



## THE STRANGE CASE OF DOCTOR GREENE AND MISTER CHASE

By **Thierry CAZON** and **Julien DUPRE**

Traduction **Henri Krasnopolski**

The scene is set at Vevey (Switzerland) at a table outside a café. Author of “*The Power and the Glory*”, “*The Third Man*” and “*A Gun for Sale*” (also published as “*A Gun For Hire*”) as well as other jewels of the modern English literature, Mr Graham Greene sips a brandy whilst his blue eyes wander peacefully at the surface of the Lake Geneva. It could be the perfect idea of Paradise on earth but Mr Greene is somewhat irritated: the brandy does not taste as the one he used to drink at Berkhamsted when he was a teenager. This Switzerland makes things insipid: drinks, food, up to the talent of the foreign writers who took refuge in this country. His thinking is interrupted by the arrival of another writer, Mr James Hadley Chase, author of numerous popular police stories. Chewing nervously his mustache, Mr Chase sits in front of his fellow novelist.

Mr GREENE: My dear James, you have asked to meet me quite urgently. I suppose you have something important to talk about ? So, do not beat about the bush and tell me the all story..

Mr CHASE: Graham, I believe that we have been discovered.

Mr GREENE: Come on... What's wrong ?

Mr CHASE: Several pamphlets I have read recently, let me think that our secret will soon be revealed. Robert Deleuse 's essay “*A La Poursuite de James Hadley Chase*” (In pursuit of J.H. Chase) calls into question the fact I could have written all my books alone. Some specific examples are given. He even puts forward the hypothesis of another writer, a man of straw more honorable than me. Privately, Deleuse (French, 1950) declares that you would be the one who would have written all the Chases, in other words, eighty nine novels plus the compilation of several stories in “*Get a Load Of This*” .

Mr GREENE: My God, privately only !

Mr CHASE: Yes, some friendly pressures prevented him to pursue his investigations in this field quite dangerous for us.

Mr GREENE: Well, since Deleuse preferred to withdraw, nothing justify your state of panic !

Mr CHASE: But that is not all. The Bulletin N° 2 from Polarophiles Tranquilles, insists on this hypothesis: it mainly refers to a text by Thierry Maulnier (French, 1909-1988) where, more lucid than most of his Académie Française's col-

leagues, he compares you and me.

Mr GREENE: about which book ?

Mr CHASE: “*Cade*”. “For which we have a tendency to find a similarity with Greene”. That’s exactly his words.

Mr GREENE: He flatters you. With a wavering construction and a continuous changing intrigue, “*Cade*” is almost a flop. But, as far as I know, this similarity does not disclose our little association since Maulnier’s feeling is only based on a literary comparison.

Mr CHASE: But there is more...

Mr GREENE: I am starting to get worried.

Mr CHASE: In the daily “*Le Figaro*”, François Rivière (French, 1949) makes you the subject of one of his celebrated “*chroniques d’Olivier Alban*” (Olivier Alban’s chronicles). It is an imaginary interview at the end of which you are credited the writing of “*More Deadly than the Male*”. You certainly will tell me that the large romantic part of the text weakened the effects of such a revelation. As a matter of fact, we did not see any of the reactions expected by Rivière but we now run the risk to arouse suspicion to people able to read between the lines. And yet, I took care to publish this book in 1945 under the signature of Ambrose Grant so that my style, quite different of my other books, did not surprise my readers...

Mr GREENE: The surprise was essentially the geographical location since it was your first novel to take place in England. Many declare that it is your best book. I would love to join my voice if, modestly, I would hate to congratulate myself.

Mr CHASE: I envy you to be in the mood for jokes. Meanwhile, because of these three texts, it becomes possible to identify the books signed Chase as being yours. I am given the role of a vulgar straw man. I wonder why the spy stories specialists, especially the French, did not prick up their ears, considering that we have been published, not by an obscure editor, but by the prestigious “*Série Noire*”.

Mr GREENE: I would add that we were even the locomotives of it.

