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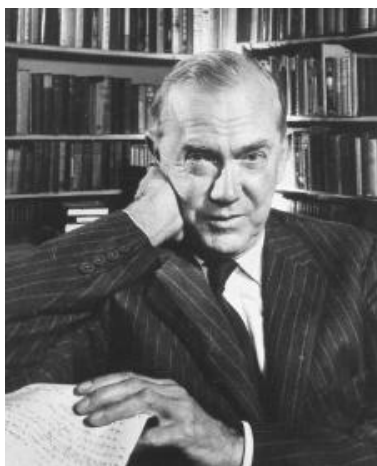
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Theme of Religion and Psychology in Graham Greene's
Select Novels: *The Power and the Glory* and *The Heart of the Matter*

T. Thenmozhi, M.A., M.Phil.



Courtesy: <http://www.notablebiographies.com/Gi-He/Greene-Graham.html>

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Graham Green

Graham Greene was one of the leading novelists of the twentieth century. Greene was a journalist, travel writer, short story writer, novelist, dramatist, and a film scriptwriter". He was born on October 2, 1904 in Berkhamsted, England. He was the fourth of six children of his parents, Charles Henry Greene and Marion Raymond Greene. His father was the Headmaster of an English public school at Berkhamsted. Greene was educated at this school until he went up to Balliol College, Oxford. He found school life rather difficult. He had a difficult childhood, and he attempted suicide on a number of occasions. After an episode when he was sixteen years, in 1920, in what was a radical step for the time, he was sent for psychoanalysis for six months in London. Later he returned to school as a day student. His therapist, Kenneth Richmond suggested that he took to writing as a way to deal with his troubled emotions.

Graham Greene's Novels

Graham Greene's first novel, *The Man Within*, appeared in 1929. It is a novel about a betrayal and it is set against a background of skeptical romance. The sense of sin does not predominate in this novel, as it does in his later works. The protagonist, Andrews, betrays his friend and leader, but does not account it a sin, though the feeling of sinfulness clouds his mind when he is seduced by Merriman's mistress. However, it was his fourth novel, *Stamboul Train*, published in 1932, which established his reputation as a novelist of promise.

Greene's famous novels are *The Man Within* (1929), *The Name of Action* (1930), *Rumour at Nightfall* (1931), *Stamboul Train* (1932), *It's a Battlefield* (1934), *England Made Me* (1935), *A Gun for Sale* (1936), *Brighton Rock* (1938), *The Confidential Agent* (1939), *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Ministry of Fear* (1943), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), *The Third Man* (1950), *The End of the Affair* (1951), *The Quiet American* (1955), *Loser Takes All* (1955), *Our Man in Havana* (1958), *A Burnt-Out Case* (1961e), *The Comedian* (1966), *Travels with My Aunt* (1969), *The Honorary Consul* (1973), *The Human Factor* (1978) and *Dr. Fischer of Geneva*, or, *The Bomb Party* (1980).

A Playwright

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Apart from this copious flow of novels, Greene has also written a number of plays, books for children and collection of essays, which were well received, although he was always first and foremost a novelist. Greene won several honours and awards for his unique contribution in the field of the novel. In 1961 he was made an Honorary Associate of the American Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1962, the Cambridge University conferred the degree of D.Litt. on him. Balliol, his old college, had made him an Honorary Fellow in 1963. He was made a Companion of Honour in 1966. He had been enrolled to the Order of Merit in 1986. Honorary doctorates were conferred by Cambridge University (1962), Edinburgh (1967), Oxford (1979) and Moscow (1988).

Awards

Prizes awarded to him included the Shakespeare Prize (Hamburg, 1969), the John Dos Passos Prize (1980), and the Jerusalem Prize (1980). In France, he was made a Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur (1967) and a Commandeur des Arts et Lettres (1984). He was made an Honorary Citizen of Anacapri in 1978 and was awarded the Medal of the City of Madrid in 1980, the Grand Cross of Panama's Order of Vasco Nunez de Balboa in 1983, and Nicaragua's Order of Ruben Dario in 1987. His name was also proposed, more than once, for the award of the Noble Prize, but he missed the honour narrowly. These are only a few of the numerous honours bestowed on him.

