

**DIVIDED TO THE VEIN: “WHISKY PRIEST” IN GRAHAM GREENE’S
*THE POWER AND THE GLORY***

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Abstract

Graham Greene is a writer who happens to be a Catholic. He is a fine psychoanalyst of the human soul, whose cinematic writing lays threadbare the inner accesses of the protagonists. One of the most autobiographical authors his characters succumb to his own temptations. Hence, this article is an endeavour to trace the pattern of the divided self of the author in the “whisky priest” of *The Power and the Glory*.

INTRODUCTION

The Power and the Glory commences with the descriptions and images which evoke the sense of the fallen world. The imagery delicately replaces material with the spiritual. This foreshadows the struggle between the State and the Church. This struggle forms the backdrop for the more serious, more intense spiritual struggle of the “whisky priest”. The unconscious urge is translated into symbols which reflect his basic concern. “Whisky Priest” is spiritually regenerated through experience. He is also the scapegoat for the Church and for the community of believers who can now, with his death, more firmly cherish their secret faith because they have yet another saint as Luis’ mother suggests.¹ The Priest is the scapegoat for his child, too, for whose salvation he offers his own damnation as propitiation. The Priest is reborn in the person of a new priest because, after his fall from grace, he has undergone humiliation and suffering. The need of the basic awareness of evil as well as the concept of the fortunate fall is abundantly evident in this novel.

THE FALL...

Innocent man is tempted in to the life of sin...Eve’s temptation to attain power and glory on eating the apple from the tree of knowledge ...is the first step to temptation and sin...

Greene’s mythic pattern refers to the Original Fall. And, still everyman is comfortably facilitated towards the world of crime. The defender of the Church, too, cannot evade the corruption surrounding him.

Set in a totalitarian Mexican state where Catholicism is outlawed, the novel *The Power and the Glory* describes the risky adventures of a hunted man---the last Catholic priest, who

resists the laws of the state by carrying on with his priestly duties. He is not only chased physically, the “whisky priest” is also pursued spiritually. What matters in this novel is not the natural pursuit of the priest by the police lieutenant; but, the supernatural pursuit of him by God, which finally succeeds. This spiritual chase is inferred from his own inward thoughts and his reactions to events he passes through. He is hunted down by God because of his shortcomings. His shortcomings, of which, he is fully conscious are his addiction to brandy; his indulgence (seven years before) in a sexual act with Maria-his housekeeper. And, consequently, begetting Brigida, his illegitimate child; cowardice, and enormous sense of pride he feels after the execution of all other priests.

THE STAY...

In his autobiographical essay, “The Revolver and the Corner Cupboard”, Greene describes the suicidal experiment he made in youth:

*Place the revolver to my head.
And pull the trigger.
Will it be mist and death?
At the bend of this sunset road.
Or life reinforced.
By the propinquity of death?
Either is gain.
It is a gamble which I cannot lose.*²

Fixed in his despair, boredom appears to him to be the sole substitute for the “black and grey” evil of human nature. Referring to his unhappy childhood, Greene desperately says:

*One began to believe in heaven because one believed in hell, but for a long while, it was only hell one could picture with a certain intimacy...the pitch pine partition of dormitories where everybody was never quiet at the same time; lavatories without locks...walks in pairs up the suburban roads; no solitude anywhere, at any time.*³

His troubled childhood is the backdrop of the bleak and paradoxical descriptions in the fictional world. Despair and boredom are part of Greene’s psychological make up. Later, his pessimistic outlook undergoes a sea change.

The secular and empty world of *The Power and the Glory* finds its best expression in a passage too long to quote in completion, hence, he uses as an epigraph to his novel, *The Lawless Roads* (1939), from Newman:

*What shall be said to this heart piercing, reason bewildering fact? I can only answer, that either there is no Creator, or this living society of men is in a true sense discarded from His presence...if there be a God, since there is a God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity.*⁴

Sick and lost in Liberia, he comes to discover in himself “a thing [he] thought [he] had never possessed: a love of life.”⁵ Greene’s obsession with the theme of the inevitability of evil justifies his crucial use of paradox in all his works. Greene analyses, “There’s another man within me that’s angry with me.”⁶ This is the anger of the present divided mind and body which nurtures unaccomplished and incomplete desires, dreams and thoughts. Things and incidents happen to him which falls out of his control. Consequently, his actions and dreams converge and appease with the deep and strong faith he possesses.

Unworthy , torn , shabby---Greene’s characters possess power and glory in another world--- seen in the eyes of God---as their eyes watched God--- so are His eyes watching them. And, the faith in Him makes his survival possible. The split space in the Self carries Greene’s characters’ both in a unifying and dividing vein.

