THE WAY TO AFRICA: GRAHAM GREENE'S INNER JOURNEY IN THE HEART OF DARKNESS

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In this paper, I propose to analyze Graham Greene's travel narrative *Journey Without Maps* (1936), which reveals his personal journey in West Africa during the 1930s, to show Greene's attempt to challenge and contest the European colonial system, as he represents the culture and environment of two African countries, despite making use of a kind of language that still belongs to imperial discourse.

The title of the book calls the reader's attention to the importance of maps in travel narratives. Pictorial maps in books act as a guide to the travel taken by the author. As Andrew Thacker has pointed out in his article "Journey Without Maps: Travel Theory, Geography and the Syntax of Space" (1999), "a map functions as a form of textual representation that alters how we read works of travel writing; if the map is an image of spatial fixity, how does it function in relation to a discourse concerned above all with representing movement?" (13) And the idea of the adventure that travelers pursue is present in most of Greene's works. In *Abroad* (1980), Paul Fussell quotes Greene talking about the writers of his generation, such as Fleming and Waugh: "We were a generation brought up on adventure stories who had missed the enormous disillusionment of the First War, so we went looking for adventure" (70).

Travel narratives are a popular kind of reading since they were usually written to satisfy human curiosity about something unfamiliar. They are also motivated by the writer's wish to compare and contrast the exotic or unusual and the familiar. Travel

writing allows the reader to understand his own world and culture and a different world and culture through different perspectives. It is also a seductive form of story-telling. The strangeness of the territory that is being told in the pages of a travel book is the key element that appeals to the reader to keep his or her attention.

One of the most important moments in a travel narrative is when the traveler-narrator encounters the "other." According to Myriam Ávila, in "O encontro com o estrangeiro: uma tipologia" (2000), it is a "momento virtual em que, teoricamente, todas as possibilidades ainda se encontram abertas para o encontro, propicia a reflexão sobre o estabelecimento do estatuto do outro que se fará a seguir" (143). In the narrative, after meeting the other culture, the traveler usually observes and then is able to reflect upon what *l'étranger* represents to him or her throughout the journey. The traveler can have a feeling of difference or sameness towards the people gazed upon. The departure, adventure, and return are the three basic elements that should be present in the narratives, both fiction and nonfiction, to give a sense of verisimilitude from the beginning of the journey up until the homecoming event.

Journey Without Maps is divided into three parts of the quest for the Primitive. The first one describes the way Greene prepares for the African journey; the second part is about the finding of the primitive as he goes deeper and deeper in the forests; and the third part tells us about his return to the "civilized world." The images, from the beginning to the end, represent a cycle in Greene's life as he attempts to find himself. The author asks himself what "made the change" in him after all his moving in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The title of the book explains his trip: he traveled to Africa, being out of Europe for the first time, as he says in the beginning of his narrative, without maps. And

this gives the traveler a certain sense of freedom. As he notes in his book, it would "be possible to travel all down West Africa without showing papers from the moment of landing, no passports, no Customs, no barriers" (62). The author feels "the happy sense of being free" (62). This "drifting" without maps/limits gives Greene the feeling that he is traveling boldly in the heart of Africa, and that he is far from being safely guided to a known place. At the end of the journey Greene is told that there was a map of the whole of Liberia, but the author feels actually glad that he had not seen it, imagining that his book will replace this map with his own routes.

Modernity arrived in Europe at the turn of the century as something chaotic, fragmented, and unstable in all areas of life. Modern sensibility implied an awareness of reality as fractured. Modern values for some people developed according to the will for adventure in a different place, especially when the means of transportations were more easily accessed. According to Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes* (1988), the traveler wants to experience new possibilities of discovering something new abroad and return home to tell their people what can been seen outside their province. The golden age of the British Empire was between 1880 and 1940, and travel writing developed more during this period, since it shows certain complicity with imperialism. Many novelists and poets were "traveling writers" because they often went away to see the unknown in the colonies and write about what they witnessed there. Helen Carr, in her article "Modernism and Travel (1880-1940)" (2002), notes that "[m]odernist texts register a new consciousness of cultural heterogeneity, the condition and mark of the modern world; in both imaginative and travel writing, modernity, the meeting of other cultures, and change are inseparable" (74).

