"WRITING AS CONVERSATION": THE NOVELS OF HENRY GREEN

with an annotated bibliography on Green

by

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ABSTRACT

Henry Green described his experiments in fiction as "conversations" between the writer and his unseen reader. "We talk to one another in novels," he said. In chapter one, the implications of this statement are discussed within the framework of the author-reader relationship in fiction from Sterne to John Barth and Robbe-Grillet. By comparing Green with these novelists and others such as Jane Austen, Dickens, Henry James, and Virginia Woolf, one can consider and evaluate more effectively his techniques of communication. Some of the aspects of conversation as a living art as well as a literary art are also discussed, with particular emphasis on the delight in process rather than in the finished product.

Chapter two begins by relating the "communication without speech" between author and reader to the dialogue between Green's characters. Then, the "project for the novelist" which the author outlined in two of his radio talks is considered as a formula for the successful management of the conversation between writer and reader. This formula is: "first, to catch his [the reader's] attention, secondly, to make him read each word as if he were not asleep, and finally to create a work of art . . . between the author and reader." The second chapter contains a study of the tactics whereby Green catches the attention of the reader, and awakens him to the experience of the novel. These tactics include: the challenging titles; the introduction of startling discrepancies, particularly in the opening chapters; the "arresting" use of coincidence; and the juggling of identical names between different characters.
Chapter three tests the second part of Green's formula: "to make him read each word as if he were not asleep." To ensure the reader's careful listening, Green forged a personal and distinctive prose style--a voice for his side of the conversation. In this chapter, the arresting aspects of his style are examined in detail. Green developed another sure technique for keeping us awake: the significant distortions which ruffle the surface of his prose and create a watchful, uneasy reader. Green's narrators in Party Going and Concluding are parodies of omniscient story-tellers; consequently, the reader is placed in essentially the same questioning, tentative position as the characters occupy in the novels.

Green's formula is completed when the reader takes an active part in the silent conversation. Chapter four discusses the ways in which this reader is urged to become a performing partner in the creation of the novel. The mysterious, unanswered questions, the lack of authorial commentary, and Green's technique of "non-description" provide silent places in the narrative which the reader must fill. Ambiguous endings put Green's reader in an equivocal position in which his own reactions become comically apparent, and most of his conventional expectations are exposed by the author's parodies of various stock devices. At the same time, Green persuades his reader to create meaning from the network of free-riding motifs and images which gives unusual freedom to the interpretive voice. Thus the reader "talks back" even after the novel is "finished," and Green's fiction becomes a vital, artistic conversation.
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Chapter I

"WRITING AS CONVERSATION"

Henry Green doted on conversation. "It is now almost the only communication there is between human beings,"¹ he once wrote; and in a fragmented, precarious world, this exchange of knowledge, feelings and intuitions through the half-truths, evasions and humour of speech was, to him, a miracle. In a memorial address given in February, 1974, V. S. Pritchett paid tribute to Green's unique apprehension of the mysterious power of human talk:

He saw that the human rigmarole is a mosaic of repetitions and that it is a sort of unconscious poetry or a touching attempt to grope our way towards intimacy and yet also to self-protection. Talk was part of the human mystery, an attempt to lift the corner of the veil. Thomas Hardy spoke of the 'low sad music of humanity' [sic]. To Henry, speech was this music, though he did not think of it as mournful; for him it was strange, even an assertion of a character's pride in the role he has a right to.²

Green saw talk between two people as a celebration of both individualism and intimacy, a symbol of "the human mystery." When I visited him, several months before his death, he had not completed a novel for twenty years, and all his strength, vivacity, playfulness and tolerance had become channelled into this living art.

The perfection of communication through conversation was an Augustan ideal. The term, "conversation," used then in a much broader sense than now, embraced the whole social relationship in its most perfect intercourse.³ In his autobiography, Pack My Bag, Green records that he
was sent, before Oxford, to "finish off" in southern France, "at a big country house and a large family with everyone speaking from noon to midnight, the women talked life and the men politics." It was an education reminiscent of the seventeenth century country houses in England, where the grace and learning which fathered the Augustans were sheltered. For twelve hours each day, Green writes, social intercourse consisted of "one raid after another superbly done, not into enemy country because they were charming people but rather from the natural activity of their minds, as birds after food" (PMB, 190). As in the eighteenth century, women were involved as intimately as men in the life of conversation; with one of them, Green played through all the stages of a courtship and marriage, in talk.

Before the break-up of the English class system during the Great War, Green found delight in conversation with the cottagers of his village. The easiness of their talk came "from the relationship between us being a fixed one with simple rules. In talking with them the minutes would slip by with nothing vital said, in ease and comfort, with no flattery but with a high sense on both sides of things untold" (PMB, 70). Green never evokes the past in his books except to illustrate how it can inhibit the growth of a Richard Roe or a Charley Summers; his characters are committed to present life. Rosamund Lehmann tells how he once wrote to her that the times of the second world war, when everything was in flux and nothing certain, were "an absolute gift to the writer. Everything is breaking up. A seed can lodge and sprout in any crack or fissure." Nonetheless, behind his characters' mishearings and
misconceptions, beneath their fragmented and evasive stream of dialogue, one hears faint echoes from a lost art of communication between men in society--the ideal behind the shifting facade.

Until his death, Green practised a brilliantly unique version of this art. He was consistently entertaining, a story-teller with an engaging talent for sharply drawn anecdotes and light-hearted fantasies. Just as, in the novels, his ear for tone and cadence had created the idioms of servants, London landladies, and the Mayfair set alike, so his conversation was highlighted by spirited speech impressions--from his grandmother, who coloured her "refined" accents with pronunciations like "yaller" to a visiting French student who clasped his hands in hers and called him "Mistair Rock." An Augustan in the ease and grace of his movements from one topic to another, Green was a Shandean as well, and made his listener the victim of a bagful of conversational tricks: deliberate misinterpretations, double entendres, "deafness," and expressive "body" language. Most important, his side of the conversation waited instinctively and sensitively on his partner's voice. Conversation was a game Green loved to play, but he sought collaboration rather than domination, and he encouraged one to take the freedom of the field. In the course of the memorial address, V. S. Pritchett also remarked that Green was "at heart . . . a listener" (p. 29).

The speech between human beings that Green saw as "an attempt to lift the corner of the veil" became his metaphor for the communication between writer and reader in fiction. In this age of what has been called "affective criticism," it is surprising that the author/reader
relationship should have been thus far overlooked in the work of a writer whose radio talks were entitled "A Novelist to his Readers."

Green describes this relationship in an article he wrote on the craft of fiction, called "The English Novel of the Future." He says:

The communication between the two will be on a common or garden plane, but the mere exchange between two human beings in conversation is a mysterious thing enough. The mere fact that we talk to one another is man's greatest asset. That we talk to one another in novels, that is, between complete strangers and perhaps, in different countries, is nothing less than miraculous if you once realize how much common experience can be shared. My plea is that we should not underestimate this and that between writer and reader we should try to create life, a life of interest, entertainment and solace, without the appeal to the heights of morals or the depths of politics, neither of which have a proper place in narrative. (ENF, 21)

The importance Green assigned to this passage is indicated by its position at the summing-up point of a statement which expresses, so he wrote to John Lehmann, "my theory of how novels should be done." 7

Wherever we look in the slender file of commentary Green left us on his work, we find this emphasis on communication—a conversation through the medium of print. Prose is described, for example, in Pack My Bag, as "a long intimacy between strangers with no direct appeal to what both may have known" (p. 88). The two B.B.C. programs, "A Novelist to his Readers, I and II," take this as their thesis: "I mean to deal here with the unspoken communication between novelist and reader in narrative." 8 In "An Unfinished Novel," he speaks of the writer "conferring" with the reader from a remote distance. 9

That writer and reader can create and sustain life across seas and after death is perhaps, as John Russell thinks, a "curiously romantic
Perhaps it indicates Green's refusal to be trapped by the limitations and vagaries of the world, through the invocation of an ideal: the enlightened and sympathetic conversation of another age. That the reader possesses, potentially, the imaginative response which can apprehend and endow a fictive life with meaning indicates a vestigial romanticism in Green the sceptic, whose awareness of man's self-delusions is fundamental to his comedy.

"That we talk to one another in novels" reminds one most persuasively of Tristram Shandy's famous dictum, from which is drawn the title for this essay: "Writing, when properly managed (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation." The most self-conscious, all-encompassing conversation in literature is, on one level, between a dramatized narrator and dramatized readers; on another level, between a dramatized narrator and us; but actually, between Sterne and us. James A. Work describes this communication vividly when he says:

The door that is shut in the fourth chapter is never opened; the whole book is a conversation between Sterne and his reader, a drama in which they two play the principal parts. Sterne is constantly present, smiling at the reader and mocking, beckoning and obstructing, revealing and concealing, leading and misleading, intriguing and irritating and delighting him--sometimes in clericals, more frequently in motley; sometimes weeping, more frequently grinning; sometimes clear, more frequently inscrutable--but eternally there. ("Introduction," TS, lxxi)

The reader has a role to play also, as we are not allowed to forget, for Tristram is constantly putting us on stage, placing us in uncomfortably equivocal positions, and testing our imagination, adaptability, and
memory. Our collaboration is essential to the telling, for "a man should ever bring one half of the entertainment along with him" (TS, VIII, xix, 559).

On the surface, the similarities between the conversation Sterne manages so well in *Tristram Shandy* and the conversation Green draws his readers into, are obscured by the outstanding difference. For, if the conversation of *Tristram Shandy* is dramatized, and Sterne's voice triumphantly assumed by Tristram, the clown, public entertainer, bumbling incompetent, and narrator-par-excellence, Green's conversation is silent and oblique—a "communication without speech." Except in *Party Going* and *Concluding*, where the narrator achieves a certain dramatic stance by parodying omniscient story-tellers, Green's techniques of scenic juxtaposition, dialogue, and exterior "camera-eye" representation of the type found in *Loving*, succeed in removing the narrator as a commentator on the action. In his last two novels, *Nothing* and *Doting*, Green as "persona" retires completely: "The writer has no business with the story he is writing" (ANR I, 506). And, whereas Sterne's eighteenth-century readers are dramatized (a social gathering of Sirs, Madams, your worships and your reverences) Green's reader is a stranger, his tastes and prejudices a mystery, "... and that is, so far as most of us are concerned to make (him)self real" (PMB, 233).

It is interesting to compare Green's notion of the reader as "stranger" with the nineteenth century novelist's familiarity. Dickens, for example, could address his reader (through Esther Summerson) at the end of *Bleak House*: "Then I, and the unknown friend to whom I write, will
part for ever. Not without much dear remembrance on my side." How could Esther, or Dickens, know the reader well enough to remember him, except in the sense of Virginia Woolf's remark about older writers, like Jane Austen, who could rely upon an audience with public norms? Dickens's trust in his reader's habitual responses was deepened by the intimacy of serial publication, and expressed itself in that ritual, incantatory rhetoric that declares a public and communal nature. The reader spoke back exactly as Dickens knew he would, after each serial episode; and the author tempered his voice accordingly. In Martin Chuzzlewit, he even changed the topic of conversation, interpolating the American episodes in response to his readers' lack of interest in what he had been talking about.

In spite of the difference between speech and silence, Sterne and Green both manage their conversation with the reader in strikingly similar ways. Many of Green's tricks for teasing, irritating, and cajoling the reader into talking to him may have been learned from Tristram Shandy; for instance, the aggressively eccentric punctuation, the mockery of traditional plot sequences, the direct challenges to the reader's inventiveness and the play with his impatience for conclusions, the use of equivocation to reveal the reader to himself. These devices are wielded silently by Green who, in lieu of a Tristram to drag us from our chairs, uses other techniques to disrupt and irritate, so that we are awakened to the point of reply. His prose style, while revealing nothing directly ("the writer will keep any direct statement from himself out of his narrative because anything of the kind has an inhibiting
effect on the magic which has to be created between writer and reader" [ENF,25]) is as distinctive and personal a speaking voice as Green could fashion for his side of the conversation.

This voice, Green believed, would be as effective in reaching us as the "dear Reader" approach of the author-narrators in fiction between Sterne and Henry James. The presence of the author being established thus obliquely, in some cases so obliquely as to be sensed only in the artistic arrangement of dialogue, gave the reader's imagination (in which Green believed so stubbornly) the freedom it needed to create life. His decision to conduct a conversation between the reader and a writer so hidden from view owes something, as well, to Green's temperament. He also "doted" on the mysterious: the deliberate concealment of strength which prompted his assumption of a pseudonym, and his insistence on the opacity of his characters. As V. S. Pritchett claims, "he felt himself to be mysterious" (p. 29). Authorial effacement was, perhaps, the condition which gave his style such a bold expressiveness. André Maurois, in his little treatise describing the spoken conversation, equates freedom of expression with the mask of concealment: "The most secretive men are confidential, but beneath the surface of general ideas they believe themselves hidden behind a mask. Even I who write this . . . . ." 16

One writer who, before James, used "rendered" scenes to communicate silently with the reader, and with whom Green has been compared,17 was Jane Austen. Even with a reliable narrator to guide us--masterfully, as Wayne Booth has illustrated18--Austen relies on a richness of unspoken comment through irony and discrepancy, often drawing on a fine mingling
of tones to evoke a complicated response. In this respect, as well as in their "unfooled" clear-sightedness, both authors are alike. The most dramatic scene of *Persuasion*, for example, involves a silent juxtaposition of Anne Elliot's capability with the helplessness of the other ladies, demanding a moral judgment from the reader, and a comic adjustment of response. Louisa Musgrove's impulsive leap from the top step at the Cobb provokes several moments of real terror and despair for the stricken group about her. Descriptions of the apparently lifeless victim, Charles's grief and Wentworth's cry of agony, "Is there no one to help me?" all suggest the makings of a tragedy. Checking the reader's response, however, are the elements of farce. Mary becomes hysterical, rendering her husband Charles comically useless, and Henrietta faints dead away, so that not one but two unconscious sisters require assistance.  

Similarly, in a scene from *Back*, comic discrepancies in tone are used to complicate the reader's response. Charley Summers, just back from the war, in which he lost a leg and his girl, Rose, looks up a lady whose address has been given him by Rose's father. Unknown to Charley, or to us at this time, Nancy is actually Rose's half-sister, and there is a mysterious likeness. When the door is opened, Charley faints, and on revival, his horror increases with every moment. Rose is back from the dead, but frighteningly altered; Middlewitch, in a sinister coincidence, is just across the landing; everything is seen through the veil of Charley's growing nausea, when all at once the scene becomes overcast with comic irony. Nancy's relief at her furniture's escape
from Charley's overturned coffee, and the softening of her manner because "the suit has taken all he had spilt," her ludicrous attempts at small talk ("D'you do this for a living, then?")--in short, the undercutting of Charley's plight, causes the reader to adjust his glasses, and make a judgement about "coincidence" and contingency.

After Flaubert's well-known dictum, "No lyricism, no comments, the author's personality absent," novelists adopted now-celebrated techniques of authorial comment without benefit of narrator. As Booth says,

> With commentary ruled out, hundreds of devices remain for revealing judgement and molding responses. Patterns of imagery and symbol are as effective in modern fiction as they have always been in poetry in controlling our evaluation of details. (p. 272)

In order to maintain a playful relationship with his reader, however, Green deliberately abandoned the tightly-controlled "seamless web" which James and modern symbolists like Virginia Woolf wove from this silent language. The somewhat exotic blend which emerges from Green's use of symbolic objects, image, leitmotif and techniques of scenic montage to suggest meaning, and the disruptive tactics he also uses to communicate with the reader, make him unique in modern fiction. Although James, for example, was particularly concerned with the reader's creative role, this role was to be chiefly a "listening" one: the reader as judge of a shaped and completed world. This is true in spite of the blank spaces left for the reader to fill in *The Turn of the Screw* and James's experiments with the ambiguous ending which only appears to be formally closed and completed.21

Similarly, Virginia Woolf relied heavily on the reader's ability
to recognize, and confer meaning on, patterns of imagery, symbol, and leitmotif. However, she uses no rhetorical strategies, as Green does, to irritate and intrigue her reader into participation. Neither does she leave silences for him to speak into—like James's, hers is a world complete in itself. Except in her comic fantasy *Orlando*, the reader is never roused from the story, as he is in Green's novels, to feel the author's eyes fixed on his face, waiting for a response.

In the deliberate rents Green made in the "seamless web" to get his reader's attention, there are affinities with some modern experimental writers; for example, Alain Robbe-Grillet. The subtle distortions of sequence, and discrepancies in Green's novels are forerunners of the seemingly capricious handling of chronology which has such a disorienting effect on the reader of *Jealousy*. Green and the "new novelists" also share a fascination with formal structure; *Nothing* and *Doting* resemble, in their mathematical precision, the principles of organization based on, for instance, train schedules or (in the case of Claude Simon's *The Flanders Road*) the ace of clubs. Furthermore, Robbe-Grillet and Green both bear a strong resemblance to Kafka, in their ambiguous endings and in their hallucinatory effect on the reader. The sense of being awake, and dreaming, at the same time pervades Green's work; particularly *Party Going*, *Back*, and *Concluding*. This atmosphere is induced partly by his "statuesque" imagery, partly by an insidious assault on the reader; in *Back*, through the lenses of Charley Summers's obsession; in *Concluding*, by a network of motifs suggesting sleep and dreaming, opiates, lethargy, dulled senses, and specific hallucinatory
effects such as black and white squares, bluebottles buzzing in azaleas, and the sun glinting on ice cubes.

In the novels of Green and Robbe-Grillet, one finds a deliberate attack on teleological tendencies within the novel and within the reader. The detective novel has been parodied by Green, in Concluding, and Robbe-Grillet, in The Erasers; their writing generally mounts an assault on plot structures and endings which celebrate a point or position, or make a "discovery" which has been carefully planted. They both, like Sterne, try to defeat the reader's instincts to proceed "in a straight line" to the end. "Digressions are the sunshine,"--it is the process rather than the product which delights, and immersion in the process allows for no fixed positions or goals. One suspects that it was Green's absolute refusal to write anything resembling an apologue, and his humorous scorn for literary or academic "point-making" that so angered C. P. Snow.

Irritated by Green's avoidance of the abstract speech of literary criticism, and his preference for workmanlike examples from everyday life, Snow charged him with "false naïveté" in deliberately not sounding like the learned, "clever man" he was.23

Snow's reaction to Green is amusingly like a well-known episode two hundred years ago. When Congreve was an old man, Voltaire visited him in England, to pay his respects to the greatest living English dramatist. He was horrified when, upon arrival, he was asked

that I should visit him upon no other Foot than that of a Gentleman, who led a Life of Plainness and Simplicity. I answer'd, that had he been so unfortunate as to be a mere Gentleman I should never have come to see him; and I was very much disgusted at so unseasonable a Piece of Vanity.24
Both men, Voltaire and Snow, took as an affectation an attitude which they misunderstood. For Congreve, the living art of conversation was more significant than the literary art; and for Green, "this determinedly unliterary author," the process of living, or of writing, was more significant than the concept or product.

Green, like Robbe-Grillet and other modern novelists, was McLuhanesque in his concentration on the process of symbol-making and associative thinking in the mind of the reader; in his drawing attention to the act of writing, through the boldly displayed components of his style; and in his commitment to the actuality of dialogue. As in Sterne, what is real in Green is the movement of the mind between points, rather than the points themselves. I do not know if Green read any early McLuhan; but his remarks to Terry Southern certainly indicate a similar emphasis on the "form of communication":

It is simply that the novelist is a communicator and must therefore be interested in any form of communication. You don't dictate to a girl now, you use a recording apparatus; no one faints anymore, they have blackouts; in Geneva you don't kill someone by cutting his throat, you blow a poisoned dart through a tube and zing you've got him. Media change.

As a writer consistently engaged in experiments with communication, Green would also have been interested in John Barth, who has proven that "new novelists" in North America can illuminate the processes of thought rather than the end-product, by using very different methods from their contemporaries in Europe. Barth has moved much further away from the novel as ordered, organic artifact than Green, who was never really "mad at Flaubert," was prepared to, but his delight in virtuosity and the
concept, which he shares with Nabokov, of fiction as a sort of literary funhouse in which the reader is invited to amuse himself even if he gets lost occasionally, is characteristic of Green's special brand of communication.

As we shall see, Green thought of his reader as a participant in the action of the story, with the other characters as his "audience." Robbe-Grillet is very similar in that he demands a creative reader; but whereas Green's reader is almost always at an ironic distance from the characters, and responds to the writer's rhetorical strategies with a renewed comic self-awareness, Robbe-Grillet's prose tends to put the reader inside the mind of the narrator. In Jealousy, for example, we are compelled to adopt the same obsessive attention to detail as the narrator. Thus, in his earlier novels, the emphasis is not focussed on the game which author and reader play. More recently, Robbe-Grillet's work has exhibited a comic self-consciousness, and in Projet d'une Révolution à New York, discussions with the reader form part of the text of the novel.

Barth, Nabokov, Green, and Sterne--these authors are more interested in playing a communications game with the reader than are Virginia Woolf or Henry James. The former writers use comic awakening tactics on the reader, who is revealed in his status as reader, and much of their prose plays a self-conscious game of waiting on the response, which enlivens the work while it reveals the reader to himself as an actor, or a character in the story. One modern Shandean, Flann O'Brien, dramatized the writer-reader relationship on several levels in At-Swim-Two-Birds.
On one level, the "I" narrator, writing a novel, plays a variety of tricks borrowed from Tristram to startle the reader and urge his participation: a portion of the manuscript has been lost, synopses are produced from time to time "For the Benefit of New Readers," directions are given to reread the synopses, and so on. On another level, the hero of the "I" narrator's novel, a novelist also, is overcome by his own characters and kept under sedation while they write the novel with him as a character. The most important problem they tackle is how to keep the reader engaged, and participating. Shanahan, one of the characters-turned-novelist, says:

"I may understand you, Mr. Lamont may understand you, Mr. Furriskey may understand you--but the man in the street? Oh, by God you have to go very very slow if you want him to follow you. A snail would be too fast for him, a snail could give him yards."29

The delightfully arrogant irony of this "technical" discussion is contained in the fact that At-Swim-Two-Birds, like Tristram Shandy, makes the most atrocious demands on its reader, expecting him (for one thing) to follow three separate and eccentric story lines at once. Green also makes heavy demands, expecting us, for instance, to sort out the complex time-scheme of Caught, while all the time perpetrating a silent joke based on the reader's "journalistic" expectations: from his conditioned responses to the printed page, to his longing for fairy tale endings.

And yet, most surprisingly, Green is a symbolist. This fact has a special significance for his reader, who is placed in an equivocal position by the duality in this writer he converses with. The blend of romanticism and scepticism which we noted earlier is recapitulated
in the mixture of the celebration of process with what sometimes appears to be a search for transcendent meaning. In this respect, Green's work casts the same sort of light as Nabokov's *Ada*, which, in its mocking exaggeration of the same romantic values which are given such convincing reality, is both romantic quest and parody. Similarly, Böck combines a medieval, romantic quest for a lost ideal with a parody of the quest, through the sentimental love story enacted on the narrative level. Thus, Summers's Rose symbolizes the only creative communication Green has ever seen for his characters (loving) but this ideal is undercut by Rose's letters, and the possibility of Nancy having been "a tart." Similarly, the eighteenth century romantic tale reproduced at the novel's center parodies the quest and universalizes it.

Just as how Green communicates with his readers stresses the act of creation, so the what of his message concerns the process of living rather than the structure of life. As he said, the experiences to be shared by reader and writer were to be "common or garden": falling in love, doting, growing old, and so on. "The great issues should be dealt with by the poets, but I think the great issues are the personal ones," he said in an interview. Thirty years later, Barth replied to a question about social criticism, "I can't in fiction get very interested in such things. My argument is with the facts of life, not the conditions of it... I'm not very responsible in the Social Problems way, I guess." Rather than telling their readers about life, like the satirist or, as Robbe-Grillet said, the "propagandist," these novelists rely on an immediacy of communication and response to create life. Thus
Green's writing is of a piece—the act of the reader's response, through the stages of his awakening to his speaking into the novel, fuses with themes built around characters living, committed, through dialogue and action, to the flux of present times. 32

In his work and in his life, Green avoided the abstraction, or the argument which concealed a "planted" conclusion. His spoken conversation was, predictably, based on the personal, and drew its examples and metaphors from everyday life. In his speech as well as in his novels, he was a great enemy of "theory" and loved to defeat any that happened along with fanciful incongruities. He once said, "Literature is not a subject to write essays about" (PMB, 213).
Notes

1 "The English Novel of the Future," Contact, 1 (1950), 21-24. Subsequent references to this article are noted parenthetically in the text by initials (ENF) and page.