Believe me, to be successful with this “*Série Noire*”, instead of publishing the classical crime stories by Samuel Dashiell Hammett (American, 1894-1961), Raymond Thornton Chandler (American, 1888-1959) or James Mallahan Cain (American, 1892-1977) etc., when the old fellow Marcel Duhamel (French, 1900-1977) launched the collection in 1945, he selected Peter Cheyney (American, 1896-1951) and your “*No Orchid for Miss Blandish*”.

The “*English Connection*” pushed in ahead of the American masters of “*Hard-boiled*” (unsentimental portrayal of crime). It is true that the personality somewhat strange – even stranger since a complete fabrication – of James Hadley Chase should have alerted the French specialists of the crime stories. A huge commercial success in France (to the point that the French editions of some Chases exceeded the American and English ones) and an author stubbornly staying behind the scene, should have set the critics thinking. But I had foreseen this silence.

Mr CHASE: You seem to be sure of yourself !

Mr GREENE: Do not forget that I am the one who has created our little association. I have foreseen and considered everything. I have not been a secret agent for nothing. You know, these specialists are typically French because they stay among themselves and believe that they are the only ones to be amateurs of police stories. However, the texts you mentioned earlier have been written by people who do not belong to their clique.

The idea of the Chase-Greene association did not come to their mind and our fellows prefer to be unaware of our existence instead of accepting the fact that they are not alone in the field. They would almost favor to denigrate the authors of these texts in lending them some mean-minded intentions: they will say that there is no proof, that they make secret of it for the only purpose to increase the popularity of James Hadley Chase’s books. But look how the silence is beneficial for us. As long as we are not the butt of criticism, all this remains confidential and the readers will never know that they have in hand the work of the most fascinating hidden author of the twentieth century, well before Romain Gary and his pseudonym Emile Ajar (French, 1914-1980)

Mr CHASE: this blindness looks so absurd ! After all, after the numerous successes of Chase in France, Paris has been crammed with police stories written by authors with American harebrained pseudonyms to make ends meet at the end of the month.

Mr GREENE: They are all amateurs. I did start well before them, in 1939. And I did it well since I took care to select a man of straw, in this case: you! These little French forgot to do it. Hence, it has been a child's play to identify most of them.

Mr CHASE: The harm is essentially due to Boris Vian (French, 1920-1959). He is the first who allowed himself to change his name and his style. It was unheard of and the critic did not see anything. With his pseudonym Vernon Sullivan, he let the cat out of the bag. His works "*Et On Tuera Tous Les Affreux*" (not translated into English -We will kill all the dreadfuls) and the other, sentenced for affront to public decency, "*J'Irai Cracher Sur Vos Tombes*" (translated into English as I Shall Spit On Your Graves) could to-day be read by everybody without finding them close to "*L'Ecume Des Jours*" (translated into English as Froth on the Daydream). His revelation divulged our own practices. When I think that in the preface, he wrote for "*J'Irai Cracher Sur Vos Tombes*" (at this time, he was supposed to be Vernon Sullivan's translator and preface-writer), Vian dared to compare Sullivan to Henry Miller (American, 1891-1980), James Mallahan Cain and ... James Hadley Chase.

Mr GREENE: You are pretty tough !

Mister Vian just forgot that in such cases, as a precautionary measure, you should put a mask on the mask. Remember it, when I asked you to sign Raymond Marshall, this precaution appeared to be very useful when somebody brought an action for plagiarism against "*Blonde's Requiem*". But this is enough. I believe that the best we have to do in order to answer all these attacks, is to sum up one by one the various elements which could put our complicity in evidence. We will see if they do stand up to scrutiny.

Mr CHASE: I am listening.

## ACTE 1

### **The Chase-Greene literary universe: life is a trap.**

Mr GREENE: When I think about our personal and literary terms, I must say that I am starting to share your concerns. If I did not know the French critic (there are so many of them refusing to face up the facts), I would have felt myself quite foolhardy to have given so many clues. After all, I am a writer and a writer cannot prevent to mark his trace including his idea of life even in the minor texts.

Mr CHASE: You could have been more careful. Somebody with a minimum of memory and a certain literary flair could undertake a comparative study of our styles and atmospheres and could immediately see a similitude of words, of motives, of scenery and probably of intrigues. Did you think of it ?

