
THE REFLECTION OF RELIGIOUS FEATURES IN GRAHAM GREENE'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

This article describes and gives essential information about life and creative work of Graham Greene and his best-seller novels. He developed his writing status as an entertaining and accomplished writer, known for his literary adroitness and flair for story-telling. His creative work was long and prolific. Greene published for more than half a century, a rare achievement indeed. In all, over forty works in various styles flowed from his pen. He is in feet one of the few twentieth century authors with an international audience. Greene's works, especially his basic novels, presents his probing interest in religious matters and influences on the human's life.

KEYWORDS: *Catholic Imagination, Image Of Human, Moral Or Selfish Motives, Religious Views.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Graham Greene is a famous British novelist, essayist, critic, journalist, short story writer, screenwriter, travel as well as children's book writer with a career stretching from the 1930s until the early 1990s. In genre, his novels range from thrillers the so-called 'entertainments' travel literature, 'Core Catholic' novel, spy novels and political works all partly based upon his own foreign and domestic experiences. According to Mark Bosco [1], an acclaimed Graham Greene expert and author of Graham Greene's Catholic Imagination, one of the divisions critics utilizes for Greene's work is into Catholic and post-Catholic works. Nevertheless, even though Greene tried abandoning his 'Catholic imagination' for his writing later in his career, it appeared even in his more political and secular work. For instance, William Igoe, Greene's priest friend notes, in *The Quiet American* (1955), a novel Greene tried to write without any Catholicism in it, the main character Fowler, after having the American Pyle killed, wishes he could confess to someone.

The Catholic frame of mind makes up the psychology of Greene's characters, even though it is never simple nor do the characters always show themselves faithful Catholics. Greene's half-believing characters are always a typical almost heretic in the dogmatic meaning of what it means to be a Catholic, but at the same time the motives of their actions, their self-hatred and their intention to sacrifice themselves for others make them much more righteous than any 'pious' figure among them in the novels. Greene endows some of his characters with psychological and spiritual suffering, bringing it into extremes, Michael Meyer, Greene's friend recalls, due to his own inner lifelong sense of an ever-present Hell on earth. The "sinner at the heart of Christianity" is at the heart of Greene's 'Core Catholic' novels a character suffering through his as if God-given fate finding the only possible escape in death. This thesis focuses on the basis of the inner torment of such figures in Greene's novels between 1940-1951. The characters focused on are the so-called whisky priest in *The Power and the Glory* (1940), a novel depicting the 1930s Mexican religious persecutions, Major Henry Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), a story of choosing loyalties

in a British West African colony, and Sarah Miles in *The End of the Affair* (1951), torn between goodness and badness for two men and God. [2]

In order for the reader to comprehend the work of Graham Greene more deeply the thesis is going to firstly look at the Greene's beginnings as a person and then as a starting writer. As we come, Graham Greene's childhood, where the young Graham built up his personal and creative mental environment of 'Greenland' a place of conflicting loyalties, betrayal, and lack of trust and safety. This state of mind Greene felt very deeply and which stayed with him throughout his whole life was partly caused by his alleged bipolar disorder leading him to several suicide attempts. These deadly experiences as well as his frequent travels and eventful love life are Greene's attempts to escape from "boredom," which he said, "perhaps drives one to creativity, to escape it." The paper also encapsulates Greene's Oxford studies, beginnings as a Catholic convert, a married man, and journalist turned novelist. [3]

According to Mark Bosco, the French Catholic Revivalists León Bloy, Charles Péguy, Georges Bernanos, Francois Mauriac as well as the British cardinal John Henry Newman played an important role in the formation of Graham Greene's understanding of what it can mean to be a Roman-Catholic at the time and how self-sacrifice can work within a novel. This emphasis on the figures which influenced Greene's writing and imagination finishes with Evelyn Waugh, Greene's modern that was also a Catholic writer and promoter of the Catholic Literary Revival in Britain, who wrote of Roman-Catholics in a more upper-class setting. Waugh, in his acclaimed novel *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) portrays different faces and sorts of Catholic belief, in an aristocratic family, narrated by, for the most part, agnostic Charles Ryder, featuring two characters Julia and Sebastian Flyte who, similarly to Greene's heroes depends on struggle with their faith. [4]

Further, the article goes on to selectively represents the certain triggers of inner torment within each identical character separately in each of the novels. Greene's novel motivated by his beginnings in MI in Sierra Leone during World War II – *The Heart of the Matter*. Major Henry Scobie is a deputy-commissioner at the police in a West African colony. He is chronically truthful, even though he is threatening his credibility and putting his loyalty in question. This does not apply to his wife Louise Scobie and later mistress Helen Rolt to whom he feels a strong feeling of responsibility for their happiness, which he can not give them both at the same time, therefore he attempts to make them of his love and affection with white lies. The feeling he has for both of the women is called 'pity love' due to his conviction that without him Helen and Louise would both be doomed to misery and loneliness which are the reasons why stays with them. Scobie would much rather be left alone, to his stereotypical work, than have to lie to two women he thinks are totally related to him, to which he promised always to love them and never to go them, feeling very much bound to those promises although he knows he is not succeeding, that he makes decision to escape in suicide. Therefore, Scobie is a study of how a deep sense of responsibility to one's promises and position as well as 'pity love' which traps him in a vicious circle of unfulfilling relations can cause one to the most desperate form of escape from life. [5]

