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## **Graham Greene's Heroes Pinkie and Whisky – Priest Presented as Tragic Figures in His Fictional World: A Brief Note**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*Graham Greene, a leading exponent of the existentialist psychological fiction, weaves his lines with the threads of utter reality of his times. He enjoys a desirable position among the gateway of modern novelists. He has pictured his heroes with all human weakness and virtues which can be appealing to every literary lovers of any age, time or place. This paper throws light on his works scrutinizing the manner in which how he has superbly blended the tragic dilemma of his characters with modern psychological vision and religious outlook.*

Graham Greene is the leading exponent in English of the existentialist- psychological fiction which dominated European literature during the forties and afterwards. One characteristic of the literary period is that the old snobbery of literary genres was given up and that thrillers are romances or spy stories or space fiction could be as well written literary form. Furthermore, it was widely agreed that these traditionally inferior genres are especially suited to the age in which we live. "Escape" literature used to be contrasted with "reality" which meant the prosaic, secure, everyday world of most English readers. But now a days, even the English reader has both realised and recognized that the late twentieth – century world was becoming more and more like the world of thrillers and spy – stories and space of fiction. The common place world was losing its special privilege for the writer. Graham Greene distinguished himself as a writer to the effect that he did his best to make the thriller a serious form of literature. Greene is the successor of Conrad in this respect. He has turned the thriller into a genre which uses the modern international world as material for art. The perception of the absurd is part of the essential philosophy of the thriller.

In some of his novels, Greene was especially preoccupied with Catholicism. He presents Catholicism in Brighton Rock (1938). The Heart of the Matter (1948) and The End of the Affair (1951) as an obsessional neurosis, acknowledging that his conversion to the Catholic Church was deeply influenced by the accidentals of his own childhood and youth. He was led to form clearly the concept of damnation; and salvation he seems to have accepted only as a logically entailed possibility. Greene's Catholic characters seem neither to have good reasons for their belief nor to find any joy in them. Fear, pity, violence, pursuit and the endless, restless quality of man's search for salvation and the God's love for man are the recurring themes of Greene's novels. Many of his novels are characterized by violence. They are "thrillers", with murder, suicide and betrayal as their ingredients. A conspicuous feature of Greene's earlier books is the presence of the element of pursuit: the pursuit of a criminal by the police, of a traitor by those whom he has betrayed, of a victim by his persecutors. It symbolized the pursuit of man's soul, his inner self by God; he was hunted down in his search for a peace that was often found only in death. Caught between pain and pain, tormented by pity and tragic dilemmas, afraid of damnation, Greene's characters are often the victims of their own unforgettable love for God. Greene's view-point and working out of his

themes demanded just such conclusions that he had to carry to their absolute ends both what he believes to be the human capacity for love, pity, fear and above all, despair, and God's love for mercy.

The dominant theme in Greene's fiction is the conflict between good and evil. This theme was stated tentatively even in his first novel and appeared again and again throughout his work, becoming crystallized with his acceptance of the Roman Catholic faith. This acceptance was the turning-point in his literary career. Such a great writer was born on 2 Oct 1904, as the son of a former and educated at this very school until he went up to Balliol College, Oxford. School life had only a depressing effect on him and even at Oxford he seemed to have been aware of the uselessness and the evil of human life. After leaving Oxford, Greene felt a desire to go to the East which promised adventure and money. Even while at Oxford, he developed an earnest desire to publish, which resulted in the publication of his very first book a volume of book namely **Babbling April** in 1925 in which he took a sour look at life's dinginess and spoke rather knowingly of death. He is said to have been intensely dissatisfied with life and the Catholic faith offered him some kind of consolation. But the effect of the Catholic faith on his writings has been really very deep. He has to his credit publication of such remarkable works as 1. **The Man Within** (1929), 2. **The Confidential Agent** (1939), 3. **The Power and the Glory** (1940), 4. **The Heart of the matter** (1948), 5. **The End of the Affair** (1951), 6. **The Quiet American** (1955), 7. **Our Man in Havana** (1958), 8. **A Burnt-out case** (1961), 9. **The Comedians** (1966) and 10. **The Human Factor** (1978) No doubt, Greene's development as a novelist reveals an attempt to restore to the English novel two qualities which it had lost; one, the religious sense and the two being the sense of the importance of the human act.

