CHAPTER II.

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND.
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The inner life of an author is reflected in his works, although we do not always possess the ability to discern it. As Edmund Wilson in his essay on Proust observes, "the real elements of any work of fiction are the elements of the author's personality." The author's imagination embodies in his characters the fundamental conflicts of his own nature. The characters are the personifications of the author's various impulses and emotions. However impersonal the author may be, the works that he leaves behind him contain some of the elements of a self-portrait.

Freud also has established from his studies of Shakespeare and Dostoevsky, the connections between the psychic life of the writer and the characters or actions depicted in the play or the novel. Freud points out that artists are gifted and sensitive persons and that in psychic knowledge they are far ahead of ordinary mortals. He observes that the artist has an introverted disposition and has not far to go to become neurotic, but instead of inhibiting his fantasies by the exercise of his critical

faculties, he permits them to achieve artistic expression in his works. The artistic expression of his conflicts through his works serves to alleviate his psychic discomfort. His artistic creations help to bring him back to normality from the brink of neurosis on which he continually wavers.

According to Freud, creative activity has its roots in the earliest experiences of the individual, traces of which are to be found in even the most polished work of art. Greene himself has mentioned that the creative writer perceives his world once and for all in childhood and adolescence, and that his whole career is an effort to illustrate his private world in terms of the great public world we all share. It is, therefore, necessary to have an idea of the various influences that moulded Greene's personality, particularly during his childhood and adolescence, before we can begin to interpret his works which have earned for him an international reputation rare among contemporary English writers.

Graham Greene was born on 2nd October, 1904. His

3. Louis Frailberg, PSYCHO-ANALYSIS AND AMERICAN LITERARY CRITICISM, p.29.
4. THE LOST CHILDHOOD AND OTHER ESSAYS, p.59.
father, C.H. Greene, was the Head-Master of an English public school at Berkhamsted. Greene was given a conventional middle-class and Anglican upbringing in the confines of his father's school, which he attended as a pupil.

Referring to his unhappy childhood Greene says: "One began to believe in heaven because one believed in hell, but for a long while it was only hell one could picture with a certain intimacy ———— the pitchpine partitions of dormitories where everybody was never quiet at the same time; lavatories without locks.................. walks in pairs up the suburban roads; no solitude anywhere, at any time." 5.

In his essay, "The Burden of Childhood", Greene states that there are certain writers, like Dickens and Kipling for instance, who never shake off the burden of their childhood. All their later experience seems to have been related to those months or years of unhappiness. 6. This seems to be true in Greene's own case. The memories of his unhappy childhood and school life exercised a great influence on Greene's imagination and there are frequent references to these unhappy experiences in his works. We find in his novels that many of his characters also have

6. THE LOST CHILDHOOD AND OTHER ESSAYS, p.31.
been greatly influenced by the memories of their school lives and that they very often refer to their days of childhood and school life.

Greene states that it was in Berkhamsted school that he met for the first time characters, adult and adolescent, who bore about them the genuine quality of evil. "There was CollifAX, who practised torments with dividers; Mr. Cranden with three grim chins, a dusty gown, a kind of demoniac sensuality; from these heights evil declined towards Parlow, whose desk was filled with minute photographs - advertisements of art photos. Hell lay about them in their infancy." 7.

Greene writes that when he was a child, he saw a man running into an almhouse to cut his throat with a knife, "having no hope, and without God in the world". 8. He also heard of a boy of twenty and a girl of fifteen found headless on a railway track. They had lain together with their necks on the rails. "She was expecting a child - her second. Her first had been born when she was thirteen, and, though that wasn't mentioned at the inquest, her parents had been unable to fix responsibility among fourteen youths." 9. Thus Greene was aware of the presence of evil long before religion could give him an explanation for it.

It is interesting to compare the description of Berkhamsted given by Greene with that given by Peter Quennell, who was Greene's contemporary at the school. Peter Quennell remembers the school as dull, and the town as drab; but the undertones of evil that Greene detected made no impression on him. Though he revolted against his humdrum surroundings, he never associated his revolt with a sense of sin. This seems to indicate that the awareness of evil was a special characteristic of Greene's emotional outlook even from his childhood.

