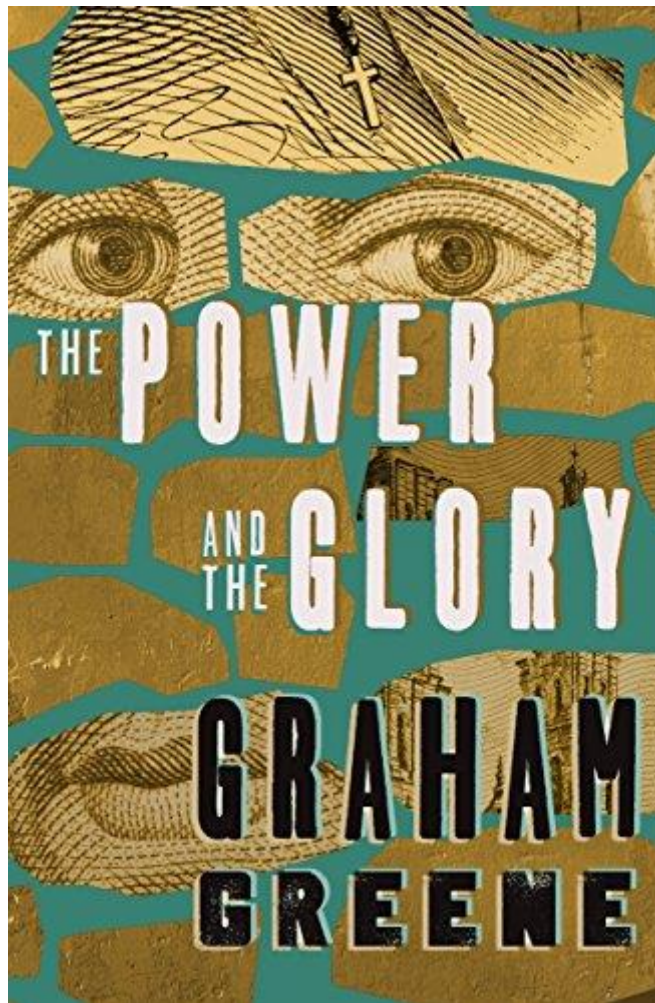


**Impact of Child Characters on the Fatherhood of Whisky Priest in
Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory***

Tahmeena Hussain, M.A. English & M.Phil. English, Ph.D. Scholar
Department of Linguistics
University of Kashmir, Srinagar



Courtesy: https://www.amazon.com/Power-Glory-Graham-Greene-ebook/dp/B07CMJ5N2R/ref=sr_1_1?crd=M6UFJPJG6D14&keywords=graham+greene+the+power+and+the+glory&qid=1578849331&sprefix=Graham+G%2Caps%2C783&sr=8-1

Abstract

In Christian ideology, father is a man who takes responsibilities for the lives of others, who is ultimately prepared to sacrifice himself for those who appear to be too helpless to survive on their own. In the novel, *The Power and the Glory*, the protagonist, Whisky Priest offers martyrdom- a self-sacrifice for the innocent children; thus revisiting the relationship between the Father in Heaven and the father on earth.

The children in the novel - Luis, Coral and Brigitta, carry some sort of recognition of Priest's faith in God and the Church in one form or the other. While Luis carries on this impression of the revival of faith successfully, Coral and Brigitta possibly perish in the process. Thus, it is only the strong character of Luis who not only withstood the test of time but also pass on the faith in God and the Church successfully to the future generations.

Keywords: Martyr, Skeptical, Faith, Father, Heroic Execution, Sainthood, Empathetic, Catholicism, Contrition, *The Power and the Glory*.

Introduction

Catholicism has remained one of the most controversial aspects of Graham Greene's novels. One of the recurring themes of his novels is the man's quest for eternal peace and of God's love for man in the world of fear, pity and violence.

Fatherhood functions in the novels of Graham Greene on three interactive levels. The lowest level is that of a biological father, the next level is that of a 'father' in metaphorical sense – the priest. This type of fatherhood is a frequent one in Greene's works. The third and the highest level of fatherhood is related to God, the Father in Heaven- God as a father who cares with His ultimate grace and mercy. This concept applies equally to the attitude of a man toward his fellow beings.

Analysis

The spiritual dimension reflected in the works of Graham Greene, like that of Henry James, is not only subtle but deeply embedded in the psychological and physical dimensions of character and place. The reliability of Greene's faith lies in the fact that Greene introduces his readers to this faith through his characters troubled perceptions, uncertainties, and longings. (Hudson and Arnold 174,185).

