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Caitlin Hesketh
SUNY Geneseo

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Altering Environments Affect the Psychological State

Submitted by: Caitlin Hesketh

During the 1950s, the decade subsequent to the publishing of Eric Ambler's *Journey into Fear*, Graham Greene's, *The Ministry of Fear*, and Henry Green's, *Back*, a new subfield of Psychology was established: Environmental Psychology. This subfield "studies the relationship between environments and human behavior and how they affect one another" (Conaway). These characters' actions, thoughts, and beliefs undergo alteration due to the physical or emotional setting that they are in. In *Journey*, Graham's ability to take action increases only after he transfers settings. Through relocation, *Ministry's* Arthur Rowe finds both his psychology and ability for romantic engagement altered. Conversely, Charley, *Back's* returning World War II veteran, remains in a single setting altered by his lover's absence.

Ambler's protagonist, Graham, is an employee for an armaments company during World War II. Because of his unique blend of technical and interpersonal abilities, Graham travels to various countries as a representative. While abroad, Graham becomes the target of Romanian terrorists in a plot to prevent Turkey from acquiring weaponry. This character's inability to take action is prevalent from the beginning of the novel when he experiences his first brush with death. After a night of entertainment with the company's Turkish representative, Kopeikin, Graham returns to his hotel room and is attacked by a man waiting in the shadows. When Graham is grazed by the intruder's bullet, he turns to Kopeikin for assistance. Kopeikin suggests that Graham change his plans for travel back to England and explains the severity of the situation.

At this point in the novel Graham does not see the necessity of taking action to save his life. He cannot comprehend how closely he is tied to the inner workings of the war and states:

Nonsense, Kopeikin! You must be out of your senses. What conceivable reason could anyone have for wanting to kill me? I'm the most harmless man alive.
(Ambler, 42)

It is clear at this point in the novel that Graham's psychological environment is one of indifference and detachment from the outside world. He does not comprehend that his work supplies a portion of the arms used to fight the war; ultimately endorsing this fighting and profoundly affecting numerous people. Because neither Graham's physical or emotional environment has been affected by the war before this time, he cannot act in any other fashion.

Graham's environment continues to affect his behavior after he has boarded the boat that will return him home. Midway through this journey home the boat docks in Greece where Graham receives word that there is a new passenger onboard. Graham finds that the man who has boarded the ship, Banant, is the assassin who attempted to murder him in Turkey. The introduction of this character within the confined boat setting alters Graham's emotional environment. He transitions from a world of detachment to a world of inescapable paranoia. The greatest marker of this change in temperament is a memory of a past feeling, which Graham recalls as a, "curious but vaguely familiar feeling... associated with the smell of antiseptics and the singing of a kettle" (Ambler, 121). Graham recounts a time when an experiment at work went wrong and a coworker

was severely injured. The same disturbing feeling that he associates with this past incident returns to him.

Due to the addition of Banat to the boat, Graham is forced out of his original emotional environment and must take action in order to save his own life. In an attempt to do this Graham seeks to procure a revolver after his is stolen out of his quarters. He enlists the help of his love interest on the boat, Josette. The two conspirators plot to steal from Jose, Josette's husband. In this portion of the text the revolver is a larger metaphor for Graham's continued inability to take action into his own hands. Although his behavior is changing due to the shift in his emotional environment, he fails at obtaining a revolver in this instance, as well as in a second attempt to steal Banant's weapon. This suggests that Graham's physical environment must also change in order for him to be able to take action. Graham's psychology will not undergo a reformation until he fulfilled his obsession with finding a revolver and also physically removed himself from the boat.

The resolution of the novel includes Graham shifting from his paranoid emotional environment to a resolute one. After finding his ally on the boat dead, Graham begins to take risks by actively planning his escape from his enemies. His first action is to finally acquire a revolver from a Frenchman on board. After Graham exits the boat he is no longer confined or paranoid, but realizes that in order to survive he must change the way that he thinks and behaves. While riding in a vehicle with his captors Graham seizes an opportune moment to save his life.

In that second Graham acted... A sudden blind fury seized him... Before he knew what he was doing, he had pulled out Mathis's revolver and fired it full in Banant's face. (Ambler, 261)

The change in Graham's physical and emotional environments is so great that he is able to transition from a disconnected inability to act, to the ability to take human lives. This new found behavior continues to present itself in Graham's character even after he is removed from the stimulus that precipitated it. At the close of the novel there is a sense that the alterations that

Graham has undergone are positive and that he will continue to move forward with his newly acquired psyche.

In the novel *The Ministry of Fear*, Graham Greene's protagonist Arthur Rowe can be analyzed through the lens of psycho geography because he is greatly affected by each geographical environment that he is in. Psycho geography is, "The study of specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (Blissett, Home). Rowe's emotions and behaviors differ depending on whether he is in an urban setting during World War II, or in a mental resort secluded from the city and the events of the war.