After giving a description of the school and the town, Peter Quennell remarks that while to Greene the school that they both attended proved to have been a place of almost unfathomable iniquity, he was conscious neither of the hellish atmosphere of the pedestrian life he lived at school nor of any particular signs of spiritual degeneracy. He states: "Perhaps I was unduly simple-minded, perhaps unusually self-centred; but the intimations of Evil that seem to have coloured Graham Greene's youth, and that since then have had so profound an effect on the shaping of his creative talents, failed somehow to enrich mine."  

This awareness of evil experienced by Greene during his childhood accounts for the recurrence in his writing of the theme of childhood as the period during which innocence is betrayed and corrupted.

Later on, Marjorie Bowen's historical novel, THE VIPER OF MILAN, which he read at the age of about fourteen, had a tremendous influence on him; Greene states that when he took Marjorie Bowen's THE VIPER OF MILAN from the library shelf, his future was decided once for all. "From that moment I began to write", he says, "All the other possible futures slid away: the potential civil servant, the don, the clerk had to look for other incarnations. Imitation after imitation of Miss Bowen's magnificent novel went into exercise books." Greene adds that the atmosphere of enormous brutality and despairing romanticism of Marjorie Bowen's novel had given him his pattern. Religion might later explain it to him in other terms, but the pattern was already there.

Greene's childhood was divided between hatred

13. THE LOST CHILDHOOD AND OTHER ESSAYS, p.15.
of school and the boredom of holidays. This boredom
seemed to him the only alternative to the "Black and
Grey" evil of human nature. He ran away from school
and his parents sent him to a psychoanalyst. Greene
describes in his essay, "The Revolver in the corner
Cupboard," how the psycho-analysis that followed his
act of rebellion fixed the boredom "as hypo fixes the
image on the negative". 14. For years, he could take
no aesthetic interest in any visual thing at all. He
was so fixed in his boredom.

Unhappy at school and unhappy at home, young
Greene wondered if life was worth living. When he was
about seventeen, he put the responsibility on Fate's
shoulders by playing Russian roulette with a revolver
that he had packed in his baggage when he went to
Oxford. Describing his attempts at suicide, Greene
states how from the age of eleven or twelve he had
repeatedly played a game with death. Once he had
patiently drunk a quantity of hypo under the impression
that it was poisonous. On another occasion, he had
drunk a bottle of hay fever lotion. Once he had eaten
a bunch of deadly nightshade which produced only a
slight narcotic effect on him. On a different occasion,

14. THE LOST CHILDHOOD AND OTHER ESSAYS, p.202
he had swallowed twenty aspirins. Now he stole across Berkhamsted Common, slipped a bullet into the chamber of his revolver, and holding the revolver behind his back, spun the chambers round. Thanks to this unique therapy, Greene discovered that it was possible to enjoy the visible world once more after risking its total loss.

From Berkhamsted, Greene went to Balliol College, Oxford, and read history for three years. It was at the end of his Oxford career, in 1925, that Greene published a collection of poems, BABBLING APRIL. The chief interest of BABBLING APRIL is a poem called "The Gamble."

"Place the revolver to my head,
And pull the trigger.
Will it be mist and death
At the bend of this sunset road,
Or life reinforced
By the propinquity of death?
Either is gain.
It is a gamble which I cannot lose."

15. THE LOST CHILDHOOD AND OTHER ESSAYS, p.203.
16. THE LOST CHILDHOOD AND OTHER ESSAYS, p.204.
As we have seen, Greene's unhappiness and boredom made him attempt suicide as an adolescent and this poem foreshadows Greene's pre-occupation with the theme of suicide in his later works.

After leaving Oxford, Greene worked for a few years as a journalist in Nottingham. It was during this period that he was converted into the Catholic religion. Greene writes of his reception into the Catholic church: "I was baptised one foggy afternoon about four o'clock. .......... I was alone with the fat priest; it was all very quickly and formally done... Then we shook hands and I went off to a salmon tea, the dog which had been sick again on the mat." 17.

The description he gives of his conversion shows no evidence of religious fervour. Nevertheless, he was immediately struck by the theological arguments of the Catholic church. Greene himself states that he is a Catholic with an intellectual if not an emotional belief in Catholic dogma. 18.

