

## **GRAHAM GREENE'S FICTIONAL FORTE OF PORTRAYING SPIRITUALLY DEAD PERSONS OR SINNERS IN HIS NOVELS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Graham Greene is regarded as one of the greatest and most popular of modern English novelists. The element that gives depth and dimension to his fiction is his faith in Catholicism. This faith has impelled him to probe deeply into the realities of existence and seek religious and metaphysical solutions to life problems. His Catholicism colours his views on the world and reality. It also provides him with answers to several complex and baffling questions concerning human life. However, this Catholicism does not deprive him of or overshadow his competence in the sphere of novelistic art. In fact, his work presents a happy blend of religious thinking and artistic merit.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Graham Greene was born on October 2, 1904. He got his early education at Berkhamsted School and afterwards at Balliol College, Oxford. To him, school was a sort of prison. Even his arrival at Oxford did not bring him any relief from his trouble. Here he seemed to have been aware of the uselessness and the evil of human life. Though he was not a scholar, he often yearned for scholastic success in life. He took degree in modern history. A short period after leaving Oxford, Greene became an intimate friend of a Roman Catholic Priest, Father Trollope and got converted to the Roman Catholic faith in February 1926. This religious conversion profoundly influenced Greene's subsequent views on life. In October 1927, the same Father Trollope united Greene in holy matrimony with an attractive Roman Catholic girl Vivion Dayrell-Browning. Their married life passed happily and they were blessed with a son and a daughter. But after some years, his relations with his wife ceased to be warm and intimate and he began to live separately. However, the relations between them remained friendly and free from antagonism. Greene's conversion to Roman Catholicism had a deep influence on his literary production as well as his personal life. The views or beliefs adopted

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by him after his conversion have found expression in several of his novels like *The Power and the Glory*, *The Heart of the Matter* and *The End of the Affair* that deal with Catholic themes and situations.

Though writing from a Catholic point of view, Greene is not narrow-minded or dogmatic in his approach to religious issues. He is always open to conviction adopting a rational view regarding his faith. There is, in his work, a continued presence of a conflict between his catholic faith and his occasional opinions that are opposed to those of the Catholics. In fact, before his conversion, Greene had already been possessed of certain obsessions like love, pity, fear, sex, betrayal and the like and even after his conversion, he continued to be haunted by these obsessions. An obsession is what possesses a man's mind providing a kind of orientation that enables him to apply his sensibility to certain experiences. In Greene's case, there is his primary obsession with evil, the 'dark' side of human nature and life, produced by his acute sensibility to his varied experience in childhood. This obsession accounts for a number of recurrent themes and motifs, which form a matrix of impulses and circumstances for Greene's characters. Isolation and failure, guilt and betrayal, squalor and corruption, crime and violence, sin and suffering, tragic love and fatality, childhood traumas and adult perversions, excess of pity and innocence – all these symbolize or dramatize the evil that permeates Greene's world. People whose lives are riddled with evil are imaginatively significant to Greene.

Greene's preoccupation with evil is inextricably linked with his religious consciousness, his obsessive awareness of God and His mercy. It is, therefore, not surprising that so many of his characters in spite of their experience of evil, cannot altogether stifle their longing for God or for a lost peace or ideal. They are pulled in opposite directions, as Greene was in his early years. They have on the point of possession of the heart of man. In their stories, Greene exhibits not only sin, corruption, egoism and the demonic, element in man but also man's impulses towards love, charity, fidelity and self-sacrifice. Greene's characters in their attitudes and sensibilities reflect those of their creator and his novels are nothing but an expression of a variety of experiences of the novelist. He identifies himself with all mankind, the guilty as well as the innocent. Though Greene is drawn more closely to the portrayal of sinners in agony, he is concerned with the human conditions and he reacts to them with love and repulsion. He sees and feels his characters in relation to his own intensely felt reactions. His characters too may be used as sign posts to his artistic sensibility, which envelops and overflows their individual outlines.

Sin and suffering, good and evil, damnation and salvation – all these symbolize the evil pervading Greene's world. Greene is more at ease with portraying his sinful characters like the whiskey priest in *The Power and the Glory*, Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter* and Sarah Miles in *The End of the Affair* than his saints or noble characters. His sinners suffer much because of the sins and seem to be eternally damned. But Greene does not regard them to be

utterly devoid of all possibilities of being redeemed through their repentance. His worst sinners are shown to be recipients of God's grace and deserving the status of a saint, as in the case of Sarah Miles in *The End of the Affair*. Through their suffering, these sinners are entitled to be the objects of God's mercy.

Greene's major characters are sinners. Scobie, Rose and Sarah commit adultery. The Whiskey-priest commits fornication. Scobie, Pinkie and Rose commit suicide. They are all concerned with how the Christian underground and marginal man can be saved and how the poor in spirit, the weak in will and the proud in soul can be saved. *The Power and the Glory* is built on the equation of the human and the non-human. The setting and the protagonist are inseparable. It is the story of a priest's attempt to escape from a land, which has forsaken religious faith. The novel is set in the primitive landscape of Mexico, during the time of political strife and religious persecution in the 1920s. Though there is a variety of characters in Greene's novels, they can be easily divided into two broad groups. One group represents law, justice and morality. The other group represents fallen and damned creatures trying to find out salvation through suffering and sympathy. Father Rank in *The Heart of the Matter* belongs to the first group and the Whisky-priest in *The Power and the Glory* and Major Scobie belong to the second group. But they are all believers in God. His second group of characters are all isolated betrayed, hunted or haunted and condemned figures. They all try to find salvation through suffering, sacrifice and martyrdom. They are either spiritually dead persons or sinners but trying to attain godliness. They are all concerned with how the marginal man can be saved and how the poor in spirit, the weak in will and the proud in soul can be saved.

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