

**The New Priest Comes**

The lieutenant has done his duty. But he now feels a kind of vacuum in his life. He thinks that he has eliminated the last priest in the country, but another mysterious priest arrives from somewhere. He knocks at the door of a religious-minded family for shelter which is promptly offered to him. This indicated that in spite of the secular state's laws religious faith is always alive. The state may shoot down individual priests but faith in religion never dies.

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**CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF 'THE POWER AND THE GLORY'**

Greene's *Power and the Glory* is the story of a priest's flight through a land which has forsaken religious faith. The novel is set in the primitive landscapes of Mexico, during the time of political strife and religious persecution in the 1920's. According to the new directives of the totalitarian government, all the priests had fled away or were shot dead, or they were made to forsake their priestly calling by getting themselves married. One of the priests (Greene does not give him a name and he is known as 'priest') has eluded arrest and is being chased by the police lieutenant throughout the state. The priest carries a reward of five hundred pesos on his head. He is a 'whisky-priest; a coward, the father of a child, born of his loneliness and weakness, "a once arrogant man who quickly recovers his old attitudes when he reaches safety."

**The Novel Based on Personal Experience of Greene**

Graham Greene undertook a journey to Mexico in 1938 in order to investigate the religious persecution in the state. As a result of these travels, he wrote his first travel book, entitled *The Lawless Roads*. Greene noted that the repression of religion was quite unevenly exerted in different states. In some states the priests were captured and put to death, but in some states they survived and lived comfortably to exercise their duties. The priest in *The Power and the Glory* is, in fact, a prototype of a priest described in *The Lawless Roads*. He is one of the two survivors in the state. The other priest is father Padre Jose who has saved himself by marrying a woman. The other priest, the hero of the novel, is chased by the lieutenant throughout the state. Thus the story of the novel is based on the actual experience of Greene.

**The Theme of the Novel**

Critics have found various thematic aspects in *The Power and the Glory*. This novel is a pursuit story. The pursued priest is considered as God's representative though on the surface it is a political-religious novel. "The surface detail, as in every political novel, marks the interplay of opposites; the political versus the religious, the dictator versus the saint. Greene twists the opposition from its usual course by making a whisky-priest, with an illegitimate child, God's representative on earth; and even more than merely representative, the sole

representative in the entire state, God's last man to struggle against his earthly enemies. The priest is indeed a frail Jesus among the sinners, a debilitated Jesus who must do God's bidding when he is unsure of what he bids for, and anguished Jesus who is as much attracted by the world he opposes as he is attracted by God's will. The use of the whisky-priest to represent the best which faith has to offer conveys both the strength and the weakness of the novel. Perhaps only in Scobie of *The Heart of the Matter* was Greene able to present a weak man with so much of a burden of sin and grace and heaven and hell."

Through the religious theme Greene seems to highlight spiritual consequences. The priest runs and runs from parish to parish in order to save himself from persecution. But finally he comes back on the call of his inner conscience to be trapped and shot dead. The priest tries to reveal himself on various occasions though he is a coward and fears revelation in the village of Maria and then in the prison. The theme of the novel is primarily the religious one of spiritual consequence—"We have the priest's ignorance of how and among whom his actions are indeed profitable; and his acute insight into those whom they do not profit—into the blindness of the faithful and of the church itself, in so far as it is an earthly institution whose officers misconceive the efficacy and the inefficacy of their ministrations. In his knowledge, he is aware that what passes for piety among believers is often the humanity of the Pharisees, and that the 'goodness' of the individual is not the same thing as his loyalty to the church and to the letter of doctrine. In his ignorance, he is unaware that, although his own child is a moral outcast who despises him, he has acquired a kind of spiritual paternity over the protestant American child who gives him shelter and refreshments, and that by his martyrdom he converts, temporarily at least, the boy who is fed up with the pious tale which his mother reads aloud night after night, but equally fed up with the drabness of the political secularity of the society in which he is growing up."