4 Pack My Bag (London: Hogarth Press, 1940), p. 187. Subsequent references are noted parenthetically in the text by initials (PMB) and page.


6 Green probably inherited his ear for speech-patterns from his father, whom he represents as an amateur of dialects (PMB, 10-11).


8 "A Novelist to his Readers: Communication without Speech," The Listener, 9 Nov. 1950, p. 505. Subsequent references to this article and its companion, "A Novelist to his Readers--II," The Listener, 15 March 1951, are noted parenthetically in the text by initials (ANR I, or ANR II) and page.


13 "To believe that your impressions hold good for others is to be released from the cramp and confinement of personality." Collected Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), II, 159.

15 Green was maddeningly Shandean when I asked him about Sterne. He pretended I had said something else, and went off on a digression. Later, he admitted to having reread Tristram Shandy, "how many times, I haven't the slightest idea."

16 La Conversation (Paris: Librarie Hachette, 1964), p. 18. All quotations are my translations from the original text.


21 "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere," wrote James, "and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so." "Preface to Roderick Hudson," The Art of the Novel (1907; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 5. The Portrait of a Lady illustrates how James solved "the exquisite problem."


23 "Books and Writers," The Spectator, 22 September 1950, p. 320, was written in rebuttal to "The English Novel of the Future."


27 In an interview with John Enck, Barth said, ". . . I guess some us us are mad at Flaubert instead, in a friendly way . . . A different way to come to terms with the discrepancy between art and the
Real Thing is to affirm the artificial element in art (you can't get rid of it anyhow) and make the artifice part of your point . . . ." "John Barth: An Interview," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 6 (Winter-Spring 1965), 3-14.

28 See Lost in the Funhouse (New York: Doubleday, 1968). Green would be particularly interested in these short pieces, I think, which Barth saw as experiments in mixed media--print, live voice, tape, etc.


31 Enck, p. 13.

32 As has often been observed, Green's characters have no past. No-one has remarked, however, how the reader's sense of the mysterious is exploited even here. For example, the silence about Mr. Rock's great discovery, in Concluding, prompts the reader's response, "What was it?" and, as the silence persists, we are made aware of our own response--a conditioned one which has nothing whatever to do with the immediate, sentient life of the novel. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of this technique.
Chapter II

CATCHING THE READER'S ATTENTION

After twenty-four years and eight novels, Henry Green began to open his workshop door by a few inches, allowing readers a brief, glancing view of his tools. Between 1950 and 1952, he gave three radio talks and wrote an article on the art of fiction. As one would expect from a writer who claims that "explanation kills life," Green reveals very little which does not deal directly with the technical managing of his dialogue novels, Nothing and Doting. However, despite the non-literary language and sly humour of "The English Novel of the Future," "A Novelist to his Readers, I and II," and "A Fire, a Flood and the Price of Meat," we do find abundant confirmation of the belief that informs his unique and consistently experimental novels. For this writer, art is communication. His first novel, Blindness, the story of John Haye's attempts to resolve the emotional disability induced by an accident which blinded him, was published before he was twenty-one. Even this early in his writing career, Green felt the imagination of the reader to be in collaboration with the artist's power. Art is defined, in fact, by the quality of its existence in the reader, as John muses about his projected writing career: "Art was what created in the looker-on, and he would have to try and create in others." One is reminded of Sartre's comment, "the literary object has no other substance than the reader's subjectivity."

Henry Green knew very well the difficulty of establishing a creative relationship between writer and reader. Writing about a novel he
tried to finish after *Blindness*, he attributes his failure to "a total lack of sympathy or communication with the reader" and comically compares the second novel to an Aintree fence which horse and rider ("not a bad analogy for the relationship between the author and his casual reader") must take together without the reader being hurled off. In "An Unfinished Novel" and "A Novelist to his Readers," he refers to the printed page almost as a faceless medium through which the writer must speak, using the words on the page to carry his voice "at second hand through the black and white of print" while he carries on his "conference" with the unseen reader. Recording, in *Pack My Bag*, his attempts to capture the speech of factory workers, he refers to "the deadening effect print has" (p. 243). How was Green to accomplish the seemingly impossible? Part of the answer is suggested in the subtitle of his second and third radio broadcasts: "Communication Without Speech."

In Green's novels, the most painful lessons in misunderstanding come about through comic distortion of discursive reasoning. Pye and Roe, in a climactic scene of *Caught*, his novel about the London blitz, struggle to make contact, but the chain which Pye forges from "sister," "wife," and "psychologist," is altogether different from Roe's because the same links have different associations to each. Green would describe this situation, common in his books, as being "on a wrong wavelength."

In the first chapter of an unfinished "history" of London at war, he records a drunken audience in Ireland, 1938, listening to Hitler in full, mad flight of rhetoric. The men thought it was the prize fight they had been looking forward to and, though "I tried to explain they were on a
wrong wavelength," they were lost in the illusion, shouting encouragement to their favourite. The insecurity of modern times, and human failings such as drunkenness and deafness have broken down the counters of discursive reasoning. More reliable now is the unspoken conversation called forth by the suggestions, half lies, omissions and misunderstandings of the other. Ironically, when confusion on the "surface" level of communication is greatest and most hilarious, the deepest transfer of feelings and fears is often effected. Harold Pinter, like Henry Green, suffers from a surfeit of readings which "prove" that his characters do not communicate with each other. Of this, Pinter says, "It's rather more that they communicate only too well in one sense. Their tentacles go out very strongly to each other . . . ." The drunken Irishmen, in making the wrong connection, have caught the violence and mass hysteria of Hitler's crowd, analogous to the prize fight. Pye's obsession remains private, but Roe catches his desperation: "It came to Richard that Pye must be insane" (p. 162). And just as Adams, in the first chapter of Concluding, develops the deep suspicion that his cottage-hold may be betrayed by Mr. Rock from an innocuous question followed by silence, surface conversation obliquely suggests an instinctive truth.

Like Green's characters, who often understand one another in spite of surface confusion, the author and his reader share a silent conversation. Using the printed page as his characters use the idiom of their everyday speech, through the language of discrepancies and omissions, what is not said is transmitted to the reader, and created by him, just as it is between Green's characters ("You needn't have told me. I
knew, don't worry," Kate said to the now empty room, but with a sort of satisfaction as it seemed in pain"). Thus the inconsistencies and evasions which apparently separate the characters can, paradoxically, bring reader and writer together through humorous recognition of the silent language. The aura of mystery which surrounds Green's work owes much to this reflection cast by the unspoken onto the verbal level. Everything depends, however, upon the reader's willingness to participate, an aptitude which can be encouraged, Green seems to say, by a prose style which will awaken him.

At the heart of "The English Novel of the Future," which, like his radio talks, is concerned with the idea of communication and the reader's role, lies a passage in which Green outlines this "project" for the novelist:

The main difficulty before the writer is to fire the reader's enthusiasm with what he is reading sufficiently, first to catch his attention, secondly, to make him read each word as if he were not asleep, and finally to create a work of art—that is, something living which isn't—between the author and reader in a work which, while non-representational, will be convincing and alive. (p. 23)

Here we have, from this most oblique of writers, a straightforward formula for the managing of the silent conversation between reader and writer. First, the reader must be awakened, surprised, and intrigued by the experience of the novel; then, his careful, imaginative listening to all the innuendoes of the narrative speaking voice must be encouraged so that he talks back and something is created between them. This formula is echoed in a talk which Green gave a year later. "A Fire, a Flood, and the Price of Meat" has been generally ignored, although it
catches the reader's attention easily enough by purporting to be about the time the cistern in the Gent's overflowed in Green's favourite pub. But here we find "a lesson for writers" which agrees exactly with his earlier, more formal statement:

It [the flood] also had the quality of every good book ever written, it challenged the attention at once, held this and drew all the modest drinkers present into a communion of people, each in his own way, equally interested in what would happen next.  

Again, we have the ingredients, in the same order, of the silent conversation. First, the assault on the reader through the narrative voice; then, the vital reciprocal flow through the reader's response. It is worth noting, in this statement, how each drinker is emphasized; for communication is to be magically conducted (with respect and playfulness at once) between private individuals. Thus engaged, they form a "communion," but Green is not interested in addressing large parties. His silent communication with each reader of his novels is best explored, I think, in terms of the formula he has twice given us.

He stresses that the first of the writer's tasks in negotiating this conversation with the reader is "to catch his attention." This is accomplished easily and immediately in Green's novels by the attention-getting device of his one-word titles. The interesting variety of his readers' responses to these (and Green is always concerned with the widest possible range of response) testifies to the success of the device. Some have found the titles obligingly helpful—"simple signposts indicating the general direction in which he intends to explore," or "like musical indications to keys." Others have found them more than helpful:
Earle Labor, for instance, tries to interpret *Loving* by the grammatical form of its title, using the gerund as a type of symbol. William York Tindall seems to reinforce this, in his claim that Green's titles are "as functional as his images." John Russell uses the titles to systematize the whole body of Green's work, dividing the novels into those of stasis and those of kinetic flow. For him, the titles give "an index to significant content," and, consequently, he attributes "liberty of judgment on the outcome" only to the "ing" novels. Interesting as this theory is, the dangers of trying to "organize" Green reveal themselves upon close examination. Other readers have found the titles annoying ("a continuous, rather nagging present participle, or more probably a gerund"), affected, and (this being the most common response) mysterious and intriguing.

Bluntly assertive and deliberately self-conscious, their first effect is, quite simply, to call attention to themselves. In doing so, they frustrate the reader's expectations of a traditional title which does not "protrude," which is inseparable from the world of the novel, like *A Passage to India* or *The Portrait of a Lady*. In their arrogant "specialness," they disrupt, ever so subtly, the reader's illusion. It is not, of course, so directly an affirmation of artifice as John Barth's story called "Title," but their self-consciousness produces the same sense of dislocation in the reader. We are not used to titles like this, and the attack on one of the conventions of the novel--the first that the reader meets--is indeed a "signpost" of what he may expect henceforth.
The charge of affectation is risked here, as almost everywhere in Green's writing. The titles exhibit themselves, with the same mannerism that defines his total style, but the self-display is a means rather than an end. The end is to quicken the reader's imaginative response, and to do this, Green wanted to forge an intensely personal speaking voice for his role in the conversation. Once the reader has the slightest acquaintance with this voice, the distinctive title becomes the first recognizable element of style, the initial note of intimacy sounded between author and reader/stranger—like the characteristic expression or accents of a friend: Raunce's "Holy Smoke" or Pye's "Sweet Jesus." Ironically, then, Churchill was partially right when he claimed that Green's titles were supposed "to excite the aficionados." The risk of being misinterpreted was one that, as an experimental novelist, Green was bound to take.

Green's stubbornly unique titles attack our dulled sensibilities as do the "precise and radiating" black and white tiles of the breakfast room in Concluding. In their stark precision, they represent to the reader a comic attempt to pin down a whole concept or experience, an attempt which is doomed to failure as the central situation blossoms forth, and the infinite suggestions of the title radiate through the novel. Thus they seem to say as well, that traditional attempts to "sum up" or structure the whole meaning of anything in a "title" (be it a novel world or a person) are worthy of ridicule. As the circles of implications widen around the opening statement "summed up" in the title, this title takes on a more and more universal aspect. The sense we have is
that it conveys everything that is unsaid, within and without the world of the novel. And when one considers that the radiating implications of Concluding and Caught include the reader himself—that is, that he is left concluding at the end of one book, and is caught in the mechanism of a ruthless and absurd time scheme in the other—Green may be expecting us to share a particularly good joke.

Another game Green plays with the reader is implicit in the challenging suggestiveness of the titles. Here is the author's first puzzle presented to the reader before he even has a chance to open the book. It is not unlike a "Hidden Pictures" game (how many birds can you find in this scene?) in which, as you search in the book from each angle of vision, and birds emerge from the landscape, you know that there are more and suspect that you will never find the last one. The puzzle-aspect is built into all the titles, and is one way in which the reader recreates the novel for himself. Many critics play this game, scoring off each other as they do. Stephen Shapiro, for example, in his interpretation of Back, declares that he will explore "the intricate veins traced through the action by the implications of the title," and wonders that Russell stopped where he did. Sometimes, Green delights in encouraging just such a participation.

Back, for example, announces Charley Summers's theme on the first page:

It was a time of war. The young man in pink tweeds had been repatriated from a prisoners' camp on the other side. Now, at the first opportunity, he was back. (p. 15)
Like all Green's titles, this simple statement blossoms into a profusion of implications, even as the first chapter opens out. The circular nature of his quest for the "real" Rose is next stressed (a quest which began when he left England): "Indeed, if he had not come such a distance, from one country at war to another, then home again, he might well at this minute have turned back" (p. 7; italics mine). The last phrase is then ironically repeated as Charley's obsession is linked with time, and the circular motion of the clock's hands:

The idea had been to make the clock's hands go round. And now that he'd come, he told himself, all he was after was to turn them back, the fool, only to find roses grown between the minutes and the hours, and so entwined that the hands were stuck. (pp. 8-9; italics mine)

Having indicated two of the directions in which the title will move, Green returns in a circular route to a splendid parody of the opening theme. James's nervous, fatuous remarks reflect all the absurdity of Charley's coming back to a "normal" society:

"Why, Charley, then they've sent you back . . . Where've you been all this time? . . . They often tell us, 'Wait till the boys come back' . . . Well you haven't come back to much I can tell you." (p. 10)

Finally, the entire opening scene, the sad, rose-hung graveyard with its beds of earth and marble pillows is one to which we will inevitably turn back when we come to the final chapter with its summer roses and Nancy's bed.

Thus Green keeps our attention directed to the radiating suggestions of his attention-getting title. A similar effect is achieved in
Party Going which enacts, on its verbal level, an elaborately emphatic word game on its title, mirroring the social games the characters play. The novel concerns a party of "Bright Young Things" whose travel plans have been paralyzed by a London fog. Both "party" and "going" are manipulated in a deliberately obvious manner from the beginning: on the second page, for instance, we find the first reference to a "party," surrounded by no fewer than four references to "going"—a fragmented title. Disintegration and lack of communication persist in the futile attempts of characters and narrator to draw the fragments together into vital or purposeful activity: "She thought here was their party laughing and shrieking as though nobody was going travelling."21

Confusion, ambiguity, and helpless passivity is developed through the shifting meanings (including the puns on "party") and the identical singular and plural forms of the words. Whose party is this no-host affair—Max's, Julia's, or the station master's? How is one party to be distinguished within the main party?

... once again Robert thought how odd he [Max] was, it was practically his party and yet he did not seem to know who would be coming and appeared to be quite ready to have Claire's aunt along, although they meant to be away three weeks. He explained that she had only come to see them off. "Don't know the party," Max said. (p. 48)

Confusion deepens with the various associations attached throughout to "going" (going home, something going on, etc.) and the juggling of different grammatical forms, with a consequent loss of meaning. This is apparent, for instance, in Max and Amabel's phone conversation, in which "going" is reduced to a meaningless counter expressing the sterility and
anxiety of the characters, unable to go anywhere in their lives:

"Oh, Max, are you really going?"
"Why?" said he.
"I mean must you really go?"
"I won't have you go, that's all. I can't bear it."
"I didn't say I was going."
"... so you are not going after all?"
"You mean to tell me you are going after all?"
"That's not the point, I've got to go."

Clive Hart has pointed out that in its past tense, the verb forms a leitmotif which sounds an ominous, deathlike note ("... and then he was gone") culminating in "She's a goner."22

Thus our attention, first caught by the title, is held as we see it appear and reappear before us in changing aspects. Fragmentation, and shifting meanings and forms provide an ultimate diffusion of meaning over the surface of the book, echoing the chatter of the partygoers and commenting on their existence. Only in the reader's mind can the pieces be drawn together.

Similarly, in Caught and Doting, Green keeps the title before us in an explicit manner, whereas in his other novels the associations are less obtrusive. The characters of his last novel juggle the "doting" relationships with an energetic gamesmanship similar to that of Party Going. More akin to Back is the technique of Caught, as concentrated images rather than word-play direct the reader to the veins radiating from the central metaphor. Within the first few pages, memories catch
Richard Roe in a "web of love and death":

But this day a permanence of rain softened what was near, and half hid by catching the soft light all that was far, in the way a veil will obscure, yet enhance the beauty of a well-remembered face or, in a naked body so covered, sharpen the sight. (p. 8)

The "netting" image (which suggests, also, the fireman's net) indicates one direction in which the title will move--the crippling of Roe's emotional life by the past--and soon we encounter another. On the train going back to London, Roe recreates the disastrous coincidence that had caught him out: "there was no escape" from the agonizing awkwardness with Pye which Christopher's abduction had caused. At the same time, an omniscient narrator recreates the abduction. In a particularly lurid scene, Pye's sister and Christopher are "caught full by the light from those windows" (p. 14). Much later, the firemen are caught in the flaring lights of the blitz. This trap is anticipated in chapter two by the wartime images of firemen caught by gas, "caught before they rightly knew they 'ad it" (p. 21), and rooks beating, cawing, against walls of rabbit wire. The title, within the first twenty pages, has already taken on its typically Greenian complexity.

Simultaneously, the reader is drawn, like Richard Roe, into a cruel and disorienting trap which reinforces the entrapment being enacted on the narrative level. This is a time-scheme which disturbs his sense of "chronos," strains his powers of deductive reasoning and, at the height of the paralyzing wait and Pye's disintegration, temporarily defeats him. In the first four chapters the reader, like Roe, is helplessly caught in units of hours, days, weeks and months:
After a time, when the turmoil of the first weeks of war subsided, conditions settled in the Service and it became possible to do ninety-six on duty to get forty-eight hours off. In this way, after three months of war and no raids, that is of anticlimax, Roe worked four days to be two days on leave. (p. 5; italics mine)

Especially at the beginning, this helplessness is illustrated by short, flat, declarative sentences. Clock time is kept rigidly enclosed, like the square space of the trap for rooks, by the narrative: "He was allowed one day's leave in three" . . . "Roe worked four days and nights straight off to get another forty-eight hours' leave" . . . "every Tuesday for three hours." Internal time provides an escape for Roe, and the reader must follow as he weaves, for instance, memories of scaling the walls of Tewkesbury Abbey at age sixteen with training on the firestation towers.

Having, with some difficulty, established a rational time-scheme, an imaginative order which can deal with Roe's memories and the flashes forward to the blitz, the reader is suddenly forced to abandon his hard-won illusion, as chapter five opens on "the evening of the second day in the substation." The point of reference is now September rather than December; what Erich Auerbach calls the "exterior frame" of the narrative has unaccountably shifted. Stokes reminds us that A. A. Mendilow has documented the reader's "yield[ing] to the illusion that he is himself participating in the action or situation," after establishing the point at which the "fictive present" begins. The difficulty in working out Roe's involved wartime schedule, complicated as it is even further by associative rather than chronological links, emphasizes the reader's sense of doubleness and shock when he must resign the order he has made. He is caught in a machine ("War puts men in this position, however, that
they can do little about their own affairs") which has only just begun, in 1939, and thus far in the novel, to play with him. The sense of doubleness stays with the reader, and he experiences the novel from this point on, in the hopes of reconciling the two "present" times. Unconsciously perhaps, this becomes an "end," the creation of order between the two realities which make up Roe's schizophrenic wartime life. For the first "frame," in dwelling on the details of Roe's domestic life, tries to "catch" his war service, subjecting it to the reality of his past memories and life with his son, in passing references:

He was to be back in a day or two, so that his night at home seemed to have been a week-end before the war, his life in the Fire Service, so easily forgotten once he was away, no more important than a routine. (p. 27)

But the second frame reverses this; as the firestation life swells and becomes hugely real, trapping the other in one sentence: "Coming back after his second spell of leave, Richard found he could not remember what his home life had been only a day or two before" (p. 134). Eventually, the two frames mesh in chapter thirteen but before they do, chronological distortions have reinforced the reader's frustration and anxiety.

These are the novels in which Green makes the most explicit use of his one-word titles as a challenging, suggestive, attention-getting device. By playing with them overtly, especially in the opening chapters, he directs our attention to their centrality, and involves us in their suggestiveness. If the first involvement must be by way of the titles, Green also depended on his comic situations to make an initial assault
on the reader. After all, the novels suggested themselves to him in the form of situations—as he has declared to both Alan Ross and Terry Southern—absurd situations, full of comic tension. Again, Green's "lesson to writers" in "A Fire, a Flood and the Price of Meat" provides us with colourful examples of situation as awakener. When the cistern overflowed in Green's pub, the scene leapt into life, all the modest drinkers were alert and enthralled, "everyone was shocked into an acute awareness of himself or herself" by the unexpectedness of the event and by "a sense of the ridiculous" in its nature. Most people have a sense of humour, says Green, and "a sort of communion" is fostered by this, and by the commonness of the experience. Green's pleasure in the chimney fire at his pub was a private one, and the other drinkers, not understanding the firemen's etiquette and thus, uninvolved, quickly grew bored. Unspoken communication is heavily dependent on the relish of a shared joke, and "the writer cannot use too much material that has to be explained." Consequently, the absurdity of Green's situations always rely on a tension that is, at bottom, human: on juxtapositions of old age and blossoming fertility, or of dying butlers and scavenging ones.

Like his titles, Green's comic situations must intrigue the reader at the beginning, to draw him into that communion of feeling which is the world of the novel. The reader must experience something of the delighted surprise with which Green heard the roar in the pub chimney; it must be an experience in which he can share, and it must be marked by "a sense of the ridiculous." In the opening chapters of the novels, the reader is awakened to the ridiculous by Green's fine sense
of discrepancy—something out of its place which startles the reader and illustrates the essential absurdity which Terry Southern noted in Green's comic situations. In *Blindness*, John Haye portrays the novelist's eye for the discordant when he picks out the red parasol in the trial scene of *Crime and Punishment*. In later novels, Green used discrepancy "to catch [the reader's] attention" and thus enliven his response. The "irony of simple incongruity" formed the basis of Pope's tactics for awakening his audience, and Geoffrey Tillotson, in the "Introduction" to his edition of *The Rape of the Lock* (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 113, speaks of the poet's technique of "laying down parallel stripes of the beautiful and the sordid." This coupling of opposites is the key, he says, to the concentrated effect of such famous lines as "Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux," forming a trap for the inattentive reader. *Loving*, for example, opens with the dying butler, Eldon, and the scavenging butler-to-be, Raunce. On the first page, Eldon's faint call "Ellen," his "pitiful appeal," is juxtaposed with Raunce's laugh. The brutal intrusion of this last in a deathbed scene is underlined by the starkness of the interjection: "Came a man's laugh." The reader is meant to jerk, just as Miss Burch does. Our sensibilities are further confused as Raunce's words emerge ("you should clean your teeth before ever you have anything to do with a woman") and become a part of Eldon's dying. Later in the same scene, this juxtaposition is comically emphasized:

"Will Mr. Eldon die?" Bert asked, then swallowed. "Why surely," says she, giving a shocked giggle, then passing a hand along her cheek. (p. 7)
loving rogues make off with Mrs. Tennant's whisky, her gardening glove, Paddy's peacock eggs, and Eldon's notebooks. Shocking our sense of propriety, the opening scene awakens us to the comic absurdity central to the novel—that is, the vital discrepancy between a lifetime's passion, in all its fairytale splendour, and the undignified, physical tricks of "getting on" which are emphasized by the medicinal motif of "doses," purgatives, and so on.

Similarly, Concluding, the story of an aging scientist threatened with removal from his cottage on the grounds of a training institute for young girls, presents us with the centrally comic situation in the opening chapter. This situation is, simply, the absurdity of growing old, of "concluding," in a scene heavy with fecundity—in life's summertime of radiant sexuality. Mr. Rock and a lush, blossoming Moira, for instance, are absurd together: they confound our expectations in the same way as the juxtaposition of dying and Raunce's "personal hygiene" do in Loving. In the opening chapters of Concluding, the reader is jolted by various discrepancies, the most subtle of which juxtapose imagery with dialogue to suggest the extremes of youth and being "old and deaf, half blind."