Modernist writers wanted to experience things abroad and be able to register what they saw in their narratives to bring other people's cultures closer to their own. Some Modernist authors, such as Jack London, D.H. Lawrence, and Graham Greene, integrated fiction into their travel writing. Carr explains the three different phases of travel writing of the first period of travel writing in Modernism:

> From 1880 to 1900, the long, 'realist' (not of course synonymous with reliable), instructive tale of heroic adventure remained dominant. In the years from 1900 to the First World War, the 'realist' texts have not disappeared, but much travel writing becomes less didactic, more subjective, more literary. By the inter-war years, which saw a surge in the popularity of travel and travel writing, the literary travel book had become the dominant form: many of the best known examples of the genre were written by writers equally or better known for their fiction or poetry. (75)

"Travel literature" evolved as a genre and was taken with a new seriousness. The theme of self-discovery, or rather, the search for a wrecked and scattered self that one sees in much modernist literature is often revealed in terms of travel. This is what we can see in Greene's African narrative. He is sensible enough to see the "otherness" and describe it; however, with a fabricated account.

In Freetown Greene has its first encounter with British colonialism. He is very hard on the way he critizes the English; he says: "civilization in West Africa means little more than exploitation" (69). For him, his people are insufferable paternalists, the colonials are mean to the blacks, and they do not care about recreating a better English atmosphere in West Africa; but despite all this, Greene acknowledges that his people display "a certain fidelity" (69), however ludicrous, to their England. The author stays in Freetown for only five days but, in spite of his outsider's point of view, Greene tries to see as much as he can about what took place in that city to share with his readers his anti-

imperialist feelings. Greene connects badness to everything he finds on the coast of Freetown.

Michel Foucault's notion of discourse is important for literary and cultural studies because discourse, as a term, is essential for the questions it allows us to ask about literature and textuality in general. Who is speaking? Foucault (1972) asks: "Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language?" (*Archeology of Knowledge*, 50) He is concerned about who has the privilege and is qualified to speak the "truth." The subject is defined by certain situations that make him occupy a position of authority. Foucault notes:

> [A]ccording to a certain grid of explicit or implicit interrogations, he is the questioning subject and, according to a certain programme of information, he is the listening subject; according to according to a table of characteristic features, he is the seeing subject, and, according to a descriptive type, the observing subject. (52)

In my point of view, West Africa becomes a laboratory in which Greene observes different aspects of the culture and society to question them. The author, as subject, and having his locus of encunciation a First World country, sees things and people, listens to information, and observes the behavior of the "other" and his own people to form an opinion related to closeness or distance between them and the other culture. Foucault (1971) notes that the discursive analysis is "always concerned with showing how the Other, the Distant, is also the Near and the Same" (*The Order of Things*, 339). Sara Mills (1997) argues that what Foucault "wants us to see is the arbitrariness of this range of discourses, the strangeness of those discourses, in spite of their similarities" (26). Similarities of textual characteristics in travel writing are the narrative figure or subject, narrative incidents, and the description of objects. Greene's gaze at Africa is also

personally conditioned: he already has an idea about the place. Under this reading, one realizes that discourses are arbitrary, and they are based on the author's conscience and authority.

British Modernists traveled to faraway places in order to escape the routine of their lives in England and because they wanted to attempt something new in different settings. It was important to take risks, especially when one wanted to show something different or similar with his culture. The English writers of the 1930s tried to be bolder and decided to travel to see and experience different things. Graham Greene was "a complete amateur at travel in Africa" (2), he confesses in *Journey Without Maps*, when he visited the continent from late January through March of 1935. He traveled to West Africa to escape boredom and mainly because of his fascination about the continent since his readings of Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1886). In order to portray another culture through their writing, novelists traveled abroad in search of sample material. Africa was a place where several British writers visited because they expected to find the exotic. As Jean-Yves Monnier points out in "Myth and Reality" (1988), Greene engaged on the journey "not so much in search of the real Africa as of what Africa stood for: the primitive, 'the childhood of the race'" (1); it was more of a journey of self search. Monnier argues that in *Journey Without Maps* Greene suggests

> that a sick civilization could learn lessons from primitive societies still adhering to fundamental human values which had gone from western societies. Because he had come to regard civilization as something negative, the antithetical notion, the primitive, was almost automatically credited with great virtues. Thus Greene reversed the prevailing contemporary scale of values by placing the primitive at the top and civilization at the bottom. (63)

This dichotomy, primitive/civilized, is present in his description of Freetown with mixed emotions: "Everything ugly in Freetown was European (...); if there was anything

beautiful in the place, it was native" (35). In Greene's reality the coast and the interior are also opposites. The coast has been corrupted and exploited by the civilized English imperialists while the interior of Africa is filled with "real natives" who are the ones "to love and admire" (39). Monnier even compares Greene's comments about the natives with Rousseau's myth of the Noble Savage (63). Yet, at times, Greene portrays a stark reality of primitive Africa, noting that the countryside is no Eden as he walks for hours through "dead forests" leading him to boredom and exhaustion. He sees deseased people in "horrible" villages, meets corrupt leaders, helps cleaning his men's sores, and sleeps in places filled with rats, cockroaches, and flies. Thus, ironically, his routine disempowers the mythical idea through an experienced reality.