Greene's obsession with the devastated innocence of the children is a major one in the early stages. In the novel *The Power and the Glory*, the children act as the unwitting outcome of adult action throughout the course of the novel. It is a child who calls the priest to duty. The burial of the dead child challenges Father Jose's uselessness as a priest. (Lamba12).

In the novel, *The Power and the Glory*; the three main child characters namely Luis, Coral and Brigitta – shape the plot of the novel to a wider and significant end. In the onset of the novel, reader meets Luis, a fourteen year boy and his two younger sisters, aged six and ten respectively. Toward the later part of the novel, reader meets a thirteen year English girl, Coral Fellows; and later, Brigitta, who is merely seven. All of these children share a bond with the protagonist of the novel, the Whisky Priest, in their own distinct way. Earlier in the course of novel, the Priest is on the run from the state authorities where priesthood is banned. The sin of secretly fathering a child and his inclination for the alcohol haunts him all along his journey, from priesthood to sainthood.

The first child who appear on the scene is an anonymous little boy, who is in need of a priest, to take him to his mother for the confession during her last moments of life. Whisky priest reluctantly helps out the child with a compelled feeling of ‘Unwilling hatred’; thus preventing the priest’s escape in the first place. It is this retreat, which repeats itself in the due course of the novel, in the hands of other children.

Luis, a fourteen year boy lives with his two sisters and his parents. His mother is a pious woman and sincerely religious, but his father pays only a formal respect to the faith. The portrayal of this Christian family by the novelist is intended to draw some idea of the variations of belief and disbelief that exist in a single family. The reader meets this Christian family in chapter 2 of part-I of the novel, when the mother is reading out an account of the early life of Juan, the young martyr. Earlier, the family had some acquaintance with the Whisky Priest when Senora, Luis’ mother, offered him shelter in her house. The Priest smelt funny to her children as he was drunk and thus, had lost his esteem in the eyes of these children. They also had some familiarity with Padre Jose, a priest who had shunned his priesthood and was a mere comic figure in the eyes of the villagers.

Luis was hardly interested in listening to the biography of the martyr being read out by his mother to her children in a routine manner. While the two sisters of Luis listened to the story devoutly, Luis seemed very much impatient, indifferent and even skeptical that definitely had a disturbing effect on his mother’s mind, and for which, she even speaks to her husband in some alarm for so many uncomfortable queries of Luis about the Whisky Priest. When the girls asked if Whisky Priest was as good as Padre Jose, the mother told them that Padre Jose had proved a traitor to God, while the Whisky Priest was not so bad, though he was not very noble either.

In due course of the novel, the pious mother of Luis is reading out the biography of Juan and Luis continues to be not only indifferent but also contemptuous of it, all of which further annoys the mother. The girls are, as usual attentive and the boy is scornful.

In continuation with the events in the novel with respect to this family, Luis tells his mother that he does not believe a word of what she was reading out. In a fit of anger, mother asks Luis to leave the room, and to go to his father as a punishment for his contemptuous attitude toward the faith. The boy in disdain speaks out: “Anything to get away from this – this” (Greene50 ,part1,ch.4). Luis tells his father that the holy book which his mother has been reading out sounds silly to him.

As events in a story usually take a violent turn, Luis turns out to be thrillingly interested only toward the last part of the biography. In chapter 4, part-I, the pious woman (mother), as a matter of routine, is reading out the biography of Juan to her children. She was reading out the account of how Juan faced the firing squad, how he raised the crucifix at the end of his beads and prayed to God to forgive his enemies and how he eventually was shot at. When the policemen had been ordered to fire, Juan had called out in a strong, brave voice: “Hail Christ the King”. (Greene219,part4).

Juan had died as a hero and a martyr at a time when the priests were being threatened with dire consequences for practising their religion. When mother reads out the account of the shooting of Juan, Luis feels excited. When she refers to Juan as a hero and a martyr, the boy asks if the priest who had been shot at that morning was also a hero and a martyr, and the mother replies in the affirmative, adding that he may even turn out to be a saint.

The story of heroic execution of Juan as read by Luis’ mother in the novel coincided with the execution of the Whisky Priest around the same time. The whole religious biography which the pious mother had been reading out to her children ran almost parallel to the events in the life of the Whisky Priest.