At this instant, like a woman letting down her mass of hair from a white towel in which she had bound it, the sun came through for a moment, and lit the azaleas on either side before fog, redescending, blanketed these off again; as it might be white curtains, drawn by someone out of sight, over a palace bedroom window, to shut behind them a blonde princess undressing. "It's not fair on one to grow old," Mr. Rock said. 28

And again:
--I do this for Elizabeth, Mr Rock told himself, but out loud he exclaimed, "I hope I have more sense." His glasses were misted, fog still hung about, but the sun coming through once more, made it for a second so that he might have been inside a pearl strung next the skin of his beloved.

"It's what them younger ones have'nt got, sense," Adams said. (p. 8)

Thus the essential, absurd disparity between youth and age is highlighted through sexual, even courtly overtones: growing old and "having sense" acquire ironic shadings through their context.

The opening of the next scene parallels the first, and we find that the same comic disparity involves Miss Edge, placing the aging bureaucrat in an opulent setting in which she is as out of place as the British dragons:

In spite of summer and that it was dawn, there was already a log fire alight as Edge moved across to draw one pair of curtains, merely to look at the weather, or to lower a window perhaps, she did not know, but the room influenced her to act on graceful impulse. She took hold on velvet, which had red lilies over a deeper red, and paused, as she gently parted the twin halves, to admire her hands' whiteness against the heavy pile. Delicately, then, she proceeded to reveal window panes, because shutters had not been used the night before, to disclose glass frosted to flat arches by condensation, so that the Sanctum was reflected all dark sapphire blue from electric light at her back because it was not yet morning. She could even see, round her head's inky shade, no other than a swarm of aquamarines, which, pictured on the dark sapphire panes, were each drop of the chandelier that she had lit with the lamps switched on in entering. (p. 12)

The courtly overtones which were ironically juxtaposed with Mr. Rock's age are here abundantly realized. Edge, previously described bluntly as "short and thin" and one of "two whiteheaded women," is painted with all the queenly trappings of medieval romance: heraldic emblems (lilies), red velvet, white hands, jewellery, and finally (triumphantly) with "no
other than" a crown on her head. Edge moves like a queen too--"gently," "delicately," and gracefully, and a regal formality pervades the prose: "she proceeded to reveal window panes . . . to disclose glass frosted to flat arches . . . ." At the outset, a tone of languour, of well-bred, even coquettish, indecision is established as she moves to the windows "merely to look at the weather, or to lower a window perhaps, she did not know . . . ." Like Mr. Rock ironically placed next to the warm breast of a lover, the elderly spinster is placed in a setting of gay, romantic decadence--and the discordance of their situations is echoed in the comic discrepancies within the settings themselves: the shrill cries echoing down the silent morning ride, and the bizarre decor of the seventeenth century room, with its British dragons married to naked Cupids.

Everywhere, our expectations are confounded. Gauguin, in his notes on the painting "Manao Tupapau--The Spirit of the Dead Watching," describes the choice of a light chrome yellow for the bedsheets, "because this colour suggests something unexpected to the beholder." In Concluding, the startling, awakening effect of discrepancy is slyly commented on by Green in describing the scene at breakfast--the black and white squares which "seemed altogether out of place next British dragons," and the Cupids above providing "a shock, a sad surprise in such a room." Deviations from the carefully designed pattern suggest something new to the awakened reader--"a game," says M. Vinaver of Loving, "at once so well regulated and yet to such a degree lawless that I am rapidly jolted out of my habitual state of mind."
Green's use of discrepancy is not confined to the opening chapters, nor is it purely an attention-getting device, for beneath the surface it sustains an unspoken communication of meaning. Discrepancies between a character's direct speech, and the spartan stage-directions Green juxtaposes create humour and convey significant information about the speaker. Here is Edith, accosted by Charley in *Loving*: "'Why you gave me a jump,' she said, not startled" (p. 7). Even in the opening scene the reader, alerted by the comic discrepancy, will surmise that Edith expected, even precipitated, the meeting, her pretended surprise as much a part of the plan for Charley's enchantment as the peacock eggs she holds. Indeed, we need this information to appreciate the irony of Charley's remark later, when he is completely under the spell of the enchantress: "'How she has come on. You'd never know it was the same girlie'" (p. 117). Similarly, Diana Middleton's reply to Arthur's plea for help in *Doting*,--"'I must think' she answered, then immediately went on"--reveals her cool mastery of a situation in which she has planned to toss her husband back to nineteen-year-old Ann Paynton (for afternoons only) in order to reserve Charles Addinsell for herself.

Also significant in the novels are inexplicable discrepancies in a character's speech; that is, sudden and startling alterations in how he says things. The mysterious and obscurely threatening aspects of this technique were first explored in *Party Going*, when the Mystery Man suddenly changes his accent: "... and without any warning he had used Yorkshire accent where previously he had been speaking in Brummagen. This sudden change did his trick as it had so often done before and Alex,
losing his nerve, asked him in to have a drink" (p. 80). In this early novel, Green does too much explaining, identifying the "trick" and its habitualness; later he lets the mystery speak for itself. His short story "The Lull," for example, portrays a barman who stutters noticeably on the first page but not on the second. Mike Mathewson lisps softly through his entrance in *Loving*, only to drop the affectation when threatened (or threatening). In a Pinteresque manner, these discrepancies seem to lend a dark undertone to the surface talk (one thinks, for instance, of *The Birthday Party* and McCann's name changing without explanation from "Nat" to "Simey") and, certainly in the case of the insurance agent in *Loving*, to communicate danger.

Along with his titles and startling discrepancies, Henry Green uses coincidence to catch the reader's attention, the action of *Caught* and *Back* being almost totally dependent thereon. The pure shock-value of coincidence, particularly in modern times when it is no longer a convention as it was with the Victorians, must not be underestimated. The sudden, unexplained suspension of a causal sequence is almost certain to call attention to itself. David Goldknopf, in his study of coincidence in the Victorian novel, uses Green's very words when he speaks of "the catch of attention it invariably produces." But the technique does more than surprise the reader, for it engages his participation on the imaginative level. Goldknopf writes:

Even when coincidence is used primarily for convenience it always has the effect of elevating our attention from a positivistic to a speculative level—we must enlarge our scope of thought to find a more comprehensive pattern of cause and effect, or, that being
Because Green openly uses coincidence to advance the plot, one might assume that he tries to minimize the "shock of surprise" to the reader. Edward Stokes believes that this is what Green tries to do in Caught, for he claims that the elaborate description of the toy shop is planned to divert our attention from the coincidence of Christopher's having been abducted by Pye's sister. Green's intention, however, seems to be rather to attract our attention to this strange and chance meeting. As in Back, the language underlines the coincidence: "... it was his Fireman Instructor, Pye's, sister of all people" (p. 17; italics mine). Not the slightest attempt at an explanation, naturalistic or motivational, is made of what brought the two together. Coincidence is compounded when Roe is assigned to Pye when called up, yet "he did not suppose even for a wild moment that Pye could be his Station Officer" (p. 37; italics mine). Finally, and inevitably, it is Roe who finds Pye in the gas oven, and Dy wonders "as she had often done, why someone else could not have found that hateful man" (p. 183). All these are chance happenings as blatant, deliberate and unabashed as the gigantic coincidence of the men's names: Pye and Roe.

Coincidence is even more obviously employed in Back, for in the very first chapter, an inexorable assault is made on the reader through the language of the prose. Green dwells mercilessly upon the vital facts of Charley's predicament:
... and her name, of all names, was Rose.

... to search for Rose, through roses ...

She had died some time about that identical week.

For of all people, of all imaginable men, and fat as those geese, was James. (pp. 6-10; italics mine)

From this hallucinatory scene, when Chance stares us in the face much as the roses seem to watch Charley, to the last but one, when Ridley rises, with shocking suddenness, and "absolutely without warning," from a shelter in the road in front of Charley and Nance, literally from a hole in the ground--coincidence is the prime moving force. While we watch Charley react to each chance happening with renewed dread, the operating principle is spelled out in his talk with Mrs. Frazier: "Every year you live the world shrinks smaller . . . Once you start on coincidences why there's no end to those things" (p. 33). The legitimacy of coincidence as an ordering device is further stressed by Nancy's remarks on Mr. Grant's sending Charley to her: "Even if he did send you along so things wasn't natural, like crossing one another in the street" (p. 75). The same point is made in Caught when the narrator says of Piper, "He was the kind of man who could never credit coincidence" (p. 150).

It seems apparent, then, that Green, in using coincidence to advance the plot, takes maximum advantage of its attention-getting value, rather than trying to divert our attention from its "shock of surprise." Goldknapf indicates two uses the novelist has for coincidence: the first, "propulsive," in which he means to control and resolve the transcending effect, and the second, "arresting," in which he uses it for its
intrinsic significance (p. 174). Green's use of coincidence is clearly arresting (Stokes to the contrary) and here he bears a surprising resemblance to the Victorian novelists like Charlotte Brontë who deliberately emphasize fortuitousness to establish the ordering control of a God. In Green's stories, a fateful Circumstantiality has the same power: any house can get a bomb without the slightest warning, or any train window a stone. The individual unable to live with this truth may "enlarge [his] scope of thought" to construct a psychotic framework (like Charley Summers's) to explain a lack of order.

At the same time, the arresting quality of a mysterious happening in Green's world is almost magical—at times, seemingly removed even from a naturalistic causal sequence. It startles us, and demands an explanation, but we are only given enough information to suggest that there is one. Not until the end of Back, for instance, do we discover that Ernie Mandrew is the bookie Phil White used to work for. A possible chain of relationships is thus created between Middlewitch and Nancy. But Mr. Grant, "the missing link," is never brought into the chain: there is enough suggested to guess but not to prove. Throughout the novels, the Greenian ambiguity and mystery sustain the magic, and help to give life's very circumstantiality a power in the ordering of the novel. Life is "like that," with a monstrous and exciting inscrutability.

Finally, it is possible that Green learned another device to shock his reader into attention from a writer whom he greatly admired, William Faulkner. Nathalie Sarraute points out, in The Age of Suspicion, that the old conception of the fixed character, which was a challenge to
the reader in Balzac's time, is an invitation to laziness for the modern reader, who immediately makes of this character a type. Hence, Faulkner's use of the same first name for two pairs of characters in *The Sound and the Fury* must be attributed to the need to make a character not too easily distinguishable, rather than to "a perverse and childish desire to mystify the reader":

This first name, which he shunts back and forth from one character to the other, under the annoyed eye of the reader, like a lump of sugar under the nose of a dog, forces the reader to be constantly on the alert. Instead of letting himself be guided by the signposts with which everyday custom flatters his laziness and haste, he is obliged, in order to identify the characters, to recognize them at once, like the author himself, from the inside. (Sarraute, p. 70)

How like Green's concern to jolt the reader from the "dismal sleep of journalese!" Like Faulkner, Green frustrates the reader's classifying and codifying tendencies by giving characters the same first names (for example, the two Alberts in *Loving*) even to the point of using "Charley" for the hero's name in two consecutive novels, Charley Raunce of *Loving*, and Charley Summers of *Back*.

These are some techniques whereby Green arrests the reader's attention, surprising and intriguing him so that he is awakened to the narrative voice. Sarraute describes such tactics as designed "to dispossess the reader and entice him, at all costs, into the author's territory" (p. 71). Green's challenging titles, his use of incongruity, coincidence, and identical names for characters succeed in dispossessing the reader of conventions which encourage laziness. Once he is awakened and ventures into Green's "territory" (the world of the novel), he must
be seduced into attentive listening: an art which is as important as speech. Careful listening establishes one side of the conversation between writer and reader.
Notes

1 The analogy is borrowed from Green who refers, in a typically non-academic style, to his discussion "A Novelist to his Readers, I" as "rather as if a mechanic were to open the door of his workshop."


7 See the comic misunderstandings between Mrs. Tennant and the drunken Mrs. Welsh, in Loving, or between Miss Edge and the deaf Mr. Rock, in Concluding.


15 Nine Novels, pp. 115-16.

16 I do not, for example, think that one is justified in saying that the ending of Back is more "resolved" than that of Loving.

17 Henry Reed, rev. of Loving, by Henry Green, New Statesman and Nation, 29 (1945), 292.

Stokes, The Novels of Henry Green, p. 23, among others.


One American reviewer, James Hilton, writes that in the "con­voluted" action of Caught, the reader feels "mental strains and stresses." "Two More by Mr. Green," New York Herald Tribune Book Review, 1 October 1950, p. 6. Another, Walter Havighurst, comments: "Mr. Green is not much concerned about making things easy for his readers . . . So he thoroughly tangles the time threads in his narrative. Perhaps it is especially true in war that the past will not stay quiet in its place and the future will not wait." "Two Worlds of Henry Green," Saturday Review of Literature, 30 September 1950, pp. 11-12.


D. C. Muecke, in Irony (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 61, defines this as "highly incongruous or incompatible phenomena in close juxtaposition."


Edge and Baker are also coupled together for comic contrast. In this scene, Edge, with her skittish prancing about the room, sets off Baker who, cow-like, settles down for a good feed.


34 It is coincidence, as well, that Diana Middleton met Arthur at the Hunt Ball and that Summers's Rose is dead. Green's delight in sharing jokes with the reader is illustrated here too: Mary is lost on Founders' Day.

Chapter III

ENSURING CAREFUL LISTENING

Henry Green's second task, having awakened the reader to a sense of the unexpected, is "to make him read each word as if he were not asleep." The quality of the silent conversation he establishes, that "gathering web of insinuations" between strangers, demands the concentrated attention one gives to poetry. The artistic spoken conversation which, as I have said, lies behind the fragmented attempts of Green's fictional characters like a forgotten ideal, also demands an alert listener. André Maurois writes, "One must be present during an entire conversation--most men are absent in themselves!" ¹ Green believes that an individual response is quickened in the reader/listener by an arrestingly individual narrative voice. Hence he concentrated, from Living on, on forging a personal and distinctive style--a voice for his side of the conversation. In "The English Novel of the Future," he writes:

> The novelist who must evoke conscious imagination in the reader will make each sentence appear as if only he could have written it, and the tendency in the next few years should therefore be for each writer to work in a very personal prose. (p. 23)

In his attack on depersonalized art is reflected the delight in human eccentricity which shows us so carefully each quirk, perversity, daydream and fear of his characters. The eccentricities of his prose which are sometimes condemned for affectation² are part of an attempt to stamp the printed page with the unmistakable imprint of a uniquely human individuality. In startling his readers from the dismal sleep of
"journalese," he hopes to make them hear his voice, to recognize it as the accents of a friend, and thus prose becomes "a long intimacy between strangers."

C. M. Doughty, the author of Arabia Deserta, represented to Green a man who had carved out a style to embody his distinctive character: "... indeed his style is so perfectly the expression of his personality that he stands out as though in the harsh sunlight he describes." This feat, involving as it did mannerisms and obscurities as well as magnificence, was so strangely "experimental" that it was neglected, unheard if you like, by the reading public of his time. Green's article in defence of Doughty contains, because of this neglect, the only bitterness I believe he has ever expressed. It also attacks effortless, facile writing characterized by repetitions and literary clichés. Speaking of T. E. Lawrence and literary "journalese," he writes:

... can we at last have the silence of those Sunday reviewers to whom, of his generation, we can almost certainly lay the charge that he was not reprinted for thirty years, and from whom, in our own generation, we resent the patronage they extend to us in phrases which, like those sung from the minaret on the last page of the Seven Pillars of Wisdom, have, from constant repetition, only a limited meaning even to those so deaf as to be able to hear, and none at all to those who, on reading the words, sigh recognition of the old trick it was on the part of Lawrence to close his book in that fashion, remembering how there is not one such in all Arabia Deserta? (p. 51)

Those readers whose sensitivity has been deafened by too much of the expected must be awakened by a daring prose which shocks us into a sense of the author and ourselves as persons conversing. Writing too easily, Green says, cannot do this. That his prose succeeds, as Doughty's does,
in being himself is unanimously affirmed by his readers, one of whom says: "You feel his authorship continuously and pervasively." \(^5\)

Perhaps *Blindness* (if we take the diary section as a fair representation of Green's career at Eton) records by indirection the author's first experiments in prose. John Haye tells us that he has just completed a story, "an experiment in short sentences." It was in his second novel, *Living*, however, that he struck out boldly, forging a spare, sometimes harsh prose to fit the life of the Birmingham factory worker, and at the same time disrupting all our conventional notions of how a sentence should read:

> Weather was hot. They lived back of a street and kitchen which they ate in was on to their garden. Range made kitchen hotter. A man next door to them kept racing pigeon and these were in slow air. They ate in shirt sleeves. Plump she was. They did not say much. \(^6\)

Even chapter divisions are gone, and the rough, abrupt juxtapositions of shifting scenes suggesting a multitude of lives like flocks of birds, miraculously joined together yet separate, give a total effect of powerful immediacy.

The other techniques which he used here for the first time to break through the curtain of "correct" English between writer and reader led Philip Toynbee, in his excellent article, \(^7\) to place Green among the "Terrorists" of the English language, along with James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Whether in *Living* the introduction to Green's world is too abrasive for the reader, as Mr. Toynbee suggests, is a matter for each individual's experience. Some have found the omission of articles, awkward inversions, redundancies, fragmentary sentences, ellipses, and the
juxtaposition of short, spare sentences with elaborate conceits, an obstacle to imaginative participation. Others, such as Rosamund Lehmann, have been startled by the same techniques into a perception of the factory life, the awkward beauty of the workers' movements and speech, and the black, gritty landscape with its splashes of colour. Does the roughness of the inversion in the above excerpt, for example, deter the reader from intuiting Lily, a plump pigeon "in slow air," by turns graceful and awkward, free flying and housebound? Here as in the later novels, style may awaken us to the vision of life it embodies.

A recent examination of Green's prose has noted "an interest in English prose as an instrument of awareness," as the primary motivation for the stylistic devices. In concentrating on the effect of rhetorical figures such as elision, chiasmus, and asyndeton on prose cadence and sound, the critic makes a strong point for looking at the language itself rather than at its "mimetic" significance. This approach highlights the effect of Green's prose on the reader. For example, Bassoff shows how, in a passage from Living, the omission of commas and articles, and an indirect pronoun reference, exercises a deliberate control on our reading tempo. We slow down and read carefully, because we begin to be unsure of the possible meanings.

Henry Green fought against the deadening effects of "correct" English by breaking its rules "laid down a hundred years back." Even his playful punctuation, by assaulting the eye, makes the reader aware of the rigid expectations he has of the printed page. Moving apostrophes about ("I'd've," "have'nt") and disregarding abbreviations (Mr) he mocks
the patterns which structure our prose and the reader who unquestioningly expects them. His use of the comma, particularly, reminds one of Sterne: Tristram Shandy wielding dashes and asterisks to test the reader's adaptability and to keep him off balance and alert to the conversation by pulling him from one thought, or place, or voice, to another. The surface of Green's prose similarly tests the energy of the reader, as in the disquieting first sentence of his short story, "Mr. Jonas":

Above us, in the night, as we drew up, in the barrage, the sky, from street level, seemed to be one vast corridor down which, with the speed of light, blue double wooden doors as vast were being slammed in turn.

From experiments in disorientation like this, Green learned to place commas to create a subtle disorder, or to bring phrases and clauses into tight and suggestive juxtaposition.

The dialogue of Nothing and Doting, for example, is deliberately written to challenge the reader's interpretative powers which, in turn, bring the characters to life. When Diana Middleton of Doting, Green's novel of middle-aged frustrations and absurdities, is chased about the apartment of her would-be lover, Charles Addinsell, she stops him with this line: "Now, just you sit down, over there, and think about me for a while" (p. 175). The unexpected pause after "Now," without which the sentence might ripple easily by, and the other commas effectively break up the flow of the first half of the sentence. Now the reader, hopefully awakened by the juxtaposition of emphases, is alive to the possible points of emphasis in the second half. Here Green's philosophy of guiding the reader towards creating his own meaning in the novels (or,
following our metaphor, responding in his own voice) triumphs, for there are three possible interpretations of this one phrase. If the reader places his emphasis on "think," he interprets Diana's mood as playfully witty—a direct reference to Charles's body-chasing; if on "me," her tone is sharper, containing a veiled attack on his selfishness. If he stresses "while" as he reads, Diana becomes flirtatious, promising future rewards to "keep him sweet." Finally, as he becomes aware of the multiplicity of reactions, the reader will see Diana "in the round": a complex character created between himself and Green. As a last joke, the line itself recreates the comically breathless effect of Charles chasing Diana around the furniture. Small wonder that Green wanted no actors giving rigid, one-way readings of his lines (ANR I, 505).

The simple omission of commas in Green's deft hands similarly awakens the reader to the life beneath the disruptive surface of the prose. A frozen moment in Loving is depicted like this: "Bert stood motionless his right hand stiff with wet knives." This sort of omission, very common in his writing, has the double effect of catching the reader up, forcing him to go back a few words to be sure of the sense (to "read each word as if he were not asleep"), and of suiting the moment as glove to hand. In the above line, for instance, the technique creates a silent place in the scene, an expectant hush in which neither Bert nor the reader is allowed to relax. In dialogue, the omission of commas and other punctuation marks presents a comically expressionless surface to the eye, underlining by contrast the emotions of the speaker:

"Well you can keep the damn thing, break your own good tidings" Mr Abbot exploded without raising his voice and handed the envelope
"Yes by God" he said then left them. "He seemed quite upset" Mr Pomfret remarked.

The joke here—that the punctuation (or lack of it) does not allow poor Dick Abbot to appear "quite upset" in print, is a private one between Green and the reader.

Comparable to his keeping the reader awake by unexpected punctuation is Green's technique of misplacing or interpolating words and phrases in the narrative ("Mrs Jack possibly knew better than to argue") which often gives it a delicate irony. In dialogue, this manoeuvre suggests a tone beneath the character's speech, especially when clichés are given a new and bizarre twist. Interestingly, the overworked expressions are often those which the reader would be apt to use himself, and thus create a sharper jolt to his sensibilities. "In 'good English,'" says Green, "the brain is dulled by clichés which have become meaningless through being used in too many contexts" (ENF, 23). From the lips of his characters come parodies of exhausted expressions, brought to surprising life by the absurd contexts in which they find themselves. In Concluding, for example, Miss Edge, lying to Mr. Rock about the resolution of Mary and Merode's adventures, states: "Absolutely nothing in their storm in a little teacup" (p. 239). By subtle alteration, and the addition of "little" (a rhetorically interesting word in Edge's speech pattern, continually used for its denigrating effect) the cliché becomes disruptive, pointing out the unease and suspicions which refuse to be subdued by tightly controlled colloquialisms. At the same time, the speech is impeccably Miss Edge, combining "jargon" with faint, ironic overtones of daintiness and gentility.
Similarly, in Nothing, Jane Weatherby disrupts her son's engagement in order to promote her own marriage to Philip's future father-in-law, John Pomfret. To Jane's surprise, Mary (Philip's girl) seems to exhibit a knowledge of the old affair between her father and Philip's mother. Mrs. Weatherby's confusion stirs up the surface at the end of this delightful festival of apt clichés: "Oh I went to my lawyer but he said let sleeping dogs lie, don't stir up mud, better not throw glass stones" (p. 57). The effect on the reader, however, is somewhat different from the first example, as the parody of idiotic platitudes is much more blatant, and the actual distortion which caps it gains its suggestiveness from the silent fact that Jane has deliberately or unconsciously left out the whole sense of the expression. Finally, in a third example, which is different again, Charles Addinsell, of Doting, infuses a common cliché with a sexual suggestiveness in order to underline Arthur's obsession and his moment of triumph over him:

"And you sit here, and make mountains out of soft molehills!"
"A little girl like Claire!" Mr Middleton groaned.
"She's not little, she's a great big creature" Charles objected. (p. 224)

Thus, the strangeness of the distorted cliché in Green's prose, underlining, as it does, the politely meaningless structure language often gives our speech and writing, startles the reader "into an acute awareness of himself or herself, and of his or her audience"—just what Green felt was the prerequisite of a vital situation. For at the same time, the secret motives of the character speaking (the reader's "audience") are revealed and brought into action against the rigidity of the cliché.
Again, style awakens us to the life of the novel.

Generally, Henry Green's dialogue has such remarkable verisimilitude that one may be tempted to assign a lesser significance to its "non-representational" aspect than Green himself did. Stokes, for example, claims that in his direct scenes, Green is interested in a "meticulously accurate rendering of 'pedestrian conversations'" (to use Green's own phrase). This, in fact, is what Green accomplishes, according to Stokes, "utilizing" language in direct scenes rather than "terrorizing" it. The words of Green he has quoted come from an interview with Nigel Dennis, in which Green is reported as saying that the writer's duty is "'to meet as many pedestrian people as possible and to listen to the most pedestrian conversation.'" The difference between listening to pedestrian conversation and rendering it is evident in Green's review of The Oxford Book of English Talk, which was published in 1953 claiming to be "the first book to record at length how Englishmen and English women actually spoke from late medieval times down to the present day." Green challenges this, using the example of his own scene from Back which is included in the book, to prove that "art must intrude." As for a "meticulously accurate rendering," Green says "possibly nothing would be more untypical or boring," adding that "written dialogue is not like the real thing and can never be."

