

**(IN) THE EYES OF THE SERPENT: PERCEPTIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF THE MEXICAN IN GRAHAM GREENE**

**N(OS) OLHOS DA SERPENTE: PERCEPÇÕES E REPRESENTAÇÕES DO MEXICANO EM GRAHAM GREENE**

Hális Alves do Nascimento França<sup>1</sup>

Luis Alfredo Fernandes de Assis<sup>2</sup>

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte

**ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to present an analysis of the works “The Lawless Roads” (1939) and “The Power and the Glory” (1940) by Graham Greene from the perspective of perceptions and representations of the Mexican people constructed by the author. In order to do so, this paper is grounded on the theoretical framework of post-colonial literary criticism and travel literature, specially regarding topics on identity, otherness and hybridism. Moreover, it presents a brief observation on the perception and representation of the Mexicans by Greene, particularly regarding the role of the eyes of this people, with the purpose of outlining his personal universalizing point of view about the native and how he characterizes the Mexicans from a Eurocentric and colonial perspective. This research adopts a qualitative, interpretative and documental methodology in the analysis and also points towards the prevalence of perceptions and representations that have established a hostile gaze over the Mexican natives.

**KEYWORDS:** Perceptions. Representations. Graham Greene. Travel narratives.

**RESUMO**

Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar uma análise considerando as obras "The Lawless Roads" (1939) e "The Power and the Glory" (1940) de Graham Greene a partir de percepções e representações do povo mexicano feitas pelo autor. Para isso, o trabalho se fundamenta em teorias da crítica literária pós-colonial e da narrativa de viagens, especialmente sobre temas de identidade, alteridade e hibridismo, para fazer uma breve observação sobre a percepção e representação dos mexicanos por Greene, com destaque para o papel dos olhos dos mexicanos, a fim de retratar seu ponto de vista pessoal universalizante do nativo e fazer um recorte de como realiza essa caracterização a partir de uma perspectiva eurocêntrica e colonial. O estudo adota uma metodologia qualitativa, interpretativa e documental para a análise proposta e aponta para a prevalência de percepções e representações dos mexicanos que evidenciam um olhar hostil sobre nativos do México.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Percepção. Representação. Graham Greene. Narrativas de viagem.

---

<sup>1</sup> Doctoral student in Language Studies (PPgEL/UFRN) and undergraduate student in English Language and Literatures (UFRN). E-mail: halisalves.uni@gmail.com.

<sup>2</sup> Professor at the Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures (DILEM/UFRN) and Ph.D. in Luso-Brazilian Literature (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). E-mail: luisalfredoassis@gmail.com.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to present some evidence of how Graham Greene perceives and represents the image of the Mexicans throughout his works “The Lawless Roads” and “The Power and the Glory.” Though having two distinct purposes, the context of the writing of both works was the same: a trip that Greene took to Mexico, in the late 1930s, following a few personal hardships in his homeland. Greene went through a personal pilgrimage in Mexico, in the 1930s, visiting locations of importance to the Catholic faith, even though the country was in the middle of a great political upheaval, followed by the near outlawing of the Church and its rituals and priests.

As a result of his trip to Mexico, Greene produced the two above-mentioned books: one as a travel journal, and the other, as a novel. In both, evidently, the Mexicans, as a primary presence, plays a vital role, and are represented as socio-psychological constructs in Greene’s own perception of that people. He does not make contact with just one or two Mexicans, but with many, at different times and places. His perception, however, has changed very little throughout his trip. In “The Lawless Roads,” Greene’s hatred for the people and for the land is more than palpable, and sometimes plainly stated. In “The Power and the Glory,” his view seems a bit more veiled and entwined with the perspective given by the narrator, who borrows his own point of view from Greene himself in several passages, which is perfectly natural, given the circumstances of the writing of the novel.

One detail that brings to light Greene’s position as a Eurocentric and colonial observer (could it be different?) is, however, the eyes. As poetic or dramatic as it may be, the eyes of the Mexican people are always present in Greene’s representation of the natives. He describes them in perpetual brownish colors, at times lazy, at times astute, sullen, or petulant. This persistence on the characterization of the Mexican eyes is recurrent, and followed by remarks on their culture or biology that are less than flattering. The understanding of the perception/representation of the Mexicans’ eyes is the concern of this work as a way of addressing questions from post-colonial criticism applied to travel literature.

### 1 Theoretical grounds and object of analysis

#### 1.1 On the narrative of the “other” in post-colonial criticism and travel literature

The field of post-colonial criticism has been developing with great strength ever since the late 20th and early 21st centuries, following the growing change in the sociopolitical scenario, specially after the long overdue decolonization process led by the United Nations policymaking groups. This, consequently, led to a number of revisions in world history, politics and literature, the latter having witnessed the undermining of universalist claims that were once made by liberal humanist critics (BARRY, 2009, p. 185). Such an understanding, or better, an *effort*, towards the universalization of Eurocentric values had been so constitutive of literary criticism so far that the need for deconstruction became urgent. It had been high time to recover marginalized narratives from the borders of the presumed “universalist” outlooks on perspectives that escaped the Western-centered view of the world, or, how Appiah puts it, “ruthless cosmopolitanism” (APPIAH, 2005, p. 220-233).

Theorists and scholars have tackled at several occasions the entity of the “other” in the rebuilding of identity in the core of the postcolonial literary studies due to the growing number of perspectives that challenge the role played by the narrative of the colonialist in the identity of the colonized, where we see that much of what was told and retold has been both deconstructed and reconstructed in order to account for the role of the individuals who were objectified, stereotyped

and dehumanized in such endeavor. This effort has been gathered around a myriad of ideas that involve the notion of cultural identity, otherness and hybridization, helping to shape the order of post-colonial studies in recent years (SELDEN; WIDDOWSON; BROOKER, 2005, p. 221-239; BARRY, 2009, p. 184-195).