THE RISE...

“It is the love for God that mainly survives because in His eyes they can imagine themselves always drab, seedy, unsuccessful, and therefore worthy of notice.”⁷ Such contradictory view is true of the “whisky priest”, the victimized and tormented protagonist in *The Power and the Glory*. He is the facsimile of Greene’s soul. Replete with guilt, sin and failure, at each step of life, he is a realist hero and feeds his soul on the special love he has for God, which is more powerfully and deeply felt through his weaknesses and failures. Pain, guilt, consciousness and suffering are the backbone of this character.

The inner conflict results due to the inability to live up to his ideal. The paradox lies herein – as – in his weakness – he finds his strength. Greene’s paradoxical mind is at work throughout the novel.

The next highlight – is-- that personal corruption causes suffering ---but--- ultimately it leads to salvation. Though sin is the impediment to being close to God – but, it also paves the way for greater love of God through subsequent guilt, confession and repentance. Awareness of the sin becomes the cause rather than the result of his faith. The concept of meeting evil on the path of good is reverted here – while on the path of evil – the man finds good and God.

He says that, “sins have so much beauty.”⁸ Of beauty Greene writes:

*Saints talk about the beauty of suffering. Well, we are not saints , you(the pious woman) and I(the whisky priest). Suffering to us is just ugly. Stench and crowding and pain. That is beautiful in that corner- to them. It needs a lot of learning to see things with a saint’s eye: a saint gets a subtle taste for beauty and can look down on poor ignorant palates like theirs. But we can’t afford to.*⁹

The priest furthermore says: “I know- from experience-how much beauty Satan carried down with him when he fell. Nobody ever said the fallen angels were the ugly ones.”¹⁰ Originally- all are beautiful-all are pure. The sins tarnish their character. An angel can also commit a sin. Only suffering and pain can purify. The reality is crafted with the amalgamation of purity and impurity, pleasure and pain, saint and sin. The juxtaposition of good and evil and the like ensures that the existence of the one colours the other. The realism of the spiritual nature of man is portrayed deeply and adeptly by Graham Greene. It turns out to be a realistic reflection of a society where a pure saint can never be born. Even a soldier who fights in the battlefield nurtures fear. Fear and desire frame the form and content of the modern man, irrespective of deeds and profession.

To achieve spiritual enrichment one has to dive through the sufferings, pains, regret, despair, boredom, loneliness. This is the answer which Graham Greene begets at the finale of the journey of the “whisky priest”. Despite the number of sins committed by the priest, he attains martyrdom and sainthood. The priest’s potentiality is clearly and beautifully manifested in the closing lines of the novel, thus: “It seemed to him at that moment that it would have been quite easy to have been a saint. It would only have needed a little self-restraint and a little courage.” ¹¹

EXTENDED MARGINALIZED SELF...

Greene's characters are "lapsed... whisky priests, but their situations are the metaphors for human condition, and in this fundamental sense Greene's novels are relentlessly contemporary."¹² Greene's characters are his extensions. The Priest's morbid psychological state of mind is a delineation of the author's unstable emotional and intellectual conditions, traumas, and repressions. Greene's real character is as fathomless as the ditch water. His bottomless character is due to the contradictory view he holds towards life, a view so clearly shown through the character of the "whisky priest." As a priest, he is supposed to have a clear conscience, yet, it is due to his confused inner psyche--should he satisfy his needs and seek pleasure or to fulfil the job of the church-- that he comes to suffer from a troubled conscience which keeps him devouring from inside.

He is the replica of the split modern man. The hybridity and multiplicity of complexities make him an enigma for himself. Even if he tries to compile his inner self, the circumstances around push him back and forth. A derelict priest wonders around as a marginalized self in search of a home. This home he finds nowhere on this earth...but...discovers completeness in nothingness.... And, this nothingness is where he finds glory and power. That glory and power is not writ on snow...but on the eternal mound of spirituality. Lost and ignored, homeless...seeks peace in absenteeism...

CONCLUSION

Greene's novels speak about his philosophy of life. The spiritual intensity and the quality of deep reality is the unifying factor which underlies his novels. Hope in hopelessness, to seek out path where it is unavailable is the significant trait of the practical man. The road and the self is beautifully constructed and framed in the journey towards eternity. The power is sought at the right place at the right time. A constructive figure is logically projected in the "whisky priest." He seems to be logically illogical in search of intangible. A Self - on the road to discovery---A Self - inquisitive and acceptable---marginalized---reachable---having the power to reach the eternal glory. Entering into a new phase with a new outlook with a better in-look.

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