

INTRODUCTION

"Theologically Greene may recognize original sin, but in his writings, the evil in man is always less than evil without arising from the collective activities of society. His observation of humanity forces him into a revolutionary attitude." *

On Graham Greene's death, at 85, we pay tribute to a writer who has been a major presence on the literary scene for longer than most of us can remember and whom many critics regard as the finest author never to have won the Nobel Prize for literature. It is indeed difficult to think of a precedent or a parallel among English novelists in a career that has spanned almost exactly six decades - his first novel was published in 1929, his last in 1988.

It is a career that has been both prolific and diverse : apart from twenty-six novels, there are several travel books, two volumes of autobiography, two biographies, six children's books, six plays as well as film scripts, a large number of essays and a considerable quantity of short stories. There is even a slim volume of verse published as an undergraduate, with the improbable title of Rabbling Azil.

George Orwell said of Dickens that he was a writer worth kidnapping. We may say of Greene that he is a writer who is out to kidnap the reader. Indeed, he has an irresistible appeal. Tolstoy would have called it infection. And, if we accept his statement

* G. Goodcock, quoted in A Concise Encyclopedia of Modern World Literature, p. 100.

that "the greater the infection, the better the art" ¹, we can't help admitting that the popularity of Graham Greene is no adverse reflection on his greatness as an artist.

Greene appeals to us as few novelists of our time do. He has been accorded a warm reception by a large majority of the reading public and at a time when the novel is at the crossroads. What is more, he is as popular in America and France as he is in his own country. Russia, too, has been gained over by Greene. Truly, he remains "Britain's main literary export" ²

Like most good writers, Greene can be read on several levels. He is an accomplished story-teller who specializes in the tradition of Robert Louis Stevenson and John Buchan, the story of an isolated individual pursued by an enemy; but he is also a sophisticated student of literature, the admirer of Henry James and Ford Madox Ford, who is constantly setting himself new technical and formal problems. He has insisted that he is less a Catholic novelist than a novelist who happens to be a Catholic, but there is no denying the centrality of moral and even theological issues in much of his work. Richard Mayne recalls how the baffled realist of a generation ago 'aroused':

In the mountain greenery,
Where God makes the scenery. ³

1. Tolstoy, Leo, 'What is Art?' , P. 222.

2. Time book reviewer quoted by David Pryce-Jones in Graham Greene, P. 2.

3. 'Where God Makes the Scenery' : Richard Mayne, New Statesman, October 1955, P. 433.

This thesis on Graham Greene traces out Greene's religious preoccupation. We deal with such themes as sin and grace. The evolution of Greene's mind suggests a basic aspect in his writing. Greene develops along two distinct planes - sin and wrongness of human life on one hand and goodness and righteousness in life on the other.

In the thesis, it is pointed out that the capabilities of Greene's heroes for both good and evil make them analyse their selves. Progress in life, according to Greene, cannot be cut off from Christian concepts of truth. Greene underlines in his works the quest and realisation of an absolute faith in human existence. It is beyond doubt, therefore, in his works that inevitability in human suffering should be the obsession of his characters like Sarah and Jerry for whom God's love and human dignity become factors of ultimate importance. At all levels of this work the path towards an absolute self-realisation in face of a discriminating self is indeed the major trend in his characters.

Thus to begin with, Greene's works make evident a number of strains that permeate the climate of his age. Greene is akin to existentialists when we discuss his individual sense of approach towards life and point to an independent consciousness and morality, that exists because of a radically different attitude towards life. In a world of decaying faith and morality that Greene shares with authors like T.S.Eliot and W.B.Yeats, there is in him the significant trend of explaining the negation of life and disbelief in it. In many ways, Greene does not differ from his contemporary writers like Sartre or Camus for they all seem to share his sense of incomprehensible human situations and a lack of pattern in life.

Another aspect of Greene's development in his major works relates to the notable changing attitude of his characters. There is a constant oscillation between good and evil in Greene's characters which prompts them towards life of ultimate virtue or vice. Spiritual development for Greene's heroes, it seems clear, is as much a matter of the rejuvenation of their lost selves as it is their absorption in religious thoughts along abstract lines. The point that Greene seems to make recurringly is chiefly an understanding of life in a wider perspective of an ultimate reality and the jumble of issues like sin and its ambiguities or an alternation between faith and unfaith for his sensitive protagonists.

The priest in The Power and the Glory or Pirkie in Brighton Beach have a combination of goodness and frailty in them. Along with authors like Mauriac and Dostoevsky, Greene concerns himself with similar notions of sin or redemption that have their origin in Christian ideals of love or freedom. Dostoevsky, who is an existentialist writer, pin-points the dominance of Reason and applies it to real life. There is an affinity in the viewpoints of all these authors in that they discuss and see life in a like manner. What distinguishes Greene is the glow of an immortality he sheds over his base creations like Pirkie. Greene manifests a peculiar disposition towards his diseased characters whose agony needs certitude and hope.