Within this tendency of perceiving pre-20th century literature, this work aims to expose the ever-shifting boundaries of travel literature, which for centuries has been associated with traveling elites, exploration/exploitation features, and the discovery of lands and their countless peoples. We now see what the post-colonial and travel literature studies thereby have intertwined and propagated, and we are calling for a renewed take on the diaries, reports, and journals that make up for the bulk of the traveling writers throughout literary history. Moreover, we come to acknowledge and understand one of the defining characteristics of postcolonial criticism much alike Barry (2009), who conveys that one of its capital objectives is to reject the taint of colonial crust that covers entire nations and bring awareness regarding several representations of the non-European, either by exoticizing or demoralizing the “other” (BARRY, 2009, p. 187). That, of course, is followed by further aspects of postcolonial criticism, such as linguistic awareness, identity and hybridization, and stressful cross-cultural interactions (BARRY, 2009, 188-189).

Developing it further, we may also pursue such a notion by mentioning several postcolonial theories brought by Selden, Widdowson and Brooker (2005), where we may find how an awareness towards power relations between the Western and “Third World” cultures was of an importance in order to understand, under imperialistic restraints, the marginalization and exclusion of non-Western traditions, cultural backgrounds and expressions (SELDEN; WIDDOWSON; BROOKER, 2005, p. 221-222). Said, Spivak and Bhabha are some of the critics included by the authors in their effort to consolidate postcolonial criticism in our given context of 20th century reconstruction of the past.

Many are the aspects we could properly look upon, so rich is the environment in which the postcolonial criticism stirs and moves up to this day. We will, however, subscribe to a specific feature of such studies, which involves the dynamics of identity in postcolonial literature and their specificities. By undertaking the notion of identity, we favor the understanding of what Thiong’o once name *cultural bomb*, about which he states: “[t]he effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (THIONG’O, 1987, p. 3). Moreover, we aim to adopt Appiah’s approach on the concept of identity, which encloses the idea that “identity” in itself is a sensible construct always in interaction with facts outside of oneself, in a dialogical constitution of being that unfolds according to several different articulated conceptions, such as those from religion, society, school and state (APPIAH, 2005, p. 18, 21). In that sense, we may subscribe to the thought that places identity at the heart of human life (APPIAH, 2005, p. 26).

It is made clear, then, that in order to defuse such an imperialistic device, it is paramount to put up more complex lenses through which we might scrutinize the organic consequences of centuries of colonialist supremacy. Furthermore, it is within such perspective that we endeavor to explore the afore-mentioned expressions of otherness and identity in works of travel literature and connected narratives.

Whereas being pointless to retell the history of travel literature and how it came to constitute an entire genre in its own right throughout the centuries (PRATT, 1992; HULME; YOUNGS, 2002), it is also important to address the specifics in which it relates to the concepts of identity and otherness. Following the words of Hulme and Youngs (2002), it is possible to infer that travel writing is inherently built on the centrality of the self, a concern with empirical detail, and a movement through time and place (HULME; YOUNGS, 2002, p. 6). By being essentially connected

to the self, it is pertinent to mention that the self may only be so in relation to “an other,” the reason why the notion of otherness is so viscerally bound to the notion of the self, and, hence, of identities.

Considering such an understanding, in this article we are set to pursue the role of otherness in the context of travel writing, and more specifically, on how Graham Greene perceives and represents the “Mexican other” throughout his experience, point of view and memory as we explore “Roads” and “Glory.”

## 1.2 Regarding Graham Greene: “The Lawless Roads” (1939) and “The Power and the Glory” (1940)

Most of Greene’s fiction is based on an artistic quest through his traveling experiences. His journey to Mexico (described in his autobiographical narrative “The Lawless Roads”), by strengthening his belief in a secular “civilization of hate” (the socialist government in Mexico) and the necessity of learning the lesson of God’s love, stimulated one of his most popular and profound Catholic novels: “The Power and the Glory.” While in “Roads,” the first-person narrator, and main “character,” is Greene himself, a journalist who undertakes travels to foreign lands in search of meaningful experiences and flight from boredom, and has a fascination with Catholicism, in “Glory,” we read the story through the eyes of an unnamed renegade Mexican “whiskey priest,” who struggles to survive in a dangerous and violent military state and goes through a sort of penitence because of his deeds in the past. This failed priest is caught between the love of God and the love of individuals. Since he cannot solve this dilemma, his only way out is through death. In “Roads,” Greene goes through religious and moral conflicts as well, but before leaving back to London, despite the big gap between the Catholicism of the Mexican Indians and that of the Oxford-educated English convert, he acknowledges a community with them and realizes that his faith in God had increased after his experience during his journey in Mexico.

In “Roads,” Greene, feeling homesick at times, plays off memories of England and his own experiences against the realities of Mexico. “Glory” is about a Mexican in his home country, from which he cannot move away, presenting to the readers a sense of claustrophobic confinement. Although having been written in two types of genres, non-fiction and fiction, both “Roads” and “Glory” are religious narratives about Mexico, a place which was for him a country to die in and leave the ruins behind, yet the Catholicism of the people, in the face of horrific difficulties, was something positive that Greene clung to. The difference is that in the first book, the author is the central character who reports with extreme realism the journey that leads him to a greater self-awareness at the end, and also takes the reader on that journey, whereas in “Glory,” one of the main characters is a fictionalized priest who drinks a lot and isolates himself on purpose and struggles daily to follow his mission, ultimately at the cost of his own life as one can see him as an allegorical figure who stands completely devoted to his mission, very much aware of his unworthiness: virtue v. vice and pride.