Religious Background

In some novels – especially *Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory*, *The Heart of the Matter* and *The End of the Affair* – Graham Greene is manifestly Catholic. In these themes and issues, the major characters are Catholic. The chief figures show tremendous faith in God; they are redeemed of their sin and relieved of their suffering through God's grace and God receives them. The theme of sin and salvation is central in these novels and so is the problem of evil and suffering. The characters are aware of their sins; many of them confess; some fail to confess, yet they are loyal to God, and come back to Him by repenting.

A Great Fiction Writer

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Graham Greene is well-versed with the technique of fiction. He approaches all the techniques of fiction with a critical and imaginative eye, deriving the best of it for himself. In Greene, the writer has become director and producer who controls the action and moves it freely. His camera-eye is like the eyes of God, seeing all, but withholding judgment. His narrative technique has received favourable critical attention for its technical virtuosity, both in the revelation of character as well as in carrying the story forward, holding the reader's attention with complete success. Throughout Greene's long literary career, he has explored several kinds of narrative techniques, such as stream-of-consciousness, picaresque, first-person narration, intricate time-schemes and so on. The technique evolved by Graham Greene is suited to the pursuit motif that forms the foundation of most of his novels and the literary productions he chose to call the 'entertainments'.

Focus on Sinful Nature

Graham Greene is certainly one of the genuine voices of the age, proclaiming its disgust and despair, its guilt and anger, and its struggle to find faith. He is pre-occupied with faith and religion in many of his serious novels. At the same time, he never loses sight of the facts discovered by modern psychology. His obsession is with sin and the seediness of our civilization. Greene not only points out how sin and suffering are inevitable in this world from the point of view of the Christian religion, but he also presents man's sense of guilt and the importance of effort to prevent a repetition of the sinful act with great psychological insight. The main interest of Greene's novels lies in this.

Blending of Religion and Psychology

Greene's greatest contribution to modern fiction lies in the unique blending of religion and psychology, which he achieves while interpreting his characters and the human situation. Graham Greene makes the readers aware of the fact that there is a dimension to human personality that cannot be explained solely on scientific evidence; he shows that only a sound religious faith can rehabilitate the whole man, supporting him in crisis, and giving meaning and purpose to his life. Greene has made use of the concepts of religion and modern psychology to

enter to the root causes of man's distress and has achieved something unique in English literature by this blending of religion and modern psychology in his works.

Greene's use of psychological analysis in the case of the whisky-priest begins in the opening chapter when he is on the way to a dying woman's home in the interior of the country, and when he begins to pray with his brandied tongue. But this is only a fleeting glimpse of the priest's mind. The detailed psychological analysis of the priest's mind is given when he is traveling on a mule to Maria's village. The readers get the glimpse of his whole past, his damned state as sinner, his failure, weakness and frustration, his mental agony, his despair and his willingness to repent. The priest's remorse and sense of the futile are brought out by means of his interior monologue in Maria's village.

Interior Thoughts

Greene also gives the readers an account of the priest's interior as regards his love for his child, his pride, his realization that the mestizo with whom he has travelled will betray him, and above all his self-realization when he says:

O God, forgive me – I am a proud, lustful, greedy man. I have loved authority too much. These people deserve a martyr to care for them – not a man like me, who loves all the wrong things. (PG 95)

When the whisky-priest is in prison, his past is brought to the notice of readers through the stream-of-consciousness method. The priest remembers how in the old days people used to come to him and kiss his gloved hand. He also realizes that he is not a saint. When the priest has finally been captured, the state of his mind during the night, which he spends in prison before his execution, is also revealed to the readers through an interior monologue. He is overcome by a feeling of his own inadequacies and worthlessness. He thinks of himself going to God empty-handed, with nothing done at all. He feels that it would have been quite easy to live like a saint if he had shown a little self-restraint and a little courage. He thinks of himself as a man who has missed happiness by a very narrow margin.

