

arts and  
entertainment

## 'The Human Factor' is typical of the spy novel genre

By David Wood

*The Human Factor*, by Graham Greene, Simon and Schuster.

In his latest work, *The Human Factor*, Graham Greene reverts to his favorite genre, the spy novel.

Genre, by definition, prescribes a standardized and limited world-view. The character and the action are mixed in set formulas so that its audience knows what to expect from the genre's particular catalog of clues. There is not so much original sensitivity involved that readers must think too much about reality.

*The Human Factor* scores on all counts.

Its scenario is so manufactured and sterile, the persons in the story are such pliant dolls (like Mattel toys) that one would wonder what the human factor is that is stated in the title.

For Greene's dolls, in their context, the human factor, I assume, is that which can make men into double-dealing double-agents, traitors, like Maurice Castle.

Castle is the main agent of the plot. He's a retiring (in both senses of the word) worker in the home (England) office of some secret service organization. He's as predictably dull and as stodgily British as the prose itself. So he's not suspected of being capable of much intrigue. Same with the book.

Castle is at least as old and dotty as Greene, and has as cushy a job. He's one of two employees in the small department of the business dealing with South African Affairs.

Once though, when he was younger, he had a more glorious career (like Greene). He worked undercover in South Africa; but that's only included in the book as dim reminiscence, rather than drama. In the dark, harsh continent, Castle fell in love with a Bantu named Sarah, who he was using as a contact there. (Many working in the office, it later seems, have a fascination with black women.)

Castle then smuggled her, pregnant with another man's son, out of her repressive country, with the aid of another

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contact he'd accordingly made with certain communist politicians in South Africa.

In thanks, Castle since has kept a communist agent informed of what passes across his desk in England. The human factor, like a paraphrase from the Book of Ruth, is that patriotically, his family is his true country. That makes him more a hero than the other in the secret service whose true countries are their egos.

The story starts when the leak is discovered. Its crisis comes when Castle's only co-worker, an unconvincingly flamboyant alcoholic and romantic, is suspected as the source and poisoned by his superiors.

The incident isn't dramatic or dramatized. Greene persists in progressing the plot through the flat dialogue of characters afflicted with security paranoia.

Throughout the book, Greene pokes humorless fun at mythic James Bond espionage. Greene's action, or inaction, contrarily evolves from easy-chairs or after explicitly described dinners or drinks.

After the murder, it would have been a smart (or human) time for Castle to quit his job and head for the English countryside. But an important emissary arrives from South African intelligence, and slips up (according to standard formula), slipping Castle the unabridged version of some pertinent notes.

Castle relays the information and himself to Moscow. The double-agency that began with his wife Sarah's removal across tight political borders, now ends unhappily for Castle, if not for the reader, with the final impossibility of her escaping England, and from her mother-in-law, to join her husband.

Politicality, Greene suggests, is as silly as religion. The side that wins, he says once, is the side that is right; whatever is better than silent warfare. But at the same time, Graham Greene, and Castle, seem to prefer a sluggish, rustic and British suburbia over any other way of life.

At least *The Human Factor* doesn't follow the spy genre formula so closely that it makes a hero of any of its characters nor cedes any clear-cut triumph; as token to more real human factors.

## Theater's latest deals with man's fear of unknown

By Charlie Krig

The bubonic plague, God, superstition and persecution comprise the section of a world premiers play Tuesday night in the Studio Theater in UNL's Temple Building. The play is *The Final Stroke* by Robert Beadell, a master of fine arts theater student at UNL.

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In a special playwright's note, Beadell says "*The Final Stroke* is not an apocalyptic version, it is a glimpse of a period of time in which man had to question his most primal beliefs. The play deals with man's fear of the unknown and how it can consume him."

The director, Jose Felix Gomez, a Ph.D. theater student from Puerto Rico, said the play is based on historical fact but is not a historical play. It is just based on people and events.

"The first time I read the play I was most interested in that these people were so affected by this thing, the plague. It was totally out of their control. Their fate goes down the drain as a result. They found out there they were caught and they couldn't do anything about it," he said.

"We, as 20th century people, can't relate to that. It's like how we go to the doctor's when we're sick. You get some medicine and then you just get well. They couldn't do that."

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Gomez said there is a certain amount of humor. "There is a black humor in it. Some parts are funny. It's not heavy. Nothing's pushed on the audience," he said. "It's lighter than what people might think."

The plot concerns the inhabitants of Tutney, a fictional English village, and the black plague's effect on them. Specifically, the townspeople are afraid of Balavignus, a Jewish scholar they blame for the disaster. In addition, Balavignus is accused of buying a boy from his mother and he must face a cruel Catholic bishop's questions.

Gomez said he directed the play according to the conflicts among the characters and not along a certain thematic line.

"I never approach a play in ways of theme. It may sound nasty but I leave that to the English and literature people. The

play is about the plague but that's not just one line. It's also about man against nature, man against God and even man abandoned by God," he said.

Gomez also said his goal when working with a play (and specifically a new one such as this) is "not just how to make it work but how to do the best you can for it. How you can get the best out of the script."

He continued, "It's not that you're looking to establish a record to become famous. You have to be conscious of the time and place where you are, where you're doing the play. If it turns out to be a smash hit, that's good. You might think of that in the back of your head but you can't make that the main part of the play."

"But I do have to admit it's really excit-

ing to do this play because no one has ever touched it before. It's raw material."

Gomez admitted he was scared at the start of rehearsals but now he's confident the play will work well. He said Beadell was very helpful and supportive during practice.

"Our relationship has been excellent because of a good relationship between myself as director and Bob as playwright. You don't find that with a playwright who doesn't believe in any changes, even minor ones," Gomez said. "Bob has been very open and flexible in our work and our concepts so we could adapt certain things with cooperative decisions."

Some of the decisions concerned the technical aspects of the play. Gomez said the short, episodic scenes are reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's work so the set design is very simple. The movement between the three interior and two exterior sets will be accomplished by lighting. Set design is by Ronald Fowlkes (MFA theater student from Oklahoma) and lighting design is by Bernard Wolff (MFA theater student from St. Louis). Karen Brown, senior theater major from Omaha, is costume designer.

Cast members are Marla Harper as Ruth (junior from Lincoln), Stef Kallos as (senior, Lincoln), Patti Raun as Ann (freshman, Lincoln), Ann Sandin as Sylvia (freshman, Lincoln), Loreda Shuster as Kate (senior, Lincoln), Steve Houser as Roger (junior, Benbrook, Texas), Kirby Henderson as Carl (freshman, Papillion), Scott Hobbs as Bartholomew (senior, Kearney), Ron Nyhoff as Timothy (sophomore, Lincoln), Myron Papich as Balavignus (MFA student, Detroit), Larry Petersen as the doctor (junior, Omaha), Cliff Radcliff as Reeve (MFA, Waynesburg, Ohio), Woody Skokan as the Bishop (Lincoln), Jim Sobczyk as Melvin (senior, Omaha), and John Thew as Tom (freshman, Lincoln). All except Skokan are theater students.

The play will run Tuesday through Sunday with daily performances at 8 p.m. Tickets (\$3 students, \$4 regular) are available at the box office in 102 Temple Building, 12th and R Sts. The box office is open from 1-5 p.m. weekdays and 1-8 p.m. on performance days.



Photo by Bob Pearson

Scott Hobbs, Ann Sandin and Ron Nyhoff (left to right) in a scene from Robert Beadell's *The Final Stroke*.