Travel writing is produced by someone who writes about their own culture or society, and it gives this person the *authority* to speak; therefore, all travel writing is a type of autobiography. “Roads” is a Modernist text of documentary travel writing in which Greene narrates his self-reflection and perspectives on Mexican culture and society through literary techniques. According to Susan Bassnett, “[m]any travel writers, men and women, have reinvented themselves in similar ways, always claiming to be writing in a spirit of ‘authenticity’ yet fictionalising their experiences by writing themselves as a character into the account of their travels” (BASSNETT, 2002, p. 235). The scenes and some of the characters fictionalized in “Glory” originated from what Greene witnessed in

Mexico during the final process of persecution of the Catholic Church. The idea for the plot of the novel was of the religious quality of a martyr in order to defend his devotion to Catholicism.

The framing of both of Greene's works under the epithet of travel literature is of no doubt. Certainly, there is enough evidence that situates the said narratives in a historical context which Helen Carr associates with Modernism and travel, comprising the period from 1880 to 1940 (CARR, 2002, p. 70). As Carr emphasizes, the Westernized world saw several improvements in transportation, centered in the figure of the British Empire as well as in the phenomenon of mass migrations in the late nineteenth century, when the British Empire had reached its peak, whilst being supported in its views by a number of accomplice writings from travelers of the Crown. When speaking of that day and age, Carr even mentions Greene's "Journey Without Maps" (1936), which in a way corroborates our positioning of Greene within the genre.

More specifically, later in the chapter, Carr comments on a particular feature of the travel writing within the assumed period, by referring to the use of *animal imagery* to describe the *savage* others. Though in the context of the reference she refers to, its use updated to include "hapless American tourists," we may easily retrocede in time to reflect on its use on the exotic "other," the mysterious figures from wild lands, rich and sensual, dangerous and unknown. The concept of animal imagery will be recovered in further sections of this analysis with the purpose of retrieving Greene's depictions of the Mexicans.

"Roads" and "Glory," however, also turn to other features detected in travel literature, which are better devised a few years later, according to Hulme (2002, p. 87-1012). In his comments, there seemed to be a growing interest in traveling for the writing itself, despite the adversities and, in a way, as a form of quasi-spiritual asceticism, which is compatible to Greene's writing of the works we presently studied, when he traveled in order to observe Mexico's political impact on the Catholic faith and practice, and writes upon his annotations on the subject afterwards.

The above mentioned works are described as follows by Bengonzi (2006, p. 103):

In spring 1938, while *Brighton Rock* was still in the press, Greene went to Mexico. He had been commissioned by a publisher to write a book on the state of the Catholic Church in that country, where for several years it had been persecuted by a fiercely anti-religious government. He spent some weeks travelling in the remoter regions, often in great discomfort, and produced two of his best books. *The Lawless Roads*, the one he had been commissioned to write, is as much an autobiographical exploration as a survey of conditions in the country, while *The Power and the Glory* is one of his most popular novels, and at the same time one of the most profound.

As objectively put by Bengonzi, this is the general background for "Roads" and "Glory." Whilst "Roads" invites the reader to an arid, challenging exploration of the Mexican countryside, with all their convoluted political complexities and Catholic persecution, it is riddled with Greene's several perspectives over the land, the people and the culture. In a number of occasions, it arguably betrays his distrust, fear, and even contempt for all that he had seen, heard or felt. His comments are, at times, pervaded by his acute sense of the "other," and by "other" we mean the "non-Westernized other," in the sense that, even though Mexicans belong to the New World, it were as if they nonetheless belonged to an entirely different category, something much more like an alien, due to their duplicitous character: Western through mimicry and indigenous by birth and soul. His spiritual dwellings, where he muses, once and a while, on the nature of his faith, the strength of his beliefs, and what it means to be a Catholic after all also eventually pinpoint the book.

“Glory,” moreover, yields a somewhat similar understanding, since it is also a byproduct of Greene’s enterprise in Mexico. Following the mishaps of a protagonist that identifies with the literary trope of the *whiskey priest*, the novel follows the character’s steps into a Mexican environment that reeks of utter poverty, violence, and of an impending sense of apathy. The colorful approach to the depiction of the land also entwined several representations of the Mexicans that need to be reflected upon: while the narrator is not Greene himself, as in “Roads,” the author makes himself visible by slips of conscience that may be identified in the tone, perception, and point of view of the priest. Further developments on this perspective will be showed as evidence of this in the next section.

## **2 (In) The eyes of the serpent: perception and representation of the mexican in graham greene**

According to what we have discussed regarding the position of Greene within the genre of travel literature, we focus further on the perception and representation mechanics regarding the “other,” in the eyes, that is, feeling, memory and point of view, of the author towards the Mexicans. Once we perceive Greene in the light of the imperialistic, Eurocentric background he bears, several standings he adopts towards the Mexican people may be more clearly understood and examined. That is the reason, not devoid of poetic bravado, why we have chosen to address him as a figure of the ex-colonizer, as the serpent (which may also recall the deity of Quetzacoatl in Aztec mythology).

Based upon such reflection, there should be firstly a contemplation of the “self,” and, in that case, a contemplation also of the colonial spirit, as well as the source of its perspective and the very matter of Greene’s perceptions. From his position, in “Roads,” we identify a sort of propensity of thinking best of his fellow European descendants, to whom he will respond with an inclination to liking and agreeableness. On such a stance, we can exemplify as follows:

A Scotswoman gave Sunday hospitality over the store she’d run for many years now, ever since she’d lost her farm in one of the revolutions. Independent, outspoken, Protestant, she was a pillar of common sense among wild, shifting fanaticisms (GREENE, 1939, p. 46).