An interesting aspect of the theme of this novel is the novelist's quest of salvation in earthly failures. In this aspect Greene may be said to have given the Christian novel a new turn. He does not portray a good man's quest for virtue or for heavenly city of God. On the other hand he depicts the quest of a sinner who forsakes God and embraces the Devil in order to reach the city of God. It has been suggested that a marginal man—poor in spirit and weak in will and proud in soul can be saved. Greene appears to hold the opinion that in earthly failure, God sees potential salvation, that in apparent worldly success God sees weakness, that in satanical pride God sees the capacity for humility, that in indecision and denial God sees the possibility of faith. The paradox has been established. Greene tries to prove that only indifference can destroy God. Greene takes up the unbelief of man in God and measures its strength. Greene tries to explore what God can mean to a man who rejects him and who shakes hands with Devil. On a larger scale he asks what God can mean to a world where only evil lives and which will prove stronger in the battle between God and the Devil—the battle that goes on in the mind of man. In fact, Greene paradoxically suggests that

in reaching out for the Devil, man may well find God, and conversely, in reaching out for God, man may find the Devil. This has been illustrated by the story of the whisky-priest. This priest is a sinner. He is a drunkard and is guilty of being the father of a bastard child. So he is a follower of the Devil though his vocation is a religious one. After the religion having been abolished from the state, this priest can very well get married and lives happily. He can save his soul or he can save his body. But he continues going his way though he is all the time aware that he cannot become a martyr. Of course, the Christ is his ideal but being a drunkard he cannot live upto the ideals of true Christianity. Moreover he has begotten a child and fear always chases him wherever he goes. So he cannot continue with his profession. Greene calls him "a sinner ready to achieve sainthood". The redeeming aspect of his personality is that he is ready to suffer. He also undergoes the ordeal of self-realization. He is fully aware of the depths to which he has fallen. He has forgotten God and accepted the devil, but the very fact of denial contains the deeds of his attachment to God. Greene endeavours to prove that this sinning priest is worthy enough to be a saint. He is a true martyr. In spite of all the blemishes in his character, the priest "carries on" as one of the minor characters says. He is always touched by his conscience. He finally goes back from safety to perform the last sacrament to the dying murderer though he knows that he is being trapped. Greene finally tells that after the execution of the priest a new priest emerges in the abandoned land.

#### Seedy Character of the Novel

*The Power and the Glory* is markedly characterized by seediness and sordidness so frequently seen in the novels of Graham Greene. The novel gives the impression that this world is full of violence, filth and squalor. This condition of the world has been revealed by Newman whose passage serves as an epigraph to Greene's travel book, *The Lawless Roads*. The words of Cardinal Newman are: "What shall be said of this heart-piercing and reason-bewildering fact? I can only answer that either there is no creator of this living society of man 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."

Besides visual suggestions of seedy character of the novel, there is a sense of spiritual emptiness looming large in the narrative. The suggestion of dirt and squalor are scattered all over the story. There is mention of the vultures and sharks in the very opening of the novel. The images of squalor are frequent, such as, "Dark fell like a curtain: One moment the sun was there, the next it had gone." "The place was half filled by a stack of maize, the rats rustled among the dried leaves." "As the sun went down, the mosquitoes came out, flashing through the air to their mark unerringly, like sailors' knives."

There are a number of pictures of filth and desolation in the novel. For example, the picture of the prison is quite abominable.—"This place was very like the world: overcrowded with lust, sand crime and unhappy love, it stank to heaven." The filthy aspect of the prison cell

reaches its extreme limits when it is suggested that a couple indulges in sexual intercourse in the overcrowded cell itself in the midst of darkness. One other picture of desolation has been created when Greene describes the abandoned bungalow of Captain Fellows. The Fellows family has left the place leaving behind only one creature in the house and that is the mongrel bitch with a broken leg. The scene of the house is completely desolate. Everything in the house is broken—a few old medicine bottles and other such things. In the kitchen the priest finds nothing to eat except a piece of bone with a little meat upon it. The bitch has been shown as a competitor of the priest for the bone.