The diverse stages of Greene's writing, do not in any way detract from the predominant element of his fiction. There is a portrayal in Greene of solitary spiritual travail and discernment of spiritual recovery in accordance with the typical belief of Christianity. Greene's heroes, on being belied by so many barriers,

come to account for their true position in life and their relation to God. What then is the metaphysics and ontology of Greene's true representatives who are drawn to the depths of sin and blessings of immortality? We can hardly account for their complete loss and a gradual revival of hope on the grounds of sheer logic. We cannot even probe their real nature and make clear their anguish by hypothesis.

Greene, in order to portray vividly the disappointment and dissatisfaction of life, makes his characters pass through the turbulent periods of disillusionment and despair. Greene attaches significance to all such symptoms of inadequacy and disquiet. The handling by Greene of the main points of Christian ethics is indicative of two modes of approach that make life intelligible. They are, namely, reason and revelation. In Greene, we see that his characters apprehend the core of their problem through this double sensitivity.

In the thesis, we make reference to Greene's philosophy. This aspect of Greene's thought is so important and so vivid in his works. For, Greene's viewpoint is one where higher religious concern is so revealing and confusing. It is here that Greene's preoccupation with sin and grace becomes interesting and worth-analyzing. We can, thus, see that Greene's guilt-ridden characters are reminded of virtue and diverted towards it only after long groping in their acute discomfort of life. The dissertation attempts to show how several courses of safety are open to Greene's heroes who are always involved in a flight from the sordidness of life.

Theologians, among whom we must name Robinson and Tillich,

too lay stress on the impact of Christian thought over man's whole life. Indeed the important viewpoint of Greene is that he shows a full concern for the inward life of man and the working of a society or culture that prevents its absolute nourishment. Greene is thus not the doctrinaire novelist whose faith is to be determined by conventions or superstitions that impede the flow of growing mind.

We treat the content of Greene's thought in the thesis which has various implications. There is a social background of which Greene is so conscious and wrestles with its influence in his pregnant broodings. As for instance there are social bonds which his characters have to encounter in making an unconditional relationship to God. Indeed, the metaphysic of life is the problem of Greene's characters. But when they acknowledge man as their foe and God as their saviour, Greene's characters find a permanent remedy for their ills.

We can see how trust in God is a logical result of the process of despair in life that becomes operative when the characters meet their first defeat in life. In spite of the fact that this is an occasion for emphasising their courage and strength, Greene's characters cannot be forgetful of the stains of their situation. They only converge on their weakness and inactivity whenever they are submerged in the world of damnation.

Of Greene, we can say that his outlook is one that synthesises varied currents of thought. Greene, in this manner, is not perplexed by negations of a definite life-attitude. The blend of dogma and liberality in viewing life precisely makes Greene an independent interpreter of the issues of faith. He is thus an artist

and a thinker whose thought essentially is not inhibitive for the maturity of his art.

In brief, we can say of Greene that he is a spokesman per excellence of the tenets of Christianity that stretch across the levels of experience which are temporal and supratemporal. Greene is one of the writers, who is so exploratory in his views over sin or damnation. When he makes articulate the intervening dynamics of his character's tribulations, he makes them undergo an experience of strong tension. Whenever there is an aberration on the part of Greene's heroes in their wearisome struggle for a transcendent self, there is an implicit suggestion of a gulf that they have to cross over in order to make real their pursuits.

The thesis expounds Christian notions of freedom and orthodoxy. Greene's emphasis on the wide-ranging human experience makes evident as to how his characters should feel their responsibility towards themselves and God. In his Controversies, Alfred Kassin declares : 'The Greene's have personified that acute and enigmatic sense of guilt.'¹ The line of argument that emerges out of these lines is that Greene is incisively occupied with the elusive nature of guilt and redemption.

Thus it is argued that the decisive character of Christian faith is the only course left for Greene's melancholy driven characters. Since they can discover their resilience, their downfall cannot always be finally disastrous. Greene always points to the sign-posts of virtue and high standards that his characters need to inculcate in them in their sense of futility and shows that an absolution from sin is finally the victory of human soul.

1. Controversies P. 183.

We may say, therefore, that the peril of contemporary chaos is not altogether disgusting. Like Karl Jaspers or Kierkegaard, Greene strikes hope in an era of positive degeneration. Greene's message is that in an utterly shattering circumstances, sublime divine love is engendered. Greene constantly reminds us of man's this position and its relevance for a sense of perfection in an absolute God. Greene is "possessed of a passionate sense of virtue, which makes sacred the foulest of sinners, and differentiates them from their crimes and servilities"¹

1. Girvin, R., *British Artists*, op. cit., p. 122.