Also, Graham Greene's most autobiographical novel of the 'Core Catholic' set – *The End of the Affair* – inspired by his romance with Catherine Walston. It is a story of a love triangle, or rather a love square, between Sarah Miles, her boring husband Henry Miles, her jealous lover Maurice Bendrix, and "that other" meaning God, in whom Sarah comes to believe in gradually and whom she joins in the afterlife. Sarah, the object of the character study in chapter five, is an unfulfilled housewife who falls deeply in love and begins an affair with the writer Bendrix. Three years into their romance Bendrix gets hit unconscious during the London Blitz. When Sarah thinks him dead so she turns to God praying for Bendrix's life willing to sacrifice their affair if he should be brought back. When Bendrix walks into the room, as if miraculously brought back from the dead, that is when Sarah's struggle with God and faith begins. Since whenever she prays to God, even though still not certain of his existence, her prayers get answered and which make her angry,

confused but also bound to keep her promises, which always go against her being with Bendrix – the only thing she wants. She is constantly in doubt whether she has to keep her vows to stay away from Bendrix and stay with her husband, but once she is convinced of God's existence, still not wanting to live the way she is supposed to according to dogmatic Catholicism, she decides to die. Sarah's belief in the authority and presence of the ever-watchful God, with his Divine Grace and love, lead her to a powerful inner conviction that she must hold to her vows to God to do what is righteous, but since she is not strong, or her love for Bendrix is so stronger, she cannot obey and seeks escape from her misery. [6]

The major secondary sources used in this thesis used to delineate Graham Greene's life are Norman Sherry's *A Life of Graham Greene: Volume One 1904-1939* (1989), Donal Sturrock's *The Graham Greene Trilogy* (1993), Graham Greene's *A Sort of Life* (1971), and Mark Bosco's *Graham Greene's Catholic Imagination* (2005). Norman Sherry was Greene's only official biographer who travelled the world and noted down every detail he could find about Greene's life, tracked down his family, friends, former colleagues, other writers, or members of the clergy, producing an altogether three-volume biography. The first volume, used in this thesis, maps Greene's childhood and development into adulthood which is where his first experiences with misery, insecurity, the omnipresent Hell and his searches for escape from such a reality began. Greene's childhood experiences brought him to his interest in suffering, in the Catholic faith and how one can escape internal torment, which partly led him to become a writer, are all found in the consistent detail in Sherry's biography that is vastly quoted and paraphrased mostly in the first chapter drawing out Greene's life. The 1993 documentary featuring Greene's friends, family, lovers, co-workers, fellow authors and himself in an insightful record of how Greene affected lives and society with his writing and existence.

Sturrock's documentary provides multiple viewpoints on the experiences, personality traits, work and personal life that all had an effect on Graham Greene's career and actions. *A Sort of Life* is Greene's autobiography in which he recalls memories of his journey to adulthood, his former opinions and the motives of his actions which accompany Sherry's biography in this thesis in noting the facts of the novelist's early beginnings. Mark Bosco, a Jesuit priest, university professor and acclaimed critical authority on Graham Greene, engagingly draws out the historical, literary, critical and religious context in which Greene came to grow as an author, mostly concentrating on the specific Catholicism in Greene's work. Bosco is a major secondary source in this thesis for his vast findings and comprehending of Greene due to his extensive study of a palette of critical works as well as primary sources being able to provide a spectrum of detached opinions.

Graham Greene's novels, this thesis concentrates on *The Power and the Glory*, *The Heart of the Matter* and *The End of the Affair*, portray an image of human suffering in an environment of corruption, contradictory loyalties, different types of Roman-Catholic belief, denial or atheism, and different moral or selfish motives. Greene is a novelist who grew up in a quite enclosed society where he enclosed himself in a world of his own, where he could roam in an imaginary land powered by his adventure-book reading or foreign lands, dreaming of escape from misery he felt himself living. Although not primarily, he turned to Roman Catholicism in search of relief only to search for it for the rest of his life. Nevertheless, his Catholic half-belief formed the psychology and the deeply rooted moral principles of his major characters whose triggers of suffering, in their partly self-inflicted partly God-inflicted destinies, are the focus of this work. [7]

“In several interviews Greene declared that the most important things in a person's life, and he meant himself as well, happen in his first sixteen years. Greene's religious imagination is so deeply grounded in these early experiences that they thematically show up in all of his most deeply felt work.” Therefore, it is important to begin tracing Greene the novelist all the way back to his childhood experiences. For the understanding of Graham Greene and his work, it is important to make the distinction between certain frontiers in which his novel heroes move.

