

## A SENSE OF ABANDONMENT IN GRAHAM GREENE'S NOVEL *THE POWER AND THE GLORY*

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### Abstract

*The word 'abandonment' derives from the old French word 'Abandonner' which means to leave or desert someone or something. Etymologically, the word means a sense of put something under someone else's control. Power and the glory are the two fantastic phenomena which always attract human beings. They keep on wandering frequently sometime by choice or sometime by the force of Almighty. Therefore in their journey of life they have to leave their home, place, relatives, priesthood, religion, emotion, memories of the pastness of past and so on back for the sake of their betterment or for their life and move ahead. But the glory they have gained becomes sometime more important than their existence. This paper looks at select samples from the novel mentioned above and correlates them with the sense of abandonment through the characters of the narratives.*

**Keywords:** Abandonment, Etymologically, Phenomenon, Priesthood, Existence

Graham Greene is one of the prominent name in the history of English literature. His novel *The Power and the Glory* is a masterpiece in the category of catholic novels. The incident of this is based on the real life experience of the novelist when he traveled in Mexico between March and April 1938 as well as his solitary sojourns in the southern provinces of Tabasco and Chiapas. The *Lawless Road* published in 1939 gives us the detailed account of his travels in Mexico. Greene had visited the country to see the religious persecution and the closing down of the churches on the arrival of secular power in the country. In this context let us discuss how the novelist throws light on the theme of abandonment through the religious persecution of the protagonist of the novel.

The novel *the Power and the Glory* deal with the subject of religious persecution in which Whisky Priest is the protagonist and possibly divine grace. It does not concern itself only with parables and it does not offer any morals. The significance of the novel lies in the literary treatment of a sense of abandonment of the protagonist and the other characters. Though the archetypal form and image of Brighton Rock is also found here the novel, according to Walter Allen, 'rises triumphantly clear of the parable'. But the temptation to draw a parallel with the movements of the action of the novel and a parable is too great to be done away with totally. In both the novels Greene was trying to restore the religious sense of the English novel that had been lost with the death of Henry James. For Greene, the religious sense in novels was of significance and as far as the characters were concerned, the question whether they were good or bad, was immaterial. What was significant was their capacity for damnation, for if they were capable of damnation, they were fit for the grace of God and the final salvation. In this context Eliot's essay on *Baudelaire* is rightly applicable where he says: *the glory of man is his capacity for salvation; it is also true to say that his glory is his capacity for damnation. The worst that can be said of most malefactors, from statesmen to thieves, is that they are not men enough to be damned.* (pg41)

There are many things which are abandoned in this novel. It can explain the apparently paradoxical elements we find in the religious thoughts of Greene and his preoccupation with the idea of evil. It also helps in the understanding of the character of the unnamed priest in *The Power and the Glory* whom Greene had made different from the orthodox Catholic priest, so that he could be prepared for damnation and refused to abandon his priest. In this context he becomes the appropriate candidate for the grace of God.

There are many things in the novel in which the central idea of abandonment is delineated. Here we find the fugitive priest Padre Jose does to come to hear confession because of the banned of Catholic religious activities by the authority in Mexico which represents his great sense of abandonment. Even the central character is being constantly abandoned one place after another for the sake of divine grace though he keeps on taking whisky and he has an illegal daughter.

The novelist also deal with about the incident of the last priest left in Tabasco when all others had either left or changed over to conform to the political change. A great sense of abandonment is reflected when the priest is said to have *existed for ten years in the forests and the swamps, venturing out at night; his few letters... recorded an awful sense of impotence - to live in constant danger and yet be able to do so little...* (pg129). The novelist's own sense autobiographical abandonment is also reflected when he describes: *I loathed Mexico but there were times when it seemed as if there were worse places... Here was idolatry and oppression, starvation and casual violence, but you lived under the shadow of religion of God or the devil* (pg234).