That Green is as much the artist in his suggestive arrangement and management of dialogue as in his descriptive passages is evident from a close reading of, for example, the discrepancies between his characters' speech and actual talk, as we have seen. Green's definition of
his non-representational dialogue, after all, is that "it will not be an exact record of the way people talk" (ANR I, 506). It is precisely in how it differs from "an exact record" that Green uses his artistry to speak to us, his readers, in a silent language of hints and humour, that "unspoken communion" which he describes so ably in the first of his radio talks. Consequently, when Stokes, in his analysis of Green's style, confines himself to the narrative as though no-one had written the dialogue ("the purpose of this chapter is to examine Green's style, not the style of his characters") he denies the voice of the author in an important respect, especially when he comes to Nothing and Doting. In ignoring the dialogue, he finds himself in grave difficulties attempting to analyze the style of novels which are ninety-four percent dialogue. And it is not surprising that his readings of these novels lack the perception and importance of his other critiques. Nothing and Doting belong to a specific genre in which dialogue usurps functions such as characterization, plot development, setting and reverie, which are conventionally developed by narration; hence the dialogue must be read as something "other" than "all the banality and fatuity of ordinary conversation" (Stokes, p. 79). It is an artistically ordered surface meant to catalyze "sub-conversation"—Nathalie Sarraute's term for the inner impulses, sensations, and memories which lie beneath the talk. The reader's perception of these "subterranean movements," and the self-awareness he is "shocked" into at the same time, help to compose the vital conversation between author and reader.

The whole of Green's prose then, dialogue and narration, is subtly
ordered to keep the reader awake. Overall, the stylistic juxtapositions of oblique, elliptical dialogue, and sparse, short sentences with richly elaborate descriptive passages have a disturbing effect on the reader, calling attention to the artifice which style imposes on life. Melchiori describes the lyrical passages as "scrollwork" which "will suddenly break out of the quiet and balanced form." Who could ignore, for example, the Greenian long sentence, blossoming into phrase after phrase as if to contain and include, qualify and describe everything, in delightful indifference to its own obtrusiveness and in startling contrast to its surroundings?

He might have been watching for a trap, who had lost his leg in France for not noticing the gun beneath a rose.

For, climbing around and up these trees of mourning, was rose after rose after rose, while, here and there, the spray overburdened by the mass of flower, a live wreath lay fallen on a wreath of stone, or on a box in marble colder than this day, or onto frosted paper blooms which, under glass, marked each bed of earth wherein the dear departed encouraged life above in the green grass, the cypresses and in those roses gay and bright which, as still as their dark afternoon, stared at whosoever looked, or hung their heads to droop, to grow stained, to die when their turn came.

It was a time of war. (Back, p. 5)

The strangeness of the contrast, forced upon our notice, awakens us to a sense of the very life which the succession of sentences has comically tried to contain--paradoxical, hallucinatory, and idiosyncratic. Similarly, the juxtaposition of entire works can have an awakening effect on the reader. Hence, in the chronological order of the novels, the sharply contemporary first sentence of Nothing, "On a Sunday afternoon in nineteen forty eight . . ." read after the timeless dream of Concluding, is an assault on the expectations.
Besides rules of punctuation, Green consistently breaks other tenets of "correct" English, from using Arabic numerals in Living to his unconventional syntax which owes a little of its rhythm to Doughty, as John Russell has shown. His unusual handling of subordinate clauses, the omission of articles, the sprinkling of inversions, and the use of emphatic pronouns ("that bed") all surprise the reader's expectations and help to render an individual speaking voice. At the same time, they provide a unique introduction to the novel's world. In Loving, for instance, the servants' idiom seems to pervade the landscape; for example, "She said, all come over faint . . ." and the narrator's reference to "Miss Evelyn" and "Miss Moira." Specifically, we can see how the simple substitution of adjectives for adverbs moves from the dialogue ("... you take everything so solemn") to the narration ("She added gentle") as if each were under the other's influence. Indeed, Green often uses this technique for comic effect, as when Mrs. Tennant and her daughter-in-law are enveloped in the atmosphere ("Mrs Jack complained limp"). Matter and manner are one, yet the style protrudes just enough for us to be conscious of the voice. As Henry Reed aptly says, in reviewing this novel, "The style has the effect of keeping one wholly alert." The magical correspondence of servants' talk and castle surroundings on the one hand, and the continuing jolts to the reader's sensibilities create a double-ness which is peculiarly Henry Green.

In all the novels, one of the factors which makes for alertness is that Green follows no pattern. He breaks grammatical rules with just enough inconsistency to be as wholly unpredictable (and thus always
startling) as life itself. Another factor is that Green is often deliberately obscure. Sometimes he is so when it suits an atmosphere of confusion (as in many of the long sentences in Party Going), or of a Lewis Carroll-like absurdity. The latter is illustrated in many of Miss Edge's comically illogical remarks: e.g., "Our Park wall that we rightly cannot get the labour to have repaired." Much of the difficulty, however, seems to stem from his use of ellipsis; that is, a deliberately difficult sentence structure in which, as in modern poetry, the reader must find the link between one thought or image and another. Toynbee, for instance, finds the following sentence from Living "frankly incomprehensible" because he tries to equate its two halves: "Again was first day outside, another fine evening." Bert thinks this on the train with Lily, as his confidence returns after a worried start to their journey. Looking ahead to a future life in Canada, he thinks of the "first day" of "life's journey," which promises "another fine evening." The sentence reflects the air of optimism in Bert's temporarily renewed courage. On a small scale, this sort of ellipsis is the key to the structure of Green's novels, in which the reader creates meaning through apprehending the links between juxtaposed scenes which, taken each for itself and without the reader's creative imagination, have no significant relationship. The difficulty that such sentence structure often poses for the reader may be seen as a form of "ostranenie," the defamiliarization described by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky, in which the more difficult the reader's apprehension is made, the more significant and lasting it will be for him. Perhaps the same sort of thing happens in
Caught, where, as I have suggested, the reader's difficulty in creating a time scheme for the first four chapters makes him hold to it even though the fictive present is rudely shifted, creating a doubleness which he attempts to reconcile (as Richard Roe must) by bringing the two schemes together.

Green's readers seldom fail to fall, completely or partially, under the spell of "the remarkable, idiosyncratic perspective from which he has chosen to represent those aspects of life that have attracted his attention." Perhaps the best expression of this unique, hallucinatory vision is Philip Toynbee's conception of the writer "spread out in the middle of a ceiling and seeing the people below him in what they would hold to be distorted and unnatural shapes" (p. 494). In this discussion of some elements of Green's style (the overall effect of which is so mysterious that it defies description), I have tried to indicate his deliberate assaults on the reader's "normal" vision of how things ought to look and sound, for I am convinced that these techniques, insubstantial as they may appear in isolation, when brought together into that mystery of style seduce the reader into seeing the world "in an odd and unfamiliar way . . . just out of focus, just to one side of center" (Toynbee, p. 490). The subtle disorientation of, for instance, "The boy looked to listen as for a shriek" might be compared, in its effect upon the ear, to a fun-house mirror's effect on the eye. The disruptive effect of this style upon our expectations keeps us attentive, as we must be, or Green's splendidly unstated comedy will pass us by. His humour is only brought to life if we, as he says, "read each word"--it
would be lost if his prose had the "fatal readability" of, for example, Christopher Isherwood's. Eschewing directness and colloquial realism, his writing, like Doughty's, "demands a hard reader." If not for the startling punctuation, sporadically misplaced words, and all his other techniques of disturbance, we might fall asleep to the wickedly clever humour lying beneath the most innocuous statement—as when, a little after the dovecot scene in *Loving*, Nanny Swift declares of the children: "Then you'll oblige me by watching 'em till I'm back or they'll go dropping each other out to their deaths" (p. 84).

Besides speaking in such a boldly individualised narrative voice that it is impossible not to listen, Green has another sure technique for keeping us awake. As I have said, his stylistic disruptions are never arbitrary, and whenever he appears to be establishing a pattern, he will promptly abandon the device. Structurally, however, he establishes patterns with a geometrical precision—only to mock them by significant distortions. In several novels, there are facts or times that refuse to "fit," rebelling against the rigidly autocratic pattern imposed. A comic analogy from *Concluding* illustrates this: all the females connected with the Institute—the myriad girls, Ma Marchbanks, Maggie Blain, Matron, Mabel Edge—have names beginning with "M," except for Hermoine Baker. The choice of Miss Baker as rebel is absurd in its pointlessness, for it is pure discrepancy meant, along with the others in this novel, to stir within the reader a subtle unrest. Edward Stokes was the first reader to comment on the small distortions Green uses to ruffle the surface of his prose, and he tends, unfortunately, to assign
them to careless workmanship. He makes an exception of *Caught*, explaining with some ingenuity the temporal dislocations as forming a "seasonal structure" for the novel. However, he condemns the same technique in the other novels, implying that because he could not find a "structure" for them, they are errors.  

Yet, if any of Green's work should be susceptible to error, it is *Caught*, written as it was when the author, a member of the Auxiliary Fire Service, was fighting the fires of the London blitz, and to exempt this novel from carelessness and accuse the others seems illogical. We had far better assume that Green knew what he was doing, rather than try to correct his time schemes, as Stokes does. When he was questioned about the "pointing out of inconsistencies" in Stokes's book, he replied, "I can't change what I've printed and don't want to." We should infer from this, I think, that the "inconsistencies" in the material events of his novels have an artistic purpose and therefore are deliberate. The structural patterns the writer imposes upon life in his fiction are challenged by the discrepancies which, as Green sees it, are mimetic of the life-force: "And if the novel is alive of course the reader will be irritated by discrepancies--life, after all, is one discrepancy after another." The use of "irritated" to describe the reader's reaction is interesting, for here again Green's concern is to keep the reader aroused, questioning, and even insecure. Indeed, as we shall see, his ultimate aim is to place us in the same uneasy posture as the characters in his fiction, for "a reader's audience, in a novel, is, of course, the characters that make up the book, that go to make it live, if it does live."
Although Green uses dislocation slightly in Living and Nothing, the effects are concentrated in Party Going, Caught, Back, and Concluding. It is evident, at first glance, that these four novels share a common atmosphere—that is, a pervasive confusion and mistrust—to a degree unknown in the others. The mystification each character feels about his own motives and those of others mirrors the disorientation of his surroundings: a railway station seen through transforming fog; London seen through the garish colours of fire; a London in which everything is the same, yet different; and a strangely futuristic landscape in which a State bureaucracy and a rampant Nature are out of tune with each other. Green's intention is, through the use of disturbing discrepancy, to include the reader in the atmosphere of uncertainty and suspicion that he creates within the novel's world.

In Caught and Back, he does this by the adroitly surreptitious use of temporal dislocations. Both novels, as I have indicated in discussing the initial impact of their titles, are obsessed with time. Pye and Roe are each caught in the net of past memories which well up and disturb the surface of the present. Simultaneously, their present lives are caught and confined by the mechanism of war into blocks of time, rigid and seemingly immovable as the chairs nailed to the floor in the asylum where Pye visits his sister. Charley Summers is embarked on a circular quest through time, ironically parallel to the spatial one which appears, at the beginning of the book, to be over: he has left one country to go to another, and then come back. Journeying back through time to recover the "real" Rose and bring her back to a significant
present time, Charley is faced, like Pye and Roe, with a strange and autocratic system--"government procedure" which regulates everything in initials, form letters, ration tickets, days and weeks.  The disorienting effect of trying to accommodate private time within a ruthlessly public order is most clearly manifested in Charley's shattering psychosis, and foreshadowed by Mrs. Grant who, when Charley first meets her, has returned to the past and "lost her connections." Roe confesses a similar disorientation as Pye's crisis nears:

"I don't know myself any more," Richard said. "This life we lead, every third day off, bewilders me. I couldn't tell you if it's Saturday or Sunday to-day, honestly." (p. 160)

We have seen that the reader of Caught experiences a "doubleness" in the narrative time-frame until Dy brings Christopher to London in chapter thirteen, when the two "presents" of Roe's domestic and service life are harmonized, just in time, it seems, "for there was not much time left" until Pye's suicide and the first raids. Consequently, the reader has already experienced anxiety. When, therefore, halfway through the novel, the chronology is distorted by three weeks completely out of sequence, causing Mary Howells's trip to Doncaster to happen simultaneously with Roe and Hilly's nightclub visit three weeks later, the effect is one of renewed disturbance and doubleness. The reader can, no more than Richard, "tell you if it's Saturday or Sunday." The disturbance is compounded by the narrator's direction to imagine a time "almost" exactly a year in the future: "Twelve months almost to a day before such things happened every night, Richard wound up the talk with Hilly . . . ."
occurs just before the "three weeks later" when Richard asks Hilly out, so that when Mrs. Howells reaches Doncaster in the next chapter, in the fictive present, the effect is one of rushing backwards through time. The tight, cinematic juxtapositioning of scenes which Green favours to create meanings through correspondences helps him to stretch, compress, or layer time to involve the reader as demandingly as possible in a narrative experience similar to Richard's, or Pye's or Charley's. The fondness for cinematic technique with accompanying chronological distortions, reminds one of Robbe-Grillet. In Last Year At Marienbad, the camera shows characters in double (and physically impossible) postures and locations. Similarly, in Jealousy, where scene linkings by leitmotifs and doubling of characters and events most strongly resemble Green, fragmented chronology makes it impossible for the reader to recreate an external order.33

This chronological distortion, and other instances in Caught,34 are mimetic of Roe's position in a wartime society in which, as Mrs. Howells says, "things go awry," and the practice is continued throughout Back. During the period of Charley's hallucination, July becomes September and June, July. It is interesting that Stokes, when discussing these shifts, uses the words "startled," "irritated," and "annoyed" to describe the reader's reaction. As Green hoped, he has been awakened by the discrepancies to a fresh way of experiencing which involves sharing Charley's experience of trying to live backwards and forwards at the same time. Simultaneously, something is shared with the author--the sense of a secret revolt against an autocratic system, or against systems in general
--including fictional time frames. If, as Terry Southern says, the discrepancies succeed in reminding the reader of the author's presence, it is a presence communicated silently by a raised eyebrow and a conspiratorial wink.

While temporal dislocations are used to disrupt the surface of the time-obsessed Caught and Back, actual events are not distorted (although often ambiguous or confusing) as they are in Party Going and Concluding. In the latter novels, the reader's disturbance deepens—partly because the narrator of each plays a very special role. As Booth says in The Rhetoric of Fiction, "Many stories require confusion in the reader, and the most effective way to achieve it is to use an observer who is himself confused" (p. 284). In Party Going, Green appears to deny his own control over events, so that the reader cannot accept (with any more confidence than the other characters can) what is said. For,

It is not to be supposed that any reader believes any more of what he is told in narrative than he ordinarily believes, in life, of what someone is telling him. In life we most of us have the most extraordinary reservations about what we hear. The novelist should never forget, and in future he will be careful about this, that everything put forward by him, however definite, is taken by the reader with a grain of salt. (ENF, 23)

The narrator of Party Going maintains this atmosphere of suspicion with a vengeance, contradicting statements made by the characters with a subtle insistence destined to shake the reader's faith in what is told him. In his analysis of the novel, Clive Hart cites an example from the opening pages. In this scene, the narrator recounts Miss Fellowes' retrieving of the dead pigeon from the wastepaper basket where Robin Adams had put it for her:
As she had not thanked him yet Adams thought he would try to get something out of this old woman, so he said:
"I put your parcel away for you."
"Oh, did you find somewhere to put it, how very kind of you. I wonder if you would show me which one you put it in," and when he had shown her she made excuses and broke away, asking Miss Crevy to tell Julia she would be on the platform later. Once free of them she went to where he had shown her and, partly because she felt so much better now, she retrieved her dead pigeon done up in brown paper. (pp. 12-13)

Yet, a few pages later, Robin says: "He thought what had done it was her ancient friend giving him that parcel to get rid of and then, as soon as he had carried that out, sending him to get it back for her." There is a further disturbing element in the above passage however, for why would Miss Fellowes ask that a message be taken to Julia when the narrator has already told us that she is there to say goodbye to her niece ("and if Miss Fellowes had no more to do than kiss her niece and wave good-bye . . ."), and Angela tells us, a few lines before this passage, that Miss Fellowes' niece is Claire Hignam. The narrator's accounts, then, differ from Robin's and from Miss Fellowes' (in indirect speech), in what appears to be a conspiracy of confusion.

Events become more and more disturbed as tiny discrepancies make their impact like pinpricks of unease. For example, as Max is diffidently trying to decide to leave Amabel, the narrator tells us that Edwards, his manservant, comes in "to say that Mrs. Hignam had rung up and would he please ring her back" (p. 19). In the meantime, Julia thinks, "It was so wrong, so unfair of Max not to say whether he was really coming, not to be in when she rang up, leaving that man of his, Edwards, to say he had gone out." And Claire, in the taxi, tells her husband Robert
"she had rung up to say they were just off and to ask him why he was not already on his way. He had told her he was not packed yet . . . ."

These reports are presented in a montage, to indicate simultaneity with Max's exchange with Edwards, and Julia's and Claire's words are so subtly at variance with the narrator's that the total effect is one of dismaying confusion.

Distorted leitmotif gives the same effect. The narrator tells us that three seagulls flew beneath the bridge where Julia stands; later Julia remembers two doves and still later, at the end, pigeons. Clive Hart discovers that the crowd's chant for trains is differently worded from one passage to another. Similarly, he notes, chronology is disturbed in "the case of an exactly repeated motif whose appearances do not seem to refer to the same moment in time" (p. 188). Twice, a "huge wild roar" breaks from the crowd, followed by the sentence: "They were beginning to adjust that board indicating times of trains which had stood all of two hours behind where it had reached when first the fog came down." This moment is apparently timeless, for it occurs on two distinctly different occasions. 38 Also once at the hotel, Evelyn sends Robert off on precisely the same detailed mission as the one he has, supposedly, already left on: "Robert said he must go and tell Claire and he would let Max know as well, and that he would meet them in the hotel." As in the posting of train schedules, "life on the platform seems to follow a different time-scheme from that in the hotel." 39

At first glance one of the most omniscient of storytellers, as he brutally analyzes each character's motives and poverty-stricken feelings,
the narrator of *Party Going* simultaneously undercuts his own authority. After a period of intense examination of everyone's reaction to Amabel's arrival (a situation very close to the ideal situation Green describes when the pub is flooded and everyone watches the newcomer), the narrator does an about-face, questioning his own reliability by blandly stating: "At the same time no one can be sure they know what others are thinking any more than anyone can say where someone is when they are asleep" (p. 144). Or, as Green was to say later, "We certainly do not know what other people are thinking and feeling. How then can the novelist be so sure?" (ANR I, 506). In *Party Going*, he even invites us to question his omniscience concerning the basic events of the novel, as in the case of Miss Fellowes's condition. The narrator's view, "She did not know how ill she was" (p. 72), is placed against that of the hotel doctor, to the effect that she is in a drunken stupour. Each opinion is given equal weight; and if the doctor's diagnosis is debased by his indecent haste to get his house fee, the narrator's is likewise debased, for it derives its support from the nannies who (like Nanny Swift of *Loving*) are Green's comically indestructible harbingers of a gruesome death. If the narrator's opinion is seconded by Evelyn (who allows herself to be persuaded by the nannies), the doctor's is upheld by Alex.

The atmosphere of ambiguity and doubt thus fostered is not unlike that which Virginia Woolf cultivates in *To the Lighthouse*. Trying to penetrate the mysterious depths of Mrs. Ramsay's nature, the narrator takes up the same questing, tentative stance as do Woolf's characters, Lily Briscoe and William Bankes. The narrator's oblique probing is
filled with the same unsureness, as the dramatic emphasis at the close of a passage exploring the enigma of Mrs. Ramsay indicates: "Her singleness of mind made her drop plumb like a stone, alight exact as a bird, gave her, naturally, this swoop and fall of the spirit upon truth which delighted, eased, sustained--falsely perhaps." The "truth" which Mrs. Ramsay is supposed to intuit is dramatically denied by the adverb, "falsely," which, in turn, is partially contradicted and qualified by "perhaps." Clearly, the narrator is in a position not much better than ours for arriving at the truth. All ends are left open, and the mystery is sustained, even deepened. By dispensing with objective, authorial statement in their novels, both writers place the reader in a state of constant, empirical discovery in which he selects or rejects according to the imaginative picture he builds of the truth. Green goes a step further than Woolf, drawing the very process to our attention, and playing with it before our eyes.

The "omniscience" of the narrator of Party Going is a well-executed joke on the reader. To appreciate this, let us try to see him in relation to the narrator of Loving. In this novel, the narrator bears a magical resemblance to the pointed Gothic windows through which the characters forever seem to be gazing. He is an almost transparent medium through which, if we look closely, every gesture and expression is revealed--but thoughts and feelings are as hidden as if we were actually on the other side of the glass. A timeless, exotic, or fairytale distance is maintained between the reader and narrator on one side of the glass, and the characters on the other, by the narrator's stubborn
refusal to see or hear anything which is not presented sensibly to the onlooker,

Edith looked out. A great distance beneath she saw Mrs. Tennant and her daughter-in-law starting for a walk.

... This young woman was poised with an object, it may have been the dry white bone of a bird that she was about to throw. She flung it a short distance. (pp. 24-25; italics mine)

We may use this as an analogy of the distance the narrator keeps us from the articulated inner lives of these characters. He does this by the pervasive negation of omniscience in his terminology, and the use of expressions which were to appear again in Nothing and Doting: "seemed," "as though," "perhaps," "probably," "appeared," "it could be assumed," "it may have been," and so on. While in his last two novels, such terms are an uncomfortable reminder of the narrator Green has otherwise managed to erase, in Loving they are blown over with the heedless charm and gay unselconsciousness of the whole—leading up to the final scene, when we are placed firmly and finally beyond the picture frame: "What he saw then he watched so that it could be guessed that he was in pain with his great delight" (p. 229; italics mine).

Within this enchanted world, we guess at what the characters are feeling, reading their thoughts from their physical gestures, such as drooping shoulders, blushes, paleness, raised or lowered voices, squints, narrowed eyes, or unseeing stance at a window:

While the nanny patted her hair, wiped her face with a handkerchief, and then, after hesitating, was gone, Edith stood slack at one of
the high windows and did not seem to see those bluebells already coming up between wind-stunted beeches which grew out of the grove onto that part of the lawn till their tops were level with her eyes. Also there was a rainbow from the sun on a shower blowing in from the sea, but you could safely say she took no notice. (p. 84)

The narrator is on the same "wavelength" as the reader all the way through, and this establishes a special relationship between them; both are engaged in constructing motives for this perfectly self-sustaining life which, paradoxically, they succeed in bringing into vital being:

As she wiped her mouth on the back of a hand she remarked as though wondering, "You aren't like this first thing are you?"

This must have been a reference to the fact that when she called him with a cup of tea in the mornings he never kissed her then as he lay in bed. Or he must have understood it as such because, standing as he was like he had been drained of blood, he actually moaned. (pp. 200-201)

Narrator and reader are thus joined in a mutual attempt to penetrate the mystery underlying common human activity. By drawing our attention, at times, to possible solutions (as he does in the above examples), Green stimulates our imaginations to the web of possible associations in the novel.

If narrator and reader are on the same "wavelength" in Loving, there is a confusing shift of distance in Party Going. In some cases, the narrator appears to offer his views tentatively, as if they are subject to change upon better information, or as if he, like the narrator of Loving, were separated from his characters by glass: "... Miss Crevy and her young man, apparently serene, envied for their obviously easy circumstances and Angela coveted for her looks by all those water beetles if you like, by those people standing round" (p. 27; italics mine).
Similarly, we have seen that the narrator is capable of roundly denouncing his own omniscience. However, unlike the narrator of *Loving*, he simultaneously indulges himself in long passages of introspective analysis concerning each character's private motives and imaginings. The effect of these contradictory authorial viewpoints is to create a suspicious, tentative response in the reader. Statements which are ostensibly made to "help us out" (and would be accepted as such in other novels) are now viewed as being potentially suspect:

"Bother Max," he said, "what consideration has he shown us? Why he said he would wait for me at his flat" (this was not true) "to come on to the station with me, but when I got there I found he was gone." (p. 54; italics mine)

Why should the narrator thus interject his voice from the clouds, anxious to set us straight on this matter, when he deliberately abstains in other events and, as we have seen, encourages confusion where there need be none? Green returns to this discomforting technique in *Concluding*, where it again succeeds in arousing our mistrust, our uneasy suspicion of being played with.

