CHAPTER VIII

THE INFLUENCE OF CHILDHOOD
We have already seen, in Chapter IV, that the theme of childhood as the period during which innocence is betrayed and corrupted is a recurrent one in Greene’s writings. We have also noted that the early influences in Greene’s own childhood and adolescence are to a great extent responsible for his pre-occupation with this theme. Greene believes that the corruption of human nature is the result of Original Sin and that these tendencies towards corruption originate in childhood. As a Catholic who believes in Original Sin, he points out to us that the corruption of childhood is inevitable from the point of view of Christian theology. We shall see, in this chapter, how Greene tries to explain this problem from the point of view of psychology, and how he brings home to us the fact that the loss of innocence and the corruption of childhood are in consonance with the findings of modern psychology also.

Modern psychologists have found out that the formative years of a child’s life are the foundation-stone of his personality. “Every marked attitude of a man can be traced back to an origin in childhood. In the nursery are formed and prepared all of man’s future attitudes.”¹ According to Freud, the fundamental cause

¹ Joseph Jastrow, FREUD: HIS DREAM AND SEX THEORIES, p. 103.
of a neurosis lies in the child’s unhappy love relationship with its parents, principally with the parent of the opposite sex. According to Adler, however, the cause lies in the feelings of inferiority which begin and accumulate in the early years of a child’s life. Adler, the founder of Individual Psychology, has pointed out that the origin of “inferiority complex” can be traced to childhood experience and that this complex gives rise to forms of “over-compensation” in later life. Excessive ambition and the urge to be at the very top of things are manifestations of this complex. Should the over-compensation itself be thwarted, the individual may resort to anti-social or neurotic behaviour. Very often, the young delinquent commits offences because he wants to prove his superiority to others. He may steal or commit other offences to buy the affection of his pals, or to supplement some felt deficiency, such as the absence of parental love. 2. The “inferiority complex” is generally the result of the interaction of the sensitivity of the individual and the condition of his environment. The delinquent adopts anti-social methods because of his failure to compensate for his inferiority in normal ways. Greene shows a clear grasp of these psychological facts in his portrayal of Andrews and also of the criminals, Pinkie, and Raven.

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Greene explains many of his characters in terms of their childhood influences. He shows that the childhood experiences of these characters have exercised a great effect and often a corrupting influence on their later lives. Andrews in *The Man Within*, Pinkie and Rose in *Brighton Rock*, Anthony Farrant in *England Made Me*, Rose Cullen in *The Confidential Agent*, Conrad Drover in *It's a Battlefield*, Helen Rolt in *The Heart of the Matter*, and Mr. Brown in *The Comedians*, are only a few among a large number of characters who have been explained in terms of the influences of their childhood.

"In ancient shadows and twilights
Where childhood had strayed
The world's great sorrows were born
And its heroes were made.
In the lost boyhood of Judas
Christ was betrayed". 3.

Greene repeatedly points out how our lives are shaped to a great extent by the early experiences of our childhood.

Anthony's disappointing life has its roots in his "Berkhamsted" school days. He can never forget "the pale-green dormitory walls and the cracked bell ringing for

3. A.E. "Germinal", (Quoted in *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays*, p.16.)
and the misery of those days. He had been prevented from running away from school only by his sister's persuasions. Their meeting in a barn half-way between the two schools is a recurrent memory to them. The misery of Anthony's school days seems to have cast a shadow on his whole life. Minty, in the same novel, has also been deeply influenced by his school life. "The school and he were joined by a painful reluctant coition, a passionless coition that leaves everything to regret, nothing to love, everything to hate". Greene points out in the case of many of his characters how the failure in their childhood to adjust themselves to home or school or social life often leads to some permanent defect in their personality.

Greene shows how Pinkie's early experiences of misery and suffering in Nelson Palace where he was born creates in him a great revulsion against it. One of his earliest memories is that of the "Saturday Mights" of his parents. "His father panted like a man at the end of a race and his mother made a horrifying sound of pleasurable pain. He was filled with hatred, - disgust, loneliness:"

5. ENGLAND MADE ME, p. 105.
he was completely abandoned; he had no share in their thoughts -- for the space of a few minutes he was dead, he was like a soul in purgatory watching the shameless act of a beloved person." 6. Pinkie also remembers one of the girls who was at school with him and who had a tragic end at the age of fifteen as a result of her love-affairs. Pinkie thinks of her suicide even on the morning of his wedding-day.

These early memories of the unpleasant and tragic aspects of sexual life have created in him a disgust with sex, a sexual nausea which bursts out recurrently during his conversations with Dallow and other friends.