At the commencement of the novel Rowe is depicted as both a victim and an aggressor. He has committed the crime of murder against his wife and continuously asserts this fact with casual statements such as, "Perhaps, I ought to tell you that I am a murder myself" (Greene, 26). It is clear that Rowe sees himself an aggressor; however, he is also a victim of circumstance. The crime that he is tried for is ruled a "mercy killing" due to his wife's poor health and his inability to watch her suffer. (Greene, 27). Rowe is also a victim of his surroundings. Although the urban setting that he lives in is not responsible for his actions against his wife, it shapes how Rowe views himself and how he behaves after the crime is committed. Rowe begins to characterize the city that he lives in as an enemy and as a result he, "grows into criminality like a habit of thought" (Greene, 31). To Rowe the city is a secret world and he feels as if he is exiled from the places that he once frequented before the murder. Rowe sees himself as a murderer because he has committed the crime and also because everywhere he turns, people and places remind him of the social ramifications of his act. These feelings of isolation inflict a want in Rowe to return to his childhood environment where he was cared for and still had the potential to love and be loved.

At the climax of the novel Rowe loses his memory due to a bomb planted by a ministry working for the axis powers. His loss of memory evokes a change in his emotional

environment as well as in his physical setting. Rowe survives the bomb's blast and wakes up to find himself stationed in a "resort" filled with patients who are battling war related traumas. In this setting, Rowe is able to return to a pseudo childhood because he is cared for by Dr. Forester and his staff, and also because he no longer remembers his past. During his time as Richard Digby, Rowe does not carry the guilt that he had before his memory loss and he is not subjected to the wartime tragedies unfolding. The new environment that Rowe is in allows him to be, "fresh," and not "tired like the rest of us everywhere" (Greene, 101). By removing these perpetual feelings of remorse and separation from Rowe's characterization, Greene allows Rowe the capability to be romantically involved with his visitor Anna. Before the memory loss Anna and Rowe have an attraction that cannot be acted on due to Rowe's mental inability to pull himself out of his deep set feelings of pity for everyone that he comes into contact with. By changing his emotional environment Rowe becomes "as he should have always been" (Greene, 104). Before Rowe is removed from his original physical and emotional setting he sees himself inhabiting the world of a murderer. After he is moved to a stress free emotional and physical environment, Rowe's world becomes idealized. The changes that he undergoes suggest that, like Graham, he will move forward in his newfound state of mind and obtain all that he initially wishes for.

The protagonist Charley in Henry Green's *Back* can be analyzed through the lens of ecological psychology because the reader observes Charley in his "ordinary surroundings" where he lives and works (Conaway). Unlike Graham and Rowe, Charley is depicted only in this hometown setting; however, because he is a returning World War II veteran, Charley has many flashbacks to his prewar self and the emotional setting that he once associated with home. Through the flashbacks that Charley experiences, it can be concluded that Charley's behavior is not altered by his return to a contorted home life; instead, his original behavior is merely amplified. Charley is not able to experience a psychological change

because he is not able to drastically shift physical environments like the characters Graham and Rowe. Before the war Charley is depicted as out of touch and in a, "usual state of not knowing" (Green, 5). He is romantically involved with a woman named Rose and continues to see her even after she marries another man and conceives a child. Charley does not appear affected by Rose's inability to commit or accurately express her feelings to him. Charley obsesses over this female, despite her ineptitude. While inhabiting his prewar setting, Charley is incapable of obtaining what he wants or desires because of his inability to accept reality.

In the environment that Charley enters upon his return from France, his inability to accept reality is heightened. Before leaving home Charley is characterized as mentally out of touch and through his experiences in the army his issue manifests itself physically. The loss of a limb forces him to navigate his "new environment" while deficient in both body and mind. Charley is unable to successfully accept romantic involvement with another woman upon returning home because his post traumatic stress, combined with his preexisting personality traits, causes him confusion. Upon meeting Nancy, Rose's half sister, he cannot accept that she is not Rose herself. Charley's obsession with his past love is heightened to the point of delusion. This enigma consumes him and he is rendered incapable of performing his work properly and sleeping. Eventually, due to the maternal love and care that Nancy provides, Charley is able to delineate between Rose and Nancy and, "all of a sudden, or so he thought, she (Rose) was dead to him at last" (Green, 122). At the point when Charley comes to this realization, it appears that he has begun to recuperate and accept his new psychological environment while existing within his old physical one.

After Nancy moves into the home of Charley's old love, he begins to have trouble distinguishing between both women again. His fantasy that Nancy is Rose becomes a concrete idea as Nancy begins to fill Rose's place by taking care of her half sister's immediate family. Reality is blurred for Charley but he accepts

Nancy's marriage proposal because he has developed a reliance on her to simultaneously be like and unlike Rose. His reliance allows him to function in his previous emotional environment while physically being in a world that looks familiar, but is a world where Rose does not exist. Essentially, Charley is unable to change his behavior or thoughts because he does not change physical environments and refuses to change emotional environments. In the end, Charley's relationship with Nancy thrives *because of* this predicament and *not despite of* his psychological state. At the termination of the novel, the suggestion for Charley's future is murkier than for Graham and Rowe. Unlike Ambler's and Greene's protagonists, Charley does not move forward with his life but chooses to simultaneously live it in the past and the present.

These emotional and physical changes affect the human psyche and, when studied, can explain the motivation and behavior of beings. Graham, Rowe and Charley are all prime examples of how a setting change can affect a man's ability to take action, to achieve happiness or to cope with reality.

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