human beings cannot do "the fatal trick of transferring emotion, of flashing back enchantingly all day long one's own image," (183) and where human beings lose the objectivity in their life and vanish into nihility.

However, when Greene became accustomed to and not afraid of the rats which "scamper along the narrow crack above" (196) his head, he could recognize "a love of life" (196) which he had not been conscious of before. And when he could be drunken together with the African native people, he perceived "a kind of hope in human nature." (223) He assumes that people can "get back to this bareness, simplicity, instinctive friendliness, feeling rather than thought." (223) Furthermore, when he nearly died of heavy fever, which relieved him from the worst boredom of the journey, he found in himself "a passionate interest in living." (251) This discovery of an interest in living is "like a conversion" (251): a rebirth. He has become "convinced of the beauty and desirability of the mere act of living." (252) It is the living in "the primitive" or "childhood" where "the sense of taste was finer, the sense of pleasure keener, the sense of terror deeper and purer." (265) On the last page of the journal he wrote down exactly his new discovery that innocence is the state of a newly born baby full of

energy: a baby with the potential for all elements of human existence.

> A child was crying in a tenement not far from the Lord Warden, the wail of a child too young to speak, too young to have learnt what the dark may conceal in the way of lust and murder, crying for no intelligible reason but because it still possessed the ancestral fear, the devil was dancing in its sleep. There, I thought, standing in the cold empty Customs shed . . . was as far back as one needed to go, was Africa: the innocence, the virginity, the graves not opened yet for gold, the mine not broken with sledges.(297)

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The concepts of "innocence" which Greene perceived during the journey are pristine enough to be developed into characters either in a subtle shadow of innocence, such as Pinky Brown in *Brighton Rock*, or on a spotlit stage of innocence, such as the whisky priest in *The Power and the Glory*. Although *England Made Me* was published before the trek, Greene's interest in "innocence" is already expressed in his description of the figure of Anthony Farrant. Combining inconsistent adjectives with innocence, Greene successfully depicts the more complicated and intriguing character of Anthony Farrant and creates a protagonist who drifts on in the world of prosperous business, not knowing the real danger latent in it.

The plot of *England Made Me* consists of Kate's love toward her twin brother, Anthony, a good-for-nothing fellow: "He has everything except success." (11) She always tries to stay with him and protect him. Nevertheless, Anthony has a strong pride as an Englishman living according to old and blank conventions. Although he goes

"half-way round the world in the last ten years he had never been far away from England." (88) He only pursues something English, working in many places in the world, whereas Kate lives as an internationalist who has abandoned England; she has no country. (6) She only hopes to gain a position for Anthony in the prosperous world she chooses to live in.

Three epithets personify Anthony Farrant in *England Made Me*: "absurd innocence," (6) "depraved innocence," (11) and "blank innocence." (26) All of them present his contradictory and untrustworthy qualities which evoke the love of Kate, his twin. These epithets from Kate's viewpoint depict Anthony's peculiar quality, which contains both an affirmative side and a negative side. She watches and understands Anthony's absurdness, blankness, and depravity, all of which contradict his innocent character.

The epithet "absurd innocence" exemplifies Anthony as a misfit in the business world. Kate is a witness to his absurd way of living.

> His face, she thought, is astonishingly young for thirty-three; it is a little worn, but only as if by a wintry day, it is no more mature than when he was a schoolboy. He might be a schoolboy now, returned from a rather cold and wearing football match. His appearance irritated her, for a man should grow up, but before she could speak and tell him what she thought, her tenderness woke again for his absurd innocence. For he was hopelessly lost in the world of business that she knew so well, the world where she was at home: he had a child's cunning in a world of cunning men: he was dishonest, but he was not dishonest enough. (6)