The seediness in the novel has been made more effective with the suggestions of horror, disgust and violence. When the priest comes before the woman whose child is about to die, his feelings are full of disgust. "Horror and disgust touched him—violence everywhere: was there no end to violence?" But more acute is the priest's sense of failure and 'surrenders.' The sense of failure always haunts his mind. When he is going towards the village of Maria he is troubled by the thought of many 'surrenders' that he has made. His feast days, fast days and the days of abstinence have all gone and he no longer can carry his breviary and altar-stone with him. He repeatedly feels that he has been unworthy for so many things. He realizes that he is a bad priest and not worthy of being considered a saint or a martyr. It is just before his execution that he is completely overpowered by the sense of failure. There is a spiritual vacuum in his life that he is leading while being chased by the police lieutenant. His sense of his own unworthiness fills him with spiritual agony.

The spiritual emptiness has also been suggested by a number of images. For example the policemen are described as walking "raggedly with rifles slung anyhow; ends of cotton where buttons should have; a puttee slipping down over the ankle; small men with black secret Indian eyes." When the lieutenant is seen lying on his bed in his room, lost in meditation, "Beetles detonated on the ceiling" while he has the vision of a dying, cooling world of human beings who had evolved from animals for no purpose at all." The description of Padre Jose alongwith his wife is also of the same nature. Jose "was very fat and short of breath; he panted a little as if after great exertion in the heat." His wife has been shown "lying in the big shameless bed that filled half the room, a bony shadow within the mosquito net, a lanky jaw and short grey pigtail and an absurd bonnet."

In the novel wickedness has been shown to have gained ground over goodness. Greene has pictured hell with certain intimacy which is more explicit than the picture of anything good. Wickedness to Greene seems to be more rampant in society than goodness. Greene often finds sinfulness where many people would find something less serious. That is why his obsession blinds him to an important part of the truth. For instance, in the episode in which the priest attends the dying murderer, the murderer tries to save the priest by giving him his revolver and asking him to escape though he knows that the trap has been laid by the 'bastards'. As soon as the murderer dies, the priest prays, "O merciful

God, after all he was thinking of me, it was for my sake...." But the priest utters the truth. "At the best, it was only one criminal trying to aid the escape of another criminal—whichever way you looked there was not much merit in either of them." Thus the action of the criminal before death is certainly laudable but Greene overlooks this aspect.

#### Character Portrayal

In point of character-portrayal also the novel needs attention. On the whole, the characters of Greene fail to impress as much as the characters of Hardy. Greene's characters appear to be convincing in the beginning, but soon they lose their vitality. Gradually they become Greene's mouthpieces. They surprise us in the beginning, but eventually they fail to surprise—they are flat characters given a series of twists; they are revolved rapidly or made to stand on their heads at intervals. But when one has mastered the direction of the twist and the timing of its recurrence, the pattern is exposed and there is no more any surprise. Thus the characters of Greene generally fail to impress.

The priest seems to be a better drawn character, but on an intimate analysis he appears to be no more than an intensely felt idea presented through a puppet. At intervals the priest comes to various odd situations in life but his reactions to those situations impress merely as regular reactions of a puppet. The lieutenant also does not impress so much because there is little life in his characterization. The lieutenant's appearance of life comes from the tension between the cold progressive on top and the wish to love underneath, which reveals itself occasionally in unexpected actions like his giving of the coin to the priest when he is released from the prison. The lieutenant's gentle gesture is also seen when he is seen with the boys of the town. He is moved by the feelings which he himself does not understand. Greene makes this remark: "He wanted to begin the world again with them in a desert.... He put out his hand in a gesture of affection—a touch, he did not know what to do with it."

The characters of the Fellows family are also not satisfactorily drawn. Mr. Fellows has been portrayed as a sort of beefy and stupid fellow whose wife has gone neurotic on account of the life of exile. In fact, there is a kind of manipulation in the character portrayal in the novels of Greene. The characters are constantly brought into positions which are more effective for the pattern than being probable. There are several examples when the characters' behaviour seems to be improbable. For example, the mestizo finally betrays the priest to the soldiers, simply saying 'Father' from the clearing as the priest reaches the door of the hut. Likewise the prisoners do not betray the priest in spite of their evil nature, and lastly, there is the instance of the boy who has admired the lieutenant and sensibly rejected the sickly tales of martyrdom. The boy changes all at once when the priest has been executed, spitting at the lieutenant and opening the door for the new priest.