Our confusion stems from the fact that we do not know what to believe. In the cases where statements from the characters and the narrator conflict, who is right? Is the author forgetful (and we are given ample evidence of the unreliability of memory in this novel), or deliberately mischievous? The characters are wary of the lies, evasions, and exaggerations in each other's stories: Amabel declares to Max, "You see I've come to know I can't trust a single thing you say" (p. 219). Similarly, we enter into a conversation with the narrator much like that of
Angela and Alex, who continually try to impose their own version on events, and who are each unsure how much to accept of what the other says.

The acquisition of power through the knowledge, however gained, of others' secrets is a major theme in *Party Going*. In this game of whispers, hints and half-concealed information, to be a confidante is an envied position, as Claire and Evelyn's pointed exchange about Julia indicates (pp. 105-6). Amabel is remote, and therefore powerful; Alex's comically over-exuberant pleasure in having "got" something on her gives him the temporary power to resist the group and suggest going home:

"There's no one anywhere like your Toddy," he said to Amabel and looked tremendously pleased. "The things I've found out about you, you'll never be able to be quite the same to me again with all I've got on you now. Really Am, it's fantastic, you can't imagine, I mean it makes coming and all this waiting worth while." (p. 190)

The secrecy at the heart of the garden of artichokes (or bamboos?) suggests the inner, hidden meaning of experience for the individual, in this case, the mixture of love and death in Julia's mind--her love for Max and her mother's death. Such secrets are jealously guarded from invasion by others: Max is told most, but not all. Knowledge of the secret held inviolate, like "a much more exciting thing of their own, artichokes, pigeons and all" (p. 255), puts Julia in the ascendancy at the end. Amabel, on the other hand, has lost some of her remoteness, perhaps through Embassy Dick, who pressed hands "as though to make secrets he would never keep, as though to embrace each private thought you had and to let you know he shared it with you and would share it again with anyone he met" (p. 254).
The least powerful member of the group is, of course, Angela, because she knows nothing, must ask continually, and is never really answered. The only way in which she can gain power is pragmatic. Not until the end of the book can she tell, with any certainty—simply from having been there, listened, and remembered—what has really happened: "Oh no Alex, excuse me you never did," Miss Crevy said, "just the opposite really, you know. You always said someone else had sent it" (p. 254). When she does not know what to believe, in the confusion of secret manoeuvres with Miss Fellowes, or mysterious references to shared experiences in the past—well, as Max told her, "You can guess then."

This may very well be Green's advice to us, for he puts his readers in the same uneasy position. Introducing discrepancies and contradictions, he awakens us to the necessity of listening carefully, reading each word as if we were awake, in an attempt to gauge the truth about the party-goers. As events shift about us, the reader becomes, as Green wishes, one of the characters, and his guesses and conclusions become part of his experience of the book to which the others, narrator included, may be "audience." And every disruption of the surface is a recapitulation of the opening theme of confusion and mystery: "Fog was so dense, bird that had been disturbed went flat into a balustrade and slowly fell, dead, at her feet" (p. 18).

Green's techniques of mystification reappear in Concluding, where, even more than in the fog-shrouded station of Party Going, they operate in a powerful atmosphere of secretiveness and conspiracy. This atmosphere is sustained chiefly by the extravagances of adolescent
excitement, the sinister undercurrents of Mary's disappearance, and the supernatural collusion of nature— that is, the hallucinatory murmurs and buzzes of the hot afternoon, the female acquiescence of the moon-powered night, and the hints of conspiracy in the winking, silvered eyelids of the house. As in Party Going, the reader is caught in a web of innuendoes spun by, and around, the characters.

Mysterious echoes along the parkland ride are structurally important to the novel, dramatically emphasizing the diurnal round which is constantly concluding one day to begin again the next. The first page of the novel echoes the last as much as the last does the first, but Green's careful patterning is once again disturbed by distortions which ruffle the surface and create a watchful, uneasy reader. The woods are alive, but sounds in Concluding are significantly strange. Mr. Rock's thesis on the origin of echoes (that they come from the house, not the trees) is carefully set forth in the opening scene:

"It's the trees throw back the sound, sir."
"Yet if you face about, Adams, call away from the place down this ride behind, you won't get a whisper in return." (p. 8)

It is also supported by the narrative throughout the novel. Simultaneously, however, Rock's thesis is contradicted when gramophone strains from the house are echoed by the trees:

"False alarm" Mr Rock said in a loud voice, and was about to elaborate with an attack on Edge for not keeping the instrument in proper order, when he was silenced, made mute, because, through his deafness, he had caught the last echoes of this music sent back by the beeches, where each starling's agate eye lay folded safe beneath a wing. (p. 187)
Whichever law controls the echoes, it is beyond the novel's explanations and we are left to conclude that there are facts we do not know about the orderings of this universe, just as the azaleas and rhododendrons are both "heavy with scent" and "eunuch, scentless flowers."

Furthermore, the echoes on the novel's surface return the sound to us distorted. The call "Ma-ree" is disturbed in tone from a high to a low register: "'Ma-ree,'" a girl's voice shrilled, then a moment later the house volleyed back 'Ma-ree, mar-ee,' but in so far deeper a note that it might have been a man calling" (pp. 10-11). Again, in the last pages, the faint cry is driven back at first "in a girl's voice, only deeper," then "louder, as before, and twice," and finally, now that Mr. Rock and Liz are far from the house, in a whisper, but thrice this time. Mr. Rock, making his way through this reverberating world with senses partially sealed, catches here a call, there an echo, and sometimes nothing at all. Nor are other characters immune to deafness, for Miss Baker cannot hear what Edge almost catches at breakfast, and Liz, at the end, walks "struck into herself" in a lovesick dream.

Are the echoes internal or external? Mr. Rock, doubting his senses, assumes that the sound "must have been a noise in the head from his old heart, the sudden twang on a vein" (pp. 245-46). As Liz speaks to Rock, she echoes a silent thought he has just had (p. 175). Like the starlings who, in the roar of their wings at sunset, make "the enormous echo of blood, or of the sea," echoes from one to the other world may be interchangeable. Furthermore, there is the mystery of the echo which either never existed, or has been "forgotten": "'Sleepwalking,'
the aunt announced, in barely concealed triumph. And Miss Baker was so flabbergasted at this forgotten echo of the dawn that, without more ado, she took the woman up to Merode at once" (p. 135). "This forgotten echo" can only refer to Merode's "sleepwalking," and there is no logical connection between sleepwalking and the "dawn" of this strange day in Concluding's world. What, then, is being "echoed?" Perhaps it is an event outside the structure of the novel, or inside someone's experience (perhaps the reader's) but "forgotten." The enigma of the echoes, their laws, distortions and "reality," is surely meant to suggest everything unexplained in the novel, and the possibility of the reader's (like the characters') being too deaf to hear a lost phrase which will provide the key is seriously advanced and encouraged by the narrative.

Green achieves this effect by building a fine substructure of echoes in the prose which are as distorted and mysteriously incomplete as those on the narrative surface of the novel. Thus the distortion of a girl's voice to a deeper register, and the transformation of one cry into two or three, are reflected by subtle disarrangements in the information communicated to the reader through the medium of print. What happens in the case of the fir/pine trees? Marchbanks conceives the idea, when discussing the decorations with Moira, of having fir trees covered with salt, thus conjuring up a swirling, hallucinatory alternative to Edge and her rhododendrons: "'Fir trees and waltzes. The snow for all of your white frocks as you go round'" (p. 49). There are several references to the fir trees during this interview and the two that follow with Miss Winstanley and Adams. Marchbanks dwells on them again when
questioning Merode. But later, as Moira flirts with Mr. Rock, they undergo a strange metamorphosis:

"Where's George Adams at work?" Mr Rock asked next. "He's to fetch the pine trees she wants round the Hall for tonight. We're to put salt over to look like snow. Only Miss Edge won't be so keen." (p. 83)

Significantly, it is Moira, the purveyor of false information, who effects this transformation; the astonishing thing is that Marchbanks herself, at lunch, appears to be under the same impression: "'I'd thought pine branches with salt,' that woman answered with a blush. 'So cool, in this hot weather, for the Dance. A soupçon of snow,' she elaborated" (p. 99). It is almost as if Moira, who deals in distortion throughout, has managed to impose her version upon the events of the novel, so that even the originator of the idea is influenced. A little later, Edge refers to "pine branches"—but as the walls are being hung with azaleas and rhododendrons, the trees become fir once more, and the game is over (p. 139).

What is the point of this deliberate distortion? Green wants to induce in his reader the same mystification his characters feel as they strain to catch, or remember, faint sounds. That these sounds are sometimes distorted only reinforces the hopelessly tangled threads of gossip and rumour within which the reader of Concluding is softly but firmly enmeshed. We think we have our hands on certain information, but we cannot trust our ears or our memory to confirm what we think we know. While information is being secretly conveyed from one character to another, and all the girls' correspondence is being read, lies,
distortions and evasions hover in this hothouse atmosphere, emphasized by the "overstrain" motif, in which the nervous errors of overheated imaginations are likely. Part of the humour depends, in fact, upon the comic distortion of information: hence, "She lost her Dolly" becomes "There was a telegram to say the sister Doll was badly ill at home."

But information is coming through to us, the readers, in the same unreliable, erratic fashion, and we are as helpless as the other characters.

In Concluding, as in the other novels, Green makes significant use of motifs to suggest meaning. In the absence of a trustworthy narrator, echoes that sound truly (if only once), as well as more fully developed motifs, are essential communicators of hidden information. Mingled with these, however, are echoes which operate like stillborn motifs: a phrase or event repeated faintly, and with distortions. (Or not so faintly, in the case of Merode who, half dreaming, has something offered to her "exactly" as Marchbanks had already offered it, with the significant distortion from cat to doll.) In this fashion, the climax of Miss Baker's Lewis Carroll-like story of pigs in the orchard ("'I had my mackintosh . . . they ate it, every scrap'" (p. 152)) is an echo of the previous scene in which the rag doll has been discovered "laid disgustingly on a bit of mackintosh." Our logic can make so little sense of this absurd transformation that we may doubt having heard it. The dreamlike echo sounds faintly again as Mr. Rock, on his way to the dance, ponders on Liz's watchful silence, "from her poor starved heart, no doubt, under that stained mackintosh hung over the shoulders" (p. 168).

In the narrative, distortions of sound arise from Mr. Rock's
short-circuits (deliberate or otherwise) in communication. For example, in his violently confused conversation with Adams secreted in the withy, the old man distorts the phrase, "You and your sort," to "Lose the fort," which makes no sense within the immediate context, but is highly significant in terms of his own "battle for the place," in which Adams appears to be a temporarily wounded soldier. Just as Rock's translations of the sounds which reach him are distorted by his own unspoken anxieties, so the distorted echoes of the prose say something to us by way of the unspoken and illogical associations which we are left free to make. In the last example, for instance, Mr. Rock's using his pig Daisy to track Mary's body, and Mary's doll (in absurd substitution for her body) lying on the last scrap of the mackintosh the pigs ate, are connected, and the addition of Liz's "stained" coat provides a disquieting note which we may hear if we wish. Hence the unspoken is transmitted by what Green called "communication through mishearing"—Rock's mishearing, on one level, serving as a reflector of that novelistic communication effected by subtly distorted echoes.

Similarly, the echo of an event which has been lost or "forgotten" is sounded for the reader in the prose of the novel. Adams's extravagantly mysterious statement to Mr. Rock from the withy, "You never intended to give me the wire" (p. 160), serves as a comic parody of other, quieter references to events which have happened, if at all, outside the novel, or have been "forgotten" by someone, perhaps the reader. Sometimes this is clearly due to a character's confusion, as when Edge, under the delusion that she had given the police responsible directions about Mary's
disappearance, complains, "Oh, Baker, what is the matter with the Police that she cannot be found?" (p. 143). More mysterious is the sergeant's inference that Mary is in the lake: "He had a vision of six hundred golden legs, bare to the morning, and said, 'Yes, ma'am.' At the same time, he had not forgotten what had been hinted on the way, and saw one pair of dripping legs" (p. 92). Mr. Rock has told the policeman about Mary's disappearance, but no mention has been made of the lake except by Moira, who has been at work with mischievous misinformation while the sergeant was on his way up to the house. She "knew" Mary was "down under water in the lake," because "Winstanley asked permission for the staff to bathe as today's a holiday, and Ma Marchbanks said better not, because Mary was drowned in it" (p. 83). Somehow, impossibly, the policeman has picked up a hint of this story.

Early in the novel, we are confronted by a mysteriously incomplete echo. Mr. Rock, sitting at Mrs. Blain's table, enjoys his tea: "... as his tea made his old blood run again, in this morning's second miracle for Mr Rock" (p. 22). Has there been a first? Kingsley Weatherhead, the only reader to attempt an answer, thinks "the warmth of the sun" was the first miracle, and this is certainly plausible, as is the possibility that simply another day's beginning, in the "concluding" life of Mr. Rock, is miraculous. But these are only conjectures, as the true miracle echoed by the "second" one remains like a lost piece in the detective story which Concluding parodies. Again and again, the reader is urged to relive the novel in order to find the missing clues.

As one can see from these examples, the narrator of Concluding
must accept some responsibility for the reader's confusion. Caught in a web of gossip which alters information from one character to another, we inevitably turn for help to the narrator, who takes an unholy delight in his false role of demystifier. In his hints of forgotten echoes and miracles, he may well be the guilty party, constantly accused by the bewildered characters, such as Mrs. Blain, who complains, "'Oh why will they make mysteries in this perplexed establishment?'" (p. 114). The narrator is to blame for the inexplicability of Miss Baker's emotional discovery that Merode is an orphan, when she herself has already pointed out the fact after the girls were reported missing (p. 20). He is also to blame for the tantalizing revelation of the anonymous letter, giving first the one word "FURNICATES," then making us wait for most of the book before releasing the whole message, and finally rendering that message absurdly incomprehensible and never telling who sent it.

As in Party Going, the narrator's suspect "helpfulness" engenders a suspicious, tentative attitude on the part of the reader. Just as events begin to be muddied by Moira's tales and Miss Edge's deviousness, this narrator intrudes, with showy omniscience, in his role of demystifier, to correct the misinformation Winstanley is transmitting:

"And they've told the police. Dakers has it for a fact the roads are to be watched within a radius of twenty miles. The sergeant left an hour ago after he'd seen Edge. Besides I believe Merode's told some story which does'nt sound too improbable and is reasonably reassuring." Most of this was false, if Miss Winstanley had only known. The child had said nothing. (p. 97; italics mine)

Here is our opportunity to lean for advice on the narrator, someone who knows, as Winstanley does not (as he takes care to point out) the truth.
But what is that truth? By specifying Merode's story as the "false" part of the information, the narrator implies that the rest is true, but we know "for a fact" that it is not. Furthermore, there is no need to tell us about Merode's silence, because we already know that, having been present at the interview. Similarly, the narrator's "revealing" insights into character are often ambivalent. How are we to gauge Sebastian's real feelings for Elizabeth, for example, when the only two glimpses the narrator gives us are contradictory:

And Sebastian, who did not answer, just stood there in a daze at the chance which bound him to these two strange people by the love he had for the granddaughter, the love, he thought, of his life. (p. 38)

... not without a sense of dread in every breast which, in Sebastian's case was even more,—for him it was the violin conjured, sibilant, thin storm of unease about a halting heart. (p. 200)

The deceptively traditional omniscience of the narrator who here, as in *Party Going*, supposedly lets us see his characters' thoughts, and gives us helpful information, is part of a game intended to teach the reader other methods of discovery, to sharpen his observation of discrepancies in behaviour and speech, and to attune his ear to true echoes, correspondences, and motifs.

The narrator's game also stresses, by its pretended usefulness and equivocal nature, that the real mysteries are left completely unanswered. In his role of Oracle ("the sequence here is light then darkness . . ."), the narrator prophesies nothing more than that darkness shall conclude the day and conceal all. This narrator, we feel, is more in command than that of *Party Going*. He is strong enough to parody
those who "tell all" to the passive reader; strong enough, that is, to play. Perplexing us with shifting facts, tricking us into reading each word carefully, deliberately, and suspiciously, Green forces us to "conclude" for ourselves, while, at the same time, mocking the process by which we do so.
Notes

1 La Conversation, p. 61.

2 As I have said, the urgent need for communication which prompts his stylistic experiments distinguishes these from the narcissistic single-mindedness of affectation.

3 Henry Green, "Apologia," Folios of New Writing, 4 (1941), 44-51.

4 In his interview with Southern, Green said of the prose writer, "His style is himself." "The Art of Fiction," p. 72.


9 Bruce Bassoff, "Prose Consciousness in the Novels of Henry Green," Language and Style, 5, No. 4 (Fall 1972), 276-86.

10 "Mr. Jonas," Folios of New Writing, 3 (1941), 31-40.


14 The Novels of Henry Green, p. 188.


17 "The Spoken Word as Written," The Spectator, 4 September 1953, p. 248.
18 The Age of Suspicion, pp. 96-97.
19 The Tightrope Walkers, p. 189.
20 Nine Novels, p. 45.
24 Cyril Connolly, in Enemies of Promise (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 79, uses this phrase to describe the ease of Isherwood's prose. After a moment's reading, "one is tobogganing through the book."
25 T. E. Lawrence used these words to describe his reaction to Arabia Deserta. Quoted in Henry Green, "Apologia," p. 46.
26 The Novels of Henry Green, pp. 108-10. It is interesting to compare Stokes's analysis with Robbe-Grillet's remark about Jealousy: "The narrative was on the contrary made in such a way that any attempt to reconstruct an external chronology would lead, sooner or later, to a series of contradictions, hence to an impasse." For a New Novel, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1962), p. 154.
27 John Lehmann documents, in I Am My Brother, his amazement at Green's ability to compose complex and elaborate writing while being called out at all times to fight fires (p. 109).
28 See p. 107 ("Chapter 7 should probably begin . . .") and p. 120 (". . . the quoted sentence should read . . .").
32 The autocracy of public time in war, while not so obvious as in Caught, is nonetheless subtly underlined by Green in this novel. Dot Pitter, in the course of changing jobs, fails to get "forty-eight hours leave" to visit her evacuated mother, and Charley's success at his job is measured by the weeks they are overdue with the plant orders. Twenty-four hours away from his job brings Corker Mead's little talk, "for he thought it likely these young men coming home from the war might be a bit wild for a period, it would only be natural" (p. 64).


In "The English Novel of the Future," Green says, "Life itself is capable of several meanings. Therefore the future function of narrative prose is not to be clear."


Party Going, p. 205; p. 227.


See p. 20; also p. 149: "how impossible it is to tell what others are thinking or what, in ordinary life, brings people to do what they are doing."

Because he faced the great house, the echo volleyed back at him, 'Ted, Ted' (p. 150; italics mine). Also, see pp. 249-50.


Concluding is not the only novel with missing pieces, of course. In Back, for example, Nancy makes an authoritative statement about Charley's having been in Rose's bed (p. 88). Even if he rereads the conversational exchanges between Charley and Nancy, the reader cannot find whatever information this statement is based on.
Chapter IV

THE READER TALKS BACK

Green's surprise-tactics which attract attention, his development of a distinctively accented speaking voice, and his artistic use of discrepancy and distortion to ensure careful listening, are all wielded with one purpose in mind—to persuade the reader to enter creatively into the silent conversation. The ideal spoken conversation is described by André Maurois as "a building on which one works in common," both speakers placing phrases and considering the effect, like masons with bricks.1 "Conversation," Green's metaphor for vital communication, suggests the role which modern fiction more and more insistently assigns to the reader. With the retirement of the Victorian narrator whom Green called "know-all" (ANR I, 506), an active collaboration on the part of the "modern" reader is urged by writers from Henry James2 to Robbe-Grillet. Northrop Frye distinguishes one of the chief concepts of modern artistry as the reader's involvement, in which continuity and even, in some cases, significance, has been handed over to the reader.3 Thus the last and most important part of Green's experiment, "finally, to create a work of art . . . between the author and reader," depends on "a conscious act of the imagination" (ENF, 22) on the part of a reader awakened by the narrative voice. What José-Maria Castellet called "the time of the reader"4 has, indeed, arrived for the novel.

In making the consciousness of his reader the end toward which all his efforts are directed, Green looks backwards to Sterne and
forwards to some contemporary novelists. In the experimental novel, the experiment is performed upon the reader as well as upon the material, and it is ironic that some of the tricks Green used to provoke communication at all costs irritated at least one reader, who fancied that he drew patterns to amuse himself and a select "coterie."\(^5\) This was a risk Green cheerfully took, for the sake of other readers who, through their imaginative participation, would extend the life of his novels.

Of all the devices Green used to cajole and tease his reader into talking back, the most consistent is deliberate mystification. That he should choose this approach is not surprising; it is, rather, instinctive. Reading Pack My Bag, one is struck by the celebration throughout of the power of mystery—a fearful wonder which sustains while it threatens life. His description of boyhood fishing, for example, concentrates on the appeal of the unknown:

There is a secrecy in wet fly fishing on the Severn with the fly out of sight and the skill lies in knowing more from the behaviour of the line than from anything on the surface of the water that a fish is taking it down. It is an exciting connection with a remote element when there is only a hint of what is going on . . . .  (p. 55)

This passage indicates something of his feeling for the secret core of the unexceptional person or event; it also describes by analogy the essence of Green's work.

In using a sense of mystery to tantalize, and communicate with, his readers, Green was drawing on simple psychology, learned from his minute observation of human beings. Like the detective-story novelist, he catered to a universal love for intrigue, and for the inexplicable.
He had discovered early that "questions unresolved stay in the mind (PMB, 35), and on this principle he based a unique version of the "non-finito" in art. He also planned a comic awakening for the reader, who would learn about himself in the process of responding to the mystery.

The reader never finishes a novel of Green's--perhaps that is the most essential implication of the "ing" titles. One of the effects of the fragmented, decentralized symbolic elements is that they cling to the mind after reading, shifting into kaleidoscopic patterns and orders; and, as with a kaleidoscope, any attempt to "resolve" the experience into a single pattern is as futile as giving a sole interpretation of a Robbe-Grillet novel or film. In *Loving*, for example, the "significant objects" to which it is possible to attach symbolic meaning (ring, dead peacock, dovecote, trapped mouse), and the patchwork quilt of motifs (peacocks and eyes, statues, gold, thieves, mice, fishing, medicinal doses), form and reform after the event, first fairytale side up, and then grubby life-side, like the sudden rainstorms and sunny skies which alternate in the book. It is thus that Raunce and Edie live "happily ever after."

Green's reader also relives the novels, and reworks them, in an attempt to penetrate the mysteries. There are expressive silences in the books which are deliberately created for our part in the conversation. As V. S. Pritchett has said, Green was a listener, and our response to the questions he poses and the blanks he leaves, is planned for and eagerly awaited. For example, the unresolved mysteries of *Concluding*, set in an atmosphere of comedy mingled with an unfathomable horror, are left to the reader's imagination. In his preface to *The Turn of*
the Screw, Henry James outlines a similar plan for eliciting a response from the reader. By leaving the terrors in this story unspecified, while evoking an atmosphere of evil, he hoped that his reader's "own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy [with the children] and horror [of their false friends] will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars."7

The reader's imagination and inventiveness are continually called forth by the unanswered questions, the tiny doubts, ambiguities and dead ends of Green's novels. The effectiveness of the aura of uncertainty cast over the stories by the means discussed in the last chapter is illustrated by the fact that many a doubtful reader has retraced his steps, thinking he has missed the vital piece of information.8 It is after the novel is read that the unresolved questions speak loudest of all; the prominence of the word "haunting" in reviews of Green's work is significant. Wandering back over the stories, one is met by enigmas large and small which one puzzles over, like riddles, trying to discover a hidden relationship. Roger Abrahams, in a recent discussion of the game between the riddler and his audience, states that participation is greater the longer the final recognition is prolonged. Hence, by prolonging this recognition indefinitely, Green keeps a creative response to the riddle perpetually alive.9

In some novels, the enigma is so large that most of the nagging smaller questions are shrouded in central mystery. Did Pye really commit incest? What are Raunce's true motives for deciding to return to England at the end of Loving? The question of Philip's legitimacy is vitally
important to all the characters in *Nothing*, but it is never resolved. Can Jane answer it, or does she simply accept the delicacy of the situation for her own ends? Is Miss Fellowes of *Party Going* gravely ill, or drunk? And, of course, where is Mary in *Concluding*?