Anthony is cunning and dishonest, but he is also too innocent in his childish and honest way to live in the real business world. For example, when Krogh, who employs Kate as a secretary and mistress, asks Anthony to expel Andersson, Anthony repels Krogh's order, considering it "their dirty work." (229) He sympathizes with Andersson, whose father was discharged from the Krogh company as a reactionary. Anthony says Krogh's way is "not respectable." (229) Although he lived as a salesman with a good, cheerful appearance and charming attitudes, he often changed jobs, sometimes doing little tricks and swindling a little. However, like a good child, Anthony repels Krogh, who represents the cruelty in the real business world. His absurd and inconsistent way of living results from his self-recognition: self-knowledge and self-deception.[6] He hides his "deep nihilism" "[b]ehind the bright bonhomie of his glance, behind the firm-hand clasp and the easy joke" (58), and "immediately without effort" he becomes a good fellow(118), showing the "automatic charm glint in his eye" (3) like "the headlamps of a second-hand car which had been painted and polished to deceive." (4) His deceptive ideas and way of living come from his nihilism, where everything is relative, losing its original meaning and value. Accordingly, he has to live in a make-believe world pursuing relative values, balancing his self-knowledge and self-deception.

As for "childish" or "boyish" behavior unsuitable for the real world, Anthony and Pile in *The Quiet American* are like brothers, both of them described as characters too innocent to live in the real world. Both Anthony and Pile are killed in the intrigue by the people considering them a nuisance; Anthony is dangerous to Krogh's enterprise, and Pile is dangerous to the lives of common citizens. Of their roles in the novels, however, Anthony and Pile are a little different from each

other. Absurd Anthony has no purpose in his life, drifting in a nihilistic void with only a small hope of living on and going back to England someday. In contrast, innocent Pile is confident that it is good and right to make Vietnam a democratic country, and his good will results in a violent bomb explosion which causes indiscriminate murders. Pile is active, but Anthony is passive. Thus, the innocence of Pile contains more positive power than that of Anthony, who manifests a negative power.

Anthony's "blank innocence" is a specific feature of his objective view of himself. He coolly calculates his own charm. For example, he "knew he looked well in evening dress," (109) and executed "on every waitress, calculated interest, calculated childishness, a charm of which every ingredient had been tested and stored for further use." (23) He also has "a dazzling smile" practiced "before the glass." (15) He has prepared his charming glances and behavior for the chance when he can act like an actor, who plays in a world of make-believe. He uses his charm as a method of living, attracting everyone's gaze. This is what Kate recognizes. She watches such an expression on his face, his "blank innocence," with disappointment and sadness.

> . . . he gazed with sudden boredom at the small lonely garden, the abandoned stage, the broken drum, the leaves drifting, the brush sweeping them away. Then he turned on her his expression of blank innocence, polished and prepared.
>
> 'Oh, can't you be yourself?' Kate said. Tears of loneliness pricked behind the lids. She missed him painfully as he built up between them this thin façade of a fake respectability . . . . (26)

Anthony's innocence, "polished and prepared," is a mere skeleton without any substance, kept in a world of make-believe through practice. Therefore, Kate's question, "Oh, can't you be yourself?" reveals not only her disappointment with Anthony's deceit but also with Anthony's self-knowledge. Kate repeats the same question, to which he answers, "I haven't a future, Kate." (29) He lives in a void of his meaninglessness and hopelessness. His deceptive blank innocence only brings his emptiness forth: his nihility. The expression of "blank innocence" is an image of his nihility reflected on the glass before which he practices innocence: it is the shadow of lost innocence.

Being self-conscious of his skeletonized innocence, Anthony differs from Pile, who is not conscious of his innocence. The difference is expressed in their descriptions about stirring the environment. Anthony's description goes as follows:

> But when he turned, his smile explained everything; he carried it always with him as a leper carried his bell; it was a perpetual warning that he was not trusted.(10)

And about Pile, Fowler, the protagonist of *The Quiet American*, says:

> Innocence always calls mutely for protection when we would be so much wiser to guard ourselves against it: innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm.(33)

Anthony's calculated smile always means his untrustworthiness or dishonesty, whereas Pile, who is ignorant of any evil intentions or tricks, justifies his plans only with his one-sided principles and is

always "wandering the world, meaning no harm." The innocence of Pile produces friction, which is a nuisance in society, producing uncertainty and uneasiness, loosening everyday affairs and making them deviate from ordinariness. An example would be Pile's intruding, with his innocent and naïve love for Phuong, on the affections between Fowler and Phuong, Fowler's mistress.