The priest's dreams and reminiscences also reveal his inner consciousness. His most significant reminiscence is the one, which relates to his days at Concepcion. He particularly

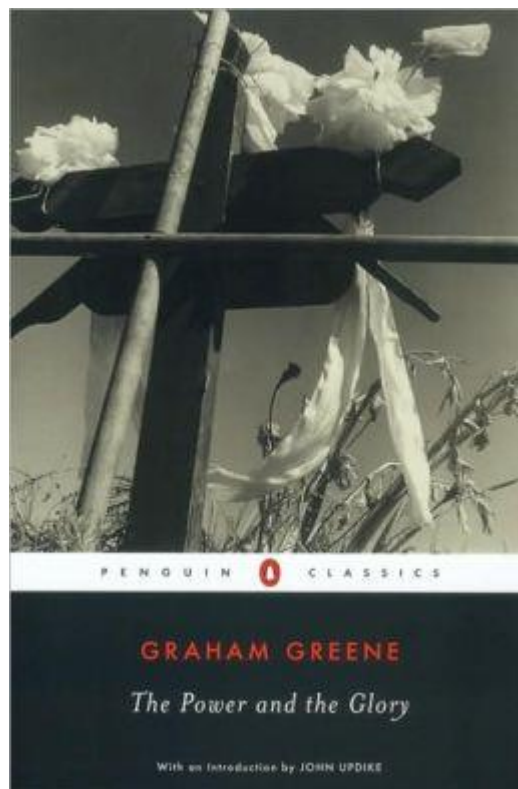
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thinks of a dinner-party held in honour of the tenth anniversary of his ordination. This reminiscence serves to show that the priest in his days of prosperity used to be a gay, carefree kind of man, fond of receiving the attentions of people, proud, ambitious, and not very particular about his duties as a priest. In his dream - dreamed the night before his execution, he finds himself sitting at a café-table with several dishes spread before him and eating hungrily. A priest is saying Mass, but this priest takes no notice of him. At last, all dishes are empty because he has eaten everything. Then he finds wine being served to him by the girl Coral from the banana station. This dream tries to show that the priest is still feeling guilty about his days of prosperity when he used to eat too much and also a sense of guilt in drinking and asking for drink wherever he had gone.

***The Power and the Glory* - More on Whisky Priest**



The central character of *The Power and the Glory*, the whisky-priest, is a staunch Catholic. Even at a time of religious persecution, he does not give up his faith and goes on allowing priestly services to the sick and suffering. He is hunted by the police for his religious beliefs, yet he is not afraid of material power and force. He goes on fulfilling his duties

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faithfully. Although externally he is a sinner who indulges in taking liquor and begets an illegitimate child, yet he has the real humanistic tendencies of a true devotee of God. He upholds God's principles of justice, truth, mercy, and does not let his belief in God slide even for a while.

The Power and the Glory is directly concerned with the issue of salvation and damnation. The hero of the novel is a weak priest who has broken the rules of the Church by fathering a daughter and by having formed the habit of drinking. Greene shows almost with eager care how unworthy this man is to be the final representative of the Church in a province cleared of priests. He is condemned and scolded; he faces humiliation. Captain Fellows calls his act of begging brandy "shameless". His mistress Maria virtually forces him to go out of her village and rebukes him: "The sooner you are dead the better". Yet he gets salvation through sacrifice and suffering; he dies the death of a martyr.

The whisky-priest has an unshakeable faith in God and His Mercy. He offers prayer to God, "O God, give me any kind of death – without contrition, in a state of sin – only save this child" (PG 82). The priest's death in a state of mortal sin suggests that the first prayer at least is answered. He repeatedly says that he is living in a state of mortal sin. The term mortal sin means sin of a very serious kind such as fornication, and it means spiritual death.

The whisky-priest is a lover of God. He sacrifices himself to the people he serves. His heart is filled with the love of God and "an enormous tenderness" for the image of God. When he dreams of his daughter, Brigitta, he prays, "Oh God, help her. Damn me, I deserve it, but let her live forever" (PG 208). His heart is filled with tenderness and love even for the half-caste who wanted to betray him to the police: "Christ had died for this man too: how could he pretend with his pride and cowardice to be any more worthy of that death than this half-caste?" Finally, the priest accomplishes the greatest act of love and sacrifice by laying down his life for God and the people he served.

