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Disillusioned and Despondent Theme in the Selected Novels of Graham Greene

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Twentieth Century literature aftermath wars define itself by reflecting the real outlook of society in the form of anger, abuse, murder, rape, frustration, despair and even sometimes suicide, Greene is a kind of author who sets the best example for a person who is torn between the beliefs of the religion and his fiction which is an example of practical reality. His novels are the perfect examples of his ambivalent attitude towards the church and its dogmas and also his perception towards modern contemporary ways of living. Examples from his novels show how Greene uses the modern techniques and situations from contemporary life of people around him to bring forth the despondency and disillusionment in the characters of his novels. . The characters portrayed in his novels find themselves secluded both internally and physically.

Introduction

Modern writers try to separate the present from the past. They also try to portray that the literature of the present is very much in relation to the conditions prevalent in the society. Many modern writers have tried to depict the effects of war through their Fiction. Graham Greene is also one among those but what set him apart from them is that he is one among the few, those had experienced the effects of two world wars. It is obvious that the fiction of Graham Greene is both Practical and spiritual. Greene uses the modern techniques and situations of contemporary life from people around him to bring forth the despondency and disillusionment in the characters of his novels. His travel experiences had enriched his potential as a writer who found ample opportunities to mingle with different class and categories of people who serves as the characters in his novels. The examples from his novels also indicate that how Catholicism is intertwined with the lives of the characters in his novels and that they are practically dependent on their religious beliefs to ward off despondency and disillusionment in their lives.

Graham Greene created a remarkable world which consisted of tragedy, trauma and conflicts. But it does not have an end here since it also includes ideological battles which form the basis of the 20th century philosophy. The aim of writing this paper is to show how Graham Greene had tried to portray the characters which reflect the turmoil of the people of late 20th century and also representing the interplay of human emotions related to despondency and disillusionment inherent in them. I have selected Brighton Rock, The Power and the Glory, The Heart of the matter, The End of the affair for the present study.

Greene is one of the finest novelists of the 20th century whose works often have religion at its centre. Though his faith always contained an element of doubt but then this doubt in mind was the driving force for his creativity as shown in his fiction. Catholicism is the religious theme which forms the basis of his four novels – Brighton Rock (1938), The Power and the Glory (1940) The Heart of the matter (1948) and The End of the affair (1951) but in all the novels taken up for the study shows the disillusionment in the characters due to the pain and conflicts that we find in the world around us. His novels show a shift from the physical to spiritual belief of the characters. Greene very well understands the nature of all his characters which are drawn from the modern world. They may be naïve and sophisticated but eventually they are find themselves torn between the values and emotions.

In 1926 before marrying Vivien Dayrell-Browning he adopted Catholicism. During this phase of life after he became Catholics, the novels of this time were richly made up of complex and variable themes. In an interview which he gave to the New York Times he said,

I've told you, my conversion was not in the least an emotional affair. It was purely intellectual. It was the arguments of Father Trollope at Nottingham which persuaded me that God's existence was a probability. ” (1)

Though he adopted Catholicism but everywhere in his writings, his faith seems to be completely shattered by doubts. This proves that Greene was a kind of person who was not showing his interest in religion but always concentrated on the subjects which relates to the inner conflicts of human beings. Few examples from his novels will prove this. Bosco argues that “notable differences can be observed in Greene’s theological perspectives and emphases over time, brought about by life experiences and shifting social, political, and religious contexts” (2)

He wrote the novel Brighton Rock, immediately after his conversion to Catholicism. The title itself is used as metaphor for Heaven and Hell. The Main Theme which he projected by the two characters Pinkie and Ida is Good versus Evil, Good cannot exist without evil. We can see the combination of both throughout the novel. A sense of despair can be found in Pinkie who has no fear of anything but he is full of unpleasant emotions. He sees the world as a morbid place which is full of illusion.

“Heaven was a word Hell was something he could trust .A brain was capable of what it could conceive and it couldn't conceive what it had never experienced” ((Brighton Rock p.248.)

The novel consists of his hatred, contempt disgust and envy and even his abhorrence towards sex is something which isolates him from humanity. He cannot express joy over anything. The thought of Love and getting into relationship sickened him to extent that he didn't want that relationship with anyone. This was the result of the deprived parental love in his childhood where his parents were themselves engrossed in their passionate relations.

