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Feminine Stereotypes in Graham Greene's *The Man Within*

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She was created to be the toy of man, his rattle, and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused.

Mary Wollstonecraft

(A Vindication of the Rights of Women, 1792, p. 66)

The novels of Graham Greene provide a clear insight into sex role stereotyping as well as gender conditioning that keeps women in the subservient position. His novels amply prove that under the patriarchal set-up, a set of different role prescriptions is meant for the male and the female sex. In this paper the argument has, therefore, been limited to the study of 'feminine stereotypes' and the social and psychological aspects of the construction and deconstruction of gender that culminate into degradation and corrosion of the strength of womanhood.

The basic concept in feminist theory recognizes the fact that gender is produced psychologically and socially rather than physiologically. Conceptually, sex means the biological sex of a child whereas gender is the culturally and socially produced behaviour assigned to that particular category of human beings into which the child is born. Under the patriarchal set-up, the male is supposed to imbibe a set of 'masculine' traits such as aggression, tenacity, courage, intelligence, ambition, initiative, dynamism, force and efficacy. The female is expected to inculcate a set of 'feminine' traits such as passivity, ignorance, acquiescence, docility, delicacy, obedience, affection, kindness, virtue and ineffectuality. In Simone de Beauvoir's words, "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman."¹

The novels of Graham Greene provide a clear insight into this sex role stereotyping as well as gender conditioning that keeps women in the subservient position. The pattern of Graham Greene's works is etched out in his early novels themselves. Greene's generally biased view for women could be traced back to his early childhood. This is evident in his biography, *A Sort of Life* where he writes, "... that I had a good deal of undeserved contempt for my elder sister Molly and through her, girls in general – a contempt which I was soon to lose. My interjections were pointed and repetitious: 'You are silly, Molly. Girls are so silly.' 'Girls wouldn't know. They know nuffin.' 'Girls are always slow and always last'."²

The title for his first novel *The Man Within* (1929) is taken from Sir Thomas Browne's (1605-1682) famous quotation: "There's another man within me that's angry with me." Andrews is a typical Greene hero or anti-hero who is an isolated man with a sense of overwhelming desolation and who finds himself friendless and alone. This inner conflict is clearly manifested in his relationship with the women characters in the novel,

namely Elizabeth and Lucy. Both Elizabeth and Lucy, the two main women characters in *The Man Within*, are presented as simple stereotypes of femininity. Used as symbols of love and lust, Elizabeth and Lucy are actually the two sides of Andrews' split personality. Despite her being angelically intuitive, Elizabeth hardly comes to life. Lucy, on the other hand is depicted as a mere plaything existing merely to satisfy the sexual needs of men that matter.

The pattern of dominance and submission in the treatment of man-woman relationship is quite noticeable in the novels of Greene. Kate Millet rightly avers: "Quite in the same manner, a disinterested examination of our system of sexual relationship must point out that the situation between the sexes now, and throughout history, is the case of that phenomenon Max Weber defined as *herrschaft*, a relationship of dominance and sub-ordination. What goes largely unexamined, often even unacknowledged (yet is institutionalized nonetheless) in our social order, is the birthright whereby males rule females...sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power."³ True to the patriarchal ideology, like all other males, Andrews in *The Man Within* considers it his birthright to rule the female counterpart. Andrews is completely infuriated to see the white serenity of Elizabeth's face, when as 'a hunted man' and 'pursued by the murderers', he comes upon a cottage where he meets Elizabeth at the end of her vigil with a dead man. Contrary to his expectations, Andrews is completely flabbergasted seeing her calm and tranquil, totally unperturbed at his forced entry: "This wasn't the way for a woman to behave. She should be frightened, but she damnably wasn't. ... It annoyed him to know that she was patently the mistress of the situation. It made him even in his weakness want to bully her, to teach her. If only he could get that gun..." (*The Man Within* 16). He fails to recognize the fact that he is an intruder in Elizabeth's private world. He shouts at her, determined to hurt her "before fainting should make him a powerless, shameful weakling at her mercy" (*The Man Within* 17). Andrews feels infuriated at 'finding him in so an ignominious a position'. In the man's eyes, it is the woman who should be the subject of humility, disgrace and discomfiture. He finds it tough to bear her boldness: "The girl has a plenty of nerve. It seemed unlikely after the way he had broken in the night before that she should not have tried to communicate with someone...What a devil the woman was – forcing him to make a move" (*The Man Within* 23).

