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SIN, DAMNATION AND SALVATION IN GRAHAM GREENE'S *A BURNT-OUT CASE*

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ABSTRACT

Graham Greene's fictional writings are famous for psychological progress in the characters individually as well as collectively as a unit. Moreover his works are filled with Catholic Christian's devotion with a minor change in it according to the World of affairs at that particular time. He takes tips from all thinkers, right from Darwin to modern ones with the idea to establish a formidable ideal without disturbing the fundamentals of Christianity. His firm belief is that man has to believe in himself and at the same time he has to believe in God, the creator of universe. In his novel *A Burnt-out Case* he depicts human values to the core and at the same time he wants to emphasise that human beings are both bad and good in nature. Even though it appears paradoxical, there lies abundant truth in it. The protagonist in the story Mr, M. Query was a famous religious personality and an architect by profession. In the beginning of his life he was a womanizer and commits a lot of sins, but earns a lot of wealth and fame in Europe. Thus he was a cult personality there. Then he is suddenly upset with such life and goes for leading life in isolation and thus suffers damnation and finally he gets salvation in a different manner. Thus in his life he goes through all three common stages in one's life such as Sin, Damnation and Salvation. All the remaining characters also experience similar life style as described in this paper.

Key Words: Psychological, formidable, emphasise, paradoxical, architect, womanizer, isolation, contemporary, bushed, interpretations, visualized, the super-ego, dialectics, identification, contending etc.

Introduction

Graham Greene is one of the greatest contemporary writers who symbolize a noteworthy experience in the twentieth century mind and the current world, noticeable from its rejection of bushed ideals and its attempts to build up a new ethics. Right from Darwin's theory of evolution through Freud to Max Plank and Einstein, the environment of universe has undergone a number of different interpretations. Darwin visualized the human dilemma in terms of a tooth and nail struggle

in which only the fittest could survive. At the same time as Marx worked out science and system of the dialectics of society and Freud saw the nature of man as torn between the contending pulls of the 'identification' and 'the super-ego'. The social, political and economic developments, of the present century, far from resolving the split, the restlessness in man's personality has further increased. The knowledge of two world-wars, have weakened the individuals' feelings and made them lonely, disappointed and unproductive. Thus sin and

damnation are visible in modern man's life and he has been fidgety and just leading a life and not living a life. He needs solace and it is not linked with the knowledge of the world and that is certain.

No doubt man has to acquire self-knowledge through intra-communication and also the awareness of the world around him with interpersonal communication. But man is not yet a self, says Kierkegaard unless he has achieved a Synthesis with God, with "the Power which constituted him". This lack of synthesis is what is called alienation which causes sickness and despair in man. Man suffers from despair for want of faith in God and this despair is "The Sickness unto Death". Thus there is no end for his miseries until and unless he comes in terms with the creator. So to achieve salvation man has to make friend with God and thus get the real knowledge.

Certainly in this context of God, a theological dimension is visible in Graham Greene's works and it is unquestionably a reliable donation to the English fiction. According to Ray North, "Greene has brought to the English Novel a metaphysical dimension that is integrated into the themes of his books in a positive way and not just a conventional background" (Religious Vision in the works of Graham Green) . By incorporating the concepts of the Catholic faith in the English novel Greene as Sister Mariella Gable says, "Has expanded the boundaries of the English novel." It is to tell that English Fiction is wholesome because of the efforts of such great writers like Graham Green.

Another interesting thing is that the disagreement between good and evil is a common thread running through all the great literature of the world. The very growth in spiritual intelligence has emphasized the radical problem of evil. And this problem is imposed by an experienced frustration of values, by the clash between what ought to be and what actually is. The essential evil sin lies in man's deviation from the straight path of righteousness. The sinful life is worldly and carnal, but sin is essentially man's perverse disdain of God's will. The Christian devotion, the fundamental Christian idea, was not a reduction of the evil to the carnal, whether manifested in sexuality or vain pride, or ambition;

the basic evil, sin, is always in the depraved straying of man's will from the higher to the lower. Man falls into errors when he fails to make God the centre of his life. If man is a creature of almost unlimited possibilities for good he has infinite potential for evil also. Thus man is the combination of good and bad and this is true all the time. Therefore in man's journey of life sin, damnation and salvation are present as stages and this is inevitable.