What is generally understood and accepted is that in the twentieth century man's faith in the accepted values and established institutions got shattered with the result that in the absence of any anchorage or what T.S. Eliot called 'Red Rock' in the **The Waste Land**, man found himself lonely, orphaned and at bay. So the literature of this century in general and novels in particular are a profound expression of this sense of nihilism with its consequent socio-economic degeneration and psycho spiritual regression beautifully represented by the modern novelists like Graham Greene, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce. The and economic values due to which there was a wide spread anarchy, anxiety, hollowness and chaos in every fact of life resulting into the feelings of disbelief among the whole mankind as said by W.B. Yeats in his poem *The Second Coming* :

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold  
Here anarchy is loosed upon the world"

As literature is the reflection of the contemporary society, Greene weaves his lines with the threads of utter reality of his times. His early sufferings made him sympathetic and compassionate towards the outcaste and downtrodden in society. As P.N. Pandit puts it,

"Greene's sense of utter futility regarding life, the stifling puritanical environment of his school at Berkhamstead, his alienation from his schoolmates, his tortures at the hands of bullies, his truanacies to the commons and his desire to end his life by playing Russian roulette and taking poison all these form a background to understand his characters" (P9)

These experiences form a symbiosis in Greene's childhood experiences and the characters of his novels recreate the same wherever they faced in their childhood. Carolyn D.Scott notes the same fact as;

“No critic can escape the childhood theme in Greene, for it is the one obsession out of which his tragedies grow”(P9)

Though Greene is concerned like many other thought. Creative writers, with the human predicament, he does carry out his mission according to his sensibility. His central characters are his mouth pieces who represent his own ideas and conflicts as well as explorations of his experiences. He looks at his heroes in relation to his own intensely felt reactions and consequently they may be used as signposts to his own sensibility. This is because Greene himself suffered from unhappy childhood, isolation, guilt, boredom, frustration, loneliness, dissatisfactory religious experiences and other such factors that comprise the disease of modern civilization. Greene's works seem to suggest that life without belief is meaningless. He is of the view that man is a unique and special creation of God and his separation from God leads him to misery and his heroes are to be judged not only by the traditional values of the society but also from God's point of view and his protagonists are isolated, disillusioned, defeated and frustrated to the core. Greene appears to be averse to offering facile solutions to the plight of the contemporary man.

Graham Greene emphasizes through his heroes the miserable plight of the contemporary man and stresses the importance of quest for a virtuous life. His heroes trapped in an existential web are shown to have discovered even in their disillusionment some positive values of life like love, nobility, dignity and authenticity. Almost all his heroes are found to be busy in search of their own identity, self and God. During the quest, they revolt against the ongoing prevalent traditional, cultural and orthodox religious values. In the garb of such a deplorable social scenario, the passionate writer like Greene could not help being committed to projecting his own views on the distress and sufferings of the individuals. Despite the dominant aspect in Greene's fiction being the conflict between good and evil, fear, pity, violence, restless and endless search of man for salvation and God's love of man are also projected as the recurring exploration of Greene's novels. The predicament in the life of Greene's heroes arises partly from his own moral conditioning and partly from the collective forces of society as, for example, in the case of Pinkie – the central had filled Pinkie with anger and hatred against the world and character in **Brighton Rock**. It was the terrible slum of his childhood that had filled Pinkie with anger and hatred against the world and with a furious loathing of sex. Pinkie committed mortal sin and accepted damnation at the age of seventeen with a proud, soured egotism. Pinkie is a soul driven to choose damnation and slum-bred Rose, the good whom he feels to be an inevitable complement to his evil, must follow him.

