

A World
of My Own

A Dream Diary

GRAHAM GREENE



VINTAGE CANADA

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A W O R L D
O F M Y O W N

A Dream Diary



G R A H A M
G R E E N E

Alfred A. Knopf Canada

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According to the expressed wish of the author, this book is published in Britain by his great friend and publisher for many years Max Reinhardt, and in Canada by his niece and publisher Louise Dennys.
—YC

Foreword

A few days before he died, when his daughter, Caroline, and I were with him at L'Hôpital de la Providence in Vevey, Graham Greene asked me to prepare this dream diary for publication. Only a strong desire to keep a promise made to him induces me, therefore, to write a modest foreword to this posthumous book he entitled *A World of My Own*.

Graham guarded his privacy as fiercely as he respected the privacy of others. He always refused to write an autobiography—after he had ‘closed the record at the age of about twenty-seven’ with *A Sort of Life*—because, as he said, it would have inevitably involved incursions into the privacy of other people’s lives. The private world of his dreams, however, was one that he nurtured carefully, recording it almost daily in the dream diaries that he kept over the last twenty-five years.

From those several volumes, he made this small selection for public reading, choosing carefully and deliberately. The project engaged him in the last months of his life. It interested him. And one of the pleasures of this book is the pleasure that he himself clearly took in making the selection.

In this world of the subconscious and the imagination—a world *farfelu* as he used to call it—where everything intersects and gets tangled up beyond time, Graham obviously feels at ease and happy. ‘In a sense it is an autobiography,’ he says in his Introduction; and it’s true that between the secret world of dreams and the real world he lived in the divide is narrow. And the barriers have been lifted. Here he can gossip about others, or give free rein to his eagerness for adventure or his delight in the absurd. Dreaming was like taking a holiday from himself. As he confided to a friend: ‘If one can remember an entire dream, the result is a sense of entertainment sufficiently marked to give one the illusion of being catapulted into a different world. One finds oneself remote from one’s conscious preoccupations.’

I told him once that I was astonished by the clarity with which he remembered his dreams, the preciseness of detail he retained. He explained that the habit of remembering went back to the time he first kept a dream diary—when, as a boy, he underwent psychoanalysis and was required by his analyst to retell his dreams (sometimes with embarrassing results—as when he had to confess to an erotic dream about his analyst’s beautiful wife). Later, when he again began to keep a dream diary, he always had a pencil and paper at hand on his bedside table so that when he awoke from a dream, which happened on average four or five times a night, he could jot down key words that in the morning would allow him to reconstruct it. He would then transcribe it into his diary. I remember the very first diary that he had—a

large notebook of dark green leather, given to him by friends. Another was the colour of Bordeaux wine.

It is well known that Graham was always very interested in dreams, and that he relied a great deal on the role played by the subconscious in writing. He would sit down to work straightway after breakfast, writing until he had five hundred words (which in the last while he reduced to approximately two hundred). He was in the habit of then rereading, every evening before going to bed, the section of the novel or story he had written in the morning, leaving his subconscious to work during the night. Some dreams enabled him to overcome a 'blockage'; others provided him on occasion with material for short stories or even an idea for a new novel (as with *It's a Battlefield*, and *The Honorary Consul*). Sometimes, as he wrote, 'identification with a character goes so far that one may dream his dream and not one's own'—as happened during the writing of *A Burnt-Out Case*, so that he was able to attribute his own dream to his character Querry and so extricate himself from an impasse in the narrative.

The most startling aspect of his dreams was their warning nature. One day, I remember, he appeared looking terribly upset. When I enquired after the reason for that distress, he replied: 'I dreamt of a catastrophe. I hope nothing has happened to one of my family or a close friend.' A few hours later we heard on the radio that a plane had crashed into the sea between Corsica and Nice, only a few miles away from his flat in Antibes, killing, I believe, all on board. One of the passengers on the flight was General Cogny, whom Graham knew well from his days in Vietnam.

Examples of that kind are numerous. Visions of panic and distress, visions of happiness—the impressions left in his mind by a dream were so vivid, so clear in every detail, that they would sometimes pursue him and influence his mood for hours after he awakened.