The smaller questions haunt us, too. How did Amabel (and her maid, for that matter) get past the "impenetrable entrance" of the hotel? Was Mrs. Grant's amnesia in the earlier chapters of *Back* feigned? And what is behind her violent hatred of Mrs. Frazier? Does James really see "the terrible likeness" between Nancy and Rose, and is he pretending not to? Is Charley's notion of Nancy as "a tart" part of his obsession, or do Middlewitch's suggestive remarks reveal otherwise? And in *Concluding*, who wrote the anonymous letter? Do the girls slip out at night to meet Adams? What startled Ted into flight?

As we can see, even by this partial list of the silent places in the conversation which Green expects us to fill, most of the questions suggest not one, but many answers. One of the funniest jokes in *Concluding* is Edge's indignant response upon returning from London, confident that "that little mystery" would "clear itself up by luncheon," only to find yet more complications: "Marchbanks, there are no two ways about this incredible affair--is she hurt or is'nt she?" (p. 77). The unconscious irony of Edge's remark is that there are no two ways, but a multiplicity of possibilities, despite the institutional attempt to place Marchbanks in the equivocal position of taking an "either-or" stand--an attempt which, predictably, Marchbanks manages to evade. The moment the reader enters into the novel to create one response, he sees another and
another—all supported and suggested by implications within the story. For example, the reader who considers Raunce's motives for returning to England in the light of his guilt about not "doing his duty" in the war (like Albert), must also see his concern for his mother; and if Raunce is concerned for his mother, why not for Edie, and her vulnerability because of the ring affair? And if he is guilty about his passive role in the war, why is he not ashamed at his fiddling with the monthly books? Perhaps the pickings were not good enough after all? All, or one, or some other of these alternatives are possible, and by leaving the situation open, Green denies the stock response.

Thus the reader is teased, by intrigue and curiosity, to participate, and, once engaged, is persuaded to open his mind to the bewildering varieties of existence. His response creates some of the complexity of the novel:

The reader of a novel somehow or other must be encouraged by the writer to extend his imagination over the whole of all the questions that have been asked in life and can never be answered . . . . (ENF, 25)

"We shall never know the truth," says Mr. Rock at the end of Concluding. Although there is no answer and all meanings are tentative, as Green says, the reader, if he will "extend his imagination" can, by apprehending some of the unasked, as well as unanswered, questions, create his own image of the mysteriously variable truth. Faulkner's remarks illustrate the same idea of a romantic collusion between reader and writer:

I think that no one individual can look at truth. It blinds you. You look at it and you see one phase of it. Someone else looks at
it and sees a slightly awry phase of it. But taken all together, the truth is in what they saw though nobody saw the truth in fact . . . But the truth, I would like to think, comes out, so that when the reader has read all these thirteen different ways of looking at the blackbird, the reader has his own fourteenth image of that blackbird which I would like to think is the truth.2

Green's most effective technique for achieving open-endedness is the ambiguous conclusion. Especially in Loving, Back, Concluding, and Doting, readers have found that in appearing to conclude (the final scene circling back to the opening), the form of the novel has merely emphasized its ambiguity. The reader has the sense of a formal ending, while the chief problems remain unresolved and open-ended in his mind.3 Thus Raunce's response to the beatific vision of Edie, his soft moan at the end of Loving, recalls the old butler Eldon's dying cry in the first scene. But have we come full circle to a renewal of the life force of loving, or is the living butler now disintegrating before our eyes, like a mouse which has lost its legs in the trap of loving?

Green's characteristic conclusion, of paradox and conflicting forces, is a common element from his earliest novel right through to Doting (with the possible exception of Caught), and the various readings of these endings fulfil Green's hope that the novel will be "all things to all men" (ENF, 21). Even at the end of his first novel, Blindness, one can interpret John Haye's "vision" as hallucination, and conclude, like Robert Ryf, that his subsequent happiness is "putting up a good front."4 Ambiguity and a strong sense of mystery is evident in the short pieces Green wrote as well. "A Rescue," for instance, simply ends: "The injured man was taken away in an ambulance. We have not heard
anything of him. He may have died." Similarly, Mr. Jonas, in another story, rescued from a nightmarish scene of smoke, steam and burning gas mains, climbs silently through the debris and vanishes, "unassisted once he had been released, out of unreality into something temporarily worse, apparently unhurt, but now in all probability suffering from shock, had risen, to live again whoever he might be, this Mr. Jonas."  

As Green hoped, the reader fills the silent places created by the unresolved questions and ambiguous endings, and as he does so, from the depths of his experience and emotions, he reveals (and learns about) himself. Thus, through the comic spirit, he enters into the communion Green envisaged in "A Fire, a Flood and the Price of Meat" by becoming "acutely aware of himself or herself, and of his or her audience." Although Henry James was not concerned with a comic awareness, we have seen in his preface to The Turn of the Screw that he depended on the reader's filling in the horrors from his own experience, and that this is a self-revelatory process is indicated in the widely divergent and personal readings of the story. Leon Edel testifies to this when he states that "each reader feels the story differently and fills in the Jamesian blanks in accordance with these feelings." Not writing comedy, however, James was not concerned with his reader's self-discovery, except inasmuch as the author is amused by "the artless resentful reaction of the entertained person who has abounded in the sense of the situation." He has his eye on the story rather than on its reader. 

Sterne, on the other hand, kept his eye on the reader all the while, and was dedicated to evoking and revealing our hidden motives and
prejudices. Using the innocuous remarks of his dramatized readers, Tristram places us in one equivocal position after another—and whichever way we respond reveals us to ourselves. As John Traugott has discovered, the rhetorical aim of *Tristram Shandy* is "to discover motives for reactions, by stimulating reactions." In place of using dramatized readers, Green intrigues us with the self-conscious posing of questions (there is nothing subtle about Ridley, the riddle of *Back*) and ambiguity at the end, where we expect resolution. As we hasten to fill the silence left by the final scene of *Back*, for instance, with its conflicting implications of renewal and regression, we feel Green's eyes watching our reactions. As Robert Ryf puts it, "there are at least two interpretations possible, and we begin to suspect, in contemplating these alternative readings, that we tend to choose the one or the other according to our own lights, that in the rose glow it is ourselves that we behold." Hence one reader, Stephen Shapiro, finds that Charley has regressed in the climactic scene: "he is retreating into the past, trying to reclaim a passive role." Another, Stokes, describes a romantic apotheosis, a fulfilment through the merging of the real and the ideal (p. 169). Ryf (p. 32) himself is unable to choose either meaning, but decides that both are inseparably mingled. Each interpretation reveals something about the reader: Shapiro's determination to fit everything into a Freudian scheme (Charley is "crying out for his mother"); Stokes's accepting the religious and mythic symbolism, and evading the suggestions of infantile regression; and Ryf's compromising.

Similarly, as we try to penetrate the secrets known only (if at
all) by the mockingly omniscient narrator of Concluding, we find nothing but our own reflection. Contemplating the central mystery of what has happened to Mary, the incurable romantic will decide from the motifs of flight and migration that the girl has escaped, perhaps "home" to Brazil and her parents, while those who want a body in the lake will concentrate on the under-water images. Or there are some who, like the nervous spinsters, will see a man in the woods. Hence Green stimulates reactions through the power of mystery, and uses our own voices to reveal ourselves. One is reminded of Sterne's remarks to Dr. Eustace:

... everyone will take the handle which suits his convenience. In Tristram Shandy, the handle is taken which suits their [the readers'] passions, their ignorance, or sensibility... a true feeler always brings half the entertainment along with him. His own ideas are only call'd forth by what he reads, and the vibrations within, so entirely correspond with those excited, 'tis like reading himself and not the book.  

Inherent in the reader's attempts to fathom the mysteries is his desire for conclusions. In having his reader experience the variety of interpretations that would fit his blank spaces, Green wanted that reader to see, as comic, his own attempts to impose a rational order on the mystifying contingency of life. Like Tristram, Green has it both ways--while urging the reader to try to sort things out and solve the riddle, he shows him at the same time that "life, after all, is one discrepancy after another." Like his misguided characters who try to sort events into some sort of system (Miss Edge or Charley Summers), we perform before the audience of other characters, comic in our need for order.

Hence Green denies our expectations of the traditional plot
structure which the shape of his novels appears to promise. The questions Green delights in raising only to leave (when conventional plot structure would demand answers for them) force us to recognize our own expectations. But Green's stories do not collapse through such omissions, as they would if plot provided the structure; instead, the gaps themselves portray the illogic of life, while affording imaginative recognition of the pattern of cause and effect that one attempts to impose upon life. The life the reader is engaged in, inside the novel, is a process infinitely variable and full of discrepancies. In wanting answers and conclusions, we are in danger "of reading straight forwards, more in quest of the adventures," like the readers Tristram berates, while missing "the subtle hints and sly communications" which tell the real story (TS, I, xx, 57). By refusing to meet narrative expectations, Green draws the reader into his mockery of pattern, through comic recognition: one should not take the traditional patterning of the novel any more seriously than one takes the traditional patterning of life.

Green's art, like Robbe-Grillet's, is the antithesis of the modern apologue as written by, say, William Golding. Not only, that is, does it refuse to move the reader to some realization about the world external to the literary creation itself, but his "dead ends" parody the tendency within the work to discover a purpose or hidden design. One of the most revealing comments Green made on Doughty concerns this "end" which novels traditionally employ: "One of the merits of his book is that he finds almost nothing, certainly nothing of any value . . . ." Hence Green delights in turning upside down the conventional "revelation" that
makes order out of disorder and explains the action to the reader. In Nothing, for example, he parodies a stock comic device, the discovery of birth which makes possible an otherwise impossible marriage. Instead of the classic ending of The Importance of Being Ernest, we have a comic reversal—the wrong marriage made possible because of the ambiguity surrounding the "discovery." In The Modern Century, Northrop Frye describes Green and other writers who explode the "revelation" when he says that in the last two decades, the emphasis in modern art has been one of attack

on those tendencies within the arts themselves that seem to lead us passively on from one thing to another. A detective story is a good example of this donkey's-carrot writing: we begin it to find out what we are told on the last page. Writing with this structure is teleological: it contains a hidden purpose, and we read on to discover what that purpose is. (p. 71)

Robbe-Grillet's novel, The Erasers, is typical of the sort of attack which Frye describes. The dramatic framework--a prologue and an epilogue to five chapters of detective story--prompts the reader to expect a final curtain, a resolution. Instead, as the novel circles back to the opening scene, with the manager, the bar, and the desultory wipe of the rag, more questions are raised than resolved. Is Wallas agent or assassin? The contrivances of the detective novel are parodied by reducing everything, from the murder itself to the "facts of the case," to the level of possibilities. Since all meanings must be tentative, the emphasis falls on the creative process of the writer/dramatist ("an automaton's arm puts the setting back in place"), rather than on a hidden design.
Green has also mocked the popular form derided by Frye as "donkey's-carrot writing," but in a manner more calculated to reveal the reader's expectations to himself, because it is comic. His seventh novel, Concluding, is an unabashed parody of the traditional detective story. The chief appeal of this sub-genre, the puzzle, is presented early in the story as a problem to be solved by the detective/reader and the characters. Where is Mary? But instead of a map or a chart to decipher, we have a ludicrous poison-pen letter, and an abundance of equally absurd "clues." The ubiquitous English country house is a favourite setting for the study of social manners in the "haut monde"—but in Concluding, the "haut monde" has departed. The typically hermetic atmosphere is undercut by the "old tumble down Park walls" and the girl who has (perhaps) escaped. Green also presents a sergeant-detective who begins his job by mistaking a female goose for a gander; a "body" comically reduced to a doll with "blood red" features and deathly slack limbs; and a "scene of the crime," the lake, to which the sergeant returns before the victim has even been officially reported missing, much less found, and at which (perhaps) no crime has happened. There is, as well, the conventional romantic sub-plot, but Sebastian is fat, very short, squeals like a pig when excited, and is six years younger than Liz, who, while recovering from a nervous breakdown, juxtaposes a courtly mien much like Edge's28 with the boldest of sexual tactics. Finally, the timeless appeal of the detective novel, the built-in guarantee that everything will turn out for the best and the complications be removed, is mocked by Miss Edge's constant, empty assurances that later in the day, or tomorrow, all will be resolved.
The primary interest of the detective novel lies in "the methodical discovery, by rational means, of the exact circumstances of a mysterious event or series of events." In Concluding, Green suggests, on one level, that the "rational means" by which, in life, we "conclude" are hopelessly confused by our own subjectivity ("dazzled," as Mr. Rock would say, by our position). Mr. Rock's conclusion that it is Sebastian Birt the girls go out to meet at night reflects his own concern about the relationship Birt has with his granddaughter. Maggie Blain, for whom life is made up of deliciously inescapable births and deaths, concludes that Mary has rushed home because of a death in the family. The scene in which Edge illuminates, step by step, for a Watsonlike Miss Baker, the process by which she arrives at her masterfully absurd deduction that Merode was only sleepwalking, is a triumphant parody of "the methodical discovery, by rational means" which pervades the novel.

Like The Erasers, Concluding suggests a resolution through its aesthetic ordering: the three-fold beginning, middle and end, or exposition, development, and resolution. Impatient for conclusions, the reader proceeds teleologically and deductively. "Clues" are planted to urge him on: the doll, the mysterious "wire," the anonymous letter, the calls along the park ride. But the rules of the detection game, which claim that all relevant facts are to be revealed to the reader, with "misdirection allowed but fair play . . . observed" are cheerfully abandoned. "Red herrings" (a favourite expression of many Green characters throughout the novels) are never identified, and the "clues" proliferate until they take on, as in life, a bewildering and inscrutable contingency.
Unlike the maps and charts of detective fiction, the anonymous message, "Who is there furnicates and his goose?" refuses to yield decorously to "rational means" and remains absurdly indecipherable. George Grella writes that the detective novel, firmly in the English tradition of empirical thought, "always provides a plausible and rational explanation of even the most perplexing chain of events" (p. 44). In Concluding, "concluding" by rational means is thwarted by missing facts, distorted information and lack of sequence.

Because the reader is thwarted, he is teased into recognizing his own impatience for conclusions. To this end, Green parodies the three novel endings which have conventionally resolved the reader's anxieties. In the last section, wedding bells sound mockingly, as Liz and Sebastian move uneasily through a parody of nuptial arrangements.

Death, the second conventional ending, is held at bay as Mr. Rock retires behind his fortifications, Ted's "outpost, or guard house," and his ring of animals. The third possible ending, suggested by Northrop Frye and Alan Friedman, is that of self-knowledge, as the protagonist moves from innocence to experience (as in Caught, for example). This convention is mocked in Concluding, as Mr. Rock receives a comic education at the hands of the adolescent girls in their Club's "initiation." Moreover, Green never allows us to forget our expectations with respect to the central mystery. Baker's comic response to the three uninvited guests is a mock-dramatic climax:

Steps made themselves heard within, at the advance. And, with a fearful creak, the great door was opened. Miss Baker stood
silhouetted. It was Elizabeth she saw first, and she mistook the girl.
"Mary," she cried, in a small voice. (p. 190)

Hence we are reminded, in a joke which includes ourselves, of the resolution called for by the traditional plot-structure, and our expectations are aroused, parodied, and frustrated.

All our attempts to being an order to experience, or to find a cause for events, are comic, says Green. Robbe-Grillet reiterates this point in his Introduction to Last Year at Marienbad:

Two attitudes are then possible: Either the spectator will try to reconstitute some "Cartesian" scheme—the most linear, the most rational he can devise—and this spectator will certainly find the film difficult, if not incomprehensible; or else the spectator will let himself be carried along by the extraordinary images in front of him, by the actors' voices, by the sound track, by the music, by the rhythm of the cutting, by the passion of the characters... and to this spectator the film will seem the "easiest" he has ever seen.33

Green, like Sterne, is dedicated to making the reader aware of his proclivity for the "Cartesian" scheme. Sterne does this by calling attention to Tristram's departures from straight lines, and Green, by tricking the reader into trying to make sense out of the mysterious, and then exposing the rigidity of his expectations. Green's message is serious—discursive thought cannot penetrate reality, and one must assimilate contradictions in life. Like Sterne, and unlike most of Robbe-Grillet, Green communicates this message comically, in a jest on ourselves, which we share with the author. Just as humour in the dialogues between Green's characters communicates the fate of discursive reasoning, a good joke (the riddle which is never explained, or the mystery which is never
solved) communicates the same truth in the conversation between reader and writer.

One finds in Green's work another of Sterne's techniques for drawing the reader into the conversation. Tristram consistently relies on the reader's eagerness to make associations in the imagination, associations which have been carefully planted, even provoked. His mocking advice

---Now don't let Satan, my dear girl, in this chapter, take advantage of any one spot of rising-ground to get astride of your imagination, if you can any ways help it . . .

--takes the reader to task for the connection of "nose" with "penis" which Tristram himself promotes "in this chapter" and in the next fifty pages (TS, III, xxxvi, 226). Similarly, in Back, Green plants "rose after rose after rose" in the reader's imagination, through sly references (to flowers, blossomings, wreaths, thorns) and word play (rising-rose). Every trick possible is tried to make us share Charley's association of all the mundane affairs of life with his lost girl, Rose; and the method is successful to the point of making us join the search, while recognizing all the time (thanks to ironic distancing) the "obscure fairyland of neurotic life" which we have entered.

A fine example of Green's play with the reader in this respect occurs in the scene of Charley's first visit to Nancy. Outside her flat, the image of the dead Rose is deliberately revived for Charley and, more important, for the reader: "He read her name, Miss Nancy Whitmore, in Gothic lettering as cut on tombstones . . . The wall paper he stared at
round the door, was of wreathed roses on a white ground" (p. 46). "What reader," says Stephen Shapiro, "confronted by 'Rose in person' does not gasp, 'Rose, back from the dead?!' The reader's awareness fuses with Charley's at this moment of revelation." Thus Green lures us into making the same mistake as the unfortunate Charley--as V. S. Pritchett states, "we are duped" (p. 29). At the same time, he prepares a comic lesson for us by shifting the perspective later in the chapter so that we perceive our error, because Charley continues to be blind to his.

Green makes equally effective use of the reader's capacity for associative thinking in the novel which follows Back, Concluding. This capacity is drawn upon to endorse the suggestion made by motifs (as well as by certain of the characters) that Mary is lying, drowned, in the lake. For example, as Merode stretches out in her bath, she feels "as though she were bathing by floodlight in the night steaming lake, beech shadowed, mystically warmed" (p. 63). The analogy of bath with lake and the subtly sinister undertones of the description of the body ("like the roots of a gross water lily" and "chalk white") unite in the reader's imagination with the inevitable association of the found girl with the lost one. At the same time, the reader's growing certainty is undercut by the lack of evidence and the deliberate inconsistencies of the text.

Still another technique Green uses to urge the reader to fill the silent places in the novel might have been learned from Tristram Shandy. The Widow Wadman, we remember, was left entirely to the imagination of the reader, who was asked to fill in a blank page from his own private fantasies:
To conceive this right,--call for pen and ink--here's paper ready to your hand.--Sit down, Sir, paint her to your own mind--as like your mistress as you can--as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you--'tis all one to me--please but your own fancy in it. (TS, VI, xxxviii, 470)

Green echoes Tristram's concentration on the individual reader's fancy when he talks about the merits of his technique of "non-description":

And yet . . . to start on a coloured description so often leads to an attempt to write down the shape of a nose, or those wonderful rosy lips, which, while almost impossible of accomplishment in any case, only leads back once more to the variations in individual reader's tastes. For how can one, as a novelist, cater for those estimable men who only admire girls with black hair and pale blue eyes? The answer is, of course, by not describing them. (ANR II, 425)

Hence the silence of the blank page is extended over an entire novel.

Some of the portraits in Green's novels are begun with one suggestive brush-stroke: Annabel Paynton's fat legs, Richard Roe's red hair, Jane Weatherby's huge eyes, Charley Summers' great brown eyes, Lily Gates's plumpness. In the case of others, like Diana Middleton or John Pomfret, the page is left completely blank. The reader is challenged to try his hand at painting--to enter into an active, creative collaboration with the writer. In gauging the degree to which this challenge is met, one notes with interest that the critics, Stokes and Russell, disappointed in the poverty of rich and suggestive description, tend to see the characters of Nothing and Doting as "blurs." Generally speaking, however, the reviewers, who come to the dialogue novels free from intimacy with Green's previous work which might prejudice their expectations, respond more imaginatively. Brendan Gill, for instance,
paints a convincing portrait of Jane Weatherby, "a warm, formidable woman," with "maneating charm." Another reviewer finds that, behind the masks of surface chatter, "they [the characters] betray themselves in speech and gesture." 

That most of the reader's imaginative creation happens after he has finished the novel is suggested by Sartre in *The Psychology of Imagination*. He believes that our mental picturing of scenes and characters seldom occurs while we are actually in the process of reading, but that it comes when we have put the book down and our thoughts wander over the material in retrospect. Green indicates a familiarity with this concept when he saves Richard Roe's sole physical characteristic, his red hair, for the last page of *Caught*. For Green's readers, Sartre's observation has a special significance because of the many unanswered questions we ponder at the end. The extent of Diana Middleton's artfulness, for example (did Paula Paynton really pay her a visit about Annabel? if so, did Diana send for her?) will colour our mental portrait. I suspect that for those of Green's readers who meet the challenge, the characters become "theirs" in a sense completely unrealized by alternative techniques of characterization. At any rate, Green's method is one answer to the writer's struggle to communicate with the reader through the hieroglyphs of the printed page. As Flaubert said, "as soon as the type is fixed by the pencil it loses that character of generality, that agreement with a thousand known objects, which makes the reader say, 'I have seen it.'"

Only in *Loving* are the protagonists, Raunce and Edie, described with any fullness, and this is because the inner life of these characters
is conveyed entirely through facial expressions. Life is revealed by the surfaces of the pictures taken by the camera-eye, and narrator/photographer and reader are together at an enchanted distance from the thoughts and feelings of the characters, who become, consequently, as mysterious as they really are. Instead of imagining physical characteristics, the reader must interpret hidden motives from blushes and stares. Indeed, *Loving* invites the same type of audience participation as does a masque; interestingly, Michel Vinaver, in his first reaction to the novel speaks of "the pleasure of putting on extraordinary masks and throwing myself, so transfigured, into ludicrous situations." Physical qualities are comically exaggerated; Edie's blush, for example, reminds Raunce of giving blood transfusions, and Raunce's, in turn, becomes "an alarming purple." The reader makes meaning from the outward signs in much the same way as the viewer of the masque, who must guess at the nature of the performers behind the visible surface. The analogy of *Loving* to a masque emphasizes a fundamental aspect of the relationship between Green and the reader, for, while the masque frees the audience to project meanings and invites speculative play, it fixes no single interpretation; the invisible is (like the viewer and the reader) dynamic rather than static. Hence, interpretation is a continuing process which, in Green's novels, carries on after the formal work of art is "finished."

The reader is urged into taking on the writer's job of description by Green's teasing silence. Similarly, he is challenged to interpret the "sub-conversation" flowing beneath Green's deliberately oblique dialogue. Even before *Nothing* and *Doting*, Green relied on dialogue rather than
interior monologue or authorial commentary to convey the subterranean dramas of life. Bringing the reader into the present tense, the now of dialogue, he brings him into an immediacy of communication which depends on the reader's response to direct speech without interference by the author. In the following scene from *Loving*, Green uses dialogue, interspersed with "pure," objective gesture or action which may (or may not) be a comment on what is said, to persuade the reader to speak what is left unsaid, for "in life, it is what is left unsaid which gives us food for thought" (ANR I, 506).

