



## Paradoxical Syndrome of Sin and salvation in Graham Greene's Major Novels

**Poonam Rani**

Assistant Prof. Dept. Of English Literature  
Indus International University  
Bathu, Una (H.P)

**Dr. Santosh Agarwal**

Associate Professor  
Gokul Dass Hindu Girls College  
Moradabad (U.P)

### Abstract

*Greene in his novels emphasizes the theme of man's isolation, alienation as Evil, Sin and Suffering and protest against the universe interfering with human activities and insisting on conformity through religious dimensions. Greene's vision of life is paradoxical as he holds both Catholicism and modern politics together in unison. Greene appears to be pleading for proper harmony the rational and vital. Brighton Rock, The Power and Glory, Heart of the Matter, End of Affair underlines the theme of Evil, Sin and Suffering as alienation, seclusion, isolation, betrayal, murder and tries to bring out the significance of doing good, human love, and strong faith in God. Finally, it is right to argue that Greene's concept of 'paradoxical vision' is closely associated with his contradictory blending of religious and political ideas.*

**Key Words:** Paradox, Sin, salvation, religion, and politics

### Introduction

Graham Greene (1904-1991) emerged on the literary scene of England in the thirties with the publication of his first novel entitled *The Man Within* (1929), a historical romance, and was indeed a prolific writer, and perhaps he still continues to be Britain's 'main literary export' to the rest of the English-speaking world. He is a rebel Christian, and in this connection says: 'I am a Catholic with an intellectual, if not an emotional belief in Catholic dogma'. He speaks a good deal about sin and salvation, damnation and redemption in his fictional works; he does not paint his characters in mere black or white, for he is of the view

that a saint may be an ex-sinner or that a sinner may be a saint in making.

The term 'paradox' has its origin in the Greek word 'paradoxos — para + doxa (opinion). Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines the term as 'a statement or tenet contrary to received opinion or belief, especially one that is incredible, absurd, or fantastic'. Thus, 'paradoxical vision' means the vision which includes two contradictory ideas or principles.

Greene's vision of life is paradoxical as he holds both Catholicism and modern politics together in unison. In his interview with Fidel Castro and Ho Chi Minh, he, very emphatically, says that both religion and politics can be



combined and made complementary to each other. In fact, he has tried to make a compromise between two contradictory ideas— religion and politics, and soften the opposition between the two through his novels and other prose writings. Finally, it is right to argue that Greene's concept of 'paradoxical vision' is closely associated with his contradictory blending of religious and political ideas. His religious ideas are faithfully Catholic and political ideas avowedly left.

Salvation is one of the promises of God to all believers: to be given the gift of eternal life. To be —Saved in the full sense of the word means to have received eternal life. The word salvation is also used to describe the process we go through before we can receive eternal life. Matt Slick in Christian apologetics and research ministry refers as Salvation is being saved from the righteous judgment of God upon the sinner. God has provided a way of escape so that people will not face His righteous judgment. This means that God is both holy and loving. He must manifest each quality equally. So, being saved from the wrath of God is called salvation.

This article underscores the fact that Greene has almost single-handedly redefined twentieth-century Roman Catholic notions on piety with his constant revelation that pious people often lack charity while salvation is

possible for sinners. It also shows that Greene's novels radically question the doctrines on morality espoused by conventional churches, thereby displaying his own religious sensitivity and courage.

*Brighton Rock*, the first novel of Greene's so-called Catholic period, can be read as a detective story, it is "almost belligerently religious in theme" (Stratford, 1967:166). This novel was a turning point for Greene in that he had discovered that "a Catholic is more capable of evil than anyone" (BR: 309)

The three main characters themselves reflect conflicting attitudes. Ida believes in life, Rose in religion, while Pinkie reveals a conscious willed unbelief. Pinkie, however, constitutes the novel's real religious paradox. He believes, but sets himself up against his belief. His is the tragedy of a Faustus, though on a smaller scale, a man who knows which way salvation lies and yet deliberately opposes himself to Divine injunctions. He tries to assert his own individuality, his own ego and personality, against Divine authority. For example, he believes in hell rather than in heaven: "Heaven was a word: hell was something he could trust" (BR:284). Greene ironically adapting Wordsworth, states: "hell lay about him in his infancy" (BR: 81). Yet, despite all Pinkie's efforts to deny his faith, he cannot get rid of his



Roman Catholicism, which in its music and rituals, for instance, constantly affects his thoughts and deeds.

To conclude, *Brighton Rock* marked a new literary direction for Greene. Here, more distinctly than in the previous novels, the conflicts between belief and unbelief come into focus, and the many facets of these conflicts, the ironic ambiguities and paradoxes, are examined and evaluated more intensely and satisfyingly than ever before.