Conventional morality begins its operations by the imposition of taboos in childhood. Children develop a profound sense of guilt and terror in all matters connected with sex. This association of sex with guilt goes so deep as to become almost or wholly unconscious. Modern psychologists point out that both sadism and masochism are connected, in their pernicious manifestations, with the sense of sexual guilt. "A masochist is a man acutely conscious of his own guilt in connection with sex. A sadist is a man more conscious of the guilt of the woman as temptress. These effects, in later life, show how profound has been the

6. BRIGHTON ROCK, pp. 249-250.
early impression produced by unduly severe moral teaching in childhood." 7 We feel that the early memories of the unpleasant aspects of sexual life, along with his early religious training, are responsible for Pinkie's sadistic tendencies. For instance, when Rose lifts her face to him for a kiss, he wants to strike her and make her scream. Again, when he sees the long stripe of sticking-plaster lining Spicer's injured cheek, he wants "to tear it away and see the skin break". 8.

The early years of the individual's life are the most decisive. Most of us have at least a dim consciousness of the debt that our religious lives owe to our childhood. "While the capacity for having a conscience may be God-given, the specific content of the individual's conscience is always learned." 9. Modern psychologists have shown that the origin of the unique feelings of guilt that we experience in our later years, is found in the teachings of the parents or parent-substitutes, which started long before we can remember.

8. BRIGHTON ROCK, p.159.
The content of an individual's conscience will depend on the training and the cultural environments of his childhood. Of course, the individual may, later on, identify himself with people other than parents, and groups other than the family. The teachings and the attitudes of these others will modify his conscience and even influence his overt behaviour to a marked degree. The influence of the family, however, will never be wholly erased. Long after his father and mother have ceased to exist, their silent influence will still be reflected in the conscience of the individual. Though he may pursue a very different road, there will remain some acts that he can never perform without paying a price of inner distress, whether conscious or unconscious, in the form of a sense of guilt. 10. This is what we see in the attitude of the "Romans", Pinkie and Rose, towards the sexual act. To both of them it is an act of moral sin.

Greene repeatedly shows how the memory of the "Saturday Nights" of his parents, along with his belief in religion, has created in Pinkie a loathing for sex. Of course, Pinkie is not free from pricks of desire. When he takes Rose to the country, he sees the skin of her thigh for a moment above the artificial silk, and the desire disturbs him like a sickness. But he tries to resist the temptation. For him love is a dirty act,

leading to the stuffy room, the wakeful children and the Saturday night movements. He could not be deceived by the lovely words. He knew that there was nothing to be excited about. He had no doubt whatever that this was mortal sin and that the priests were wise in keeping themselves away from this.

The sordidness of Nelson Place leaves a permanent mark on his mind. It makes him turn against the society which has permitted such injustice and poverty. When he visits the place again in the company of Rose to meet her parents, he again sees the shabbiness in which he had spent his childhood. "Half Paradise Piece had been torn up as if by bomb-bursts; the children played about the steep slope of rubble..........His home was gone; a flat place among the rubble may have marked its hearth."11

Pinkie is horrified on seeing the condition in which Rose's parents lived. He feels that "nobody could say he hadn't done right to get away from this, to commit any crime..."12. Greene makes it clear that Pinkie's childhood environment is responsible to a great extent for his developing into a young criminal.

In A GUN FOR SALE, Raven's personality is moulded

11. BRIGHTON ROCK, p.187.
12. BRIGHTON ROCK, pp. 190-191.
by his childhood memories of his father's execution and his mother's brutal suicide. His mother had borne him when his father was in jail, and six years later, when his father was hanged for another crime, she had cut her own throat with a kitchen knife. Raven can never forget "the kitchen table, the carving knife on the linoleum, the blood all over his mother's dress," and the Christmas spent in the Institution. The solitary confinement in the Institution has left a deep and permanent mark on his mind and, as a result, he is unable to feel the least tenderness for anyone.

Raven's life is conditioned by the brutality of his childhood. He hates the world because he is born ugly and deformed. He had learnt, when he was very young, how repulsive his hare-lip was. It was inevitable that Raven who could be loved by nobody, should be made by hatred. "It had constructed him into this thin smoky murderous figure, ............. haunted and ugly." 

Raven happens to overhear the hotel-maid, Alice, describe him to the police, "Ha's ugly through and through. That lip of his...It gives you the creeps".