Contextualization:

Thus in the story *A burnt-out Case* the main character Mr.Querry is a rich man and a terrible womanizer. All of a sudden he gets fed up with all the worldly fame and everything related to the material happiness. Thus he is a moral and psychological burnt-out case as the title suggests. He lost his catholic faith, his ambition; his sexual desire and his interest in everyday interpersonal relationship as a socialiser. He likes to be detached from and wants to be disliked by people as generally do with lepers. He renounced everything and comes to the leprosarium in Belgium Congo to hide himself from the world. He is of the opinion that he has come to the end part of his life. Though he is unable to renounce all his senses he is still alive to his personal needs and responsibilities. So he says to Dr. Colin, "If I could be any use to you-I know I am not trained." (*A Burnt-Out Case* p. 24) It is clear that he doesn't like to sit idle and eat the efforts of others without himself doing anything. This is the beginning of the revival of interest in human relations in the life of Querry. When Querry offers some help to the hospital Dr. Colin said,

"If you really want to help me and you don't mind a rough journey you might take the second truck to Luc. The boat may not be back for weeks. My new apparatus should have arrived by now in the town. It will take you about 8 days there and back- if you are lucky. Will you go?" (p. 26)

For this Querry said, 'Of course I shall start right away.' Thus he is pulled into the worldly affairs once again in a different manner and finally loses his life for no mistake from his side. Querry and his assistant reached Luc and 'searched a long time for the Doctor's apparatus'. (p. 30) Querry had to dig out

the European controller who was having an after lunch rest. When he was with the controller of stores Mr. Rycker meets him and invites him to 'stay a night at my place on your way home' (p.32) Actually Mr. Rycker has never seen Query or has had any acquaintance with him. It is only through the photograph of Query which his wife has preserved that he comes to know that he is the Query, the famous architect.

Thus Query has to spend that night with Rycker as 'the river the truck has to cross far too high. Not a chance to pass tonight. Who know whether even tomorrow...(p.34) It is here that he meets for the very first time Marie Rycker the wife of Rycker who looks very innocent and at the same time stunningly beautiful. 'It is women that seduce mankind' is a Christian proverb that started from Eve's eating the forbidden fruit. In this novel it is Marie Rycker who creates a storm in the life of Query and disturbs him in his rather second birth as a pure man.

Query goes to Rycker's house when Rycker introduces his wife to him. Immediately Query understands that Marie is just imitating the words of her husband and she has no self thinking to her credit. Doubtlessly Marie is too young for Rycker. Rycker himself explains why he has married so young a girl to be his wife.

"But I look ahead. If you believe in marriage you have to look to the future. I have still got 20 years of - let us call it ---active life ahead of me, and what would a woman of thirty be like in 20 years?...there are enough problems without sex, I can assure you St. Paul wrote, didn't he, that it was better to marry than burn. Marie will stay young long enough to save me from the furnace. At the bottom of my heart I believe profoundly." (p.35)

Query observes a teacher and pupil relation between the couple. He complains to Query just like a teacher talk about his student. Immediately Query understands that Marie is leading 'a lonely life of her age.' (p.38) But Rycker's conclusion is that his wife doesn't understand the true nature of Christian marriage. He finds fault not only with his wife but also with the nuns who taught her in her

childhood. Query clearly understands that Rycker wants to keep his wife under his control by preaching Christian values while she is full of sexual desires as any girl of her age feels. His religious teachings spread boredom in her life and thereby she refuses him even as her husband also. Query is also angry with Rycker because he made public his personal life which he doesn't want to disclose.

In the mean time once Marie Rycker goes to the leprosaria to meet and invite Mr. Query to her house. Query too invites her into his room through the superior saying, "Oh well, at least it's not her husband." (p.81) Query is also angry at the horrible treatment levelled against his child like wife by Rycker. So he is interested in talking to her, but she goes away in her car without meeting Query. This act of Marie Rycker confuses both Query and the superior who remained in the room with him. The construction of the hospital has been progressing well under the supervision of Query. Yellow journalist Parkinson at the insistence of Rycker has published an article finding fault with Query's past. Query is very furious at it and goes to Rycker to question him. (p.163) Then Rycker is sick, is in bed and Marie is looking after him. He says to Marie, "I must speak to him myself. A touch of fever is not going to stop him from hearing what I have to say." (p.165) But she begs him not to go in as Rycker thinks it is her fault to allow Query in. But Rycker is already awake and is sitting on bed.

Query and Rycker enter into heated arguments about the newspaper articles. Only after he had slammed the door, shut did he remembered that he had said nothing of Marie Rycker and of her journey to Luc. Marie has been waiting eagerly to know the result of her error. Actually Query sees in Marie a baby who is satisfied with a bag of sweets, and at the same Rycker suspects Query for being her boyfriend. Immediately after this incident Marie requests Query to take her to a hospital in Luc. Query is reluctant and both of them go to the city Luc. Since she has no friends and relatives there, they prefer to go to a hotel to spend the night. In the morning they are seen by the journalist Parkinson who instantly informs the matter to Rycker who is very angry with both Query and his wife.