Greene was received into the Catholic Church

18. JOURNEY WITHOUT MAPS, p.4.
in February, 1926, and he married Vivien in October, 1927. Later Greene worked as a sub-editor on the staff of "The Times" in London. Greene gave up this job and became an independent writer with the publication of his novel, THE MAN WITHIN, in 1929. Greene thus reached maturity as a writer at the age of twenty-five in the beginning of the nineteen-thirties.

Greene's unhappy childhood, the boredom of his days of adolescence, his attempts at suicide, the psycho-analysis he underwent, and, later on, his religious conversion have contributed much to the development of his personality and we see the influences of these events in his personal life on all his works. These experiences in his life have confirmed in him the conviction that evil and suffering are inevitable in this world and also have contributed much to his awareness of the inner processes of the human mind. These personal experiences are also responsible to a great extent in fostering in him the habit of analysing all human behaviour both from the point of religion and modern psychology. It has enabled him as a writer to attempt a synthesis of religion and psychology in his works.

Greene has always been a highly topical writer and his early novels are an interesting
reflection of the nineteen-thirties. He uses the events of the nineteen-thirties as a background for the novels written during this period. Greene often penetrates to the weak spots of the capitalist world. But, as he himself remarks in connection with his travels to Liberia, he has never felt any belief and hope in the possibilities of mankind as expressed in Utopian ideologies.

Greene's early works are full of humanitarian ardour. We notice a mildly Leftist outlook in his early books like *Stamboul Train* (1932), *It's a Battlefield* (1934), *England Made Me* (1935), *A Gun for Sale* (1936), *The Confidential Agent* (1939) etc. As George Orwell points out in a letter written in 1949, in these books, "the bad men are millionaires, armaments manufacturers etc., and the good man is sometimes a communist."

Czinner in *STAMBUL TRAIN*, is an idealist who dreams of a juster world. In his speech before Colonel Hartep, who is the representative of the reactionary

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forces of law, Czinner argues: "You are employed to bolster up an old world which is full of injustice and muddle . . . . . . You put the small thief in prison, but the big thief lives in a palace." 22. Again, he says: "The wealth of the world belonged to everyone. If it was divided, there would be no rich men, but every man would have enough to eat, and would have no reason to feel ashamed beside his neighbour." 23.

Conder, the crime journalist in IT'S A BATTLEFIELD, had spent his life in learning "the incomprehensibility of those who judged and pardoned, rewarded and punished. The world was run by the whims of a few men, the whims of a politician, a journalist, a bishop and a policeman. They hanged this man and pardoned that; one embezzler was in prison, but other men of the same kind were sent to Parliament." 24.

The prison chaplain, in the same novel, breaks down before the Assistant Commissioner: "I can't stand human justice any longer. Its arbitrariness. Its incomprehensibility." 25.

Greene shows in ENGLAND MADE ME how any

23. STAMBoul TRAIN, p.201.
25. IT'S A BATTLEFIELD, p.230.
protest against the dehumanising capitalist world is stifled at once. When Anthony Ferrant revolts against this society, he is mercilessly killed by its henchmen.

In BRIGHTON ROCK also, Greene points out how human society is based on injustice and vested interests. In such an unjust society, Pinkie is only behaving like everybody else in trying to carve out a place for himself. Pinkie feels an awful resentment against society: "Why shouldn't he have had his chance like the rest, seen his glimpse of heaven if it was only a crack between the Brighton walls...?" 26.

It is possible to believe that Pinkie is an anti-social juvenile delinquent whose salvation lay in the hands of a psychiatrist and that in a society based on justice there will be no such delinquents. But by the time Greene wrote BRIGHTON ROCK (1938), he had lost all hope for human nature and had become disgusted with the social systems devised to control it. He had come to the conclusion that sin and suffering are inevitable in this world and that every human soul should have the freedom to develop in its own way.

"Every really gifted writer is, in some

degree, a critic of his own age; but his criticism is implied, hidden deep beneath the surface, inseparable from a larger view of the condition of humanity as a whole. 27. This is what we find in Greene's works. In his preoccupation with the emotional life of his characters Greene makes a study of their social background and points out the various injustices in society. At the same time, he never fails to present a larger view of the human situation.