13. A GUN FOR SALE, p.156.
15. A GUN FOR SALE, p.17.
Later on, he tells Anne: "If a man is born ugly, he doesn't stand a chance. It begins at school. It begins at school. It begins before that." Raven feels that his lip is like a badge of class, which reveals the poverty of his parents who couldn't afford a clever surgeon. Dark and thin, and made for destruction, he is unable to control his anger when he sees the shop windows in Shaftesbury Avenue full of tinsel and hard red Christmass berries. "It maddened him, the sentiment of it." He feels great disgust when he sees a Jewish girl with a neat curved figure bent over a dummy. He "fed his eyes contemptuously on her legs and lips; so much flesh, he thought, on sale in the Christmas window." "

Raven believes that this is really a wretched world to bring children into. In a shop by the Catholic Cathedral, he finds himself facing again the images that angered him -- the plaster mother and child, the wise men and the shepherds. They were arranged in a cavern of brown paper among the books of devotion. "He stood there.............. staring at the swaddled child with a horrified tenderness, 'the little bastard',

17. A GUN FOR SALE, p. 12.
he knew what the child was in for, the damned Jews and the double-crossing Judas and only one man to draw a knife on his side when the soldiers came for him in the garden." Raven's early experiences in life make him look at the infant Jesus with great sympathy.

When Raven realises that he has been double-crossed by Mr. Cholmondeley and that the police are after him, he is possessed by a deep sullen rage. He is ready to shoot the lot of them. He tells the hotel-maid, Alice: "I don't care a damn if I plug one of you. I don't care if I hang. My father hanged......what's good enough for him ......... There's hell coming to somebody for this." 

The same day, when he goes to Dr. Yogel to get his hare-lip operated so as to hide his identity, he finds the nurse secretly ringing up the police and trying to give information about his whereabouts. This incident infuriates him beyond all limits. He takes the knife out of Dr. Yogel's hand and hacks and saws at the telephone wire. He is touched by an overwhelming sense of injustice. "These people were of his own kind; they didn't belong

inside the legal borders; for the second time in one
day he had been betrayed by the lawless". 21. Raven
has always felt lonely and deserted, but he has never
felt so lonely and deserted as this. Without speaking
another word for fear that his temper may master him
and that he may shoot the doctor and the nurse, he
goes downstairs and walks into the streets in a dark
loneliness of spirit, with his handkerchief over his
face. Greene shows how Raven's experiences during
childhood and adolescence harden his mind and turn
him into a criminal.

Andrews in THE MAN WITHIN is pursued by his
memories of an unhappy childhood and his overbearing
father who was the leader of smugglers. He often
remembers his father who was "domineering, brutal, a
conscious master, not chary of his blows to either
child or wife". 22. His father was easily aroused,
and he seemed to keep his whip more for his family than
for his hounds. As a result of his father's ill-treatment
of him, Andrews develops a deep hatred of his father.
He wonders how different it would have been if Carlyon
had been his father. Carlyon would have satisfied his
mother's heart, and he himself would have been born

22. THE MAN WITHIN, p. 33.
with will and backbone. It is to take revenge on his father for the damage done to him in his childhood that Andrews anonymously tips off the Excisemen about the smugglers.

As in the case of his other characters, Greene shows in *The Power and the Glory*, how the lieutenant is also inhibited by his childhood experiences. If childhood fails, the whole life may follow it into hell. Greene points out that the lieutenant is such a lost soul because there had been a combination of suffering and deprivation in his childhood. While walking home through the shuttered town, the lieutenant recalls his early days: "All his life had lain bare: the syndicate of Workers and Peasants had once been a school. He had helped to wipe out the unhappy memory...

......The new children would have new memories: nothing would ever be as it was. There was something of a priest in his intent observant walk -- a theologian going back over the errors of the past to destroy them again". 23. There are mystics who are said to have experienced God directly. The lieutenant, too, was a mystic. What he had experienced was vacancy -- a complete

certainty in the existence of a dying, cooling world
and of human beings who had evolved from animals for
no purpose at all.

The lieutenant wished to eradicate as ruthlessly
as he could anything that reminded him of his sufferings.
This was his own land, and he would have walked it in,
if he could, with steel until he had eradicated from
it everything which reminded him of how it had once
appeared to a miserable child. He wanted to destroy
everything; he wanted to be alone without any memories
at all.

It infuriated the lieutenant to think that
people should believe in a merciful and loving God. He
knew there was nothing, and everyone ought to know this
nothing. That was his mission. When he sees a "swarm
of children" playing some obscure and intricate game on
the plaza, he feels great sympathy for them. It was for
them that he was fighting. He would eliminate from
their childhood everything which had made him miserable.
He would drive out everything that brought misery,
poverty, superstition, and corruption. "They deserved
nothing less than the truth -- a vacant universe and
a cooling world, the right to be happy in any way they
chose. He was quite prepared to make a massacre for
their sakes". Greene points out very clearly that it is the suffering and deprivation in the lieutenants' childhood which makes him anti-religious and the champion of the poor and the down-trodden.

