

グレアム・グリーン著「名誉領事」論

The Honorary Consul

Richard Logan

Graham Greene published *The Honorary Consul* in 1973. He had visited the land-locked South American country of Paraguay in 1967, and used the setting for his previous book, *Travels With My Aunt* which was published in 1969. Greene had also traveled in other South American countries and was well aware of the military coups, left-wing terrorism, and the general political and social conditions in the area. Greene discussed the genesis of his new novel in *Ways of Escape*:

The origin of my next novel, *The Honorary Consul*, written between 1970 and 1973, lies in the cave of the unconscious. I had a dream about an American ambassador—a favourite of women and a good tennis player whom I encountered in a bar—but in my dream there was no kidnapping, no guerrillas, no mistaken identity, nothing to identify it with *The Honorary Consul* except the fact that the dream lodged inexplicably in my head for months and during those months the figures of Charley Fortnum and Dr. Plarr stole up around the unimportant ambassador of my dream and quietly liquidated him.¹

Greene had read about the kidnapping of the British ambassador in Uruguay by the Tupamaro guerrillas, who were very efficient at

terrorism. Knowing that Paraguay was less well developed than Uruguay, Greene thought his plot of bumbling guerrillas kidnapping the wrong man by mistake would seem quite believable if set in that area. In fact, while visiting Argentina, his idea for a plot actually happened. A Paraguayan consul was kidnapped by mistake, but was released a few days later when the government refused to negotiate for his release.²

The actor Alec Guinness, who often starred in films adapted from Greene's novels, remarked on Greene's prescience:

Take any of the world's trouble spots from Cuba to Haiti and you will find that Greene has been there two or three years beforehand and accurately dealt with the tensions there through the medium of the novel. I have often said jokingly that when I hear that Graham is going off to visit some part of the globe I will avoid the place like the plague because that means that a revolution or a war is bound to break out there soon.³

EDUARDO PLARR

Doctor Plarr is a medical doctor living and working in a provincial town in northern Argentina along the river that marks the border with Paraguay. Doctor Plarr's father, a Briton who married a local Paraguayan woman and settled on a small farm, was arrested by the Paraguayan government for political opposition to the dictator, General Stroessner. Doctor Plarr's father saw to it that his wife and son escaped to Argentina, where they settled. Eduardo had been fourteen years old when last he had seen his father. Since then, he had had no word of his father, except that he was still alive but held prisoner.

Doctor Plarr is generally apolitical but as a doctor tries to help the poverty-stricken people in his town by treating them at reduced rates or for free. He also treats the rich and elite as there are only two doctors in the town. Doctor Plarr finds it hard to settle down with one woman and has a series of affairs with women he first meets as patients. Doctor Plarr conducts his love affairs rather unemotionally and even finds them somewhat ridiculous. On one occasion he muses on an affair where he made love with a woman while her husband was in the room with them:

He remembered that Escobar had always been a very heavy sleeper. Once, very early in their relationship, Margarita had told him, "nothing ever wakes him except a sudden silence. Just go on talking." "What about?" he had asked.

"Anything. Why not tell me how much you love me?" They had been sitting together on a sofa and her husband was sleeping in an armchair at the opposite end of the room, the back of the chair turned to them. Doctor Plarr couldn't even tell whether his eyes were closed. He said cautiously, "I want you."

"Yes?"

"I want you."

"Don't sound so staccato," she said as she touched him. "He needs to hear the steady murmur of conversation."

It is difficult to keep a monologue going while a woman makes love to you. In desperation Doctor Plarr had begun to recount the story of the Three Bears, beginning it in the middle, while all the time he watched with anxiety the

powerful statuesque head above the chairback.

“And then the third bear said in his gruff voice: Who has been eating up my porridge?”

Senora Escobar sat astride him as though she were a child playing ponies. “And so all three bears went upstairs and the little bear said: who has been sleeping in my bed?” He clutched Senora Escobar’s shoulders, and lost the thread of the story, so that he had to continue with the first phrase which came into his head, “This is the way the postboy rides. Gallopy, gallopy, gallopy.”⁴

DOCTOR PLARR'S MOTHER

Doctor Plarr’s attitude toward women seems to be in part a reaction to his mother, who lives in Buenos Aires in idle luxury. When she meets her son periodically, she has nothing but complaints to make about how her husband should have escaped with her to Argentina, rather than get involved in politics. When the honorary consul is kidnapped, Doctor Plarr visits the British ambassador in Buenos Aires. After the visit, he meets his mother in a tearoom. Rather than ask her son what he is doing in the capital, she launches into her usual litany of complaints:

“If only your father had been less obstinate... What was the use of staying on the estancia to be murdered? He could have sold it for a good price, and we could have been happy here together.”