"There is social criticism and hatred of avoidable cruelty and injustice in Greene's novels, but such injustice is always seen as part of a wider reference to the injustice of life as a whole." 28.

JOURNEY WITHOUT MAPS, the account of Greene's travels in Liberia, was published in 1936. Like its Mexican successor, THE LAWLESS ROADS, written three years later, it gives an insight into Greene's personality. Greene's preoccupation with the seediness of civilization and his conviction that nothing civilization can do will ever conceal the truth about

human beings are frequently seen in these books. In his postwar fiction - THE END OF THE AFFAIR (1951), THE QUIET AMERICAN (1955), A BURNED - OUT CASE (1961), and THE COMEDIANS (1966), Greene has moved to a position of greater pessimism centred on belief in the inevitability of sin and consequent suffering.

"Novel" and "Entertainment" are Greene's terms to differentiate his serious from his light fiction. In a broadcast with Walter Allen in May 1955, Greene explained:

"In one's entertainments one is primarily interested in having an exciting story as in a physical action, with just enough character to give interest in the action, because you can't be interested in the action of a mere dummy. In the novels I hope one is primarily interested in the character and the action takes a minor part." 28.

We cannot, however, stick rigidly to this classification. For instance, BRIGHTON ROCK was initially categorised by Greene as an entertainment, but, later on, it was classified as a novel. But the novels have generally a central religious issue which the entertainments do not have.

A GUN FOR SALE, THE CONFIDENTIAL AGENT, and THE MINISTRY OF FEAR form a trio of Entertainments in which Greene has presented vividly the tensions set up by the threats and final outbreak of the Second World War. The heroes in these Entertainments - Raven, 'D', and Arthur Rowe have no faith in religion. There is a great contrast between the "THRILLER" atmosphere of these early Entertainments and the theological pre-occupation seen in the later novels.

David Pryce-Jones points out that the later Entertainments have acquired a deepening fantasy, and even whimsicality. But the early Entertainments like A GUN FOR SALE, THE CONFIDENTIAL AGENT, and THE MINISTRY OF FEAR can be really described as secular novels. They are "presentations of a social scene through an unexplored medium by a writer whose literary sense moulded the form to suit himself." 29.

Greene became a Catholic in 1926, but his first explicitly Catholic novel, BRIGHTON ROCK, did not appear until 1938. Though in form it is a thriller, it is a dramatization of the clash between two opposed attitudes to life - the secular and the religious. The secular is

29. David Pryce - Jones, GRAHAM GREENE, p.76.
represented by Ida Arnold. She is a sentimental, good-hearted, life-loving and promiscuous woman, who is not concerned with the higher truths of religion. She believes only in Justice and in Right and Wrong. The religious view is represented by Pinkie, the seventeen year-old gangster-leader, who, as a Catholic, thinks in terms not of right and wrong, but of good and evil. These two views of life, the secular and the religious, are always at eternal enmity with each other.

In many ways, BRIGHTON ROCK is Greene's first fully mature work. It may be taken as the typical Greene novel in which the sinner seems nearer to God and more likely to receive the visitations of Grace than the innocent humanitarian. BRIGHTON ROCK has the theme of salvation and damnation, but it is studied in the light of the psychological fact that our childhood experiences largely govern our future. Greene relates the perversions, despair, and violent deaths of the central characters, Pinkie and Rose, who are Catholics, with their childhood experiences as well as the Catholic doctrines in which they believe. It is in BRIGHTON ROCK that we see explicitly for the first time Greene's attempt to blend religion with modern psychology.

The world of THE POWER AND THE GLORY (1940), THE MINISTRY OF FEAR (1943), and THE HEART OF THE MATTER (1948),
is built on the sentiment of pity. The whisky priest, Arthur Rowe, and Scobie - the central characters in these works - are all compassionate by nature. In these works, Greene analyses the aberrations of behaviour which can be caused by the emotion of pity. The thought of Peguy to whom the priest in BRIGHTON ROCK refers while consoling Rose, seems to have been in Greene's mind while writing THE POWER AND THE GLORY and THE HEART OF THE MATTER. The central characters in these two novels, the whisky priest and Scobie, are Catholics, and they are ready, like Peguy, to be damned for the sake of others. Greene portrays the mental agony and the sense of guilt of these characters in the light of the doctrines of Catholic Religion and the concepts of modern psychology.