Although Greene's narrative is very much autobiographical, the author selects his ideas and makes statements about what he considers to be true. His objective is to show his readers that he knows about a certain topic, therefore, he can speak the truth. The reader believes in the travel writer for there is the first hand experience. He tells his readers all the incidents in Africa, the people he meets along the journey in the interior of Liberia, and he also describes the customs and festivities.

The author is a strong Catholic but shows curiosity about the African religious cerimonies and beliefs, such as the bush devils, the secret societies, and even the religious masks. As for religion, Greene has praising remarks about the missionaries in West Africa. His devout Catholic faith triumphs in his ideal Africa: Greene constrats the priests and nuns he meets in the villages with the Europeans from the coast of Freetown. The missionaries become "honorary natives", and the "little group of nuns had a standard or gentleness and honesty equal to the native standard" (96). Once again, the author has

double standards: the missionaries are European, but civilized, while the his people, or the colonias who live on the coast, are uncivilized. This is his own ideology constructed in his narrative.

Graham Greene was also drawn to the "seediness" of Africa, especially in Liberia. He compares it to "the seediness of civilization, of the sky-signs in Leicester Square, the tarts in Bond Street, the smell of cooking greens off Tottenham Court Road, the motor salesmen in Great Portland Street" (19). This seediness which he had seen and felt in his home country appeals now since it reminds him of something that is in the past, or "the sense of nostalgia for something lost; it seems to represent a stage further back" (19). As the author travels into Liberia, he is able to feel a deeper sense of seediness, which, for him, represents "the primitive". This is actually what he had been looking for since the start of the journey.

Everything starts to make sense to him. Sometimes Greene acts like a tourist who always compares his culture with a different one and thinks his has better qualities. He brought Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) with him as he thought the book matched the mood of the beginning of the journey, and realized that what he really needed was something to contrast with the "sad" and "depressing" reality of the place as the trip progressed. On the other hand, Greene, with a sense of justice, became aware of the fact that being in Liberia without the restraints of the maps and limitations of the western civilization is a much better situation. He describes to the readers an event that became common place along his journey:

> I was afraid of moths. It was an inherited fear, I shared my mother's terror of birds, couldn't touch them, couldn't bear the feel of their hearts beating in my palm. I avoided them as I avoided ideas I didn't like, the idea of eternal life and damnation. But in Africa one couldn't avoid them any more than one could avoid

> the supernatural. The method of psychoanalysis is to bring the patient back to the idea which he is repressing: a long journey backwards without maps, catching a clue here and a clue there, as I caught the names of the villages from this man and that, until one has to face the general idea, the pain of the memory. This is what you have feared, Africa may be imagined as saying, you can't turn your back, you can't forget it, so you may as well take a long look. (96)

In the passage above, Greene knows that he must endure and overcome his fears. They are part of the quality of his journey. The "primitive" he had read in books, but never experienced with such intensity before, comes up now in full force, and he must explore it. Greene's journey in Liberia is the one into his past ("backwards"); it is a link between his past and his present condition. But for this to happen, it is necessary that he maps it himself, with his own experiences. It is clear that Greene sees Liberia as a whole part of Africa, a representative place of that continent. He probably thought he "knew" Africa as he read about it in imperalistic books; however, Africa proved to be an unknown space. In reality, Greene "discovered" Africa through his own "gazing".

The concept of the gaze is sometimes used as an equivalent of the "look". According to Mieke Bal, in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (2002), the gaze indicates "the position of the subject doing the looking" (35). And this look points to a position of the object being "real" or represented. If the gaze has a fixating or colonizing mode of looking, it is a look that objectifies and disempowers the one who is being gazed. The travel writer with whom I am working gazes at the object (Liberia) and look back at himself as he sees the differences and similarities between the other culture (African) and his own during the trip. The gaze is something central. Bal explains that "[t]he objectification and the disempowering exotization of 'others' further flesh out the issues of power inequity that the concept helps lay bare" (36). In this case, Greene was able to gaze everything around him and compare it to his own culture. As Tacker points

out, "[t]his is why Greene is so attracted by the motif of drifting without maps, for the maps be provided or created by the traveller, the writing is itself the proper map of the journey" (20). And as Dennis Porter notes, in *Haunted Journeys* (1991), the most interesting travel books are those that "combine explorations in the world with self-explorations", or texts that are able to create a self through "a dialogic encounter with others" (8). Greene concludes that