The doctor confirms Marie's pregnancy. At this again Marie plays a nasty game and says that the cause of the pregnancy is Query though it is not real. She tries to argue with Query that her statement is correct with some vague proofs. Poor Query is not in a position to prove his innocence and thus becomes a bad man in all his acquaintances. And thus he suffers damnation. In his past life in Europe he leads a life of a sinner. At the end of the story he is murdered by Rycker even though he is innocent. Thus the innocent soul of Query gets salvation because there is purity in his death for he is not a criminal. Thus he undergoes the three stages in life and they are sin, damnation and salvation.

The Important female character the reader comes across in the novel is Marie Rycker. She is a beautiful lady and at the same times a cunning lady also. First this tiny girl marries a middle aged man Rycker whose manliness doesn't satisfy the craze she has towards sex. In addition to this her husband goes on preaching Christian ethics to her. He tries to tell her how a wife should respect her husband according to catholic Christianity. He teaches her spiritual concepts where as she is suffering from deep material and sensual desires. Thus their married life is a bad example for the new couple. On the other hand his patriarchal thoughts make her hate him to the core. So she hates her husband and shares her opinion with Query whom she loves and feels a good alternative to her real husband. Now the question is 'who is this Query?'

One day she happens to see the photo of Query on the cover page of a magazine. She imagines him as her imaginary husband and goes on thinking about him though he is with her real husband Mr, Rycker. As time goes on Query comes to her place as he is frustrated with his name and fame and wants to lead a peaceful life in a hidden place. Insolently he meets her husband and her also in a bad moment. She plays tricks on him and makes him stand as a womanizer though he is not. In his past he had all the bad habits but he is a gentle man now-a-days. Thus she intentionally makes Query a bad man in the eyes of the society though he is good by nature. Thus she commits sin and thereby suffers damnation by experiencing torture from her husband. She has a lot of open-self and says boldly

that Query is the father of her baby though it is a cooked statement. She believes that Query is her dream husband. Though she has sexual contact with Rycker, she sees in him her dream husband, Query. The evidence is clear that her baby is a true copy of Query. Her heart is clear with this idea and therefore there is no confusion or ambiguity. Thus she is pure in heart and so enjoys the bliss of purity. In this way there is sin, damnation and purity in her life.

One more prominent character in the novel is Rycker who is a rich businessman. He is a believer of God and has sincerely followed all the rituals of Catholic Christianity. He is a priestly personality and a Good Samaritan to the society. He has cordial relations with other members of his community and spends much of his time in spiritual activities. His weakness is that he has married Marie who is a lot younger to him with regard to age. And thus he is not in a position to satisfy her sexually. This creates frustration in his young wife. He thinks of alternatives and finds ways to console her.

He goes on telling her the spiritual stories of Jesus Christ and Christian ethics in which he is a doctorate. But the young girl who has still a lot of life left over is not interested in his preaching's. Thus she develops a sort of hatred towards him. He has many complaints with his wife. Interestingly she has developed an instant love with Query whose photograph is printed on the cover page of a famous magazine. She preserves the magazine in her personal collection and she looks at the charming face of him whenever she finds time. Fortunately for her this Query comes to their town to lead an isolated life vexed with his image.

Mr. Rycker invites Query to his house and introduces him to his wife. She is delighted at the sight of his hero and moves with him closely. He too with sympathy on her condition sees a daughter in her. He tries to share her feelings and tries to console her by telling her some soothing words. But she uses him in another way and spoils his name by propagating that they spend a night together in bed. This makes Rycker an angry man who wants to take revenge with Query. In the process he kills him. This is the biggest sin he commits and at the end he

knows the reality and feels sorry for his act. Thus he too faces sin, damnation and salvation in his life. In this way the three main characters in the novel *A Burnt-out Case* undergo the three stages of life called Sin, Damnation and Salvation.

Conclusion

Greene's work, particularly this novel, reveals his penetrating interest in religious matters. His works indicate that in his entire career he has shown interest in essential ethics - and often paradoxical - issues concerning religious faith, particularly as these issues impose on the twentieth-century mind. (The extremely brief introduction to the obituaries to Graham Greene in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (Anon, 1992:285) singles out religious interest as the hallmark of Greene's work: "Greene was renowned for exploring religious themes in his work".) At least this novel thus comprises a substantial documentation of man's spiritual condition in the twentieth century. It depicts people who are caught in the chaos and flux of modern events in the world.

What Greene wants to tell is that in the present world in every human being there will be good and bad. Frankly he needs a lot of assistance from the Creator to live a satisfactory or at least a contented living. This is clearly depicted in Graham Greene's novel *A Burnt-Out Case*. Actually the theme of the novel is to tell that man suffers three stages such as Sin, Damnation and Salvation in his life. For living such a life man needs a lot of skills and they are artistically and meticulously mentioned in this novel. It is to say that man has to lead a wholesome life and not a partial one. In this story all the main characters are partially soft and at the same time partially evil. All the characters use God as connectivity once or more times in their lives. As they are worldly, they have both good and bad instincts in them and undergo the three stages of life named Sin, Damnation and Salvation.

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