Mr GREENE: Of course, although I must confess I have reacted with an excess of optimism and great haste.

Mr CHASE: I am afraid, a little bit late. I do not believe that such a thinking came to your mind when you wrote and published the screenplay of "*The Third Man*". In the after-war Vienna, it is the story of a penicillin dealer who fakes his own death in order to puzzle the military authorities chasing him. It is the dealer's friend, Martins, who, investigating on this death, stumbled on what had been going on.

Mr GREENE: Well ?

Mr CHASE: Well, two years ago, you published under my signature: "*No Business Of Mine*" where we find an intrigue mechanically similar in every respect to "*The Third Man*", the differences resting on the setting, the sex of the characters and the subject of the traffic. Here again, after the war, we have the investigation of a friend called this time Steve Har- mas, returning from London to learn his girl friend Netta's death. In fact, she is well alive but is the source of a plot involving a traffic of jewelry. As in "*The Third Man*", the only witness able to identify the "living dead" had been assassinated.. I do not insist on the false burial episode with a real corpse in the coffin to avoid all suspicions. The background of the intrigue is a shady London comparable to the Vienna of the same period plagued by sordid traf- fics of alcohol as adulterated as the penicillin sold by Harry Lime to the Viennese Hospitals.

Mr GREENE: I had a hell of a nerve to polish up such an intrigue in a form of a Chase before refining it to perfection in a screenplay. Sometimes, I surprise myself. But since we are trying to pinpoint the similitudes of our intrigues, you could have mentioned the ones existing between my book “*A Quiet American*” and “*A Lotus For Miss Chaung*” published under your name in 1961, simply because the setting in Saïgon is common to both works and also because the main character, the American Jaffe, has a Vietnamese girlfriend Nhan as Fowler lives with the young Phuong in “*A Quiet American*” . The two women are both hostess in a nightclub. In addition, the presence in Saïgon of foreign powers (French in “*A Quiet American*” and American in “*A Lotus...*”) is an oppressive factor added to an already heavy atmosphere.

Mr CHASE: Furthermore, there is an episode quite identical: the car immobilized by a Vietnamese attack at the door of a police station. For God's sake ! You should agree that your book does not help to keep our secret. And I am not talking about “*The Third Man*” .

Mr GREENE: Except that in the case of “*A Quiet.../A Lotus...*” I have inverted the creation scheme of “*No Business of Mine/The Third Man*” , this time using an intrigue and a setting eminently “Greenian” and signing Chase. A possibility, may be rude, but efficient to cloud the issues.

Mr CHASE: As far as the other books signed with my name, despite you have been better at concealing your sources, I have found a lot of embarrassing similarities.

Mr GREENE: Are you going to moan again ?

Mr CHASE: I could. Look at the beginning of “*A Gun For Sale*”. Do you remember how the killer is surprised by the female secretary of the old Czech minister he has just shot down ? He will have to eliminate the annoying witness. Conclusion: two murders instead of one.

Mr GREENE: I know what you are talking about. Fifteen years later, in 1951, I published under your name “*Why Pick On Me*”. The main character will also kill a secretary. But this time, the killer was caught searching some confidential documents, not killing a political man. And the secretary was a man. You see ? The analogy was limited to some details but displaced in the story.

Tell me, for a writer, how to avoid to repeat himself ? As a matter of fact, it is very easy: you change the sex of the main character and the action of one protagonist is carried out by another. And the critic is completely taken in. You know, the peculiarity of my creation is to operate with a clever dose of writing organized by scenes. I make the connection between several characters in a specific setting where they will act until, unexpectedly, appear other protagonists in a different situation without apparent links with the previous group. It is only some similar schemes and tiny allusions from one scene to another that will ensure the continuity of the story and because I am working very carefully the scenery of each episode of my novels, I know how to modify the lighting in case of a too obvious repetition.

Mr CHASE: So, we have reviewed the most visible coincidences between your creations and mine.

Mr GREENE: Yours ? That's easy to say, my dear. But you are right. The rest has a more discreet resemblance: names, the use of some elements. You see, we can easily forget the intrigues simply analogical to enter a far less dangerous zone where my modest personality is difficult to be recognized.