For now, Luis’ whole outlook for the Whisky Priest has changed drastically. The same night, Luis is awakened from his sleep by a knocking at the door. When he gets up to open the door, he finds a stranger who introduces himself as a priest, willing to spend the night in his house as he has an introduction for the ‘Senora’ living there. On his learning that the visitor is a priest, Luis promptly seizes the stranger’s hand and kisses it. Luis then reverently steps aside to let the stranger enter the house. This transformation of Luis from a skeptic into an earnest believer and the revival of his faith in God and the Church, form the climax of the novel.

The second important child character, after Luis, is that of the Coral Fellows, a thirteen year little girl and a daughter of a banana planter, Mr. Captain Fellows, who is an agent of the Central American Banana Company who himself is an Englishman living in the Mexican state.

Coral appears in the part-I, Chapter three of the novel. It is when, Whisky Priest takes shelter in Captain Fellows house, a policeman (Lieutenant) comes out there in search of him and enquires from Captain Fellows if he had any information about him. Captain who was completely unaware of Priest's presence in his house denied vehemently. Later, reader comes to know that Coral had confided Whisky Priest in the barn among the bananas. Captain, on learning this from his daughter, Coral, was left annoyed and astonished. He yearned to meet the Priest and simultaneously reprimanded Coral and declared in lucid words that they have no business to interfere in another country's politics by providing shelter to the Priest. Coral replied to her father that it was not politics, adding; "I know about politics. Mother and I are doing the Reform Bill" (Greene37,part1,ch.3).

Coral was a very daring girl, about thirteen years of age. She was not at all afraid of whatever worst ; life could offer her from death, snake bite, fever, rats or a bad smell. "Life hadn't got at her yet; she had a false air of impregnability. But she had been reduced already, as it were, to the smallest terms-everything was there but on the thinnest lines". (Greene33,part 1,ch.3).

This description of Coral by the author not only points to her independent nature but also hints at the pathos of her ultimate fate. Neil Sinyard views Greene's style as 'an extraordinary labour of simplification' on the same lines as described by Eliot, for that of William Blake (40).

Coral risks her own life for the Whisky Priest by giving him shelter against the law of the land. When the Priest begged Captain Fellows for the little brandy, which he refused to provide because he would not break another law of land; it was Coral who not only carried secretly some of her father's beer to the priest but also resisted his point of view about the priest that the latter was a shameless fellow. "Coral had an answer to everything. She never spoke without deliberation : she was prepared". (Greene34,part1,ch.3). Coral pointed out to her father that he too drank liquor sometimes.

In her conversation with the Priest, Coral asked him why he cannot renounce his faith for the sake of his safety. Priest replied that renouncing this was impossible, as it was out of his power. Coral reflected on a witty remark. She said to the priest, "Like a birthmark"? (Greene41,part1, ch.3).

After having the drink, Priest feels brave enough to leave the hiding place in the barn. For Coral, "the word play had no meaning to her at all – the whole of life was adult". (Greene54, part1,ch.4). Coral was much ahead of her age, in her wit and understanding of life. The miseries of life and landscape has turned her prematurely into an adult. The ugly mature life has already

touched her tender age and “the vultures rose languidly at her approach”. (Greene53,part1,ch.4). She was small and black and out of the place among the banana groves.

Coral was approaching her life at a much faster pace, the pace she could not go with. Coral’s father, Mr. Fellows, observing his helplessness to protect his child, says, “It is like watching the one you love driving recklessly towards the broken bridge, the torn-up track, the horror of seventy years ahead”. (Greene36,part1,ch.3).

When Coral learns that the Priest would be shot if captured; she feels empathetic for him and says, “I hope you’ll escape... If they kill you, I shan’t forgive them-ever”. (Greene42,part 1,ch.3). She promises to provide shelter to the Priest if he happens to come again there and also promises to teach him Morse code too. Reader comes to know that Coral has lost his faith at the tender age of ten, the fact, which she discloses to the priest on his request to pray for him.

Coral Fellows remains part of the Priest’s consciousness till the end. On his later visit to banana station, the Priest did not find her there, fearing his death or flee. While rummaging among the papers that must have belonged to the girl, the Priest remembers the readiness of Coral to swear enmity against anyone who hurt him. What the Priest could only do now was to hold her close in his tearful prayers.