Another passage of the narrative describes Greene’s ideas about the woman:

Dr. Fitzpatrick was an elderly Scotsman who had never been out of Mexico – not even to the States. [...] But Dr. Fitzpatrick was saved from complete absorption by an immense family pride (GREENE, 1939, p. 145-146).

In such cases, Greene depicts the Scotswoman with more fine qualifications than he ever did, to the best of our recollection, with Mexicans: independent, outspoken, Protestant (which in itself is a curious quality from his Catholic point of view), and a pillar of common sense. She is then perceived as an island of good humanity amidst chaos, while coincidentally being British, much like as if she held a relieving outpost for the civilization. In addition, we meet another Scot, that being Dr. Fitzpatrick, who in his turn had never set foot in his motherland (was it ever truly his?). By using this tone, Greene seems to betray himself when he says: “Dr. Fitzpatrick was saved from complete absorption” (GREENE, 1939, p. 146), as if ample integration with the place in which he was actually living was something to be saved from, and by considering that the so evaluated family pride was something to be cherished. This lends some force to the argument that Greene’s position as an observer was held as a superior benchmark in relation to the colonized.

Later in the book, we come across another interesting exemplification of such a posture:

Through an open door in one of the little houses I came suddenly on a tall tragic woman with hollow handsome features and a strange twisted mouth – like an expression of agony – talking rapidly in Spanish. [...] She sent her daughters with me – two thin little blonde girls of fourteen and eleven, startlingly beautiful in a land where you grow weary of black and oily hair and brown sentimental eyes (GREENE, 1939, p. 189).

In this excerpt, we are presented to a character described as a “tall tragic woman.” We do not know her racial origins, but of her daughters he describes: “two thin little *blonde* girls” (emphasis added). This hint about who their mother might be gives away Greene’s perception of both Mexicans and non-Mexicans in the following statement: “startlingly beautiful in a land where you grow weary of black and oily hair and brown sentimental eyes.”

If we come to dwell a bit deeper in the implications of the excerpt, we may see clearly that Greene has put forward a comparison that goes both ways: he praises the beauty of the little blonde girls due to his weariness of the appearance of the Mexicans. The kind of qualities he values the most seems to be evident, as he does not deign Mexicans with positive aspects in this case (or hardly any at all, all things considered). One might argue that “sentimental” might seem to lean more towards a positive quality, but in the light of what we are currently examining, we will see that “sentimental” in Greene’s depiction of the Mexicans is less related to empathy or sensitivity, and more to unrefined emotional response to their environment, or the way in which one may act by instinct under the sheer force of one’s primeval feelings.

Later in “Roads,” this notion of colonial moral superiority is retrieved in the context of the author’s explanation of the legend of Guadalupe, according to which Our Lady appeared to a native Mexican and thus raised to divine status within the Catholic faith of the country. A certain Señora B., who at some point in the narrative guides Greene, thinks that the vision was rather doubtful, regardless of what happened or not, but because of *who* had actually witnessed the deed: “She, for one, would have been more than ready to accept the vision if it had come to the conqueror and not to the peasant, to the grown mind and not to the child’s” (GREENE, 1939, p. 107).

In this quote, we observe that Señora B. holds the idea that the conqueror is more “dignified” to have such an epiphany-like vision, not the peasant. And why would that be? Because the conqueror is entitled to such a position, since he is of a “grown mind,” in opposition to the peasant, whose mind is that of a “child.” That metaphor is compatible to what we will see about Greene’s perception and representation of the Mexican people later on, where we may devise the eye of the conqueror upon the conquered, the gaze of the civilized over the uncivilized, which will further justify the need of taming the wild intense identities shared by those who were colonized.

The sympathy for the conqueror himself over the past Mexican natives is perceived in the following example:

[At Mixtec ruins in Mitla] “On some walls are the remains of fresco work, like illustrations to a hideous Wells romance: all gas-masks, tanks, and guns of a yet uninvented horror, a mechanistic world. With whatever ferocity the Conquistadores fought, the faith they brought with them [...] was more human than this” (GREENE, 1939, p. 254).

Additionally, we may offer a closure on the discussion regarding the sense of superiority of the colonizer in the next quote, in which Greene offers a personal aesthetic account of beauty by comparing the town of Puebla by Western European standards, which serve as guidelines for everything that should appear attractive to the universal eyes, regardless of cultural background.

Puebla was the only Mexican town in which it seemed to me possible to live with some happiness. It had more than the usual wounded beauty: it had grace. Something French seemed to linger there from Maximilian's time. You could buy old French glass and portraits of Carlotta on paper-weights; even the arts and crafts of Puebla were civilized in a Victorian, European way: glass like Bristol glass and delicious little sticks of fruit nougat, toys of straw like the paintings of Tchelichev (GREENE, 1939, p. 258).

By addressing such description by means of comparison, Greene is actually observing Puebla from “above”; in that sense, his reference is, of course, the classic conception of beauty that was known in the past, which is that of the Western European civilizations. Everything else that does not reach up to that is bound to fail in the cultural hierarchy of Westernized cultural values.

Knowing the point of view of Greene's lenses over Mexico, we come to a better understanding of the circumstances of his standpoint and the hyperstructure of values he brings with him in his travels throughout the country. Without a doubt, the Mexicans are not able to fit into what Greene defines as civilization or civilized, and, as such, several conflicts of cultural references come to clash, resulting in a number of byproducts that may lend support to postcolonial critical revisions within travel literature.