Mr CHASE: What element are you thinking about ?

Mr GREENE: Animals, for instance. There is a case illustrating marvelously this aptitude to use the same thing from book to book. Do you remember the Pekingese dog in “*Night Out*” published under your name in 1954 ?

Mr CHASE: Pretty well ! And I see a first analogy: the dog's name Leo is the one attributed to the cat sharing the poor hero's existence in “*More Deadly Than The Male*” .

Mr GREENE: In “*Night Out*”, the dog has the function to reveal the most voracious and corrupted sides of men. Belonging to a dreadful blackmailer named Sweeting, it is also the pretext for strewing the all book with black humor. In fact, “*Night Out*” has a double intrigue: the sadistic murder of a prostitute echoing the one carried out by the fatal Gilda who will get rid of her husband to marry the rich gangster she is kept by. Sweeting who came to sell some information to Gilda, discovers by accident the body of the tender husband hidden in the refrigerator (we will use the fridge case again in “*There Is Always A Price Tag*”). Hence, Gilda will kill Sweeting, but she will forget the dog ! And when

the rich gangster arrives followed by a policeman, the dog will guide the two men to the corpse of Sweeting and the refrigerator containing the cold human flesh. At the end of the book, the Pekingese dog will play the ironic role of the guilty conscience eye, this time with the client of the assassinated prostitute. Once the latter is in the clear, he goes to the station to meet his wife. Obviously, he will not talk about what has just happened to him and will behave as if nothing had changed. When at home, what does he find? On the doorstep, stands a red dog looking at Ken with bulging eyes. The futile reaction of the woman (Oh, darling, what a ravishing surprise!) makes the dog unbearable to the husband who, from now on, will have to live with this eternal reminder of his disreputable adventure. Meanwhile, his wife will remain thankful for the gift offered by a loving husband.

Mr CHASE: Actually, this is a beautiful case of black humor!

Mr GREENE: Well, if you take the novels signed with my name, you will notice that from my Pekingese dogs, I draw the same ironic and symbolic effects but I will modify somewhat the situation so that the analogy is not obvious. Chinky, the Pekingese dog (belonging to the mayor's wife) in "*A Gun For Sale*" reveals its master's corruption and fecklessness. The latter personifies how a certain British ruling class behaves and think just before an armed conflict. But it is also a pretext to some black humor scenes, for instance the episode of a dinner with a wealthy arms dealer Sir Marcus. The mayor and his wife will conceal Chinky under the couch for their guest hates dogs. Obviously, all the people working under Sir Marcus, dread only one thing: to see the dog coming out of its hiding place. With the same intention, I re-use the Pekingese dog in one of my novellas "*Beauty*" and you will notice that between the dog and its unbearable and ageing owner, there is the same relationship as between Sweeting and Leo in "*Night Out*". Obviously, each time the setting is different to keep confusing the issue. "*Night Out*" takes place in London, "*A Gun For Sale*" in a mining town in the north of England and "*Beauty*" in the vicinity of Antibes. All these places have nothing in common.

Mr CHASE: well, the Pekingese story is possible considering that the identical symbolic situations could be due to chance. But let me tell you that I stumble over a point: it is your little quirk to always use the same names for your characters in the books signed either Greene or Chase. You have called Raven, the hero in "*A Gun For Sale*", fine... But how can you re-use the same name five years later for the main character in "*Miss Callaghan Comes To Grief*" signed Chase. You have to admit...it's the limit...

Mr GREENE: It is only absent-mindedness

Mr CHASE: We can accept the coincidence considering that the two men have only the name in common. But the cure is worse than the disease: the sadist and nihilist Raven in "*Miss Callaghan Comes To Grief*" reminds us the disturbing Pinkie character in "*Brighton Rock*"! Under these conditions, how do you expect that our little trick is not discovered? All paths, one way or another, lead to you. And since we are at considering the names, take the case of "*A Gun For Sale*" which worries me. As you know, the name of the main character is Rollo Martins.