Despite her apparent boldness, Elizabeth is hardly able to shed her image of being an acquiescent being true to the patriarchal norms. 'Tired of being alone', Elizabeth does not resent the intrusion of Andrews in her calm and uninhabited world with only the dead body of Mr Jennings inside her room. As a weak and defenseless person, she feels the need for some shield. All her boldness and self-confidence eludes her at the very thought of being alone. She is so adapted to her past life in Mr Jennings' company in spite of all the bitter memories. But she cannot think of living alone and even draws solace from the spirit that inhabits the dead body ready for its memorial service: "Yet because she had had no love for the body itself, which when she was small had beaten her and when she grew older had made strange crude gestures blindly towards her and repelled her, she felt unmoved. She was accustomed now to the absence of the cursing, unhappy, perplexed spirit. She had loved that with quiet steady warmth. It had fed her and sheltered her and she was grateful, and when towards the end she had seen it putting up the best fight it was able against its own groping, sneering body she had pitied it" (*The Man Within* 34). Gratitude for food and shelter has obviously softened

Elizabeth's hard feelings towards the crude cruelty she had suffered at the hands of the man lying dead. Her desperate dependence on her male tormentor imposes a hateful conformity on her life. Her passive acceptance of her lot, projects the familiar image of helplessness and goodness so often associated with women.

Elizabeth, though somewhat vague and ethereal, is one of the few wholly good characters (not morally chaste or good in the eyes of society) Greene has drawn. While on the run, Andrews is saved by Elizabeth and it is in her quiet repose that he finds some sort of peace always so elusive and obscure to him: "Peace was a sanity which he did not believe that he had ever known" (*The Man Within* 43). "The energy that does redeem Francis Andrews", says R. W. B. Lewis, "is the love of Elizabeth, which combines with the stimulus of danger to give him a glimpse of the ultimate source of existence."⁴ If in her presence, he feels a sense of confidence and affability to which he has been an alien, it is her 'cold neutrality' he hates the most. Tormented as he is by his lust and cowardice, there appears to be a kind of aura around Elizabeth. To him, she seems unapproachable, as 'holy as a vision'. But does he attach any significance to 'this holy vision'? She provides him refuge in the garb of her brother and saves him from Carlyon. Had she not submitted willingly, he would have forced his entry: "If she would only meet him again with resistance, he would be happy to seize shelter by force" (*The Man Within* 41).

Andrews is unable to mask his deflated ego and sense of depression over his dependence on women: " 'We get tired of our own kind', he said, 'the coarseness, the hairiness – you don't understand. Sometimes I've paid street women simply to talk to them, but they are like the rest of you. They don't understand that I don't want their bodies' " (*The Man Within* 53). Torn with fear, hatred and self-abasement, he is unable to shed his weariness and disbelief: "His relations with her seemed necessarily compounded of suspicion. When he first came he had been suspicious of her acts and now he was suspicious of her thoughts" (*The Man Within* 53). He is fully conscious of the fact that he has been a coward, a bully and a lustful sentimentalist throughout. But he hesitates to touch her for the fear of losing "the sense of something unapproachably beautiful" (*The Man Within* 54). Andrews has a sudden desire to tell her everything, what he is fleeing from and for what reason. Simone de Beauvoir says, "Another function that man readily entrusts to woman is the weighing of values; she is a privileged judge. Man dreams of an other not only to possess her but also to be ratified by her; to be ratified by other men, his peers, demands a constant attention; hence he wishes consideration from outside to confer an absolute value upon his life, his enterprises, and himself."⁵ As he is about to narrate his flight from Carlyon over a cup of tea, the sudden entry of Carlyon himself makes him suspicious of betrayal by Elizabeth. He hides himself in the dark of the shed, "giving occasional rapid shivers like a man in a fever" (*The Man Within* 59). He is dismayed at 'the vileness of her treachery'⁶, but all his bitterness vanishes when Elizabeth restrains Carlyon from inspecting the cottage and very smartly makes the excuse that his brother left the cottage in a hurry with his tea unfinished: "She is a saint, he thought. The charity and courage with which she hid him from his enemy he had taken for granted; but to his muddled unstraight mind the act of drinking from the same cup came with a surprising nobility" (*The Man Within* 61). Howsoever noble and chivalrous a woman might be, man is always there to look down upon her. In this case, Elizabeth is far more valiant, poised, fearless, calm and reposed than either Andrews or Carlyon, but both assert their superiority despite their inherent weaknesses. The assumed superiority implied in Carlyon's desire to keep aloof from women is nothing more than his awkward pretense of chivalry: "If he had known

beforehand that there was a woman to be dealt with, he would have sent one of his companions to the cottage in his place, the small, cunning cockney Harry, or the elephantine Joe” (*The Man Within* 62).