One of such incurrences is that in which Greene depicts negatively the Mexicans, being that in themselves, as people, or their lands. Such a characterization may be naturally due to Greene's own hardships when traveling throughout the land, by experiencing the hostile environments of a revolutionary Mexico. It is even fair to say that very often Greene seemed honestly concerned with the overall situation of the country, which seems to have stemmed from religious beliefs<sup>3</sup>. But unfortunately that is not the general approach. Upon the reading of “Roads,” and later of “Glory,” however, we continue to come across perceptions that could be considered fairly problematic in the

---

<sup>3</sup> There is not solely hostility in the eyes of Greene, fortunately, as he was but another human being. We have highlighted a few examples that may enlighten on the sense that Greene had of empathy for the Mexican, which complexifies his overall perception of them. Such emotions are retrieved from the following:

[In Monterrey] “At night I found a little square scented with flowers and leaves, a silent fountain, and demure courtships going on upon every bench – I thought of the couples sprawling in ugly passion on the Hyde Park grass or on chairs performing uglier acts under the shelter of overcoats. It was as if these people hadn't the need for lechery, their nerves were quieter, the marriage bed was the accepted end. They didn't feel the need of proving their manhood by pressing on the deed of darkness before its time. [...] And again if only I'd known it, I was taking the tourist view – on the strength of one prosperous town on the high-way, on the strength of a happy mood, I was ready to think of Mexico in terms of quiet and gentleness and devotion” (GREENE, 1939, p. 40-41).

“One will never exhaust these little storehouses of human cruelty. They are tucked away like petrol from air-raids, in a street off the Tottenham Court Road, in a London Park, at Huichapan – they are always there to be drawn on in case of need” (GREENE, 1939, p. 71).

“There was nothing to connect this European capital with the small wild farm and the Indians in the hills. They belonged to different continents – how could one ever help the other? This was like Luxembourg – a luxury town. [...] There were few people about, and most of these were American, except that in the doors of shops in the Avenida Juárez, out of the wind, crouched small Indian boys, homeless, wrapped in blankets, singing low melancholy traditional songs – but you find that, I suppose, in every capital: the untouchables under the Paris fortifications, and old women rotting at night in Regent Street doorways” (GREENE, 1939, p. 71-72).

[On the vision of Guadalupe] “This Virgin claimed a church where she might love her Indians and guard them from the Spanish conqueror. The legend gave the Indian self-respect; it gave him a hold over his conqueror; it was a liberating, not an enslaving, legend” (GREENE, 1939, p. 102-103).



context of postcolonial criticism. It is of our interest to highlight such relevant moments, commenting briefly and arranging them according to thematic relevance.

First, let's examine the following quotes:

And a New Mexican with an exotic shirt covered with polka dots and an untrustworthy *mestizo* face talked back, neither paying attention to the other, all through the night talking at a tangent over the hip flasks (GREENE, 1939, p. 18, emphasis added).

A sailor came and told me there was a second gringo on board: he was sitting on the bench the other side of the smokestack. The boat was crowded now with passengers from Frontera, where he had come on board sick, unshaven, in an old black greasy hat. He wasn't very good to look at, sitting there with his mestizo wife and two blond washed-out little boys with transparent eyelids and heavy brown Mexican eyes (GREENE, 1939, p. 132).

The “untrustworthy” qualification of the “mestizo face,” in the first quote, recalls a previous consideration on the figure of the other, in all their exotic strangeness. In the second one, we witness the appearance of Doc Winter, a dentist, with his mestizo wife and kids, another example of intersection between two worlds. Towards the end of the quote, one of the main descriptions of Greene regarding the Mexicans makes its entrance: the “heavy brown Mexican eyes” and, in this case, intertwined with “transparent eyelids,” which, together, constitute a clear symbol of hybridity.

When faced with the unknown, the narrator seems to be riddled with mistrust, whereupon Greene delivers a clear message on how he perceived that person from New Mexico and the dentist: the oddity of the blending of “different” worlds is met with apprehension and dubiety. The figure of the hybrid is unique, and as such, unpredictable. Greene's visualization of that is made clear in the transcribed quotes above. Here, we may retrieve another moment from the narrative that recalls upon that specific statement:

I sat at the head of the stairs and had my shoes cleaned by a little blond bootblack – a thin tired child in tattered trousers like someone out of Dickens. Only his brown eyes were Mexican – not his transparent skin and his fine gold hair. I was afraid to ask his name, for it might have been Greene. I gave him twice what I usually gave (twenty centavos – say, threepence) and he returned to me ten centavos change, going wearily down the stairs with his heavy box into the great heat of Sunday (GREENE, 1939, p. 151).

Again, the figure of the hybrid resurfaces, along with it another glimpse of Greene's stance on the subject. The child, while being a mixed-race offspring by his description – transparent skin, gold hair *but* brown Mexican eyes – obtains from the author twice what he would actually get in other circumstances, which are left to the reader to infer which ones they would be. In the light of what we have been discussing so far, we might as well argue that Greene usually gave half of that value to fully Mexican bootblack boys. This line of thought leads us to understand that Greene, while bearing his colonialist mindset, even if involuntarily, as it commonly happens, draws a hint of sympathy towards the boy mainly due to his European looks, and for that the poor child deserved more of his pity for being put in such an unfair, wild place. That is fundamental in understanding Greene's perception, not only of the Mexicans, but also of the Mexicans in relation to the other people, most particularly the ones of European descent. To Greene, they seem to be two worlds that interbreed and whose product is something to be regarded with wary suspicion.