In **The Power and the Glory**, the central character a Whisky- Priest shows the struggle between the church and the state. The Whisky-Priest is drawn with an understanding which borders on love and pity exceeding that accorded to Pinkie and Rose. This only priest has firm faith in God and he is different from martyrs whom we meet in edifying religious stories, yet he is one who unhesitatingly goes into the trap leading to his death because he can't refuse a dying man's confession and absolution. Greene's superb strategy is to make his hero “an unworthy priest, not merely a hunted tramp” (Points of view 399). The priest's flight

from a secular force epitomizes all types of unintelligible terror and that his flight has a double implication is stressed upon by Paul West who says:

“The terror here surpasses the similar forest flight in Eugene O’Neill’s **The Emperor Jones** because it is double; not only physical flight, but also from spiritual salvation, which is the only remedy for the physical kind of flight “(P94)

Scobie in **The Heart of the matter** has something of both Pinkie and the Whisky-Priest in his character. He is, like Pinkie, involved in crime and he has, like the Whisky-Priest, a plodding desire to be good and an innate love of God, which means, as Edward West puts it :

“The love of ones fellowmen raised to the highest power, at which every man assumes the form of Christ crucified which is one of the aspect of the incarnation” (P94)

The very setting of the **The Heart of the Matter** presents a fundamental truth of life - the overwhelming reality of evil and its influence upon the characters. The squalor, violence, lust, meanness, brutality, injustice and corruption of a seed decaying world is very much evident here too. Greene’s heroes are frustrated, on the one side, with the inadequate social norms and on the other side, anger and anxiety ridden religious dogmas control their individual liberty. Greene’s heroes prove themselves not as super human beings and staunch believers but as ordinary human beings capable of falling a prey to temptation.

Greeham Greene himself suffered from boredom and anxiety in his teenage and came to terms with his life by his son own efforts and that is why his heroes too are angst-ridden because he feels himself incapable of being at once with his deeper self. He is one of those

“men and women who lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape, the longing to transcend themselves, if only for a few moments is and has always been one of the principal appetites o f the soul”(Huxley 157).

Like Greene himself, his heroes like Scobie and Pinkie seem to be sick with the disease of modern civilization and are in search of the meaning of life in this meaningless world. Bored and frustrated from the materialistic world, Greene’s heroes try to find solace in religion but here too they are not able to get any satisfaction. Conventional and religious values appear insufficient in helping them find out the core and purpose of their existence and hence they suffer due to their tragic dilemma. In Greene’s view, religion and divinity are problems concerned with the individual. Due to the tragic dilemma he faces, Greene’s hero finds himself in a state of confusion and chaos because on the one hand, he is aware of his failure in coping with the values of the society and on the other hand, he realizes that he is unworthy of any reward from God because of his sinfulness. He is always engaged in a soul-bearing “struggle to know what is “good” and what is “evil” rather than to know what is “right” and what is “wrong” according to the fixed canons of the society. That is why Greene insists on the authentic experience of the mysterious which has evaporated in our time as a result of scientific progress which makes his heroes hostile to the rigid calculating rules of life and rational outlook. So, the personality and character of Pinkie - the hero of the novel **Brighton Rock** is a five products and superb execution of Greene’s attempt in this direction.



Pinkie stands first in the list of those heroes who are saintly sinners. The boy, Pinkie, is the most powerful embodiment of evil in Greene's novels. He is the evil in propria persona that seems to have haunted Greene's mind from his very childhood. He is a poor, shabby, fierce-souled creature, born and brought amidst poverty, corruption and violence of the slums. Pinkie is dehumanized, vicious and sadistic. This gangster who "is the most driven and damned of all Greene's characters" is at odds against the world he exists in. He is unapproachable and devilishly cunning. In his relentless pursuit for power, Pinkie has made himself an agent of the devil and he is completely untouched by human feelings. Pinkie, like Macbeth, commits one murder and then in order to cover one killing by another, he covers a long journey of murders and sins. He is totally engrossed in evil-betrayal, violence, murder but with a full awareness of the consequences and eternal meaning of his acts. Pinkie suffers due to a tragic dilemma and evil force has entered in him to do crimes his childhood his pride and sin impel him to do crimes which, in turn, sustain ego. Pinkie thinks himself a super criminal and his morbid thinking from normal impulses has made him a criminal. He cannot conceive of goodness as he had lived in a state of hell throughout his life. His crimes such as the murder of Hale and Spicer, the fake suicide pact to get rid of Rose, his acts of sadistic cruelty, pushing a blind man out of the way all are the causes of his tragic dilemma. Pinkie's tragic experiences of life make him the most powerful vehicle of evil force. Greene endows