Early in the novel, Raunce presents himself in the morning room, and begins to bluff his way past Mrs. Tennant and into the butler's job by giving his notice. At the beginning, the outcome seems unpromising, as the lady insists on calling him "Arthur," her generic name for the footman of the house. The scene continues like this:

"What Arthur?" she asked. She seemed exasperated. "Just when I'm like this when this has happened to Eldon?"
"The place won't be the same without him Madam."
"Surely that's not a reason. Well never mind. I daresay not but I simply can't run to another butler."
"No Madam."
"Things are not what they used to be you know. It's the war. And then there's taxation and everything. You must understand that."
"I'm sure I have always tried to give every satisfaction Madam," he replied.
At this she picked up a newspaper. She put it down again. She got to her feet. She walked over to one of six tall french windows with gothic arches. "Violet," she said, "I can't imagine what Michael thinks he is about with the grass court darling. Even from where I am I can see plantains like tops of palm trees."
Her daughter-in-law's silence seemed to imply that all effort was to butt one's head against wire netting. Charley stood firm. Mrs. T. turned. With her back to the light he could not see her mouth and nose.
"Very well then," she announced, "I suppose we shall have to call you Raunce." (p. 10)
The silences here accrue from the lack of interpretive comment, underlined by the spartan stage-directions. The only hint of what might be going on is at the beginning of the last paragraph but one, and the narrator is careful to say "seemed"--this may be only his opinion. Is the reader, then, freed by the writer's silence? Here is one response to the scene:

Few novelists would have had the fortitude not to spin this out to several times its actual length. We should have had Raunce's inner plannings, his slight concern lest he be taken at his word, his subsequent delight with the crispness with which the whole scheme had come off; from Mrs. Tennant we should have had reflections on the essential nature of servants, 'oh that Raunce, I've never really liked him' and so on.42

This is a splendid example of the potency of silence. When the writer abstains from interior monologue or authorial commentary, relying instead on talk followed by gesture or action, the reader supplies it himself. Raunce's bold declaration combined with a nervous movement towards his waistcoat button become "his slight concern lest he be taken at his word." Mrs. Tennant's irritable talk followed by her evasive actions are translated into a remark she might have made to herself. And we must remember that the above reader, Anthony Quinton, is concerned with indicating only the outline of the scene as he has imagined it through the medium of the printed page. Nathalie Sarraute's remark about the "grossness" of the perceptions when one is unaided by explanations is surely beside the point, since comedy such as Green's demands the creation of distance between characters and readers. The communication of more subtle movements behind the speech, created by the memories and
associative images of interior monologue, belongs to a Mrs. Dalloway or a Lily Briscoe, not to Green's ironically comic creations.

Rather than an empathy between reader and characters, the brilliantly suggestive surface of Green's prose creates an intimacy between reader and writer. One of his formulas for quickening imaginative life is to combine words and action: "We get experience, which is as much knowledge as we shall ever have, by watching the way people around us behave, after they have spoken" (ANR I, 506). In his study of Doting, D. S. Taylor elaborates the obliquity of the formula--suggestive, but inconclusive dialogue followed by inconsequential, and equally inconclusive action, catalyzing a multitude of possibilities for the reader, whose judgment concludes the act of communication begun in the writer's mind. Doting is at the farthest reach of the ongoing experiment in the abnegation of authorial control which began with the parody of the omniscient narrator in Party Going. However, as we saw in the passage from Loving, Green had developed his "catalytic rhetoric" long before the dialogue novels. If we apply his formula to all the novels rather than the last two only, and if we apply it broadly across the entire book rather than one scene at a time, it is apparent that dramatic irony plays as important a part as inconclusiveness in forging communicative links between reader and writer.

"To create life between writer and reader," says Green, "humour should in future be the bridge" (ENF, 24). Elsewhere, he remarks, "... if you can make the reader laugh he is apt to get careless and go on reading. So you as the writer get a chance to get something into him."
Much of the fun for Green's readers comes from comparing the way his characters behave with what they say; the discrepancies provide "a glimmering of what is going on." Claire's protestations of independence to Evelyn, in *Party Going* ("Oh no, darling, I can't leave you to do all my duties" [p. 240]), when contrasted with her actual behaviour, silently defines Evelyn's role as paid attendant. Liz Jennings, at the beginning of the "twenty firster" in *Nothing*, is emphatically indignant about rumours of her social drinking; later in the evening she is seen emptying her glass with a remarkable thoroughness. Similarly, Jane's determination in the final pages to send her daughter Penelope to a boarding school makes us cast an ironic smile backwards, at her hovering protectiveness ("I guard my poppet too well for that" [p. 126]) in previous scenes.

Humour creates a bridge also when surface conversation masks what the characters are really thinking. As we have seen in the last chapter, Green often brings this to our attention by suggestive disruptions in speech (misplaced words, punctuation, distorted clichés) but this subtle indication is the only commentary he makes. Discrepancies are apprehended silently, and with a real sense of discovery by the reader. Thus intimacy is created between writer and reader through a shared, unspoken response to the jests of the novel.

Green's dialogue is often compared to that of his contemporary, Ivy Compton-Burnett, but only because she had been writing the dialogue novel for thirty years when Green pronounced that "dialogue will be the mainstay of novels for quite a while" (ANR II, 425). While they both
write "non-representational" conversation, the difference between the two is at once apparent. The "sub-conversation" which in Green's dialogue is so carefully hidden from everyone except the reader, who "creates" it from the oblique surface, makes its way into the conversation of a Compton-Burnett novel; it is articulated on the conscious level. The polished, epigrammatic dialogue is the shape for thoughts which are usually deliberately suppressed, or hardly conscious. In this exchange from Manservant and Maidservant, for example, there is very little left unsaid:

"Do you not expect me to have things to say on my side?"
"No. I know you have nothing to say. And you also know it."
"What do you expect from me, Mortimer?" said Horace, as though he did not hear his wife.
"I expect nothing, my dear boy. I have got out of the way of looking for a word or a glance."
"We will put that note aside. It comes to seem a strange one. I have to say the one thing, that I know the truth. And I want no word from you. I can see you have none to say."
"It does seem to fit in," said Mortimer.
"You will not do as you have done. You will not live under my roof and eat my bread, and seek to undermine my life."47

As if not enough sub-conversation can be heard in dialogue like this, Compton-Burnett's characters frequently communicate sotto-voce the motives they are too timid to voice. Indeed, this device illuminates so many scenes that one could almost regard it as a substitute for interior monologue. In short, when W. Y. Tindall writes about Compton-Burnett's dialogue "performing in the service of so much beyond its common capacity,"48 he describes what it does for her characters: it "de-mystifies" them. Green, on the contrary, tries to preserve some opacity in each of his characters. 49
Another striking difference between the dialogue novels of Green and those of Compton-Burnett concerns authorial commentary. Compton-Burnett occasionally intrudes with interpretive remarks ("'I wish it was us who had a party,' said Tilly, who was an almost startling example of failure to rise above a lack of advantages"), and background information on her characters and their situations. By the time he wrote Nothing and Doting, Green had rejected the authorial voice altogether. In the effort to give the reader's interpretive powers full and uninterrupted play, he discarded the ornately descriptive passages which had been a familiar part of his unique speaking voice, but which, by 1950, he considered intrusive. With his techniques of confusion and disorientation, his scenic juxtapositionings, and his parodies of "know-all" narrators, it is evident that Green had been moving towards the final elimination of a narrative center since, perhaps, Living. The notion, which I believe Stokes originated, that Green fit the theory to his declining powers is discredited by a chapter of his unfinished book, published in the London Magazine in 1960, under the title, "Before the Great Fire." In this fragment, he returns to the lyrical, stylized descriptive passages of Concluding or Back.

In giving up the voice of a "know-all" novelist, Green relies on an infinitely more subtle authorial commentary by the arrangement of scenes and images in the reader's mind. In "A Novelist to his Readers, II," he says,

In other words, just as the composition of a painting gives it meaning, so the way in which the writer places his characters in the shifting scenes of his book will give the work significance . . . if
the arrangement of words and the 'placing' of his characters are the only means whereby he can do this, then the superimposing of one scene on another, or the telescoping of two scenes into one, are methods which the novelist is bound to adopt . . . . (p. 425)

As the stories unfold through the symbolic techniques of placement, juxtaposition (which includes equations of imagery), montage, leitmotif, and Green's self-conscious use of "significant objects" and "poetry of incident," the reader is urged to fuse the narrative himself. By "a conscious act of the imagination," he recreates the theme that has determined the writer's selection and arrangement. What Eisenstein claims for montage in the film is applicable to montage in the novel:

The strength of montage resides in this, that it includes in the creative process the emotions and mind of the spectator. The spectator is compelled to proceed along that selfsame creative road that the author travelled in creating the image. The spectator not only sees the represented elements of the finished work, but also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the image just as it was experienced by the author . . . The strength of the method resides also in the circumstance that the spectator is drawn into a creative act in which his individuality is not subordinated to the author's individuality, but is opened up throughout the process of fusion with the author's intention, just as the individuality of a great actor is fused with the individuality of a great playwright in the creation of a classic scenic image. In fact, every spectator, in correspondence with his individuality, and in his own way and out of his own experience—out of the womb of his fantasy, out of the warp and weft of his associations, all conditioned by the premises of his character, habits and social appurtenances, creates an image in accordance with the representational guidance suggested by the author, leading him to understanding and experience of the author's theme.

Eisenstein reveals each creative spectator as an actor whose "individuality is not subordinated to the author's individuality." Green, too, thought of his readers as actors whose individuality, because "we are dealing here with narrative which is not on the stage," would not be
"subject to the disadvantage of the actor's or the producer's interpre-
tation" (ANR II, 426).

Thus, the modern symbolist, such as Virginia Woolf or Henry Green,
employs a narrative line in order to engage the reader in a demanding
"actor's" role. Woolf describes this exploitation of a familiar conven-
tion: "The writer must get into touch with his reader by putting before
him something which he recognizes, which therefore stimulates his imagi-
nation, and makes him willing to co-operate in the far more difficult
business of intimacy." 53 Hence, Clarissa's motif in Mrs. Dalloway,
"Remember my party!" is meant for the reader as well as for the other
characters; the story line draws him forwards like the puzzle in Conclud-
ing while the symbolic elements engage him in the "real" story. As we
have seen, once Green manages to get himself "introduced" to the reader
by way of what seems to be a perfectly conventional plot structure, he
deliberately thwarts his expectations, forcing him to look elsewhere in
search of significance.

This one-by-one synthesis in the reader's imagination, without
benefit of interpretive comment, demands a great deal from the novelist's
partner in the "conspiracy of insinuations." As one critic has observed
of Mrs. Dalloway, "The establishment of an authorial point of view by
means of the linguistic surface places a burden of recognition upon the
reader; he must note the reappearance of words and patterns previously
encountered or deprive himself of authorial commentary." 54 Green places
an even heavier "burden of recognition" upon his reader than Woolf does.
First, his judgment never escapes beyond the network of symbolic elements
in the story; nowhere in his novels can we hear the omniscient voice, undisguised, offering a moral evaluation as in the passage on "Proportion" and "Conversion" in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Secondly, Green's handling of "significant objects" tends to put the reader on his guard in the matter of attaching symbolic meaning.

Once upon a time, in the days of the Victorian "my reader and I" relationship, the novelist communicated exact meaning through his symbolism. Dickens, for example, used it as rhetoric to persuade, rather than to suggest. His message had to be fully understood before it could be felt. Thus, the confusion and horror of Krook's shop—dark, cluttered, filthy and disintegrating—is the corruption represented by the law of an inhuman society:

"It's true enough," he said, going before us with the lantern, that they call me the Lord Chancellor, and call my shop Chancery. And why do you think they call me the Lord Chancellor, and my shop Chancery?"

And Krook, of course, proceeds to tell Richard, and us, exactly why. The masterfully-told story of *Bleak House* demands a participation in feeling, rather than in the creative construction of the tale itself. The latter sort of collaboration, such as one might find in an artistic conversation, is sought by modern symbolists.

There is a difference, however, between Green and his contemporaries which centers on how the reader is made to feel about the status of symbols. Nowhere in his novels is there a symbol so comfortably meaningful as Woolf's lighthouse; not only does the latter declare its role in the title, like James's golden bowl, but we are taught the clues to its significance in the narrative:
James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white-washed rocks; the tower, stark and straight; he could see that it was barred with black and white; he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry. So that was the Lighthouse, was it?

No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing.57

The sense of security we experience from this central focus of meaning which explains images and suggestions elsewhere in the story, although the reader must make the connections and confer the penultimate significance, is notable by its absence from Green's work.

There is an element of parody in his symbolism which leads one to suspect that Green may be, in part, laughing at the symbol-hunting which Ursula Brumm calls "a highly popular sport these days, like picking out raisins from a bun."58 Certainly some of the objects ("this so-called symbolism, the love for a significant object")59 in which his characters have invested special meaning, draw attention to themselves by their apparent inanity: a dead pigeon, a wooden egg containing toy elephants, and a toy gun (Party Going); a strangled peacock and a mouse caught by the legs (Loving); and a rag doll (Concluding). The deliberate undercutting which one critic has called Green's "comic symbolism"60 extends to the process of conferring significance—a process which is demonstrated, at least in Party Going, to be illogical and childish.

Miss Fellowes picks up a pigeon which has, inexplicably, fallen dead at her feet. She washes it, wraps it in brown paper, and carries it with her like a talisman throughout the novel. It becomes apparent that magic powers connect the pigeon with her illness for, having arranged for its disposal in a waste basket, she immediately feels better: "He
took it and went off. She felt better at once, it began to go off and relief came over her in a glow flowing out of her weakness" (p. 12). Miss Fellowes is unable to leave it, however (again, the sense of a spell or charm is strong), and her attachment of meaning to the bird is rendered in a deliberately ludicrous and childish manner:

And there was that poor bird. One has seen so many killed out shooting but any dead animal shocked one in London, even birds, though of course they had easy living in towns. She remembered how her father had shot his dog when she was small and how much they had cried. There was that poor boy Cumberland, his uncle had been one of her dancing partners, what had he died of so young? One did not seem to expect it when one was cooped up in London and then to fall like that dead at her feet. (pp. 24-25)

Even more comic is the conversation between Evelyn and Claire, in which the choice of the bird as symbol (or the symbolic process) is ridiculed:

"I think what we are both afraid of," said Evelyn, "is that parcel she had and what was inside it. She never belonged to any societies for animals, did she? She never kept pigeons herself I mean?" . . . "You know I have absolute faith in searching out whatever it is that is really worrying one underneath what seems on the surface to be the matter with anything if you understand me, Claire, my dear. And I know in my case it was her having picked that pigeon up somewhere and then seeming so ill. She can't have bought it or she would have had it delivered, unless she got it off a barrow, but then they don't sell them on barrows . . . Now if it had been a goose or some other bird . . . ." (pp. 211-12)

We must wait until Concluding for the goose to appear. When it does, the parodic elements of its mysterious flight remind one of the final joke in Orlando—the wild goose which springs up over Shelmerdine's head. 61

Miss Fellowes has made an irrational, "magic" connection between the bird and that other "dead pigeon," Cumberland—a resemblance which
really emphasizes their dissimilarity. At that time, Miss Fellowes was disposed to make "an instinctive compact with death," and the "significant object" could have been anything at hand. In his discussion of the literary symbol, W. Y. Tindall stresses the fact that it "conceals what it carries and resists total explanation because it is founded upon analogy, which, philosophers say, is primitive, childish, and irrational." That Green sometimes portrays, and draws our attention to, the absurd delicacy of the moment when symbolic meaning is conferred does not indicate that he disparages it. As ever, in the novels, the comic is used to awaken our participation by exposing us to the process of creation. Discursive reasoning fails to communicate, as we have seen, in his stories. It is only on the basis suggested by charms, "primitive, childish, and irrational," that meaning is created between the characters, and between Green and his reader.

This theory is an attempt to explain why Green's readers often feel uncomfortable with his "significant objects"—so embarrassingly easy to pick out, like raisins in a bun. We are given complete freedom of interpretation; unlike Woolf, the author does not reassure us. Placed in an equivocal position again, the reader feels Green's silence waiting on a response. What will we do with a dead pigeon, or Mr. Rock's goose? Once more, one is reminded of Sterne, whose Tristram constantly cloaks very serious matters in suspiciously rhetorical language for the sole purpose of urging, however rudely, the reader into the game. For example, the bombastic attack on the reader which follows the innocent question, "And pray who was Tickletoby's mare?" is so overdone that we suspect a
joke; and yet, Tristram's point, that men often know books, perhaps his own, without having read them, is completely serious (TS, III, xxxvi, 226). Similarly, the caution with which we identify sexual or moral disintegration with Miss Fellowes's dead pigeon, or (to take a deliberately uneasy example) Raunce's guilt over his wartime role with a strangled peacock (my interpretation) is delightfully complicated by the fact that the "meaning" of the novel depends on the associations, no matter how illogical or childish, we make. (In other words, it may be necessary to act like Julia Wray packing her toys.)

The network of free-riding motifs and images in the novels, which cohere "by glancing reflections" rather than a federal order, gives unusual freedom to the reader's interpretive voice. John Russell, perhaps Green's most imaginative reader at, as he puts it, "the poetic level," recognizes the tentative nature of the meanings he assigns:

Although a pattern of symbols can be determined, one runs the risk of systematizing them and thereby reducing their force. Whatever meanings one fixes on, then, can be assigned only with the admission that other meanings may inhere.

Tindall, concerned with evoking the "normal" reader's response to Green's work, in this case, Party Going, reaches a similar verdict:

Another reading might almost fix the relationship of artichoke, station, and bird that baffles and delights me, but "almost" is the important word. In enterprises of this kind we confront the penultimate at last, and if, avoiding it by some dodge, we could attain our goal and comprehend the incomprehensible, what else could we do?

Possible interpretations of the repeated images and motifs are never really concluded in the reader's mind; like the unresolved questions,
they gather and reverberate after the work is "finished."

Almost without exception, Green's readers testify to this ongoing conversation with the writer. Their experience is perhaps best summed up in Diana Trilling's remark about Loving, which turns out "after one had set the book aside, to reverberate so beyond its announced limits as to constitute a rarely rich and wide human experience." The kaleidoscopic effect of shifting symbolic elements, which refuse to fix themselves into a static substitute for story-line, is achieved by Green's introduction of incongruities. A comparison with Virginia Woolf underlines the plurality of meanings yielded by Green's symbolic elements. David Daiches's discovery of the fairly straightforward thematic importance of colours in To the Lighthouse ("Red and brown appear to be the colours of individuality and egotism, while blue and green are the colours of impersonality") is supported everywhere in the novel. It is possible, however, for two readers of Loving to construct different meanings from the colour symbolism Green uses. The flexibility of the motifs (peacocks, for instance, in Loving), images (moon, water, flowers, animals, birds in Concluding), and those scenes which one might call "poetry of incident," which "tremble on the verge of symbolism" (Mr. Rock and the starlings), is Green's method of creating the widest possible range of response to his side of the conversation. To this end, he has said, "There can be no precise meaning in a work of art" (ENF, 22).

The commentary which Green provides through juxtapositions, dramatic irony, equations of imagery, comic structure, and related techniques, is quiet and oblique. The silences which are left for the reader
to fill are answered by an authorial voice which, while it does not persuade us to adopt the writer's moral stance, leaves us in no doubt about it. Even *Doting*, which is at the farthest reach of Green's experiments in the "invisible" narrator, contains an "interpretive rhetoric" which, according to D. S. Taylor, gives the reader the author's evaluation of his work. Through this rhetoric; that is, "comic mythos, equations of imagery, symbolic evaluation, suggestions of names, the mechanics and mathematics of plot," Taylor (p. 98) presents a full and "moral" reading of the novel, although he is reluctant to claim for this presentation the authority it has.

"The mechanics and mathematics of plot," for instance, provide an evaluation of the characters through the wit and contrivance of the formal structure--"something mechanical encrusted on the living." Readers find *Doting* "mordantly funny and horribly sad," partly because the comic sterility of these aging partygoers is commented on by the form. The mechanical ingenuities of structure and the mechanical manoeuvring of characters mirror each other in a fun-house atmosphere. Furthermore, since Taylor's interpretation is based chiefly on equations of imagery and scenic juxtapositions, let us consider some additional commentary of this nature, which supports his reading.

There is an analogy between sex and food in *Doting*, which is emphasized by the book's circular structure, in order to provide a moral evaluation. One aspect of this involves a parallel between the difficulties of the middle-aged men in getting service at restaurants, and their sexual frustrations. Arthur's "doting" is comically appraised, when the
last scene recapitulates the first and Charles, who has had good "service" from Claire (although when he was pursuing the frigid Annabel he found it a "terrible job to get attention these days" [p. 124]) has to calm his agitated and still frustrated friend. The commentary comes to life when we juxtapose this behaviour with Arthur's sympathetic response to his equally frustrated adolescent son, who wails for service in the opening scene:

"Oh God when are we to get something to drink?" Peter protested and turned his face away, frowning.
"I know old chap" Mr Middleton agreed,
"A pint of shandy!" the son wailed.
"Steady on" his father moaned, but no one paid the least attention. (p. 4)

And here are Arthur and Charles at the end:

"We shall never get a waiter!" Arthur wailed.
"Steady the Buffs" Mr Addinsell said.
"I'm doing all I can!" Arthur Middleton complained, and waved violently.
"I know you are, old man. Forget it." (p. 236)

It is fine, unstated comedy, but surely it offers us, as well, some commentary on what has been happening. Arthur is no more emotionally mature than his sixteen-year-old son, and doting most emphatically is not loving --it is an anxious quest for instant gratification.

For all their incongruities, silences and ambiguities, it is possible in each of Green's novels, to determine the author's essential moral position. In other words, although we are in doubt about some of the mechanics of his fictional world, we know, through his interpretive
rhetoric, what he is for and against. But a particularly heavy burden of recognition is placed upon the reader. In the controversial final chapter of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth argues that "the moral question is really whether an author has an obligation to write well in the sense of making his moral orderings clear, and if so, clear to whom" (p. 386). Later in the same chapter, he writes, "the novelist cannot be excused from providing the judgment upon his own materials which alone can lift them from being what Faulkner has called the mere 'record of man' and turn them into the 'pillars' that can help him be fully man" (p. 397). In placing such obstacles as "comic symbolism" in his reader's interpretive path, and eliminating a reliable "telling" voice, does Green risk leaving the reader altogether without a guide?

I think the answer must be "yes," the risk is there, and Green took it in order to create a reader imaginative enough "to bring half the entertainment along with him." However, with respect to Booth, how can we be sure that the reader, in this "age of suspicion," is certain to interpret the comments of an omniscient narrator as the author intended? Green said, "it is not to be supposed that any reader believes any more of what he is told in narrative than he ordinarily believes, in life, of what someone is telling him" (ENF, 23). Ironically, the proof of this statement lies in the reaction of some of Green's own readers, who have chosen to mistrust the narrator of *Loving* in his promise of a fairy tale ending.74 This interpretation delighted Green, although he had intended "that they were to have . . . a long and happy life thereafter" (ENF, 23). He paid his reader the compliment of listening for his voice, and an
imaginative, creative response is, in itself, a moral judgment against passivity and silence.

When the reader talks back to Green, the author's formula for the creation of a living work of art which he outlined in "The English Novel of the Future" is completed, tested, and proven. From Blindness to Doting, Green employs increasingly inventive techniques to urge the reader's participation without inhibiting his freedom. Obliquity creates the illusion of artistic autonomy for the reader--an uninterrupted silence within which his imagination can play. Hence, Green's use of unanswered questions, ambiguous endings, equivocation, associative thinking, non-description, and scenic juxtapositions rather than interpretive commentary, effectively conceal the author and, simultaneously, provoke a reaction from the reader. Green speaks by remaining silent; the subtle disruptions on the surface of his prose which shatter the reader's expectations and awaken him to the conversation are the more disturbing and mysterious because they appear to come from within the novel's world, rather than from an authorial hand. Similarly, while his distinctive prose style seems to reflect the inner and outer speech of his characters, it establishes, at the same time, a pervasive presence which the reader recognizes as that of his conversational partner. Seduced into participation by this duality, the reader finds that he has become a "character" in the comic experience of the novel; his reactions are self-revelatory, and ongoing. Thus, the "communication without speech" becomes a conversation without a conclusion.
Notes

1 La Conversation, p. 60.

2 James counted on as much attention as the reader was disposed to give him. In his "Preface to The Wings of the Dove," he states that the surface illusion, like ice on a lake, is strongest which can bear as much pressure from the reader as possible. The Art of the Novel, pp. 304-5.


6 Green usually creates this atmosphere through a precise image. For instance, after the comic scene with the police detective, Mr. Rock watches the revolving bicycle pedal with "a dreadful reluctance" (p. 74).

7 The Art of the Novel, p. 176.

8 For example, see James Hall, The Tragic Comedians: Seven Modern British Novelists (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), pp. 66, 69, and 77.