Deviation from ordinariness is one of the features of "depraved innocence," which also implies the image of acting or deceit. Kate is surprised at Anthony's childish and stupid pretense.

> She could have sung with joy, when he pulled her to her feet, because they were a pair again, if she had not been daunted at the sight of him in his suspect smartness, his depraved innocence, hopelessly unprepared in his old school tie.
>
> 'What is that tie?' she asked. 'Surely it's not —'
>
> 'No, no,' he said, flashing the truth at her so unexpectedly that she was caught a victim to the charm she hated. 'I've promoted myself. It's Harrow.'(11-12)

Anthony wears a false school tie, not of his school, a fact which clarifies a miserable condition expressed in Anthony's disguise. School ties were status symbols in English society, especially between World War I and World War II. The false school tie illustrates Anthony's calculations of its importance and value in society. "His suspect smartness" and "depraved innocence" depict his falsity, his shame and his ignorance of the absurdity latent in his good calculations. On one hand, he is utterly simple enough to say, "I've promoted myself. It's Harrow." On the other hand, he knows the benefits the school tie gives him in society. His choice of a Harrow tie reveals his

affirmative attitudes toward social values or a traditional sense of value, but simultaneously it expresses his neglect of the rules or orders of society and consequently, the meaninglessness of them. Kate remembers a letter from Anthony's superior from the office from which he was dismissed.

> He was clever, the managing director had written, he had a fine head for figures, there were no specific complaints, but he was corrupting the office.(169)

Anthony corrupts the place where he is; he ignores the order of the office and perverts the territory of normal ordinariness, throwing it into disorder. Thus Anthony loses his standing and identity in society, ignoring the approved values in society and simultaneously taking advantage of them.

The disorder latent in Anthony's "depraved innocence" is a germ that develops later, in *The Quiet American*, into the violent demolitions of Pile's bomb. After the explosion of a plastic bomb, although Fowler feels affections for Pile so innocent and evocative of his younger days, Fowler recognizes that "[i]nnocence is a kind of insanity."(183)[7] This phrase implies the possibility of causing harm and upsetting normality. Pile's innocence cannot help being extraordinary in ordinary human society. As mentioned above, the innocence of the wild African forests is considered equal to energy, which is simply the original force of nature continuing on. No meaning of good or evil which human beings have cultured is perceived in it. Pile's innocence, it might be said, contains a tendency to retrogress to the disorder of nihility or to the chaotic condition of the beginning.

Another point manifested by the false school tie is that with this

disguise, Anthony throws away his true self and acts out his false self. His inner self and appearance do not accord with each other, and there comes forth a man without any dignity as a man. He can stand as a perfect man only when he accepts his own absurd and empty existence, just as King Oedipus chooses his blindness and becomes himself: a genuine character with pride and dignity. The borrowed clothes and imitated behavior debase his identity and only evoke laughter from others. Greene notices and describes the same humiliating situation of African native people in *Journey Without Maps*.

> They wore uniforms, occupied official positions, went to parties at Government House, had the vote, but they knew all the time they were funny (oh, those peals of laughter!), funny to the heartless prefect eye of the white man. If they had been slaves they would have had more dignity; there is no shame in being ruled by a stranger, but these men had been given their tin shacks, their cathedral, their votes and city councils, their shadow of self-government; they were expected to play the part like white men and the more they copied white men, the more funny it was to the prefects. They were withered by laughter; the more desperately they tried to regain their dignity the funnier they became.(33)

Greene says "[e]verything ugly is European" and "anything beautiful" in Freetown "was native." (32) Nevertheless, the native people are expected to behave as Europeans in Europeanized political organizations, and they themselves hope and try to be like Europeans, only to become laughingstocks, losing their own pride and dignity. Greene with sympathy claims that human beings must be themselves, must

not wear borrowed clothes, and must live on their individuality. Anthony's false school tie plays on this idea of Greene's, and the depravity of Anthony implies a miserable situation in which a man is losing his own identity.