The lieutenant, however, is not merely an embodiment of an idea. Like the priest he too is introspective in nature. In spite of working for the totalitarian government he believes in a kind and merciful God. He

is deadly against religion because of the evils that had crushed the commoners. His heart is full of compassion for the poor. He often shows concern for the welfare of the rising generation in his country, though he lacks the foresight to realize that the religious instinct in men cannot be suppressed by any government strictures. Though he has been hunting for the priest, yet he is able to perceive the innate goodness of the priest and goes out of his way to procure brandy for him and to make an effort to bring Padre Jose to hear his confession. Thus the lieutenant has been drawn as an individual as well as an embodiment of an idea, i.e., the idea of secularism.

Among the minor characters the English dentist and the Police Chief may be mentioned to be of some note. The English dentist, Mr. Tench, has been living in this state for a long period. But he is thoroughly bored with his life with the result that he has become forgetful and absent-minded. But in the company of the priest he feels at home. The Police Chief has been drawn as a comic figure who is least bothered about his job. He drinks with the priest whom the police has been chasing. There is however the humanitarian side of his character because he is distressed at the shooting of the hostages. The mestizo, the sole villain of the novel has also been drawn quite skilfully. He is a convincing villain who shows his hypocrisy, treachery and fawning manners in quite a convincing way.

#### Structure of the Novel

The plot of *The Power and the Glory* is well-knit and compact. The novel tells a single story without any sub-plot or digressions. The story revolves round the character of the priest who is being chased by the Mexican lieutenant. The purpose of the novelist is two-fold: to show that religious faith cannot be totally suppressed; and to show that a man may rise to great heights of heroism and self-sacrifice in spite of his inner weaknesses and frailties.

Greene is able to achieve his aim by introducing a number of episodes directly or indirectly concerning the priest. The main interesting episodes are: the priest's meeting with the English dentist, Mr. Tench; his taking shelter in the house of the Fellows family; his visit to the village of Maria, the woman with whom he had come into sexual relationship and begotten a girl named, Briggita; his encounter with the mestizo; his accompanying the beggar-looking man to the hotel and meeting the Governor's cousin and drinking brandy with the Police Chief; his capture by the red shirt and detention in the jail for a night; and his second encounter with the lieutenant at the time of his release; his second visit to the deserted house of Fellows; his meeting the bereaved mother and their trek through the wilderness in search of a church; his arrival in the neighbouring state; his going back to minister the dying American gangster on the suggestion of the same mestizo; and finally his arrest by the lieutenant and execution. All these episodes are co-related and various characters involved in all these episodes are relevant and necessary for the development of the plot. All the characters have their own place and importance in the narrative. For example, Mr. Tench meets the priest in the beginning and he is the

witness of his execution in the end. His reaction to this execution is that of intense shock and it enhances the readers' emotional reaction. Likewise, Mr. and Mrs. Fellows may be indifferent to the welfare of the priest but their daughter Coral not only gives the priest shelter but does not mind providing some brandy for him. Coral may be called the spiritual daughter of the priest and serves as a counterpart of his own daughter Briggita.

The plot of the novel is characterized by an element of suspense. In fact Greene is known as a pastmaster of plot-construction. He introduces a number of dramatic situations which create feeling of suspense. For example, a suspenseful situation arises when the lieutenant interrogates the priest in the village of Maria. The situation is so dramatic that one expects the priest to be arrested any moment but on the spur of the moment, Maria comes to the rescue of the priest by saying that he is her husband. The journey of the priest in the company of the mestizo is also full of suspense because we feel that the mestizo can reveal the identity of the priest any time to get the reward. There is yet another such suspenseful situation when the priest comes upon a wounded child and is later joined by the mother of the child. The child dies and his dead body is strapped by the mother on her back and carried to a nearby cemetery and the priest goes with her. In the prison the priest encounters the lieutenant once again but the latter is not able to recognize the former. He talks to him and gives him a five peso coin. This situation is full of suspense.