“He was an idealist,” Doctor Plarr said.

“Ideals are all very well, but it was very wrong of him and very selfish of him not to put his family first.”⁵

Doctor Plarr muses on what his father would make of the fat,

whiny woman his mother has turned into if they were ever to be able to meet again. He cynically decides that it would be better if his parents never do meet again.

CHARLEY FORTNUM

Charley Fortnum is a British man who has spent his adult life trying not very successfully to wrest a living from a plantation he owns in the country outside the town where Doctor Plarr lives. Because Fortnum had entertained some important guests from England years before, he had been granted the title of honorary consul. Fortnum had no official standing with the government, but the British embassy granted him a small expense account to entertain visiting Britons and Americans. After showing the American ambassador around the local Indian ruins, Fortnum gets kidnapped by guerrillas. They were trying to get the American ambassador but did not know what he looked like. Realizing their mistake, they decide to hold Fortnum and make their demands that political prisoners be released in exchange for him. The guerrillas do not understand until too late that the government will do nothing for Fortnum, since he is not an important person.

CLARA

Fortnum, now sixty years old, has been a widower without children for some years. He falls in love with and marries a very young woman he met in the local brothel. Marrying a prostitute lowers his prestige among the local people to an even lower level than it had been before. Passive and ignorant, Clara is easily talked into bed by Doctor Plarr, who seems to seduce women to show to himself how easy it is to do. Doctor Plarr doesn't pretend to love the women he seduces, but Clara doesn't seem to mind as perhaps

she has always been treated with little respect by the men she has known. Doctor Plarr had first talked to Clara in a desultory way at the brothel where she worked before meeting Fortnum. When Doctor Plarr meets her again in the street, he asks her about her marriage:

“Is it true that you are married?”

“Yes.”

“What does it feel like?”

“I think it’s like wearing another girl’s dress,” she said, “which doesn’t fit.”

“Why did you do it?”

“He wanted to marry. Something to do with his money when he dies. And if there’s a child...”⁶

Clara doesn’t respect Fortnum and after he is kidnapped she clings to Doctor Plarr and wants to move in with him. Doctor Plarr begins to lose interest in Clara quickly but feels he must try to help restore Fortnum to her.

LEON RIVAS

Leon Rivas is the leader of the guerrillas who kidnap Fortnum. Rivas is a former Catholic priest who went to university with Doctor Plarr. Rivas draws Plarr into the plot because Fortnum needs medical care after being kidnapped. Plarr lets himself be drawn into the situation as a secret intermediary. Rivas plays on Doctor Plarr’s sympathy for the political prisoners who are held indefinitely without charge and holds out the hope that Doctor Plarr’s father might be released as a result of the kidnapping. Maria Couto points out that Leon Rivas appears to be based on Camillo Torres, a priest who was killed with guerrillas in Colombia, and that

Greene knew other priests involved in left-wing politics in Central and South America.⁷

Although Rivas has quit the church and gotten married, the three other guerrillas (including his wife) continue to call him Father and treat him like a priest, much to Rivas' annoyance. After Doctor Plarr explains to Rivas that Fortnum is not a government official and is therefore useless as a hostage, Rivas insists that they will have to continue the operation anyway. Doctor Plarr attempts to argue with Rivas about releasing Fortnum, but Rivas refuses to change the plan:

Father Rivas said, "He is not in our hands, Eduardo. He is in the hands of the governments. In the hands of God too, of course. I do not forget my old claptrap, you notice, but I have never yet seen any sign that He interferes in our wars or our politics." ⁸

RIVAS AND HIS FAITH

Rivas has lost faith in the Catholic Church and its complicity with the vicious military regimes in South America. Rivas believes in what is called "liberation theology" but in fact has not really squared his desire to help the oppressed with the terrorist methods he now has to use to achieve his goal. Rivas is ashamed that he had to preach the message of giving to poor people who had nothing to give, while the church authorities lived well by catering to the ruling elite.