Mr GREENE: Which became Holly Martins in the movie. I did explain in the "*Third Man*" preface that I did change the name at the request of the actor who had the part, Joseph Cotten. According to him, for American ears, Rollo had a homosexual connotation.

Mr CHASE: I cannot believe it

Mr GREENE: Excuse me?

Mr CHASE: You know perfectly well what I mean. You have changed the name to Holy because you had already used Rollo for a Chase: this surname is so rare that the connection would have been easily discovered. Do you remember "*Make The Corpse Walk*" that you asked me to published in 1945 under the pseudonym Raymond Marshall? We find there a Rollo, shady manager of a night club, expecting to find out the missing corpse of a billionaire's brother in order to get the wealthy reward.

Mr GREENE: Good. Time has come to be equal to the situation. I do understand your worries but all the elements we have listed, do not constitute any tangible proof. As a matter of fact, there is none in the novel. We cannot limit a literary world and its creator with coincidences. To identify me as the real author of all the Chases published up to now, it should be necessary to see a similitude of... how could I say... of mood...frame of mind. The press acknowledged the originality of my creation although it let me baffled by this "Greene-Land". One does also recognize a world to be out

of the ordinary to the production signed Chase although it is often associated to some less noble epithets such as “commercial author” or “eccentric *hard-boiled* hogwash” . Now, let me ask the question: are these two worlds compatible although they have been, up to now, considered separately ?

Mr CHASE: Recently, I read an essay written by the French author Thomas Narcejac (1908-1998) about the black police novel, “*La Fin d' Un Bluff*” (the end of a bluff). Our names and styles are criticized in a disagreeable manner and the author is not very “*fair play*”. However, I found a quotation which appears to cement marvelously “our” respective works :  
“*We discover here the most original aspect of the to-day black police novel. It is not its violence nor its crudeness which is black. It is even not the despair which can arouse from a reader easily suggestible. It is something more intrinsic, more mysterious which could be defined in presenting the world as a trap. This world has a sens but we are unable to understand it; its meaning is of poetic nature and only accessible to the one who, victim or tormentor, is conscious of the unavoidable failure of his own life justification. The world is at war. Whatever is done, it is a bloodshed. And it is just when the blood runs out that appears the strangeness of all things. The universe ignores and crushes us. But, right at the moment we are crushed, we learn something about ourselves. The horror is therefore at the heart of reality, of life. The horror, far to be a refinement supposed to escape from boredom, is the expression of the human condition. If the contemporary novel is black, it is because humanity has just entered the age of anxiety. The man cannot be examined any longer without encountering pain, revolt, hatred and death. The black novel is always , by some kind of way, political and metaphysical.*”

That is exactly how our respective universes can be characterized: the world seen as a trap (after all, I have not published “*Trusted Like The Fox*” for nothing). With Chase or Greene, fate is powerful and pulls the strings of all the characters who are simple puppets led by their own instinct. More they believe to be free, more they are impaled themselves on their pathetic destiny.

From our books, the reader get the painful impression, wherever the hero goes, whatever the hero does, that he is led, most of the time, to the slaughter. This idea has gained ground mainly after the second world war in the works of writers such as Frédéric Dard (French , 1921-2000)or Georges Simenon (Belgian, 1908-1998)

Mr GREENE: This black humor is also a common characteristic of “our”works. After all, there is something horribly comical to look at a pig struggling to escape from the butcher. It is the laugh of the fright.

Mr CHASE: it is no good. With all the flagrant relationships of our respective universes , our scheme leaks from all sides. Unless we start to undertake an action right now.

Mr GREENE: I am listening. What punitive behavior would you suggest against possible critics, journalists or specialists who could prove our association ?

Mr CHASE: judicially speaking, I do not think that we would have to counter-attack. According to our agreement, I always gave a flat refusal to the journalists who asked me for an interview. If they were insistent, I always answered that the books I did write were commercial publications, without any literary value. They did not only hold it against me but it gave me some more prestige: Chase the secretive, Chase the hermit of Vevey. The snoopers can only speak by hearsay based on presumptive grounds only. I therefore do not see the need to drag them into court. The only difficulty is that these snoopers will be listen to. Who knows if their suppositions are not going to gain a following ? Even if we can turn away the journalists as much as we can, we cannot prevent the future insights.