Today, remembering, I can't help thinking about a persistent dream of his which, like a kind of riddle, now seems to have sheltered a personal message. In *A Sort of Life* he refers to a series of dreams which recurred over the years after the death of his father in 1943, and he writes: 'In them my father was always shut away in hospital out of touch with his wife and children—though sometimes he returned home on a visit, a silent solitary man, not really cured, who would have to go back again into exile. The dreams remain vivid even today, so that sometimes it is an effort for me to realize that there was no hospital, no separation and that he lived with my mother till he died.' His unhappiness at these frequent returns to the hospital is perhaps just coincidence, but it is difficult not to see in the dreams a premonition of what he himself would have to endure, nearly half a century later, at the end of his life—his own enforced exiles in hospital, which he suffered from so much.

In this last book of his, he gives us a glimpse of the strenuous inner life, his elusive source of creativity, that lay beyond that door which he always kept firmly closed, for fear an intruder might destroy 'the pattern in the carpet'. As a kind of farewell, Graham opens a door for us on the world of his own.

Graham—

In *The Power and the Glory* you wrote: ‘The glittering worlds lay there in space like a promise; the world was not the universe. Somewhere Christ might not have died.’

If such a place exists, you certainly have found it.

*Yvonne Cloetta
Vevey, Switzerland
October 1991*

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*The waking have one world in common,
but the sleeping turn aside each
into a world of his own.*

HERACLITUS OF EPHEBUS

500 BC

Introduction

It can be a comfort sometimes to know that there is a world which is purely one's own—the experience in that world, of travel, danger, happiness, is shared with no one else. There are no witnesses. No libel actions. The characters I meet there have no memory of meeting me, no journalist or would-be biographer can check my account with another's. I can hardly be prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act for any incident connected with the security services. I *have* spoken with Khrushchev at a dinner party, I *have* been sent by the Secret Service to murder Goebbels. I am not lying—and yet, of all the witnesses who share these scenes with me, there is not one who can claim from his personal knowledge that what I describe is untrue.

I decided to choose, out of a diary of more than eight hundred pages, begun in 1965 and ended in 1989, selected scenes from My Own World. In a sense it is an autobiography, beginning with Happiness and ending with Death, of a rather bizarre life during the last third of a century (the wars described here belong to the sixties, not the forties)—but no biographer will care to make use of it, even though I may sometimes include a date when I want to give for my own satisfaction the day and the year when an unusual event or an unusual meeting took place.

For that reason I thought at first of beginning with my unexpected encounter with Henry James on a river boat in Bolivia in the spring of 1988. However, my plan to begin with this strange episode changed when in January 1989 I experienced for the first time, in all the records which I have kept of this private world for more than twenty years, happiness. Great names are a commonplace in this World of My Own, but real meaningless and inexplicable happiness—this is the only experience of it I have recorded.

It has often been suggested that opium helps to open the closed door of this World, but I have no evidence for this. In the fifties, when I was smoking opium in Vietnam and Malaya, I was busy keeping a diary of violent events in the Common World, but I have in my memory only one remarkable happening in the World of My Own, remarkable because it goes so far back in time—in fact to the year 1 AD.

I was living then not far from Bethlehem, and I decided to walk down to that small town to visit a brothel I knew there, carrying a gold coin with which to pay the girl whom I would choose. At the approach to the town I saw a strange sight: a group of men in Eastern clothes who were bowing and offering gifts. To what? To a blank wall. There was no one there to receive their gifts or return their salutation. I stood quite a while watching this curious scene and then something—I don't know what—impelled me to throw

my gold coin at the wall and turn away.

Time in the World of One's Own can move slowly or it can move very rapidly. In this case the centuries passed by me like a flash and I found myself lying on my bed reading in the New Testament a story of how some Eastern kings came to a stable in Bethlehem, and I realized that this was what I had seen. My first thought was: 'Well, I went to Bethlehem to give that gold coin to a woman and it seems that I did in fact give it to a woman, even though all I saw was a blank wall.'