In keeping with the theme of the novel, Greene has made frequent use of psycho-analysis. There are a number of interior monologues which reveal the inner recesses of the heart and mind of the priest. The priest who is a man of introspective nature solicits our admiration and sympathy mainly because we come to know much about what he thinks and how he reacts to his crucial circumstances. He is seen struck by his own unworthiness and inadequacies and finally he comes to the sad conclusion that his life has been a failure. Thus through the interior monologues the priest has achieved a kind of glory and divinity.

The plot of the novel is not completely devoid of the comic element. The life of Padre Jose after his marrying the woman who has made him a highly comic figure has become a subject of comedy. It is his utter subservience to his wife which makes him an object of mockery among the children of the neighbourhood. This unmatched couple is a perennial source of humour in the novel. Likewise, Mr. Tench's chronic indigestion and the chronic toothache of the Police Chief are also somewhat humorous in their nature.

#### The Cinematic Technique

An interesting feature of the novels of Graham Greene is that they are built on the basis of cinematic technique. Greene was greatly interested in films and he was a severe film-critic. Cinematic technique lays emphasis on the visual effect of action. In *The Power and the Glory* the very opening paragraph of the novel is marked with this visual effect: "Mr. Tench went out to look for his ether cylinder, into the blazing Mexican sun and the bleaching dust. A few vultures looked

down from the roof with shabby indifference; he wasn't carried yet. A faint feeling of rebellion stirred in Mr. Tench's heart, and he wrenched up a piece of the road with splintering finger-nails and tossed it feebly towards them. One rose and flapped across the town; over the tiny plaza, over the bust of an ex-president, ex-general, ex-human being, over the two stalls which sold mineral water, towards the river and the sea. It wouldn't find anything there; the sharks looked after the carrion on that side. Mr. Tench went on across the plaza."

In his novels Greene appears to be a film director who manages his action according to the requirements of vision. His novels look like shooting scripts. The following description also shows this calibre of Greene; "The *General Obregon* was about thirty yards long. A few feet of damaged rail, one life-boat, a bell hanging on a rotten cord, an oil-lamp in the bow, she looked as if she might weather two or three more Atlantic years..... Half a dozen passengers leant on the rail, among the hobbled turkeys, and stared at the port, the warehouse, the empty baked street with the dentists and the barbers."

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#### CRITICAL OPINIONS

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Greene's conversion to Catholicism, as he describes it in *A Sort of Life*, was rather diffident. He was walking his dog past a church that 'possessed for me a certain gloomy power' because it represented the inconceivable and the incredible. Inside, there was a wooden box for inquiries and I dropped into it a note asking for instruction ..... I had no intention of being received into the Church. For such a thing to happen I would need to be conceived of its truth and that was not even a remote possibility.' But, after a few sessions of vigorously arguing the case of atheism with Father Trollope, something happened; 'I can only remember that in January 1926 I became convinced of the probable existence of something we call God, though I now dislike the world with all its anthropomorphic associations.' Early the next month he made his first general confession, was baptised, and received. 'I remember very clearly the nature of my emotion as I walked away from the cathedral: there was no joy in it at all, only a sombre apprehension.' The entire swift surrender reminds us of another, which occurred a bit earlier during his four months of living alone in Nottingham and being terribly bored.

Once on my free day I walked over the hills to Chesterfield and found a dentist. I described to him the symptoms, which I knew well of an abscess. He tapped a perfectly good tooth with his little mirror and I reacted in the correct way. 'Better have it out,' he advised.

'Yes', I said, 'but with ether.'

A few minutes' unconsciousness was like a holiday from the world. I had lost a good tooth, but the boredom was for the time being dispersed. While still an Oxford undergraduate, he had repeatedly