Mr GREENE: what would you propose ?

Mr CHASE: to develop some implacable objections

Mr GREENE: such as ?

Mr CHASE: I thought about it before coming to see you. First, we can demonstrate your material impossibility to write the Chases for me. But all depends on you and your supposed capabilities to write.

Mr GREENE: go ahead. I would be delighted that you explain them to me. One does not have so often the possibility of knowing oneself.

Mr CHASE: you write slowly. Everybody knows the care taken by you over the wording of your work, not only on the “serious” novels such as “*The Power And The Glory*” which took you two years to write but also on what you call your recreation: “*A Gun For Sale*”, “*The Ministry Of Fear*” , “*Our Man In Havana*” ...etc... How a man so concerned about the style and the impact of his metaphors, so anxious to produce plausible characters including their contradictions, could have the time to write eighty nine books published under the name of James Hadley Chase ? All the more, and simultaneously, you are traveling all over the world and have some other activities such as scriptwriter, editor... without mentioning your past occupation as secret agent.

Mr GREENE: but, dear ! I can write fast when I want it ! By the way, better to let you know that now: on my writing speed, I let the cat out of the bag with my autobiography “*Ways Of Escape*” . .

Mr CHASE: not clever !

Mr GREENE: No ! I gave the excuse of exceptional circumstances: in 1939, I was in need of money. I had just published “*Brighton Rock*”, an ambitious book which would become the cornerstone of my production. However, at this time, it did not sell. In addition, after a trip to Mexico, I got sunk into another quagmire: the writing of “*Power and Glory*” . The book was going slowly, too slowly for my needs at this time (a wife and two children). It was supposed to be as complex as the “*Brighton Rock*” although in a different way and I could not see a chance to obtain an immediate success. It was just the time to do what I always did during the lean times: write some kind of entertaining story, a novel which took into account my creative obsessions and a spirit sufficiently conventional in order not to disconcert the reader. “*A Gun For Sale*” , my previous recreational work, witnessed the fear of the political and financial situation of the 30's: everybody knew that an armed conflict was on the verge to take place. I embroidered a new variation on this theme: “*The Confidential Agent*”. But there was an obstacle to this project: “*Power And Glory*” that I could not put to the scrap heap after so much time spent on it. As one goes along the creation of a book, the writer himself modifies his way of thinking.: in giving up provisionally “*Power And Glory*”, I had reasons to fear, once “*The Confidential agent*” is completed, to come across a subject unrelated with my concerns. I then wrote the two books at the same time, working full speed on “*the Confidential Agent*” in the morning and more carefully on “*Power And Glory*” in the afternoon. All this in six weeks swallowing a lot of amphetamine to keep going: I was in such a need of money. “*The Confidential Agent*” was published in 1939 and had an honorable success which got me out of trouble.

Mr CHASE: Very good. This proves that you are able to write fast and occasionally, that you are not reluctant to face a commercial success. Nevertheless, “*The Confidential Agent*” is written more carefully than any other police story by James Hadley Chase. Well, I am not going to bite the hand that feeds me. The Chases are good books of their kind, but of their kind only. And this one consists primarily to plunder the most visible clichés of the “tough nut” detective novels to produce standardized commercial hits. I have been sufficiently criticized, essentially in France, where an author such as Jean-Patrick Manchette (1942-1992) has described me as a “flashy star of a catching black edition” in the same capacity as Peter Cheney (British, 1896-1951). Under these conditions, I am therefore asking you: why a quality writer such a Greene would have demeaned himself to write as Chase ?

Mr GREENE: You are talking of it as if it was shameful. But look better my dear. Look for the human factor, simply the human factor. Or rather, for want of anything better, what the investigating officers, the examining magistrates and the journalists call “the motive”. I leave you there. We will continue our discussion to-morrow for now, I have a personal matter to deal with..

Mr CHASE: Okay ! See you to-morrow, dear.

**End of Act 1**

To be continued: the disadvantage for two authors, to have the same fiscal advisor.