After discussing Luis and Coral Fellows at length, the most vital child character who leaves an indelible mark of sainthood on the heart and mind of Whisky Priest is his own illegitimate daughter, Brigitta.

Toward the end of the novel, in succession of events, Priest visits his home after an absence of six years. He is greeted by a group of young children, wherein he fails to recognize his own daughter. A little later, he realises that the young old girl who stared at him with a ‘devilry malice’ beyond her age is his own daughter. On her first meeting with her father, Brigitta is utterly insolent. Her mother- Maria scolds her for her impudent and malicious gesture at the priest.

Despite her tender age, Brigitta was rather mature. “He (namely, the Priest) caught the look in the child’s eyes which frightened him, it was again as if a grown woman was there before her time, making her plans, aware of far too much”, (Greene67,part2,ch.1).

Like Coral, she is unprotected. The world has entered her heart already in the guise of disease, hunger, and lust, not to mention compromise and shame, like a ‘small spot of decay in a fruit’. (Greene81,part2,ch.1). To the Priest, Brigitta appeared as a rag doll with a wrinkled aged face – it seemed unlikely that she would live long.

While leaving the village, the Priest makes another attempt to establish some kind of contact with Brigitta, she complains that other children make fun of her because, while they all have their fathers in the village, she had an absentee father, a priest who is not spoken of. Her mother Maria held that the girl is evil and that she will never change. “She’s bad through and through” (Greene79, part 2,ch.1).

The horrendous maturity of Brigitta is the outcome of the ‘Saturnalia of adult passions and attitudes being rushed through her childish mind’ (Sinha 29).

The Whisky Priest went down on his knees and pulled Brigitta to him while she giggled and struggled to be free. He said, “I love you. I am your father and I love you, Try to understand that”. He held her tightly by the wrist and suddenly she stayed still, looking up at him; He said, “I would give my life, that’s nothing, my soul ... my dear, my dear, try to understand that you are – so important”. The Priest continued, “You must take care of yourself because you are so necessary. The President up in the Capital goes guarded by men with guns – but my child, you have all the angels of heaven”. (Greene82,part2,ch.1).

“He put out his hand as if he could drag her back by force from – something ; but he was powerless ; the man or the woman waiting to complete her corruption might not yet have been born : how could he guard her against the non existent” ? (Greene67,part 2,ch.1).

The Priest prayed for his daughter; “O God, give me any kind of death without contrition, in a state of sin-only save this child”. (Greene82,part2,ch.1).

The priest’s escape which was prevented by an anonymous boy at the onset of the novel; is now a willful affair for the priest, because, “If he left the State, he would be leaving her too, abandoned”. (Greene67,part2,ch.1).

Priest is filled with profound anxiety when he thinks of Brigitta. Priest often prays for her consciously, and unconsciously. When he is in prison, waiting for his execution, his thoughts go back to her again and again; He says; “Oh God, help her. Damn me, I deserve it, but let her live forever”. (Greene208,part3, ch.4).

In the novel, *The Power and the Glory* ; unlike the traditional catholic novel, the theological suffering of the Priest does not end up satisfactorily ; which in turn, results in the clear delineation of the child. The reader is compelled not only to go with the Priest’s faith but also to believe in the possibility of the child being saved. This theme of what Robert Hugh Benson called a ‘contract’ with God is repeated in the works of Greene, and in this case, it

involves a willingness by the Whisky Priest to give up salvation itself for his child. (Griffiths 170).

Conclusion

The children, in the novel, *The Power and the Glory* represent hope against hope, in the otherwise dark, despair land of Godlessness. While Brigitta is the biological child of the Priest, the other two, Luis and Coral share the spiritual bondage of parenthood with him. Coral puts her own life at risk by giving refuge to the Priest; Brigitta saves him from damnation by upholding his courage which ultimately culminated in his martyrdom. It was because of these children that the Whisky Priest, an imperfect sinner throughout the novel, comprehended the term ‘God’ in its true connotation that was otherwise, a mere religious ‘trite’ word for him. It is worthwhile to mention that the theological suffering of the Priest is an act of love - a salve, in return of his agony en route fatherhood that alleviated his painful journey toward the final destination of priesthood.

Whisky Priest takes shelter in Luis’ house, Coral’s house, and in and around the Brigitta’s life, influencing their thought process in terms of faith and Godliness. While Coral and Brigitta perish in the process, it is the strong character of Luis who successfully upholds the priest’s faith in God and the Church.

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