Greene's next novel, *The Power and the Glory*, "a pre-eminently religious novel" (Lamba, 1987:58), exposes conditions in Tabasco, a small state in Mexico, where priests were persecuted with pitiless cruelty by the totalitarian, anti-religious regime which took over the province in 1917. The central opposing characters are an unnamed Whisky Priest, who sometimes assumes the name Montez, and a similarly unnamed Lieutenant of the Police. *The Power and the Glory* is divided into four parts. The first introduces the Whisky Priest, who has been a fugitive for eight years, while trying to escape from the country where he has remained as the last priest, following the execution or defection of the others. The second part shows the Priest's return to his native village, where he meets his illegitimate daughter, Brigitta, and narrowly escapes arrest by

the Lieutenant. The Priest is later arrested for breaking the anti-liquor laws and spends a night in prison. The third part chronicles the Priest's betrayal by the mestizo who wants to get a reward promised by the Lieutenant. The fourth part of the novel reports the last conversation between the Priest and the Lieutenant before the Priest is executed.

Greene believes in the original sin of man. As a catholic he is of the opinion that man has a natural tendency to fall to the path evil. Therefore he makes a clear distinction between virtue and vice. These are the motions of right and wrong on the human level and sin and virtue on spiritual level. It is rightly said that Greene's novels deal not only with in relation to society and to himself but fundamentally in relation to God. Therefore, Greene preoccupies himself with man's innate sinfulness, his awareness of his sinfulness and his consequent search of God's mercy and salvation.

His another master piece *The Heart of the Matter* is basically the story of corruption settling on a God-fearing and religious minded-man, Henry Scobie. He is tormented by his love of God because he cannot reconcile it with his love of human beings. He does also discover that goodness involves suffering. Scobie suffers in and for his own life. But he does also suffer something which is most



illogical and incomprehensible. He suffers in and for the lives of others. This saintly feeling is indeed a reflection of his religious pursuit. On the other hand, *The Heart of the Matter* is typically viewed as a novel having paradoxical analysis as Scobie, the protagonist of the novel, is a religious man as well as a political one having the status of a police-officer. Feeling the religious impact of the novel, one cannot ignore the political one that is playing an unavoidable role invisibly behind the curtain.

Greene had strong belief in the inevitability of suffering and sin and hence importance is given to sin, suffering and misery of human beings which could be erased only by the grace of God. Thus, in the 'trilogy' Greene expresses his philosophy or vision of life. One could say that Greene's novels are meant to express human nature rather than to give moral instruction. Answering a question in an interview with Gene D. Philips, Greene himself has said that his novels are 'about human beings'.

On account of the special nature of Greene's themes, the techniques adopted by him in his novels have a strange appeal for the reader. As Greene's protagonists are often embodiments of evil and are often sinners trying to save themselves, he

finds the spy-thriller a very useful method of writing. A spy-thriller is usually full of crime, hunts and journeys and Greene's characters – more specially, his heroes – are gangsters, smugglers, criminals and outcasts of society. Very often these characters are shown to be caught in desperate plights and are shown to be either escaping the law or betraying or murdering their friends. Just as we feel fascinated by a spy-thriller so we feel drawn to a Greene novel, but with a difference. In an ordinary spy-thriller we are just interested in the story and how the criminals are punished. In a Greene novel, on the other hand, we are involved with the characters, and we partake of their emotions.

### **Conclusion**

Graham Greene is one of the greatest fashionable novelists. He represents the contemporary English novel. Evil, Sin and Suffering transforms a man to towards god through redemption. They are the conceptions that are central to Christian theology. Greene's view of evil and sin and his imaginative and sympathetic view of the darker side of man provide the real source of religious dimensions which are the shades of Greene as good, love and faith are in many of Greene's fiction. It is the deep study of sin that prompts Greene to think of the redemption of the



sinner. Greene suggests that a true believer and in the process of redemption he finds the presence of God. In this process, Greene seems to say that even if, one has committed a mortal sin, and it is quite possible that he would be redeemed by the touch of the Grace of God.

Greene in his novel emphasizes the theme of man's isolation, alienation as Evil, Sin and Suffering and protest against the universe interfering with human activities and insisting on conformity through religious dimensions. Greene appears to be pleading for proper harmony the rational and vital. Brighton Rock, The Power and Glory, Heart of the Matter, End of Affair underlines the theme of Evil, Sin and Suffering as alienation, seclusion, isolation, betrayal, murder and tries to bring out the significance of doing good, human love, and strong faith in God. These shades of Greene as religious dimensions will make a man to live in peace, belief and moral values as a perfect man with the fear of God to realize about himself and transform towards God through salvation.

Thus Greene has made use of his ideas regarding sin and salvation, as depicted through his novels, to encompass the whole world within the scope of

universal love. So the common man or the evil man who might have been considered insignificant and worthless by the society has gained access into the domain of God and His divine grace.

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