In THE COMEDIANS, Greene gives us many details of Mr. Brown's childhood environment and shows us how the influences of his childhood develop into a sense of rootlessness in him. Mr. Brown was born in Monte Carlo. He is not sure of his mother's nationality. He knows, however, that she was certainly not British. Perhaps she was French or a rare Monegasque. Mr. Brown describes his parents: "The man she had chosen for my father left Monte Carlo before my birth. Perhaps his name was Brown. There is a ring of truth in the name Brown -- she wasn't usually so modest in her choice. The last time I saw her, when she was dying in Port-au-Prince, she bore the name of the Comtesse de Lacot - Villiers." 25.

Mr. Brown's mother had left him and Monte Carlo hurriedly, soon after the armistice of 1918, with his bills at the College unsettled. The Society of Jesus

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25. THE COMEDIANS, p.64.
continued to support him. He was a prize-pupil, and it was half-expected that he would prove in time to have a vocation. But even in those days he was troubled by disbelief. One day, soon after a College performance of "Romeo and Juliet", in which he had taken the part of Friar Lawrence, he made himself up as an elderly man and "borrowing" the pass-port of one of the young lay-professors of the College, he bluffled his way into the Casino. There, in the surprising space of forty-five minutes, due to an unlikely run of nineteens and zeroes, he gained the equivalent of three hundred pounds, and only an hour later he lost his virginity, inexpertly and unexpectedly, in a bedroom of the Hotel de Paris. 26.

Soon after this incident, Mr. Brown has to leave the society of Jesus and set out to England. But the sense of rootlessness which he had acquired in his childhood on account of his being deserted by both his parents, still lingers in his mind in all the vicissitudes of his life. He always feels rootless and that he has left all involvement behind him in the College of the Visitation. In the same way, he suffers throughout his life from "the never quiet conscience" which had been

injected into him without his consent, when he was too young to know, by the Fathers of the Visitation. 27.

Throughout Greene's works, there are frequent references to childhood as well as adolescent events which later appear to possess a relationship, usually a formative one, with the adult personality. We find, for instance, in ITS* A BATTLEFIELD, that at times of stress Conrad Drover's mind reverts to memories that were rooted in his childhood -- 'the smell of anthracite, the sound of drills, pictures of starved, naked children on a screen'. 28. He associates each of his failures with a childhood memory, which, though it looked innocent at the time, seems in retrospect to foreshadow a later failure.

In THE FALLEN IDOL, Greene develops the idea that a single event in an individual's childhood could leave a permanent mark on the whole of his life. The sight of the house-keeper's crumpled body had a permanent effect on Philips' mind in THE FALLEN IDOL just as the green baize door and "the witch at the corner of the nursery passage" 29. left a permanent mark on Greene's own mind. Greene points out that certain things that happened to Philip on that day were to condition him for

27. THE COMEDIANS, p.304.
28. ITS* A BATTLEFIELD, p.198.
the rest of his life.

Greene repeatedly emphasizes in his works the importance of the impressions we receive in our childhood. Our lives are shaped to a large extent by these impressions and experiences of childhood. One never escapes one's past. For instance, along with the inheritance of the gang and its activities from Kite, Pinkie has the inheritance of Nelson Place also. Pinkie tries his best to forget Nelson Place where he was born and where he spent his childhood -- the hole, where are "murder, copulation, extreme poverty, fidelity and the love and fear of God." He has enormous ambitions. He wants to have the power and position of Colleoni -- the suite at the Cosmopolitan, the gold cigar-lighter, chairs stamped with crowns. He thinks of Rose with sullen disgust and tries to disown any connection with Nelson Place. But all his attempts are in vain. Nelson Place has its grip on him to the last.

The unhappy dentist, Mr. Tench in THE POWER AND THE GLORY, an exile in a fever-ridden Mexican state who is drained of all initiative by the heat and the prevailing shoddiness, is also a product of his childhood influence.

30. BRIGHTON ROCK, p. 163.
Mr. Tench's father had been a dentist too. His first memory was finding a discarded cast in a waste-paper basket. It became his favourite toy. They tried to tempt him with Meccano, but fate had struck. "There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in. The hot wet river-port and the vultures lay in the waste-paper basket, and he picked them out." 31.

Greene thus points out how the childhood environment of each of his characters contributes to his or her development in a particular manner. He explains many of his characters in terms of their childhood influences and points out how their disappointing lives have their roots in their earliest experiences. If the childhood fails, the whole life may end in failure. We see this characteristic in Greene's works from his earliest novel, THE MAN WITHIN, to his latest one, THE COMEDIANS. 