Like Anthony, who acts out the role of a Harrow alumnus to gain benefits in society, Jones in *The Comedians* also plays a false role, passing the narrow defile between fact and fiction. Jones also is given the characteristic of innocence. Brown, the narrator, is listening to what Jones says:

> '. . . I always felt that Mr Smith and I had a bit in common. Horses out of the same stable.'
>
> I listened with astonishment. What could a saint possibly have in common with a rogue? . . . and I thought: innocence perhaps.(241)

Brown considers Mr. Smith, a vegetarian who innocently hopes to make vegetarianism popular in Haiti, a saint, and Jones, a self-appointed Major Jones, a rogue. Although their characters contrast, Brown notices they queerly have the same quality: innocence. In other words, neither of them can face reality and both of them stand apart from the real world. They are outsiders who innocently find their reasons in unrealizable dreams, and hence they cause trouble. Like Anthony or Pile, Jones especially brings troubles to those around him: "'Anyone who touches Major Jones is in trouble,' Petit Pierre said." (292) The words and behavior of Jones are ambiguous: "He wore his ambiguity like a loud suit and he seemed proud of it . . . ." (42) Truth and falsity about his past — full of plausible lies — are not distinguished. He calls himself Major Jones, and he eventually plays

the role of a major in the real guerrilla fighting and loses his life. Jones dies defending the guerrillas against the government military forces. He chooses his death, a choice which is suitable to the role of a Major Jones. Comparing Anthony and Pile, who do not choose their death themselves, Jones has the quality of hero. Brown presumes that Jones's secret hope was to gain citizenship and become an insider of society instead of a roguish outsider.

> I wondered whether perhaps in all his devious life he had been engaged on a secret and hopeless love-affair with virtue, watching virtue from a distance, hoping to be noticed, perhaps, like a child doing wrong in order to attract the attention of virtue.(329)

Jones knows he is a rogue, but he secretly hopes to be included in the realm of goodness, which is out of his reach; what he does is roguish. However, although his words and behavior are ambiguous, he distinguishes what he is from what he should be, like a good child. At this point, his act as a Major Jones in guerrilla fighting and his loss of life effectively reverse the meaning of his deed. Here the possibility of an inner reversion from roguishness to saintliness is attributed to Jones's hopeless wish: his innocent wish for virtue.

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It is valid to take Greene's *Journey Without Maps* and *England Made Me* as demonstrations of his concepts of innocence in the 1930s. Greene's discovery of pristine innocence and the inconsistent qualities attributed to the innocence of Anthony Farrant can be seen as the germs of Greene's characterization of the complexity of innocence.

Throughout his long career, it might be said, Greene possibly tried to capture in writing his ideal characters that would exemplify his concepts of innocence. Thus they, in due course of time, gaining various connotations in their particular situations, develop into characters attributed with varying degrees of innocence. His characters, therefore, in different shades of meaning, embody various stages of the quality of innocence, from the puerile innocence of Raven in *A Gun for Sale* to the flawless innocence of Father Quixote in *Monsignor Quixote*. These characters are rich and distinctive as human beings when examined in the light of innocence, and simultaneously clarify how Greene's perceptions of human beings have diversified and varied from each other to create an intriguing world of his own .

Notes:

1) The text used in this paper is *The Quiet American* (London: William Heinemann & the Bodley Head, 1973). All subsequent references will be to this edition, with the relevant page numbers incorporated within parentheses in the text.
2) The text used in this paper is *England Made Me* (London: William Heinemann & the Bodley Head, 1970). All subsequent references will be to this edition, with the relevant page numbers incorporated within parentheses in the text.
3) The text used in this paper is *The Comedians* (London: the Bodley Head & William Heinemann, 1976). All subsequent references will be to this edition, with the relevant page numbers incorporated within parentheses in the text.
4) The text used in this paper is *Journey Without Maps* (London: William Heinemann & the Bodley Head, 1978). All subsequent references will be to this edition, with the relevant page numbers incorporated within parentheses in the text.
5) Norman, Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, vol. one: 1904-1939 (London: Jonathan cape, 1989).
6) See Miyano, Shoko, *Graham Greene Sakuhin Kenkyu* (Tokyo: Gakushobo, 1994).

7) *ibid.*

* My ideas about the innocence of the characters in the novels of Graham Greene are mostly interpreted in the above book, and are excerpted from the chapters: 1 and 2 of "Innocence of Anthony Farrant" and chapters I and II of "*The Quiet American.*"