Later, while waiting for news on the radio of the government's reaction to the kidnapping, Doctor Plarr notices Rivas reading something. When Rivas says he is reading an English detective story, Plarr asks him how it is. Rivas replies that he can always

guess the ending:

“Then where is the interest?”

“Oh, there is a sort of comfort in reading a story where one knows what the end will be. The story of a dream-world where justice is always done. There were no detective stories in the age of faith - an interesting point when you think of it. God used to be the only detective when people believed in Him. He was law. He was order. He was good. Like your Sherlock Holmes. It was he who pursued the wicked man for punishment and discovered all. But now people like the General make law and order. Electric shocks on the genitals. Aquino's fingers. Keep the poor ill-fed, and they do not have the energy to revolt. I prefer the detective. I prefer God.”⁹

RIVAS AND HIS FATHER

Leon Rivas had grown up in a very rich family in Paraguay. Doctor Plarr at one point asks Leon about them. Leon describes his family's palatial mansion with six servants. He also recounts how his mother would not allow him to bring his friends in the house, as they might break or soil the valuable furnishings. Leon says he preferred the servants to his parents, especially a gardener named Pedro, who was fired for taking a few pesos he had found on a bench in the garden. Leon says that people always said his father was a good provider for his family. Doctor Plarr cannot help but compare his father to Leon's and in the process realizes that following ones moral and political principles are more important and certainly more honorable than going along with the status quo in order to take care of one's family.

RIVAS AND THE CHURCH

Doctor Plarr asks Leon if he had imagined that he would ever leave the Church in the past. Doctor Plarr points out that circumstances change and people change their ideas. Doctor Plarr asks Rivas if he ever thought his priesthood would come to an end:

“No, I never believed that. Not for a moment. I thought the Church and I wanted the same thing. You see I had been very happy in my seminary. You might say that was the period of my honeymoon. Only there were occasions... I suppose it happens the same way in all honeymoons... there was a hint that something might be wrong... I remember one old priest... he was the professor in the moral theology course. I've never known a man so cut-and-dried and sure of the truth. Of course moral theology is the bugbear in every seminary. You learn the rules and find they don't apply to any human case... Oh well, I used to think, a little difference of opinion, what does it matter? In the end a man and wife grow together. The Church will grow nearer to me as I grow nearer to her.”¹⁰

Rivas goes on to say that he has not really left the Church. It is a separation, not a divorce. Rivas has no quarrel with his faith but with the men who run the Church and serve the ruling elite rather than help the oppressed poor.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Doctor Plarr and Rivas talk about how God could allow the horror and pain that fill the world. Rivas admits that his fellow priests somehow were able to ignore the evil in the world. The evil in the world could be blamed on the devil and man's inability to exercise

his free will in a moral and good direction. Rivas says he does not believe in Satan, but that it is God who is evil:

“I believe in the evil of God,” Father Rivas said, “but I believe in His goodness too. He made us in His image - that is the old legend. Eduardo, you know well how many truths in medicine lay in old legends. It was not a modern laboratory which first discovered the use of a snake’s venom. And old women used the mould on overripe oranges long before penicillin. So I too believe in an old legend which is almost forgotten. He made us in His image - and so our evil is His evil too. How could I love God if he were not like me? Divided like me. Tempted like me. If I love a dog it is only because I can see something human in a dog. I can feel his fear and his gratitude and even his treachery. He dreams in his sleep like I do...”

“I find my disbelief a lot easier to understand than your kind of belief. If your God is evil...”¹¹

In a 1978 magazine interview, Greene mentioned that he had asked a friend of his, a Spanish priest, if Rivas’s views were too odd:

But he said, “Not a bit of it - perfectly Catholic, perfectly acceptable,” Mr. Greene said. “You know, Father What’s-His-Name in The Honorary Consul had the idea of a night side of God and a day side of God, you know - God’s evolution and God as evil. God and the Devil are the same person. I invented this for him because he’s got to have his theology, as it were, as he had left the church and married. Well, I thought it would probably not be

acceptable to the Catholic Church." ¹²

RIVAS AND GOD

Rivas explains to Doctor Plarr how God is both good and evil. God's night side is evil and God's day side is good. Rivas says that God's day side is evolving and increasing while the night side is decreasing. Doctor Plarr mentions Hitler and Stalin and the South American dictators and their torture and suggests that the night side is gaining on the day side. But Rivas refuses to believe that:

"But I believe in Christ," Father Rivas said, "I believe in the Cross and the Redemption. The Redemption of God as well as of Man. I believe the day-side of God, in one moment of happy creation, produces perfect goodness, as a man might paint one perfect picture. God's good intention for once was completely fulfilled so that the night-side can never win more than a little victory here and there. With our help. Because the evolution of God depends on our evolution. Every evil act of ours strengthens His night-side, and every good one helps His day-side. We belong to Him and He belongs to us. But now at least we can be sure where evolution will end one day - it will end in a goodness like Christ's. It is a terrible process all the same and the God I believe in suffers as we suffer while He struggles against Himself - against His evil side." ¹³

DOCTOR SAAVEDRA

Before Doctor Plarr gets irrevocably involved in the kidnapping of Charley Fortnum, he tries to get people he knows to help put pressure on the government to negotiate with the guerrillas. One of these people is a novelist named Saavedra, who had received an

honorary degree from a university in Buenos Aires. Doctor Saavedra turns out to be more concerned with his literary reputation than in helping Fortnum get released. Doctor Saavedra refuses to be hurried into writing a letter to be sent to the press, because he wants his literary style to be as impressive as he can make it. Because the guerrillas have set a time limit of just four days before they will kill Fortnum, Doctor Plarr has to write the letter himself and Doctor Saavedra refuses to add his name to it. Saavedra does eventually make the empty gesture of volunteering to take Fortnum's place as a hostage, but nothing comes of it.

Greene seems to have put Doctor Saavedra into the novel to make fun of novelists who are more concerned with filling their books with deep symbolism than in dealing with life as it is. Saavedra is obsessed with working symbolism into his novels. Doctor Plarr listens to the self-important Saavedra talk about the difficulties of writing and does not seem to notice that Plarr is subtly mocking him: "Discipline," Jorge Julio Saavedra was repeating,

"is more necessary to me than to other more facile writers. You see I have a daemon where others have a talent. Mind you I envy them their talent. A talent is friendly. A daemon is destructive. You cannot conceive how much I suffer when I write. I have to force myself day after day to sit down pen in hand and I struggle for expression... You will remember in my last book, that character, Castillo, the fisherman, who wages an endless war with the sea for a small reward. In a way you might say that Castillo is a portrait of the artist. Such daily agony and the result - five hundred words. A very small catch."

"I seem to remember Castillo died from a revolver shot in a bar defending his one-eyed daughter from rape."

"Ah yes, I am glad you noticed the Cyclops symbol," Doctor Saavedra said. "A symbol of the novelist's art. A one-eyed art because one eye concentrates the vision. The diffuse writer is always two-eyed. He includes too much - like a cinema screen. And the violator? Perhaps he represents this melancholy of mine which descends for weeks at a time, when I struggle for hours to do my daily stint."

"I hope you find my tablets give you some help." ¹⁴

With Saavedra's character, Greene not only makes fun of writers and their egos, but also criticizes writers who refuse to write about current political and social problems and claim to be writing timeless literature for the ages. Greene also takes a dig at himself, as he often mentioned to people that he sat down each morning and forced himself to write five hundred words a day as a discipline.

COLONEL PEREZ

The chief of Police in the town where Charley Fortnum was kidnapped is Colonel Perez, who is charged with the investigation and must not only try to save Fortnum but also must catch the guerrillas. Perez is very sharp and catches Doctor Plarr in several lies, as Plarr tries to hide his involvement with the guerrillas. Plarr knows that Perez will bide his time until he has gathered all the evidence he needs before he will be a threat to Plarr. Plarr and Perez play a game of cat and mouse. Perez lets Doctor Plarr know that he is well aware of the doctor's affair with Fortnum's wife and that Plarr's father is held in prison in Paraguay.

After Doctor Plarr visits the British ambassador in Buenos Aires

to see what can be done to get the government to negotiate with the guerrillas, he meets Colonel Perez on the flight back to their small town. Plarr tells Perez that no one seems to care about Fortnum:

“I wanted to see the Ambassador about Fortnum.”

“Yes? What did he have to say?”