Graham was a very sensitive child always as if seeking refuge and a private space of his own. He began to distinguish several worlds or spaces since his childhood. “The future novelist was born into three small worlds, the town of Berkhamsted, the family home attached to the school and Berkhamsted School itself . . .” Graham Greene’s childhood at the School, Mark Bosco notes, was a significant and dark part of his life where his strong sense of split loyalties, frontiers, evil and betrayal formed. Connected with the need for hiding places and safety he searched for was the need to escape. Graham found several ‘ways of escape’, the name of his second autobiography, in his early years. The sense of conflicting loyalties was a main problem for Graham who was the headmaster’s son not being accepted amongst his classmates nor did he stand out in his family in comparison with his older brother Raymond who was a great, complex, also a kind of school authority, and good at sports. Charles Greene accented “respectability and social correctness” and representing the School authorities and his wife Marion was closer to her husband than to her children, were aloof to their children who could spend time with them only an hour a day in their early childhood. Graham’s sense of belonging to a family with a long line of traditional upbringing “varied in degrees of success, proud of their history” also contributed to his need to rebel later on. Graham’s friend from school Claud Cockburn described, according to Sherry, how Graham looked different, separate, from his family, some of their classmates thinking him a spy because of that, in contrast to his sporty admired prefect of a brother Raymond. [8]

In conclusion, Graham Greene’s whisky priest in *The Power and the Glory*, Major Henry Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter*, and Sarah Miles in *The End of the Affair* are all characters who are led by their beliefs, convictions and moral codes to such, for them, hopeless crossroads that they seek escape in death. Greene chose three completely dissimilar settings a Mexican state in the 1930s where religion is banned, a wasteland of a British colony in West Africa, and (post-)World War II London and recreated them into Greenlands of uncertainty, misery, where one should never trust and shall be tracked down by some kind of authority. Scobie’s suicide is the most heretical solution to his inability to decide how else he should please both his wife and lover, while disobeying his promise to them being out of the question, but at the same time he is created, bearing such a deep sense of responsibility for his promises, that there is not other solution in his mind, the way it was created. Having failed in being able to make neither Helen nor Louise happy he thought he sacrificed himself for their good chance at a better life without him. If he were only less truthful and did not stand behind his promises and felt responsibilities, his love out of pity that tied him to Helen and Louise being also a kind of duty for him, he could still live, with the woman he would choose as the High Commissioner of the colony police.

Joseph Conrad helped Greene to visualise that the darkness within each man’s heart is a choice, even though one was led down the wrong path by the inhumanity and corruptness of the ruling society. Cardinal John Henry Newman gave Greene a deeper understanding of his own conversion to Roman Catholicism and what it can mean to be a Catholic in British society. The French Literary Catholic Revivalists provided Greene with examples of how he can write psychological and spiritually challenging literature calling for a shift in thinking about fixed truths and boundaries of Catholicism. Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene wrote side by side promoting the Literary Catholic Revival in Britain, each in their own way. Graham Greene is still readable today because his novels are thrilling ‘entertainments’ challenging the boundaries of what it means not only to be a Catholic but also a human being trying to stay true to certain principles of humanity, morality, and justice in a world where it is harder and harder to know right from wrong.

So, this article is based on the origins and triggers of mental torment in the novels *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), and *The End of the Affair* (1951) by Graham Greene. Greene’s sensitivity to suffering is related to his childhood where he could not side with either his father who was a pedagogical authority nor with his rebellious groupmates, because that would be a betrayal of his family. His suicidal tendencies awakened in him an interest in death and

escapes from life traps. Greene's psychoanalyst Kenneth Richmond was one of the people who brought him to assist him direct his rich inner life and imagination into writing. Personalities who influenced Greene imaginatively and spiritually were Cardinal John Henry Newman and the French Literary Catholic Revivalists, and literarily it was Joseph Conrad.

An interesting comparison arises with Evelyn Waugh – Greene's Catholic literary contemporary. In *The Power and the Glory* the main protagonist, the so-called whisky priest, is pursued not only by his guilt, which he cannot get redemption, but also by his feeling of unworthiness being the last priest in the state, where religion is persecuted. *The Heart of the Matter* is a novel about Scobie, who has a strong inner sense of responsibility of keeping to his promises and duties, who is torn apart due to his inability to keep his vows of and make the two women of his life happy at the same time. *The End of the Affair* is a story of a love square between two lovers, a husband and God, where Sarah, on the basis of her vows and wagers with God, is led to lead a life she does not want from which she is saved in tragic death. All the novels by Graham Greene are reflections on the possible boundaries of human tolerability of inner torment caused by a deeply rooted inner moral and spiritual sensitivity.

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