In THE HEART OF THE MATTER (1948), Greene attempts to reconcile the presence of evil and suffering in this world with the existence of an omnipotent and merciful providence in heaven. The Assistant Commissioner in IT'S A BATTLEFIELD finds human and divine justice equally incomprehensible. But he is not a devout man like Scobie; nor is pity an important element in his mental make-up. It is the thought of waste that worries him. When Caroline Bury asks him if he hasn't faith, the Assistant Commissioner replies, "Well, one lives and then, that is, one dies." 30. As Greene remarks, it was the nearest

he could come to conveying his sense of a great waste, a useless expenditure of lives: Caroline in the operating theatre, Drover on the scaffold, the girl on Streatham Common, Justin in Spain. It was impossible to believe in a great directing purpose, for these were not spare parts which could be matched again." 31.

In THE HEART OF THE MATTER, the incomprehensibility and the heartlessness of the scheme of things are not only deeply felt by Scobie, but he also wonders how so much of suffering and evil could co-exist with the infinite mercy and love of God. When he sees the child, on the stretcher, being carried into the temporary hospital erected for the victims of the torpedoed ship at Pende, he is overwhelmed with pity. Scobie finds it difficult to reconcile the pain and suffering the child has experienced in the open boat for forty days and nights with the love of God. 32. Greene has fully developed the themes of pity, fear, love and despair in this novel. He has, also, carried to its conclusion the implications of his own faith - the love and mercy

31. ITS A BATTLEFIELD, p.220.
and mystery of God.

As a study of obsessive love and obsessive jealousy, *THE END OF THE AFFAIR* (1951) is masterly. Greene shows great psychological insight in his portrayal of Bendrix's sexual jealousy. It is only when we read Sarah Mile's diary at the end of the novel that we realize that the real theme of the novel is not sexual jealousy at all, but the working of divine grace.

Greene's first two plays to be staged, *THE LIVING ROOM* and *THE POTTING SHED*, are religious in their themes; but the third play, *THE COMPLAISANT LOVER*, is lighter in tone and belongs to the species of the comedy of manners. *THE LIVING ROOM* deals with the problem of the Catholic in relation to an impossible physical love. It is also a terrible indictment of the pious Catholic. "The failure of both priest and psychiatrist leaves room only for the mercy of God; but whereas in *THE HEART OF THE MATTER* Greene succeeds in conveying the meaning and purpose of Scobie's action, in the case of *THE LIVING ROOM* one is left with a sense of waste." 33. *THE POTTING SHED* also deals with a religious theme; "The technique with its taut construction, atmosphere of mystery, abundance of 'clues' in the early scenes and emphasis on suspense, resembles that of a thriller. Indeed, the play could be

described as a spiritual detective story." 34.

In his more recent novels, however, Greene's religious pre-occupation, though still there, is less obvious, and we also notice in them a constant and persistent pre-occupation with sex. An element of "religious dehydration" is increasingly apparent in his writings since the publication of THE END OF THE AFFAIR in 1951. It seems as if religion as a source of inspiration for further novels has run dry. 35.

But Greene cannot completely get away from his religion. The hero of THE QUIET AMERICAN (1955), for example, is neither weak nor a Christian. Similarly, in A BURNT-OUT CASE (1961), the hero is a famous French Catholic architect, who is disillusioned about his talent and tired of his love-affairs, and who feels no religious fervour at all. But the unspoken question about the hero of A BURNT-OUT CASE is whether he is saved, just as the unspoken question about the hero of THE QUIET AMERICAN is whether he is damned. Even his latest novel, THE COMEDIANS (1966), which mainly deals with the sexual jealousy of Mr. Brown, is not free from religious overtones.

In fact, Greene is among the very few English novelists of modern times, who have dealt with the theme of sin, grace, and salvation. His unique achievement lies, however, in his juxtaposing the points of view of religion and modern psychology.