The motto of the novel is the conflict between the power of the state authority and the protagonist Whisky Priest's desire of salvation for divine grace. He is the last Catholic priest who has still heard the confession, capable of surviving in the suddenly changed totalitarian state of Mexico, is hounded by the powerful state machinery and finally executed by a firing squad. In this context, the greatest heroism of this novel is that the protagonist's refusal of the priesthood and priestly performances in the meantime of the prohibition of religious activities.

The title *The Power and the Glory* might have been taken from the Biblical episode *Thine is the kingdom*. Here the words "Power" and 'Glory' are both attributes of God. The novel too, in a sense, extols the power of God, though in a highly dramatized manner. The priest probably achieves both the power and glory that makes him come closer to God, though he himself might not have come to know of it. It is not only a story of a whisky priest fighting the whole establishment, but also about all the ordinary men and women in the novel who sacrifice their lives in the service of the Almighty when they follow the commands of the priest. The priest, in the end, has to lay down his life, despite the fact that in the conventional sense he might not have been worthy of acts that he had performed throughout his career as a priest. Greene in a sense makes him an individualist who creates his own rules and follows them in his own way. He manages to follow his way of performing his duty irrespective of what the Church or society decreed. If, on the one hand, he violates the new rule of the country that prohibits the practice of religion, he also violates all the tenets of

religion that he is so keen to establish in the chaotic order of the new political and social set up of the country.

Though this novel Greene wants to establish that though temporal order of the government is successive to change, the power and glory of God is permanent. To achieve the grace of God, the priest abandons the order of the state. He feels that he is abandoned by people because of his materialistic desires. Mr. Tench has abandoned his family. Mr. and Mrs. Fellows also abandon their family and domestic animals. Even the novelist abandons Christian notion priesthood. In this context he establishes another side of the question and that is the power of God in relation to all the other things in the world. Though the whisky priest has sinned in the traditional Christian sense of the term, God's power is capable of uplifting him to unimaginable heights. What is needed for the priest is just a bit of soul searching and total surrender to God. As soon as he surrenders himself to God, he is raised above all the others, although he is dead and gone, before being awarded the position.

Though Greene had vociferously denied the label of a Catholic novelist, he cannot deny that religion, especially Catholic religion, had tremendous appeal for him since his conversion in 1926. As a novelist Greene was trying to note down his experiences of Mexico in a religious way as simply as possible. The novelist," Greene had written in his essay on Henry James, 'depends preponderantly on his personal experience, the philosopher, on correlating the experience of others, and the novelist's philosophy will always be a little lopsided.'<sup>1</sup> Though written about Henry James, the words seem to be appropriate even for Greene's own novels. We know Greene's novels are, most of the time, experiences that he had gathered moving all over the world. But he was not writing autobiographical pieces, rather he was attempting to write in an objective way, correlating about what, how and when characters behave when they are placed in a give set of circumstances. And finally, Greene's thought in the essay, whether the novelist's philosophy, if there are any, can be treated as lopsided. In the fictional world of Greene, the question that sometimes comes to mind is, whether any philosophy or philosophical truth really emerges out from his novels. In his novels, or the religious novels like the trilogy, Brighton Rock, The Power and the Glory and The Heart of the Matter, they do, and whether Greene liked it or not, it is the Catholic view

of life that he tries to project before the reader. In *The Power and the Glory* it is difficult to accept whether a non-Catholic would be touched by his thoughts in the same way as a Catholic would, not to speak of a non-Christian reader. It is highly unlikely that even a Catholic reader would appreciate the manner in which Greene had tried to lay bare the ideas of sainthood because he had tried to view things from a non-conventional way.

After the scrutinization of all the samples it is quite clear to us that Greene through his novel *The Power and the Glory* deromanticizes the myth of priesthood and questions the traditional method of salvation. He further deromanticizes the notion of religious morality through his protagonist Whisky Priest who has done all the immoral things though he is a priest. In this sense he himself abandons his traditional belief. Other priests are either killed or give their priesthood up and get married. In this sense they also abandon hearing confession. Here lies the success of the theme of abandonment.

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