When Elizabeth, on Carlyon’s departure, urges Andrews to tell her the true facts and the reason behind his hiding, he shows his hesitation. He agrees only when he clings as a desperate resort to a position in which “he could at least physically look down upon her” (*The Man Within* 70). How could he, a man, relish being in such an ignominious position? Carlyon rightly tells Elizabeth: “Women generally show us up to ourselves and we hate them for it” (*The Man Within* 65). Andrews’ account of his past life does not perturb Elizabeth the least. He stares at her in amazement on what seems “the illimitable peace of her mind” (*The Man Within* 75). He is piqued with fear, restlessness and anything, “which could mar her perfect happiness” (*The Man Within* 75). ‘She is a saint’, he acclaims. And yet, he is not ready to fully accept the feeling of gratitude for the manner in which she has saved him from Carlyon. Blinded by her beauty like a child and battered by contrary emotions of admiration and suspicion, love and jealousy, he cannot altogether bequeath the desire to possess her.

For Andrews in *The Man Within* (1929), Lucy is merely a plaything, an erotic object to gratify his sexual lust. ‘Robbed suddenly of four sheltering walls, alone in a bare, chill, hostile world’ of Lewes, Andrews makes his way carefully to an inn. There he runs into Lucy – a pretty and richly dressed girl with a small red pouting mouth and curious eyes. He watches her with greedy interest and tries to obliterate any thought about Elizabeth: “What’s the use of thinking of her? ... Besides it was because of her that he found himself here and why he must take the risk? Here was someone who was not too good for him, formed of the same lustful body and despicable heart” (*The Man Within* 111). A temporary homesickness for the cottage and Elizabeth is banished by Lucy’s smile, which promises fun: “Why should he not have fun where he found it” (*The Man Within* 118)? Unable to resist the restless prick of desire, Andrews is completely taken in by Lucy’s lovely and fascinating physical appearance: “Never before had he desired a woman so much – no, not Elizabeth. Andrews is unable to resist the call of flesh, which proves stronger than his sense of responsibility towards Elizabeth: “It would be to save myself, he told the star to which he instinctively addressed words meant for Elizabeth, for no other reason. I do not love her. Never will I love anyone but you. I swear to that. If a man loves one, he cannot help lusting after others” (*The Man Within* 158). When he leaves Lucy, he feels no fear of death, “but a terror of life, of going on soiling himself and repenting and soiling himself again” (*The Man Within* 167). He foresees no escape from this lusting reality and has no will left. To him even if he has stood true to his dream of taking Elizabeth to London, gaining her love and marrying her, it is impossible for him to resist these temporary temptations: “When I had been married to her for a month, he thought, I would be creeping out of the house on the sly to visit prostitutes” (*The Man Within* 167). Elizabeth senses this weakness in him very easily when she tells him: “You are the kind of man who does that frequently, I imagine” (*The Man Within* 184). Even Andrews confesses before Elizabeth: “You can never wholly trust me. I told you that I was with a woman last night. I’m dirty, I tell you, soiled” (*The Man Within* 190). On being asked whether he loved her, he admits: “You are very young after all, aren’t you? Men don’t go with harlots for that” (*The Man Within* 190). What is the predicament of harlots? In this context Simone de Beauvoir says, “I use the word

hetaira to designate all women who treat not only their bodies but their entire personalities as capital to be exploited.”⁷

Most of the feminist critics go on to cite sexual relations as one of the important areas where male dominion operates. In Simone de Beauvoir’s view, it is indeed the woman’s role as sexual object that dooms her to “immanence.”⁸ For Andrews in *The Man Within*, Lucy is merely a plaything, an erotic object to gratify his sexual lust. He is completely taken in by Lucy’s lovely and fascinating physical appearance. As he takes her in his arms and kisses her lips, throat and breast, she remains passive and shows no signs of resistance: “The animal in him could ponder her beauty crudely and lustfully, as it had pondered the charms of common harlots, but with the added spice of a reciprocated desire” (*The Man Within* 120). His physical love for her lacks any regard, admiration or reverence for her. The demands of his animal self vitiate his motives in appearing as the witness for the prosecution: “He was doing for a wrong reason what he had refused to do for a right. He had turned a deaf ear to what his heart, supported by the critic within, had asked him, but he had capitulated at the first hungry wail his dirty, lusting body had uttered” (*The Man Within* 121). His dilemma is that of a person who wants to feel superior even when he is inwardly convinced of his own wretched plight. Clearly, for Andrews, women are too exalted or debased to be real or reliable.