Another novel “The Heart of the Matter” has the main theme as pity. Scobie is the main character who is projected as a weak man, but whose intentions are good. He is actually doomed by his sense of pity. It is basically a novel of morality. Scobie thinks that by following the path of religion, he can repent his actions and if he fail to do so, he will have to face hell. "He thought: I'll go back and go to bed, in the morning I'll write to Louise and in the evening go to Confession: the day after that God would return to me in a priest's hands: life will be simple again. Virtue, the good tempted him in the dark like a sin." (The Heart of the Matter P.186)

According to John Updike “The three novels (as opposed to “entertainments”) composed before and after *The Power and the Glory*—*Brighton Rock* (1938), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), and *The End of the Affair* (1951) —all have claims to greatness; they are as intense and penetrating and disturbing as an inquisitor’s gaze..... Yet the Roman Catholicism, in these three novels, has something faintly stuck-on about it—there is a dreamlike feeling of stretch, of contortion.”

The main theme of the novel seems to fade away between belief and disbelief. Jealously in practical ways can be depicted in “*The End of the Affair*”, Where Sarah and Bendrix are free to make their own choices between love and hate. Sarah sacrifices her romantic love for Bendrix and instead decides to choose for a divine love. Sarah’s love is the end of Human love, but then this kind of love is bound by the human limitations. In this novel is revealed the painful happiness of a short lived relation between Bendrix and Sarah. Bendrix hates God, as he believes him to be the destroyer of human beings happiness.

“Heaven was a word Hell was something he could trust .A brain was capable of what it could conceive and it couldn’t conceive what it had never experienced” ((*Brighton Rock* p.248.)

The contents of “*The End of the Affair*”, novel are clearly inspired by the conventional romantic fiction. Although the theme of jealousy percolates in the characters but one can see that Greene had also tried to cater in this novel the spiritual beliefs of the characters.

“The sense of unhappiness is so much easier to convey than that of happiness. In misery we seem aware of our own existence, even though it may be in the form of a monstrous egotism; this pain of mine is individual, this nerve that winces belongs to me and no other . . . as though I loved in fact what I hate” (*The End of the Affair* P.36) .

Bendrix frustrated love affair with Sarah turns into hatred and he becomes a despondent.

“But I’m sick with life, I’m rotten with health”(The End of the Affair 152) .

The Theme of desolation and abandonment also runs among the poor people through the very famous and widely read novel by Graham Greene “The Power and the Glory”. The novel deals with the interaction of politics as well as religion. Politics in this novel are represented as Socialism of the Lieutenant who is concerned with improving social conditions especially of the poor. Religion in this novel is represented by Whiskey Priest who is mainly concerned here with the salvation of the souls. This novel suggests that both the ways that is practical and spiritual ways of approaching the life has failed. The main character Whiskey priest is desperate and who is trying to find out his dignity as a priest, because he belongs to a place where there is a ban on Church Practices and Priests are shot dead.

Greene presents the spiritual conditions of his characters as the deepest Part of their creature identity. The whiskey Priest is full of guilt and dogmatic devotion towards his duties and also he is morally weak. The lines from the novel clearly indicate his torn mind between his desire for achieving worldly and spiritual perfection.

“One mustn't have human affections—or rather one must love every soul as if it were one's own child. The passion to protect must extend itself over world—but he felt it tethered and aching like a hobbling animal to the tree trunk. He turned his mule south.” (The Power and the Glory Chapter One of Part II P.80)

The character of the priest is full of uncertainty and doubt throughout the novel. It is reflected from the feeling of his isolation and his fear that he is unable to redeem his sin.

Considering all the examples from the novels mentioned in this study, it can be understood that Greene never considered himself as a Catholic writer, but he treated himself as a writer who took characters with catholic ideas for his books. Green always has the perception of the moralists and that this vision he reflected very well through his characters. He never imbibed Catholicism as his religion, but it was only because he wanted a better grasp of the nature of the faith of Vivien Dayrell-Browning that he converted himself to Catholics for the sake of his fiancé. This wit is true that Greene is a kind of writer who had dared to put forth the problems of faith and belief before the world which is full of Violence prevalent in and around the society. This is one of the drawbacks that in search of peace and moral values of his characters in his novels he often ends up in violence. The characters portrayed in his novels find themselves secluded both internally and physically. Many characters in his novels find related to his own experiences in his life He has a superb quality to understand human psychology and thus he had put forth the problems of faith and belief in the mouth of his characters.. Despite the fact that Greene himself was deeply disappointed in his own life, but then he could always finds out a way of salvation for his gloomy characters. Thus, it is well reflected from his novel how the sense of alienation pervades through his characters in the novels taken up for the study. The paradoxical statement given by Greene in his novel *The Heart of the Matter* that

“Point me out the happy man and I will point you either egotism, evil –or else an absolute ignorance The truth...has never been of any real value to any human being –it is a symbol for mathematicians and philosophers to pursue.” (The Heart of the Matter)

So, according to Greene sufferings are necessary in the life of a person and then only he will find way for salvation. Many Catholics and Religious persons were surprised by Graham Greene’s views on religion. But he could make his place as a writer due to his perceptions matching that of the common people.

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