"this brutal, undersized, seventeen-year-old criminal with the capacity to choose evil, to parody his creed 'credo in unum satanum' and to take a bitter pride in the prospect of his own damnation" (P148)

Since he has been only the worst of human nature, he simply cannot perceive any notion of goodness. He ponders :

"A brain was capable only of what it could and it could not conceive what it had never experienced; his cells were formed of the cement school play ground, the dead fire, the dying man in St. Pancras waiting room his bed at Billy's and his parents bed" (BR 79)

What matters to him is his own self, his dangerous egotism. Pinkie believes in Hell flames and damnation and Heaven to him is distant. He knows and thinks that his tragic experience has alienated him from God.

In **The Power and the Glory**, the setting is made of violence, fear, corruption, squalor, misery and irrational outlook. It is the priest's belief in God and religion which controls his life. The unnamed hero of the novel, who is a priest with unflinching faith in God and undeterred devotion to his Roman Catholic church is addicted to excessive drinking and has sexual relationship with a woman, Maria who gives birth to a daughter, Brigitta. Being tired of his running away from one place to another to escape police, the priest thinks that getting married and settling down in life by obeying the secular power can end his misery. But as the only surviving priest not to come to terms with the secular power, he knows he can still absolve people's sins, although he himself is corrupt. This is the tragic dilemma of this unnamed priest due to which he suffers throughout his life which leads him to death. He has always been a pompous priest who misuses his authority and leads him to believe that he can commit any sacrilege against the norms of priesthood. He camouflages his feelings of fear, pity and terror behind the veneer of vanity and arrogance. His weakness for alcohol makes

himself felt acutely in every circumstance he is placed. He is a bad priest who is painfully aware of his failure and corruption. The dilemma in his mind makes him a stranger wherever he goes, which forces him to conclude that there is a unbridgeable gap between him and the people surrounding him,

The Whisky-priest, like Pinkie, is an angst-ridden character who recognizes his worthlessness and feels that in setting such a bad example, he has failed his God. His dilemma arises from his fear that he can do nothing to redeem himself and that his damnation is a certainty as for him :

“Happiness was dead again before it had time to breathe; he was like a woman with a stillborn child-bury it quickly and forgot and begin again. Perhaps the next would live” (P63)

The priest, like Pinkie, suffers agonies of conscience for his estrangement from God but unlike Pinkie, there is in him a positive longing for forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Pinkie's guilt is a sign of his eternal separation from God but the Whisky-priest's guilt is a cry of the repressed image of God in him seeking its source and end. The Whisky-priest faces a tragic dilemma at every step where his movements are monitored by his faith in Christianity and stern belief in God. Having illicit relations with Maria, demanding wine at the place of preaches and giving sermon and helping people in their salvation in a state of complete intoxication, he advises people not to follow immoral acts hoping people to give up all these things. There is another conflict in his mind where he advises people to face life without fear and despair but he himself lives as a fugitive. Helping people in their confession and salvation, he himself dies without any confession and salvation.

Thus Greene has pictured his heroes with all human weakness and virtues. They are not super human beings in Marlovian sense but ordinary human beings feeling and behaving like us, yet they are constantly by everyone. By making his protagonists as amalgam of good and evil qualities, Graham Greene has superbly blended their tragic dilemma with modern psychological vision and religious outlook.

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