“I interrupted his siesta, poor man. He said the trouble is that no one's really interested. ”

Colonel Perez said, “I assure you I am. Yesterday I wanted to organize a thorough search of the barrio popular, but the Governor thought it too dangerous. He does not want shooting if possible. Ours has been a very quiet province up till now except for a little trouble from those third world priests. He sent me off to Buenos Aires today to talk to the Minister of the Interior. I think the Governor hopes to delay matters. If he can postpone action long enough and we are lucky Fortnum's body may be found outside the province. No one can complain then that we acted imprudently. The blackmail will have failed. Everyone will be happy. Except myself. Even your government will be happy. I hope they will pay a pension to the widow?”

“I doubt it. He was only an Honorary Consul. What did the Minister say?”

“He is not afraid of shooting, that man. We could do with more like him. He advises the Government to go ahead whatever happens and to use troops if necessary.

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Colonel Perez goes on to say that whatever the government position is, he has a job to do. The guerrillas are no different from common criminals as far as he is concerned. Eventually, through dogged police work Perez finds where the guerrillas are holding Fortnum and his police surround the spot. Doctor Plarr is there with the guerrillas, and when he tries to serve as intermediary he is shot dead along with the other guerrillas and Fortnum is rescued unharmed.

THE THEME OF THE NOVEL

Doctor Plarr is the central character in the novel and the issue of commitment - political, social, and personal - faces him throughout the novel. Doctor Plarr is only vaguely committed to his imprisoned father. Plarr has set up his medical practise just across the river from Paraguay in a perhaps unconscious effort to be as close to his father as possible. However, Doctor Plarr is politically apathetic and does not work aggressively for the release of his father. When there is a chance of freedom for his father through the kidnapping of Fortnum, Plarr acts indecisively and is pushed and pulled by circumstances. Doctor Plarr's relationship with his mother is strained and unloving. He feels little commitment to her, beyond visiting her once in a while. Doctor Plarr's affairs with women show a lack of commitment to a love relationship. The affairs mentioned in the novel are all with married women who are satisfied with a short term fling.

His cynicism about people extends to religion as well as politics. Plarr (and by extension, Greene) continues to grapple with religious issues like evil and faith throughout the novel. In the end, Plarr suffers a meaningless death. One is left with the feeling that

Greene does not really believe that political action can eradicate poverty and oppression. However, faith does not seem to have any effect against evil either. In the end, each person struggles individually with his fate and if faith helps him to live in a cruel and unjust world, then that is all that we can hope for.

THE FILM

There was immediate interest in turning *The Honorary Consul* into a film upon the publication of the novel. Due to various problems with financing and finding bankable actors, it took ten years for the film to appear. Filming started in 1982 in Mexico, with Richard Gere playing the part of Doctor Plarr. Michael Caine played Charley Fortnum and Bob Hoskins took the part of Colonel Perez.

The film, which was titled *Beyond the Limit* to appeal to the American market was not popular with the critics. Like so many other films based on Greene's books, the script ignored the religious and political dimension, while staying faithful to the action of the plot. Richard Gere came in for much criticism for his wooden performance. The film did moderately well at the box office.

NOTES

- (1) Graham Greene, *Ways of Escape* (London: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 223.
- (2) *Ibid.*, p. 224.
- (3) Gene D. Phillips, *Graham Greene: The Films of his Fiction* (London: Teachers' College Press, 1974) quoted in Quentin Falk, *Travels in Greenland* (London: Quartet Books, 1990), pp. 190-91.
- (4) Graham Greene, *The Honorary Consul* (London: Penguin

The Honorary Consul

- Books, 1973), pp. 144-45.
- (5) Ibid., p. 139.
 - (6) Ibid., p. 79.
 - (7) Maria Couto, *Graham Greene: On the Frontier* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 161.
 - (8) *The Honorary Consul*, p. 38.
 - (9) Ibid., p. 206.
 - (10) Ibid., p. 217.
 - (11) Ibid., p. 225.
 - (12) Gloria Emerson, 'Our Man in Antibes: Graham Greene' , Rolling Stone (9 March 1978), in *Conversations With Graham Greene*, ed. Henry J. Donaghy (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), p. 129.
 - (13) *The Honorary Consul*, p. 226.
 - (14) Ibid., pp. 53-54.
 - (15) Ibid., p. 146.