Soon after, we find another occurrence: “Not quite genuine Mexican (it is far too clean for that)” (GREENE, 1939, p. 20). This sneer remark clues of Greene's discontent and discomfort about Mexico, especially in relation to what he considers to be the standard, or acceptable. The

comment occurs in the context of the beginning of his trip, roaming in the border between the United States and Mexico, and right where both cultures mix and intermingle. This indisposition towards the hybrid is a staple icon of the colonial reflection, and will be distinctly recurring in other passages of the book.

Going further, the figure of the Mexican is perceived also as close to the most basal instincts: people with excessive emotion, rather than common human sensibilities, which adds spice to his depiction of the people. The following quote is representative of this instance:

“[...] and the young American girls looked pale and weak and self-conscious before the dark sensual confident faces of the half-castes – who knew instinctively, you felt, all the beauty and the horror of the flesh” (GREENE, 1939, p. 23).

Moreover, it is possible to examine some evidence towards the depreciation of the land and its products, as we may as well see in “I made him drink a tequila – the spirit made from agave, a rather inferior schnapps” (GREENE, 1939, p. 36), or in the passages below:

The cacti had no beauty – they were like some simple shorthand sign for such words as “barrenness” and “drought”; you felt they were less the product than the cause of this dryness, that they had absorbed all the water there was in the land and held it as camels do in their green, aged and tubular bellies. Sometimes they flowered at the tip like a glowing cigar-end, but they had no more beauty even then: an unhealthy pink, like the icing in a cheap pastry-cook’s, the kind of sugar cake you leave upon the plate (GREENE, 1939, p. 42).

Outside lies the market – a grim place at sunset, far more squalid than anything I had ever seen in the West African bush. A few potatoes, a few beans; pottery and basket work in ugly arty shapes and colours [...]; hideous little toys and trinkets [...] (GREENE, 1939, p. 44-45).

The underwhelming characterization of tequila, a local liquor, as well as of the Mexican flora and popular art, is compatible to what would be expected to be seen by the perspective of the colonizer, who bears as reference the cultural superiority of their Western European homeland. Despite the aesthetic criticism of the subjects at hand, it is both appalling and evident that Greene chose to see the cactus, for example, as a vision devoid of any praise, which instills his overbearing sense that poverty reigns even over nature itself, and that whatever shortcomings the people have, that also extends to the land they live in, as if it was somewhat transmissible. Besides, it also brings to the surface, by contrast, his vision of beauty, which, one may infer, is derived from the flora and fauna he may have thought to be more akin to bonanza and environmental prosperity. After all, nature itself is clearly strange to any aesthetic point of view, and if the subject is beauty, therefore, it lies only in the eye of the beholder.

Changing ever so slightly our trajectory, we refer, too, to a roll of examples in which Greene gives us yet another recurring view on the Mexicans, this time regarding his or her own identity. This perceived identity is of great importance, and reveals itself throughout the whole of “Roads.” One of such perceptions in the view of the Mexicans as very inclined to lose all emotional control, as observed thus:

But death dictates certain rites. Men make rules and hope in that way to tame death – you shall not bomb open towns, the challenged has the choice of weapons... Three lines were drawn in the sand: death was like tennis. The cocks crowed and a brass band bleared from

the stone seats and sand blew up across the arena; it was cold in the wind, in the *somber*, among the hills. And suddenly one felt an impatience with all this mummery, all this fake emphasis on what is only a natural function; we die as we evacuate; why wear big hats and tight trousers and have a band play? That, I think, was the day I began to hate the Mexicans (GREENE, 1939, p. 49-50).

Then one Sunday in Orizaba police agents followed a child who had been at Mass; she ran from them and they fired and killed her – one of those sudden inexplicable outbursts of brutality common in Mexico. Mexicans are fond of children, but some emanation from the evil Aztec soil seems suddenly to seize the brain like drunkenness, then the pistol comes out (GREENE, 1939, p. 112).

And even further, Greene adds “No hope anywhere: I have never been in a country where you are more aware all the time of hate” (GREENE, 1939, p. 157). Such a depiction adds to a sense of “savagery,” one that is not unusual in the perception of the other in postcolonial studies (as we have mentioned *supra*). The animal imagery is a reality and is an appreciated device utilized in narratives that construct a representation of the colonized as being barbaric, unreliable, and animalistic creatures that intend to dehumanize them and read them for a dignifying conquest. It is a call to bring them to the fold of civilization and spread the supremacy of the superior peoples. This is further expressed in Greene by stating that the bursts of brutality are due to “some emanation from the evil Aztec soil” (GREENE, 1939, p. 112), consisting of an almost textbook colonial approach to indigenous history by being hostile or, as is the case, outright villanizing cultural aspects of the colonized. Greene’s reaction to that is of plain hatred, as literally expounded in the above quotes.

Moreover, such a perspective towards the natives leaves them, at last, mostly instinctive or emotional, and devoid of any self-control over themselves. Or so Greene seemed to have thought, lending force to the notion of animal imagery afore-mentioned. As evidence, we may observe these quotes on how the lack of responsibility in the Mexican people:

I suppose I dozed, for there were the Indian and the guide looking down at me. I could see the guide was troubled. He had a feeling of responsibility, and no Mexican cares for that. It’s like a disused limb they have learned to do without (GREENE, 1939, p. 176).

Hunched in the thin rain, the Indians came through – a curious automatic walk, Tibetan rags, creeping by like insects in single file with their long poles. [...] It is true what their admirers write of the Mexicans, that they are always cheerful whatever the circumstances; but there is something horribly immature in their cheeriness: no sense of human responsibility; it is all one with the pistol-shot violence (GREENE, 1939, p. 203).