Elizabeth and Lucy both the two main women characters in *The Man Within* (1929) are poles apart in their character portrayal. Elizabeth is an angelic figure symbolizing pure love; Lucy, on the other hand is depicted as a sex doll existing merely to gratify the sexual needs of men that matter. Evidently, for Andrews, both the women are too dignified or debased to be true or trustworthy. His relationships fail with both and the core of the female experience remains the same. The angelic Elizabeth and the voluptuous Lucy are equally ill treated and deplored. According to Patricia Ingham, “Woman can be angelically intuitive or intuitively capricious, wilfully silly, both angel and the ninny are part of the same signification of ‘woman’.”⁹ Despite the aura built around Elizabeth, she hardly comes to life. Elizabeth is insufficiently developed as a character outside her victimization to gain our attention.

‘Tired of being alone’, Elizabeth does not resent the intrusion of Andrews in her calm and uninhabited world with only the dead body of Mr Jennings inside her room. As a vulnerable young woman, she feels, equally, the need for protection. She possesses boldness when she is being protected, which vanishes as soon as she must live alone. Forced by circumstances to seek refuge under Mr Jennings’ unsafe roof, she had been holding him off, narrowly, “always with a sense of danger, till he died” (*The Man Within* 84). With her caretaker’s death, she accepts Andrews, an intruder, as male armour. In other words, she makes herself acquiescent to still another male.

Forms of degrading and belittling talks can sap women’s strength, autonomy and sense of self. At the burial ground, Elizabeth cannot escape the peering eyes of men folk: “They spoke of her slyly to each other in whispers, not so much to keep their comments from her as to keep them from their wives, comments on the fun she may have afforded to the man now dead” (*The Man Within* 36). These lines very clearly reflect the sick mindset of the people with regard to women. Nobody takes this fact into cognizance that Elizabeth has no other option but to stay with Mr Jennings – her caretaker, after the death of her mother. Regardless of her consent, the circumstances compel her to stay with the

old man. She is always an object of suspicion in respect of her birth and moral character. She has to put up with all kinds of malicious gossip: “There had been rumours – that she had been the dead man’s mistress, his natural child, a dozen contradictory tales...” (*The Man Within* 36). Elizabeth is equally upset and sore about the peering eyes and sly remarks of the unscrupulous crowd gathered at the burial ground. In the cold and cruel public gaze, even her innocent actions like ‘turning her back abruptly on the grave’¹⁰, have a bearing on her birth and moral character.

Lucy, on the other hand, is presented before us as an object of lust and pursuit. She remains passive and shows no signs of resistance. Andrews’ physical love for her lacks any love or regard for her. He enjoys her body crudely and lustfully only to condemn her easy virtue: “Her smile which in the dark had seemed the beckoning of a passionate mystery, he considered now a shallow mechanical thing” (*The Man Within* 166). His passing association with her fills in him momentary feeling of shame and disgust as if he has fallen back into the slime for a while: “For a day we are disgusted and disappointed and disillusioned and feel dirty all over. But we are clean again in a very short time, clean enough to go back and soil ourselves all over again” (*The Man Within* 167). This sense of shame is so short lived for persons like Andrews. For him Lucy is no more than a disposable article to be thrown away after use.

The conventional images typecasting Elizabeth as a saint and Lucy as a sinner (just a harlot!), distort his relationships with both women and cause a further split in his own divided mind. He admires Elizabeth’s purity and peace even as he resents her impossible virtue as a mocking indictment of his own lack of it. He enjoys Lucy’s body only to deplore her easy virtue. Thus, he uses and abuses both. Andrews is sympathetically presented even when he wallows in callow sentimentality, parades his fragmented selves as a mark of distinction, or passes the burden of his guilt on to Elizabeth or Lucy. Undoubtedly, it is a no-win situation for Greene’s women.

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