"Mr. Jonas," Folios of New Writing, 3 (1941), 31-40.

We are reminded that by "audience," Green meant "the characters that make up the book."

The well-known essay by H. C. Goddard, "A Pre-Freudian Reading of The Turn of the Screw," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Turn of the Screw and Other Tales, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 62-87, was related to his own memory of a governess he had when he was a boy.


The Art of the Novel, p. 177.


"Henry Green," p. 32.


For example, the two symmetrical halves of Loving; the "three-act" structure of Concluding.

"We must not expect too much of life," Green says in "The English Novel of the Future" (p. 25).

"Apologia," p. 49.


At the dance, for example, "she thought how the hand she had on his shoulder must seem to him like his heart's white flower" (p. 202).


Also parodying the triumph of deductive reasoning is the Lewis Carroll atmosphere of Concluding. Illogic (rather than reason) reigns, as when Edge orders Moira to cut ribbon in lengths of exactly twenty-one inches, without a ruler.
Grella, p. 43.


Quoted in Anthony Quinton, "A French View of *Loving*," p. 28.

Again, the comparison with Robbe-Grillet is inescapable. He writes: "The essential characteristic of the image is its presentness . . . on the screen verbs are always in the present tense (which is what is so strange, so artificial about the 'novelized films' which have been restored to the past tense so dear to the traditional novel!): by its nature, what we see on the screen is in the act of happening, we are given the gesture itself, not an account of it." "Introduction," *Last Year at Marienbad*, p. 12. Green's use of dialogue is his method of evoking the "gesture" rather than the "account": "If we wish to create something between the author and the reader, we cannot depart from current life" (ENF, 24).

Anthony Quinton, "A French View of *Loving*," p. 34.

"As for the famous intaglio implications that the supporters of this system think they obtain by giving no explanations, it would be interesting to ask the most experienced and most sensitive among their readers to tell sincerely what they perceive, when left to themselves, beneath the words spoken by the characters . . . We should be surprised by the simplicity, the grossness, and the approximation of his [sic] perceptions." *The Age of Suspicion*, pp. 104-5.

This explains why Green's dialogue reminds so many readers of Congreve's plays.


This, I am sure, explains the distaste for Compton-Burnett's writing which Green exhibited when we met. When sub-conversation is given a voice in the dialogue, it denies the reader the act of creation which Green felt to be so necessary in the author-reader relationship.

Brothers and Sisters (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1929), p. 42. The author here intrudes a remark for its comic effect, whereas the humour in Green is, for the most part, unstated until it is recognized by the reader.

It is especially applicable to the novels of a writer who documents the influence of the cinema on his technique (ENF, 22). Pack My Bag describes his addiction to films, which he watched on Saturday afternoon, while working at the Birmingham factory and writing Living. This novel clearly demonstrates their influence.


To the Lighthouse, pp. 276-77.


Russell, Nine Novels, p. 43.

The Literary Symbol, p. 12. The difficulty of definition in discussing the symbolist nature of Green's work is illustrated in the fact that G. Melchiori does not regard him as a symbolist because his images lack "all precision of reference and consistency, two essential qualities of symbols" (although, in the same chapter, "The Abstract Art of Henry Green," he refers to Green's use of "cryptic symbols"), while Tindall declares that he is a symbolist because the lack of fixed values defines one type of symbol.

Tindall, The Literary Symbol, p. 92.

Nine Novels, p. 131.

The Literary Symbol, p. 95.


See Stokes, p. 120, and Barbara Davidson, "The World of Loving," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 2 (1961), 65-78.


J. D. Scott, rev. of Doting, by Henry Green, New Statesman and Nation, 43 (1952), 564-66.

The exception is Melchiori, in his study, "The Abstract Art of Henry Green." His thesis, that the emphasis on style in this century springs from the desire of authors to provide an aesthetic order for a world where they find no other, so that form becomes a symbol through which transcendent meaning is perceived, assumes that Green, like Joyce or Woolf, accepts his aesthetic ordering as meaningful. Melchiori overlooks the (perhaps too obvious) alternative that Green has juxtaposed his comic order with the artificial behaviour of the characters the reader finds comic.

Earle Labor's article, "Henry Green's Web of Loving," is the
most dogmatic of these readings. It is important to note that Booth offers this article as the only item in his bibliography on Green. Obviously, he has followed Labor's lead in finding the narrator of Loving unreliable, although the majority of Green's readers do not.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. PRIMARY SOURCES

1. Green's writing

Since Henry Green's writing is recorded here in its entirety, chronological order provides a useful description of his career.

"A Private School in 1914." Folios of New Writing, 1 (1940), 11-25.
"Mr. Jonas." Folios of New Writing, 3 (1941), 31-40.
"Apologia." Folios of New Writing, 4 (1941), 44-51.
"The Lull." New Writing and Daylight, 3 (1943), 11-21.

"The Spoken Word as Written." The Spectator, 4 September 1953, p. 248.


"For Jenny with Affection from Henry Green." The Spectator, 4 October 1963, p. 422.

2. Books, Articles and Reviews on Green: An annotated bibliography.


Allen deals quite fully with Green's work before the publication of Caught. He describes the novelist as a "pure artist" because of his preoccupation with style rather than subject, and indicates, with considerable imagination, how symbolic elements are used to create "a gathering web of insinuations." A particularly good discussion of Living, and some interesting comparisons with contemporary writers such as Isherwood, Wyndham Lewis and Calder-Marshall.


Allen repeats his discussion of Green's earlier work (see above), adding a brief account of Loving. After this novel, he says, one finds a "fragmentation" of Green's talent--certainly a minority viewpoint.


A brief and appreciative review, which applauds Green's escape from sentimentality or burlesque. The reviewer notes a tendency for the author to become "coldly clinical"--an interesting observation in view of what some critics (Toynbee, for instance) find in Green's later work.


Because this article introduces Green to TLS readers as an important novelist, the reviewer, while concentrating on Concluding, also
outlines the stylistic features and themes of previous novels. Resem­
blances to Proust, Gertrude Stein and Doughty are noted, but, in the 
end, Green is unique—"a poet of the persecution-complex." The re­
view treats the novels with competence and a close familiarity.

104-10.

The review, "Molten Treasure," begins with a collection of the 
more sensational items in Henry Yorke's career. It then turns to a 
consideration of Loving which is chiefly plot summary.

(1951), 86.

A slight review which, nevertheless, manages to suggest something 
of Green's complexity. Chiefly plot summary.

Bassoff, Bruce. "Prose Consciousness in the Novels of Henry Green." 
Language and Style, 5 (Fall 1972), 276-86.

A detailed analysis of Green's prose experiments in Living and 
Party Going. Bassoff places the author's stylistic mannerisms in a 
poetic context by isolating some tropes such as chiasmus and asyndeton 
(which remind one of Milton's use of schematic language, although 
this connection is not made in the article). Bassoff makes a convin­
cing argument for considering Green's language from a poetic rather 
than mimetic point of view, and points to the effect on the reader of 
the author's concern with prose as an instrument of awareness.

Review, 19 February 1950, p. 29.

This interview affords us a glimpse of the novelist in the United 
States. Obviously intrigued by Green--his pseudonym, and oblique 
replies--Breit pays tribute to his conversational artistry. Green's 
remarks, although few, are interesting.

(1926), 174.

Impressed by Green's first novel, the reviewer pays tribute to 
its "imaginative power," psychological realism, and thematic unity. 
He notes, even this early in Green's career, the characteristic 
absence of a conventional story line; Blindness, he says, is made up 
of "emotional incidents significant only in their immediate effect, 
and making no formal pattern in the life or its record."


This dissertation is a brave attempt to contain all of the 
novelist's work within Bergsonian theory. As does any attempt to 
classify Green, it fails to some extent, particularly with Concluding, 
but Brothers's interpretations are always stimulating, especially 
when one disagrees.

The article was written in response to Earle Labor's somewhat dogmatic interpretation, "Henry Green's Web of Loving," in Critique, 4, No. 1. Churchill displays a fine appreciation of the novel's comedy and compares scenes in both Loving and Concluding, in their "broadly smiling animalism," to Chaucer. In the process, he illustrates that Labor's reading is "both over-solemn and not really supported by the text." A cool and persuasive counter-attack on an attempt to systemize Green through symbols and analogy.


A brief description of Loving and Back, with one or two interesting observations (for example, "Henry Green builds his sensible objects into an appearance of riddle"). Cook places Green in the school of Flaubert, Turgenev and Chekov.


Davidson's article concentrates on the symbolic elements in Loving, from which she creates particularly convincing portraits of Mrs. Tennant, Mrs. Jack and Edith. She analyzes the blend of realism and myth, fact and fantasy in the novel without damaging its delicacy, and points to suggestive links between Green and contemporary painters.


Dennis contributes a lively, but essentially serious, portrait of Green, his "double life" and his work. We are, indeed, indebted to him for eliciting several invaluable comments from the novelist about his fiction—for instance, Green told him that "anything which has a voice is invited to use it—but the reader is left to supply the shapes and colors out of his own head." Dennis includes some stimulating observations of his own; and he considers Concluding Green's "richest and finest novel."


Farrelly rates Back higher than Loving. This is because he dislikes the "camera-eye" narrative technique (which he calls "a crippling distance") of the latter. The review is an interesting example of the type of response to Green's openendedness which longs for "a significant judgement."


Fry and Lee question Green's "discoverer" who, in the course of a rather hostile interview, makes some remarks about the novelist's
writing. ("I have a particular predilection for the novel where the novelist distances himself and sinks himself in his material . . . .")


Garnett's review of Party Going illuminates the structure by a comparison with ballet, such as Les Sylphides. He also illustrates the continuing response of Green's reader after he has "finished" the book: "Yet, an hour afterwards, none of us remembered the book as comic."


A review of Nothing which, while briefly considering technique, pays most attention to the comic novelist's role in modern fiction—one which Gill finds unfashionable but necessary and refreshing.


Hall's first chapter discusses Green, and the other six novelists, within the broad context of the comic novel as sub-genre, with its "mixed sense of reality." In chapter five, "Paradoxes of Pleasure-and-Pain," Hall explores Green's illustration of this "mixed sense" in his novels. A thematic analysis of Loving and Concluding stresses the alternative states of anxiety and cheerfulness in Green's plots and characters, and points out a resemblance to Sterne's delight in human eccentricity. In the final chapter, Hall returns to a broader consideration of all seven novelists and their central themes.


Hart discusses the "abnegation of authorial control" in Party Going, revealing Green's campaign to induce a fundamental uncertainty in the reader. He is the only critic to date who gives serious consideration to the effect of Green's tricks (especially with point of view) on the reader. The second half of the article discusses how correspondences and motifs are used to create patterns of meaning.


In this review of Back, Havighurst notes the comic distancing from the central character, and seems impervious to most of the magic in the novel.


Except for remarking on the difficulties Green creates for his readers, Havighurst reviews Caught and Concluding by summarizing their plots.

These slight reviews of Caught and Concluding consist almost entirely of plot summary. Hilton is an interesting illustration of the casual reader's approach to Green's complexities ("the reader must work at these books").


Howard's review of Concluding is an important study of Green's "development of the poetic process to extend the range of the novel." In her concentration on his use of form and imagery to suggest meaning, Howard is careful not to destroy "the weblike filaments" of the book. In the process, she ignores Green's splendid comic sense, but contributes a fresh view of his descriptive powers (for instance, "all the girls look like azaleas").


Howe offers an unbiased response to Loving, the first of Green's novels to be published in a new American edition. He makes a revealing comparison between this novel and Shakespeare's comedies, and stresses the complex mixture of tones throughout. "One plays with it in memory."


In this interesting article, Johnson attempts to explain "the peculiar wedding of symbolism and comedy" in the novels and claims that Party Going is "a parable of symbolic creation." While one admires his courage in tackling the status of Green's symbols (most of them "special cases" in modern fiction), it is disappointing that he restricts his discussion to one novel.


In this review of Loving, Jones defines Green's "double view" as the ability "to see his characters as they see themselves, while establishing, implicitly, a rational set of values by which to judge them." Hence, says the reviewer, a complex blend of tone is achieved and human personality portrayed "in a state of flux." Jones admires, as well, the "densely symbolic passages" and makes some interesting remarks on Nanny Swift and the children at the dovecote.


A most readable and penetrating account of Green's work which raises many important aspects usually ignored by the critics. For instance, Karl contemplates the novelist's juxtapositions of rational and irrational elements, his creation of chaos through exaggerated detail, and his consistent campaign to involve the reader: "Green
forces the reader into 'making' the novel himself." There are interesting comparisons with Chaucer, Joyce, and C. P. Snow.


Kettle studies *Party Going*, paying almost undivided attention to the social reality which Green suggests "tangentially." Kettle's bias is obvious in his concluding remarks; for instance: "Once the difficulty which the modern artist feels in coping with the central issues of a complex world is elevated into some kind of theory that defends the limitations of a minority culture as a positive virtue then the danger signal is pretty close at hand."


Knodt discusses the novels in chronological order, and in the context of five major themes: work as beneficial, the oppressiveness of authority, escape through love or communication, profound psychological experience and nature as solace. His analyses follow various critics rather closely, but his use of passages from *Pack My Bag* to elucidate colour symbolism and themes is interesting and original.


Labor's claim that "the critics have almost made a fetish of the novel's inscrutability" prefaces an energetic attempt to read "darkly terrible meanings" into the comedy of *Loving*. However ingenious his interpretation, one perceives a fundamental unease at dealing with Green's comic vision in the critic's language (the seriousness of the "social message" has been overlooked, along with "a starker, more universal theme").


A perceptive review of *Back*, which recognizes Green's unique blend of realism and symbolism, his technical affinities with Picasso and Matisse, and his habitual portrayal of solipsistic characters. Lazarus concentrates on Green's use of irony, however, to the exclusion of other features of the novel such as hallucinatory prose and suggestive dialogue.


Lazarus is disappointed with *Doting*, and, as a reader, remains unchallenged by the "unexpressed" feelings of its characters.


This book, together with *I Am My Brother*, and *The Whispering Gallery* are autobiographies which contain interesting glimpses of Green, particularly during the war, in the passages I have indicated here, and below.


A most revealing view of Green in the war years, stressing his dedication to a self-imposed régime and his artistic purity. One of his comments at this time, she reports, was: "In time of war the writer, our kind, must sink absolutely down to the bottom and remain anonymous." Lehmann rates *Living* highly, and regards *Loving* as his masterpiece. After this novel, "tenderness withdraws."


On the whole, an unsympathetic review of *Doting.* Mayberry divides modern fiction into the usual two camps; novels which render political or religious ideas (Graham Greene) and those which "render trivia with grace and skill" (Henry Green). Hence, he sees the latter's style as consisting of "unnatural disciplines" which impede "latent warmth towards basic human considerations."


The opening chapter defines the common atmosphere of "funambulism" which Melchiori finds in the writers he has chosen to discuss: "the achievement of the true artist in our age, who, like the successful acrobat, succeeds in keeping step by step, moment by moment, his balance, while being aware of the void or the turmoil round him." In "The Abstract Art of Henry Green," Melchiori discusses the novelist's "precarious equilibrium," both emotional and stylistic, throughout Green's work. This chapter contains a very sensitive treatment of style and form, although one may not always agree with the conclusions.


Phelps's article begins with a revealing comparison of Henry Green and Graham Greene, and develops into a perceptive study of the marriage, in the former, between vision and medium. Phelps sees that Green's message--the attempt of human beings to make creative contact with each other--is everywhere reflected in his manner. The article contains some imaginative asides; for example, Edith and Raunce, in *Loving,* "persuade the final sentence of the book to abet them." Phelps's treatment of *Nothing* and *Doting,* however, is abrupt and unsympathetic.


Pickrel characterizes Green's narrative stance as "the Olympian
outlook" in a Promethean age. The writer gazes down, in the tradition of Fielding, Austen and Thackeray, on characters who betray themselves by their speech and behaviour.


Prescott treats Green (along with Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Bowen and Graham Greene) with frivolity and a display of persuasion through rhetoric ("a feverish revolt against traditional cultural forms, an effete and unhealthy reaction"). The only point he makes which bears the seeds of legitimate criticism (other readers have found some of Green's dialogue too accurate to be suggestive) is destroyed by excess ("No one of its Back's characters ever says a thing worth hearing").


A careful and comprehensive review of Back. Pritchett, while he considers Loving the novelist's "high water mark," pays tribute to the seductive fantasy overlying the realism of people and places in Back. This novelist/critic was the first to point out that wartime society, rather than Charley, had "gone mad."

Pritchett's article is essentially historical, claiming that the concentration on style rather than material in one school of fiction results from "the contemporary situation." There is only a mention of Green, or any other specific novelist: "the novelist has become the historian of the crisis in civilization, whether he writes politically... or with the obliquity of those dispossessed poets, Henry Green and Miss Elizabeth Bowen."

Pritchett, V. S. "The Future of Fiction." New Writing and Daylight, 7 (1946), 77.


Quinton summarizes an essay by Michel Vinaver, the translator of Loving for the French edition. Then he comments on Vinaver's application of "the favourite slogans of literary existentialism" to Green's novel. Finally, he offers his own evaluation of Green's technique in Loving. A fascinating exercise.


It was this reviewer who coined the phrase "emotional Black Hole
of Calcutta" to describe a continuing theme of Green's novels. Reed's brief account of Loving contains some pertinent observations about style, and its effect upon the reader, particularly after he has "finished" the novel: "It is not, for example, till after one has put the book down that one realizes precisely how some of the novel's furnishings have contributed to its total effect . . . ."


An honest appraisal of Back by a "hard-headed reader" who finds enchantment, a "refreshingly distinctive style," and "a curious kind of tenderness" in the novel. Green's most impressive achievement, according to Rolo, is the blending of realism and fable, naturalism and poetry. "He is a novelist who makes considerable demands on the reader."


Ross begins by considering Edward Stokes's critical study, The Novels of Henry Green, which had just been published. He then interviews the novelist, using quotations from Stokes as a launching-pad for questions. Although Green is much more reticent here than with Terry Southern, there are interesting moments.


Appearing only a year after Stokes's book, Russell's full-length study of Green has a completely different approach. Between two preliminary chapters and a conclusion, the author discusses Green's novels separately and in nearly chronological order—perhaps a more useful arrangement for the student than Stokes's. Russell's chief contributions to Green criticism are: a penetrating study of affinities with other writers such as Kafka, Céline, Lewis Carroll and Sterne, and some imaginative interpretations of themes and characters through an analysis of symbolic elements. His reading of Concluding is particularly rewarding. About style, he has much less to say, except for an interesting comparison of Green's sentence structure with that of Doughty. Some readers may feel that Russell tends to overclassify Green (in spite of his protests to the contrary) but his opinions are always well-supported and well-expressed.


Ryf's essay treats the novels chronologically, with delicacy,
humour and understanding. Particular emphasis is placed on ambiguity in Green's work, and there is a good conclusion with some general observations on themes and method.


Schorer reviews Caught and Concluding by carefully distinguishing between the "mechanical" plot and the "true" plot. He is particularly adept at describing the atmosphere of these two novels, which he claims are "more intensely impressionistic than any of the others."


Scott's intelligent review of Doting is, in spite of its brevity, marked by a genuine understanding. Finding the novel "a little disappointing" because it is not surprising, he pays tribute to its brilliance and poetry. Green's artistry is described as "the scintillating virtuosity of the surgeon."


Some of Back's mystery and exotic flavour is lost when the novel is forcibly contained within "depth psychology." Shapiro sees Charley as the victim of an Oedipus complex, and tries to fit imagery, dialogue, and everything else, into this pattern.


Snow rebuts Green's article "The English Novel of the Future" with sarcasm and rhetoric such as "this perverse aesthetic," "artistic diffidence and decay," and so on. Profoundly unsympathetic to Green's attitudes, distrustful of what he views as affectation, and completely oblivious to the sly humour of ENF, Snow succeeds in polarizing the two schools of fiction. Green did not reply.


Southern has created a most stimulating and deftly arranged interview with Green, which manages to convey a real sense of the author's whimsical personality. Elsewhere, Green has said, "Explanation kills life. It becomes argument, and is sterile." Here he does a little explaining, albeit indirectly, and the results are invaluable.


This article is largely contained in (and superseded by) Stokes's book, The Novels of Henry Green, which was published three years later.

This book of criticism, the first to appear on Green, has a particularly fine opening chapter—a sort of aerial survey of the novels which picks out essential paradoxes and ambiguities in each. After these "Preliminaries," Stokes settles down to a careful and resourceful study of the fiction under distinct headings: characters, narrative technique, plot, symbolism, and so on. Although this book was published over fifteen years ago, there are two areas in which Stokes's work has not been improved upon: his interpretations of the colour symbolism, and his painstaking analysis of style. Although the use of statistical tables in the latter often seems an overly heavy burden to place upon a style as magical as Green's, Stokes draws some interesting and sometimes surprising conclusions.


Green reviewed this book in his article, "The Spoken Word as Written." English Talk contains a reprint of a conversation from Back (in "chapter" four, between Charley Summers and Mrs. Frazier) under the title, "London Landlady." Sutherland's preface claims that his book is the first to record how the English actually speak. Green challenged this, indicating that the artistic rendering of dialogue is not a tape-recording.


Taylor juxtaposes a study of *Doting* with passages from Green's radio talks and "The English Novel of the Future" to produce a scholarly and lucid explanation of the "catalytic" (as opposed to "definitive") novel. In the process, he makes some valuable discoveries about how structure, imagery, and symbol shape the reader's response, while at the same time they provide for freedom of interpretation.


In this discussion of *Loving* and *Concluding*, Tindall reiterates the theme of his study of Green in *The Literary Symbol*: that the symbolic elements in Green's novels set up "a reflexive relationship," suggesting meanings that elude statement. To this, the critic adds some thoughts about the "loose ends" in Green's work; for instance, "Inconclusiveness becomes a form for attempted conclusions or for the very feeling of life and our ideas of it."


Green's work provides the illustration for Tindall's third "variety" of symbolic novel: "a system of almost equal elements, cohering not by subordination to a great image or a narrative but by glancing reflection." Tindall offers readings of *Party Going* and *Loving* but makes no attempt to produce a "system" which would explain the "reflexive flickering" of symbolic elements.

Toynbee, like some other critics, approaches Green by placing him in the tradition of Flaubert, Firbank and Virginia Woolf, as opposed to "the grand tradition of moralists" to which Graham Greene belongs. Familiar as he is with Green's previous work, he indicates the artistic growth from Pack My Bag to Caught, and stresses the "perpetual intrusion of the abnormal on the normal" in the world of London at war.


Trilling defines the subtle appeal of Nothing as Green's "refusal to choose" (between the generations) which, in the end, becomes his refusal to sacrifice living for principle. She is especially perceptive about style: "His syntax is his own wild but brilliant secret."


Turner perceives a similarity between Stevens and Green which places the latter's work in a fresh and stimulating perspective. Neither artist, says Turner, works with correspondences in their symbolic presentation, hence their imagery reveals states of consciousness rather than "hidden meanings." Concentrating on Party Going and Concluding, Turner draws some interesting conclusions about the "statuesque quality" of the imagery.


In his "Introduction," Weatherhead admits to limiting his discussion to the theme of self-creation in Green's novels; aspects irrelevant to this "order" have been consciously sacrificed. The resulting full-length study is extremely readable, well-organized and, in places, highly entertaining. Weatherhead is ingenious in his moul­ding of "images of hell and analogues of the dark night of the soul" to his central theme, but in deliberately ignoring the comic spirit which is everywhere at work, he misses the complexity, the exotic blend of tones, and much of the ambiguity. One cannot accept many of Weatherhead's conclusions, because of everything that does not "fit,"
but the working out of the theory contains some fascinating points, especially about style (for instance, his discussion of the use of heroic simile and other "equivalences" in Living).


Welty's article is perhaps the most remarkable yet written about Green. Ranging through his work, she touches on most aspects of technique and themes, often capturing an entire novel with a metaphor ("Concluding is like Venus on a clear evening going down over water"). Among the many insights in her essay are inspired comparisons with Jane Austen and William Faulkner.


West provides a sketch of symbolism in Green's work which, although brief, makes some valuable comments; for instance, "in Nothing and Doting, the subtlety of the symbolism is transferred to the intonations of speech."


Wyndham makes a brief mention of Green, along with Elizabeth Bowen, Anthony Powell and Joyce Cary, who "demand an alertness, even a faculty of intuition, in their readers."

B. SELECTED SECONDARY SOURCES


_____. *To the Lighthouse.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927.