Equally problematic, perhaps, is his depiction of Mexican women, as we may recover in following examples, such as when the narrator says “A young Indian girl with big silver ear-rings and a happy sensual face began to make corn coffee [...]” (GREENE, 1939, p. 176), or when:

Out from an inner room [...] came a little party of Indian women, tiny and bowed, old and hideous at twenty. With their cave-dwellers’ faces and their long staffs they might have been Stone Age people emerging from forgotten caverns to pay their tribute to the Redeemer on Resurrection morning (GREENE, 1939, p. 242).

In this context, this primal, wild force that drives the Mexicans, while pairing up with a previous quote (“dark sensuous confident faces” who knew “instinctively” both “the beauty and the

horror of sex”), is directed here towards women, where the “sensual” description makes a novel appearance. This is very clearly what Said has mentioned concerning orientalism, in which the Western gaze will often regard the exotic as sensual, a perception that usually comes up in the perception of non-European descent women (SAID, 1979, p. 4, 188, 216). Soon after, we discover a quote that conceptualizes that primal force into the idea of the primitive, non-developed; the depiction of Indian women is crafted in an inferior manner, from the perspective of the “civilized world,” through the use of the much depreciative remittance to cavemen. This is a comparison that brings a strong similarity to an underdeveloped pre-historic world.

And, somehow, the impending sense of exotic wilderness coalesces around the eyes of the Mexicans. Greene seemed absolutely attracted to them, not only in “Roads” but also in “Glory.” We can better visualize the fact throughout the following quotations:

[...] until one turned the head and saw a black-haired baby face working out from under a shawl – thick hair and tiny skull like a shriveled head from Ecuador, with large brown lustrous heartless eyes (GREENE, 1939, p. 115).

A young Mexican dentist called Graham joined us [...] and presently in the parade the Señoritas Greene went by – raven hair, gold teeth, and the dumb brown eyes of Mexicans (GREENE, 1939, p. 144).

How one begins to hate these people [...] The hideous inexpressiveness of brown eyes (GREENE, 1939, p. 255).

It was a bad night. On the floor below a hysterical woman screamed and sobbed and a man spoke every way in vain – patiently, roughly, with love and hate. God knows what relationship was breaking up so publicly in the hotel room. Next day I watched the couples in the lounge and the elevator, the brown impassive sentimental Mexican eyes (GREENE, 1939, p. 265).

Eyes, as a literary and narrative device, are widely understood as rich of meaning and significance. In the case at hand, no less importance is given in the way Greene expresses the Mexican eyes, leaving him unguarded and indicating many of the inclinations of his heart and mind. In the citations above, brown eyes are ever present in the representation of the Mexicans. We have seen before how we could find some examples related to hybrids, as well as their characterization, and here we conclude the endeavor in the addressing of how Mexicans were described and perceived in the eyes of Greene.

In that sense, Greene uses several adjectives to describe the Mexican eyes: large, lustrous, heartless, dumb, hideously inexpressive, and sentimental. In a way, that is exactly the feeling that the reader may notice in Greene’s own manner of perceiving the Mexican, by combining in a nutshell everything he feared, distrusted, or hated about them. We can easily paint a picture of the Mexican, in the English writer’s eyes, as a primitive, instinctive creature who was unable to restrain itself from the bounds of its overarching nature, while being emotional to the point of violence and animalism, lost in an endless cycle of hate and sex. This seems to be ultimately the result of our interpretation in regard to what have been exposed on Greene’s perception of the Mexicans, and of how he decided to represent them in the works currently under scrutiny.

We may further suggest subsequent indications on the manner of how Greene represents the Mexican eyes in “Glory.” Here, we have a far more reminiscent construction from Greene’s view towards the writing of a fiction novel based on his own experience and observation, while in “Roads” we had a stronger sense of external perception on the making of those memories, aided by

his travel journal notes. In either case, the presence of the Mexican eyes is nonetheless maintained, as we may observe in several excerpts.<sup>4</sup> In fact, a number of those descriptions are actually a repetition of some of the terms Greene had used in “Roads,” such as “large,” “sullen,” “expressionless,” and “stupid” (previously, “dumb”), providing additional evidence of an already consolidated image of the author towards the perceived identity of the Mexicans. Greene’s insistence on addressing the eyes and all the attention they drew from him is hereby established as a narrative tool of perceiving and representing Mexican characters, depicting them as beings of passion, of the wilderness and of a nature so diverse of his own, with such a borderline savage demeanor, that it cannot simply be overlooked in the context of postcolonial deconstruction. Greene sees all with the eyes of the pervasive Western civilization, whose powerful stare opposes all that does not fit into its self-centered notion of civilized, even if itself has had a hand in the fall from grace from the *other’s* notion of civilization. It seems to echo the ancient sentiment of the Romans, who perceived all who escaped the boundaries of their rule as barbarians, with the wariness towards the other being in itself a tale older than time in the history of human settlements.

That being the case, we may better understand now how the colonial gaze has broken

---

<sup>4</sup> A child stood in the doorway asking for a doctor. He wore a big hat and had **stupid brown eyes**. Beyond him two mules stamped and whistled on the hot beaten road. Mr. Tench said he was not a doctor: he was a dentist. Looking round he saw the stranger crouched in the rocking-chair, gazing with an effect of prayer, entreaty. ... The child said there was a new doctor in town: the old one had fever and wouldn’t stir. It was his mother who was sick. (GREENE, 1940, p. 11-12, emphasis added)

“Go away,” Mr. Tench said. The child did not stir. He stood in the hard sunlight looking in with infinite patience. He said his mother was dying. **The brown eyes expressed no emotion**: it was a fact. You were born, your parents died, you grew old, you died yourself. (GREENE, 1940, p. 12-13, emphasis added)

THE SQUAD of police made their way back to the station: they walked raggedly with rifles slung anyhow: ends of cotton where buttons should have been: a puttee slipping down over the ankle: **small men with black secret Indian eyes**. (GREENE, 1940, p. 15, emphasis added)

The mother, compressing her lips, continued: "... the persecution of the Early Christians. Perhaps he remembered that occasion in his boyhood when he acted Nero before the good old Bishop, but this time he insisted on taking the comic part of a Roman fishmonger ..."