Triumph of Religion

In spite of the opposition of the lieutenant and his advocacy of the power of materialism, the glory of the church, of God is victorious. Religion triumphs in the end. The priest is

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executed, but his prayer “Oh, God, send someone more worthwhile to suffer for” – is answered, and another takes his place. The lieutenant loses the unshakable conviction in his ideas and the boy Luis is won to the Church by the priest’s martyrdom.

The whisky-priest has abundant faith in God’s mercy, though he does not know the exact nature of this mercy. As he tells the lieutenant,

I don’t know a thing about the mercy of God; I don’t know how awful the human heart looks to Him. But I do know this . . . that if there’s ever been a single man in the state damned, then I’ll be damned too. (PG 43)

God’s mercy is not immediately comprehensible to him as it is not comprehensible to the readers, but He is merciful – the proof of which comes before us after his death when another priest resurrects him by his arrival to continue the work of God.

Revelation of Sinfulness

The whisky priest is overcome by his own faults, inadequacies and worthlessness. He is given too much to sin. His dreams also reveal his guilt. The dreams of the police officer reveal this obsession to completely annihilate religion from the Mexican state. Padre Jose lives under mental tension because he wished to be a priest but circumstances forced him to live as a common person. The ritual of the confession of sin is also a mixture of religion and psychology. It helps the sinner to get rid of his guilty conscience, he feels lighter after the confessions and is re-vitalized to begin life afresh.

Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter*

Similarly, Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter* is aware of the sins he has committed and the end for him is damnation. Scobie becomes an isolated creature because of his honesty and integrity. Scobie is heart-broken after the death of his only child and soon begins to pity the helpless Helen Rolt. However, the emotion of pity leads to many miseries for Scobie.



The readers see a blending of religion and psychology in Greene's depiction of Scobie's sufferings. They see here Greene employing the Catholic idea of sin and damnation and at the same time presenting Scobie's state of mind with great insight. Scobie's sufferings lead to his spiritual purgation and his dying speech represents a completely Christian attitude towards suffering. He offers his life to God so that Louise and Helen may be happy, and he risks the damnation of his soul so that the others may live in peace. The suffering Scobie undergoes reflects his deepest motivations and the nature of his character.

Scobie's is the suffering of the soul rather than of the body. The suffering is the result of the evil of lust, which is an offshoot of his pity. His suffering is the ironic result of his own character and will. Because of his acts of sin, he feels the irreparable sense of loss, which represents the deepest level of suffering. Greene in Scobie, paints out the human tendency to demand that God should act according to man's idea of right and wrong or else, he should cease to be God. Scobie's sufferings and pain are, in fact, the results of his attempts to play the part of Providence. Greene shows how Scobie's actions based on pity, paradoxically lead to his own sufferings.

God's Justice

Greene shows that God's justice operates in a number of ways for the punishment of sin, and the sense of guilt is one of these ways. Scobie, for instance, does not foresee the chaos of guilt, fear, and anguish from which they later suffer. Christian theology considers spiritual pain as the worst punishment of the damned. The sinner, confronted with the moral choice between God's will and what is not God's will, chooses to cut himself away from God. In doing so, he brings about by his own act, the condition of separation from God, which if not altered by the

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time of death, becomes the basis of damnation and the cause of eternal agony. The punishment of the damned soul is to remain eternally in hell.

Blending Psychology and Religion

As a Catholic writer, Graham Greene deals with the problem of sin and evil, damnation and salvation. The basic theme of Greene is man within, that is, the exploration of man's psyche. He has conducted fine psychological studies of his characters. He shows how the tension within his characters is due to their faith in God and religion, getting revealed in the working of their minds through psychoanalysis. Thus Religion and psychology have been blended together in Green's Catholic novels - *The Power and the Glory* and *The Heart of the Matter*.

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