There is an imaginative side to the World of One's Own quite distinct from that of the Common World. Robert Louis Stevenson told an interviewer about the strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde: 'On one occasion I was very hard up for money and I felt I had to do something. I thought and thought, and tried hard to find a subject to write about. At night I dreamt the story, it practically came to me as a gift, and what makes it appear more odd is that I was quite in the habit of dreaming stories. Thus, not long ago, I dreamt the story of "Olalla", and I have at the present moment two unwritten stories I likewise dreamt.'

'Olalla' is an unfairly neglected story of Stevenson's and in it there is a kind of underground resemblance to Dr Jekyll. It is a story which belongs quite definitely to the World of His Own rather than to Spain, where the scene is supposed to be set, just as in Dr Jekyll's London we seem to be moving in the streets of Edinburgh or the streets of a city in Stevenson's own private world.

The strange thing is that the author, when he is in the Common World, feels a stranger in the World of His Own, and Stevenson was lost and puzzled by his own story. He wrote a letter: 'The trouble with "Olalla" is that it somehow sounds false ... the odd problem is: what makes a story true? "Markheim" is true; "Olalla" false, and I don't know why.' He even went so far, in the case of Dr Jekyll, as to throw the first draft into the fire.

A few of my short stories have been drawn from memories of the World of My Own. In 'Dream of a Strange Land' I recorded my experience in that World when I was a leper seeking treatment in Sweden. Only the sound of a shot with which the printed tale ends has been added. In another story, 'The Root of All Evil', laid in Germany far back in the nineteenth century, I changed nothing after I woke, with a smile of amusement, from My Own World to the Common World.

There is another side to what we call dreams, very interestingly exposed in J.W. Dunne's *Experiment with Time*. They contain scraps of the future as well as of the past. I have already written of how at the age of seven I dreamed of a shipwreck on the night the *Titanic* went down, and again nine years later I witnessed another disastrous shipwreck in the Irish Sea. As I look through the long record of my dreams I note time and again incidents of the Common World that have occurred a few days after the dream. They are too trivial to include here, but I am convinced that Dunne was right.

The strangeness of my completely unexpected meeting with Henry James in My Own World at least seems worthy to take precedence in the second

chapter, to which I have given the title 'Some Famous Writers I Have Known'. Unlike the biographer, I do not find it necessary to plod along in the footsteps of the years, and my earlier meeting with Pope John Paul II in a hotel bedroom seems unimportant compared with my more recent meeting with Henry James. (I am sure no good would have come to either the Pope or myself if I had woken him up. We were not made to like each other.)

The erotic side of life may seem oddly absent from this record but I do not wish to involve those whom I have loved in this World of My Own, even though I am powerless to censor biographers and journalists who write of them in the Common World. Another thing lacking is nightmare. Wars and danger are here, but nothing as bad as the witch who used to haunt a passage on the way to the nursery at home when I was a child until at last I turned and faced her and she disappeared for ever. I have known fear often enough in Haiti and Vietnam in My Own World, but never terror, never nightmare. Perhaps there has always been an element of adventure and a kind of pleasure in my fear, both in the Common World and in the World of My Own.

I

Happiness

It was 1965. I had decided to do a little Liberal canvassing in a forthcoming by-election and I had chosen a country town called Horden. Apparently one couldn't leave from the main station at Victoria, but by a branch line, the Horden line, which had its own entrance. I gathered that it was a very old and very interesting line and so it proved.

The first train to leave consisted of pretty carriages which must have dated back more than a hundred years, but this train didn't go to Horden. The second train was bound there, but it was very crowded. I was much struck by the kindness and jollity of the passengers, who welcomed me and made room for me in a very packed carriage. They all wore strange clothes—Edwardian or Victorian—and I was fascinated by the stations we passed. On one wide platform children were playing with scarlet balloons; another station was built like a ruined Greek temple; at one point the track narrowed and the train went through a kind of tunnel made with mattresses.

I had never in my life felt such a sensation of happiness. Lights were beginning to come out in the quaint houses which we passed, and I longed to return with the woman I loved at just this hour of the evening.

The train drew up by a little antique shop and I heard a passenger say, 'You see, all the men are drinking or playing cards.'

A young couple (the girl pretty but quite unerotic and her husband a simple good-looking man with curly hair and an open face) became almost instantaneously like old friends. I said, 'I've lived in London fifty years and yet I've never heard before of the Horden line. I could make this journey every day and not be tired of it.'