"I don't believe a word of it," the boy said, with sullen fury, not a word of it."

"How dare you!"

"Nobody could be such a fool."

The little girls sat motionless, **their eyes large and brown and pious**, enjoying themselves like Hell. (GREENE, 1940, p. 44-45, emphasis added)

He made his way on alone towards the police station: and the chief went back to billiards. There were few people about; it was too hot. If only, he thought, we had a proper photograph—he wanted to know the features of his enemy. A swarm of children had the plaza to themselves. They were playing some obscure and intricate game from bench to bench: an empty gaseosa bottle sailed through the air and smashed at the lieutenant's feet. His hand went to his holster and he turned: he caught a look of consternation on a boy's face.

"Did you throw that bottle?"

**The heavy brown eyes stared sullenly back at him.**

"What were you doing?"

"It was a bomb." (GREENE, 1940, p. 50-51, emphasis added)

They were breathless with interest. He stood with his hand on his holster and watched the **brown intent patient eyes**: it was for these he was fighting. (GREENE, 1940, p. 52, emphasis added)

through Greene's perception and representation of the Mexicans, and how it took place through the narratives of the selected works. In a sense, perhaps Greene himself is not to be so blamed for, since he was in the eye of the imperial hurricane, a herald of its core values and, after all, a limb of colonialist traditions that still, as of today, linger, even though almost ninety years have come to pass. Yet, it seems to be undeniably clear that the constructed image of the Mexican through his eyes is similar to what many have struggled so far to decompose in the relentless process of the postcolonial criticism. The deconstruction of such images is, therefore, paramount. It is in such cases that we realize how much is yet to be done to revisit, re-evaluate and reconstitute the several instances in which the representations of the non-Western "other" came to be in the Western literature.

### 3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the brief discussion developed throughout this paper, we expected to shed some light on Greene's perception and representation of the Mexicans, with ensuing evidence, either by scrutinizing his non-fictional work "The Lawless Roads" or his novel "The Power and the Glory," both written in the context of his trip to Mexico in the late 1930s. By addressing the figure of the colonized "other" in the eyes of the "civilized," we attempted to contribute to the deconstruction of the non-Western character, as seen in such samples of travel literature, in the modern tradition of postcolonial criticism.

To that purpose, we focused on both the eyes of Greene, and how he perceived and represented the Mexican in his writings, and on the eyes of the Mexicans, as described by Greene. In our findings, we observed that Greene tends to push carefully away from hybrid identities, to view non-Western people from a superior moral standpoint and to negatively portray them with a touch of animalistic savagery, delivering descriptions that entail representations of the Mexican "other" as somehow primitive and emotional to the point of easily acceding to their most basic instincts, such as violence and sex. Moreover, his interpretation of the emblematic brown eyes of the Mexicans has been observed to lean more strongly towards the idea of sullenness and sentimentality, devoid of rational expression or intelligence.

Considering, thus, such perspectives, we reinstate the relevance of pursuing further literary investigations through the lens of postcolonial criticism in order to readdress the problem of the "other" in the travel literature cannon, represented here by the two works of Graham Greene and by our focus on the eyes, both of the "civilized" and of the "uncivilized." By putting such an endeavor into motion, we hope to keep establishing renewed assessments over significant literary works within the genre and to proceed in the improvement of our understanding of the re-perception and re-representation of identities from the standpoint of the post-colonized, in contrast to what has been witnessed in travel literature until not so long ago, and more so, even in our contemporaneity.

### REFERENCES

- APPIAH, Kwame Anthony. **The Ethics of Identity**. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- BARRY, Peter. **Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory**. 3. ed. New York: Manchester University Press, 2009.

BASSNETT, Susan. Travel writing and Gender. In: HULME, Peter; YOUNGS; Tim (Orgs.). **The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 225-241.

BERGONZI, Bernard. **A Study in Greene: Graham Greene and the Art of the Novel**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

CARR, Helen. Modernism and travel (1880–1940). In: HULME, Peter; YOUNGS; Tim (Orgs.). **The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 70-86.

CATES, Baldrige. **Graham Greene's fictions: the virtues of extremity**. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000.

GREENE, Graham. **The Lawless Roads**. Surrey: The Windmill Press Ltd., 1950.

\_\_\_\_\_. **The Power and the Glory**. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.

HULME, Peter; YOUNGS; Tim (Orgs.). **The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

HULME, Peter . Travelling to write (1940–2000). In: HULME, Peter; YOUNGS; Tim (Orgs.). **The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp.87-101.

MIYANO, Shoko. **Innocence in Graham Greene's novels**. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006.

PRATTI, Mary Louise. **Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation**. London: Routledge, 1992.

SAID, Edward. **Culture and Imperialism**. New York: Knopf, 1993.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Orientalism**. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

SELDEN, Raman; WIDDOWSON, Peter; BROOKER, Peter. **A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory**. 4. ed. New York: Routledge, 2005 .

THIONG'O, Ngugi wa. **Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature**. Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1987.

Recebido em 15/1/2018

Aceito em 23/3/2018