> [t]his was what I carried with me into new country, an instinctive simplicity, a thoughtless idealism. It was the first time, moving on from one place to another, that I hadn't expected something better of the new country than I had found in the old, that I was prepared for disappointment. It was the first time, too, that I was not disappointed. (99)

According to Fussell (1987), "successful travel literature mediates between two poles: the individual physical things it describes, on the one hand, and the larger theme that it is 'about' the other" (126). The balance of the personal and impersonal should be present in a travel narrative. The writer's own thoughts and preconceptions interplay between the observer and observed (the "other") and between the self and the world when the author narrates the events of the trip. According to Pratt (1988), the contact zone is "where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (4). An author, who usually writes in first person, talks about his/her own experiences, through a feeling of comfort or uneasiness, with the other culture and tells what he/she observes about the other. Thus, the other must be gazed upon so that the writer has valid material to be written in his text.

Greene's self discovery in Africa is very significant to him as a writer, since he had always had a different perspective of the African people and culture. The way he perceives the territory around him will be important for its portrait in his book. As he

arrives in a village called Duogobmai after a long walk, Greene describes it by its physical features: “a line of blackened huts at the top of a long red-clay slope” (125). He was anxious because there were not huts for him and his guides to sleep in or anything for them to eat; however, a “transformation” of the place takes place in Greene’s eyes and mind:

> And suddenly I felt curiously happy and careless and relieved. One couldn’t, I was sure, get lower than Duogobmai. I had been afraid of the primitive, had wanted it broken gently, but here it came on us in a breath, as we stumbled up through the clung and the cramped and stinking huts to our lampless sleeping place among the rats. It was the worst one need fear, and it was bearable because it was inescapable. (126-7)

The primitive is one of the central themes in *Journey Without Maps*. This very own primitivism the author somehow dreaded meeting has finally come, which he knew it would sooner or later on the journey. Now this “horrible” village is transformed into something desirable for he wanted to escape from the limits and the western places fixed upon maps.

There is a passage in the third part of the book which is named ‘Into Buzie Country’; the sub-heading of this part is actually named ‘The Horrible Village’. Greene notes in his diary: it “looked very old and very dirty. It wasn’t a place I would have chosen to rest in. It was a really horrible village. The only thing to do in it was to get drunk” (128). He saw many “scarier” things in Sierra Leone and Liberia, such as people dying in the middle of roads, illnessess taking over entire tribes, corruption all over the place. He himself almost died of malaria. In fact, as his exhaustion increased and his willingness of discovery wore off, Greene came to long for the comforts of the civilized world. As Monnier notes, “it was through his exposure to primitive Africa that he rediscovered the virtues of Western civilization – at least temporarily” (66). It seems that

Greene cannot be apart from his cultural world. It is a battle between the weight of experience and the return to the old values. Greene's "Englishness" is widely present in his African narrative, as he himself admits that Europe was "the world to which [he] belonged" (308). Was the ideal Africa a romantic fantasy after all?

Greene had dreams almost every night trying to find part of his own identity. Once he had a dream in which he was in a nursery and saw many masked creatures dancing around the place. The witch had form, though the other creatures did not, and he tells us that, in fact, "you can't call these things evil, as Peter Quint in *The Turn of the Screw* was evil, with his carroty hair and his white face of damnation. That story of [Henry] James's belongs to the Christian, the orthodox imagination. Mine were devils only in the African sense of being who controlled power" (181). Thacker notes that this is one of the things that can explain Greene's odd comment near the end of the book that "what has astonished [him] about Africa was that it had never been really strange" (248). It is the author's attempt to turn this other space into a known place.

Graham Greene traveled to Africa in search for existential knowledge, but he also brought along preconceptions and a mythical image of the Dark Continent. Greene realizes that the shape and "color" of Africa "is roughly that of the human heart" (36). It caused a disillusionment with contemporary Western civilization. His ideal helped him to sympathize with the "other," but as he traveled on, reality was bigger and made him realize that his yearning was nothing but mythical. He was able to discover many things about Sierra Leone and Liberia, but mainly about himself. No journey is ever without maps; there is always a limit, a frontier.

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