The girl replied, 'The only thing is—don't let them put you up in a hostel if you stay the night.'

'Aren't there hotels?'

'They are just as bad.'

I had decided to do nothing about my canvassing. All I longed for was to see Horden. I had planned to be back in London for dinner, but all the same I enquired about a late train when I got out. I was a little apprehensive that it might have already left and I would find myself staying in a disagreeable hostel. However all was well, there was a late train at 10.25.

The girl took my hand and told me she would show me the town. I said, 'First the two of you will have a drink with me.' I could see the bars were full of laughing people. 'You are not teetotallers?' I asked.

'No,' the girl said.

'Then you choose the nicest pub.'

All the time there stayed with me that sense of inexplicable happiness. If only I could go back one day to the little town of Horden which exists in My Own World, but not in the world I share.

II

Some Famous Writers

I Have Known

An odd thing about this World of My Own is that it contains no living writers. It seems that a writer whom I have the pleasure of knowing must die before he enters my secret world.

Henry James

On April 28, 1988, I found myself on a most disagreeable river trip to Bogotá in the company of Henry James. The boat left after midnight and we had to find our way along the quay in complete darkness, carrying our hand baggage. I would have turned back if it had not been for the determination of the great author, and my admiration for his work.

What made things worse was the loud voice of an official—invisible in the darkness—who was continually shouting threats. ‘Anyone who tries to come on board without a ticket will be fined one thousand dollars.’ In the crowd pushing to get onto the boat it was impossible even to show our tickets.

There was no place to sit—we just managed to squeeze ourselves into a corridor tightly packed, mainly by women—but I heard no complaint from Henry James. At some place on the river the boat stopped for a few minutes and a few passengers got off. Surely, I urged James, we could take the opportunity and escape too, but no, James wouldn’t hear of it. We must go on to the bitter end. ‘For scientific reasons,’ he told me.

Robert Graves

One night I had a happy encounter by the roadside with Robert Graves, who looked as young as when I had known him in the Common World when he lived near Oxford in 1923. He was pleased to see me again and recalled a chance meeting we had once had on the Italian frontier, which I had forgotten. I told him how much I had always admired his poems, even in the twenties, and how I still treasured a copy of his first poems, *Over the Brazier*.

‘Do you remember,’ I asked him, ‘my own awful book of verse, *Babbling April*, about which you were kind in the case of one poem?’ I teasingly added, ‘Now the book is fetching even a higher price at auction than your own first

book.’

Jean Cocteau

In November 1983 I met Jean Cocteau at a party and was pleasantly surprised. As I told him frankly, I expected to find his eyes cold, but they were understanding, even affectionate. His boyfriend turned up a little later dead drunk.

Ford Madox Ford

Talking to Ford Madox Ford I wanted to express my admiration for one of his books, which concerned the Spanish Civil War. He said he had never written such a book. Searching in vain for the title, I went to my bookshelves to find a book of his which might list the other. I found only two volumes in the Bodley Head edition—one a book of essays which I didn’t know at all. His other titles were not given. Suddenly (several times I had begun to say *For Whom the Bell ...* but checked myself) the title came to me—*Some Do Not*.

We went for a very pretty country walk together. He told me of a legend that the Holy Virgin, standing on a hill, had bent down and picked out of the river we were passing a man who was drowning seven miles away from her.

‘But the land is quite flat,’ I said.

‘Not if you look closer. It slopes down past that old millhouse to the lock.’ People had spoken to me of the woman who kept the lock—a wonderful cook with a great interest in local history, which she tried to pass on to her sons.

We began to cross a field—nervously on my part, because it contained one large bull and a young one that showed itself too interested in our movements. I edged back on the road and, looking round, I saw the young bull had mounted on Ford’s shoulders. He didn’t seem disturbed.

I walked on to the lock to wait for him. There was a delicious smell of cooking and the woman was talking to a neighbour. The lock was just at the entrance to a small town. Ford joined me. The woman said she recommended soup and fish. We said we would go into the town and buy a bottle of wine. She offered to send her son, who was dressed in a sort of smock like an old-time agricultural labourer, but we insisted on going. As we went Ford said to me, ‘Have you noticed that men don’t like wearing anything that comes below the knee?’

T.S. Eliot

I was working one day for a poetry competition and had written one line—‘Beauty makes crime noble’—when I was interrupted by a criticism flung at me from behind by T.S. Eliot. ‘What does that mean? How can crime be noble?’ He had, I noticed, grown a moustache.

W.H. Auden and Evelyn Waugh

Rather strange circumstances brought the two writers together. I had been part of a group who had managed to beat a gang of guerrillas, but the chief of the gang, Wystan Auden, had escaped. He was hidden somewhere in the brushwood which we were carefully searching. I had armed myself with a kitchen knife, for he was the most dangerous of our enemies. Suddenly he broke cover and dashed into a nearby house. He had been shot by Evelyn Waugh and was bleeding from his wounds.

I followed him and stuck my kitchen knife into his side, but he seemed unhurt by my blow and began a literary discussion of which, strangely enough, I can remember nothing.

Next night I found myself at a party, again with Auden, and I do remember our conversation then. I expressed my preference for living in England rather than in the United States because English literature was far richer than American. Shakespeare made all other writers into dwarfs and there could be no jealousy among dwarfs. American literature, having no such giant, gave room for jealousy.

Auden replied that all the same he was content in America. Although he was no scientist, he held a position in the science faculty of the university. He gave an impression of lazy well-being, tilted back in his chair.

I said, 'It would be fun if you could discover one small scientific principle so that we could speak of "The Auden Digit".'

Our hostess now left us alone, saying, 'Help yourselves to drinks.' We both agreed that the larger the bottle of whisky, the easier it was to welcome her invitation.

D.H. Lawrence

It was the Duke of Marlborough who introduced me to D.H. Lawrence. I found him younger and better groomed than I had expected. He was quite friendly towards my work.

Sartre

I remember having a discussion with Sartre. I had made notes of various questions to ask him, and I tried to be very precise. I apologized for the badness of my French, which prevented me from being as precise as I wanted to be, and Sartre said kindly, 'You speak French very well, but,' he added, 'I don't understand a word you say.'

Then he became amiable and referred to a book of mine which Robert Laffont had published in France, the English title being *The Origin of Brighton Rock*. It was a reproduction of a childish manuscript in brown ink—a story with animal characters—and it was illustrated by Beatrix Potter. Sartre very

much admired her drawings, but he said nothing of my writing.

Solzhenitsyn

I met Solzhenitsyn one day in 1976, with another man who was speaking of a new magazine he was planning, and I suggested he should ask Solzhenitsyn to contribute to the first six numbers. He replied very insultingly that he couldn't bear Solzhenitsyn's small eyes and his high hypocritical moral tone.

On another occasion I was giving a party for Solzhenitsyn, who seemed to be known more as a painter than as a novelist, in my apartment in Moscow, which was crowded with pictures even along the passages. He was late and I had my doubts whether he would be allowed to come. I had left the door ajar to show that we were not afraid. I wondered whether he would enjoy his visit because there were so many twittering ladies around.

A stocky man in a beard whom I recognized as a KGB type arrived at the door and I thought we were in for trouble, but then I saw that Solzhenitsyn was with him, very badly dressed. The bearded man had some children with him and, having delivered the painter, he turned to go downstairs. I ran after him, thinking it was politic, and asked him if he would like a cup of tea. He said no, but if his children could have some caramels.... I took them from a bag which I had bought a few days earlier for my grandchildren. Suddenly he began to show an interest in the pictures. 'They are so lovely,' he said, and for a moment I thought he was going to weep with longing and nostalgia. I took him along the passage and showed him more. I was looking for a large painting of Solzhenitsyn's to show him what a great painter his prisoner was, but it had mysteriously vanished—I could find only a small one. I deliberately did not take him into a room which contained only Art Nouveau.

Edgar Wallace

I met Edgar Wallace only once, at a party, and he told me he preferred his Australian stories but they were not a success because they offended English readers. I asked him about his hardback rights and he said that his publisher, Collins, was putting them up to auction. As we left the party together he asked me jokingly if I was responsible for the story going around that he had had sexual relations with E.M. Forster. I denied it and said I thought the true story concerned his relations with Hamish Hamilton.