CHAPTER IV.

CORRUPTION OF CHILDHOOD AND THE INEVITABILITY OF SIN.
The theme of childhood as the period during which innocence is betrayed and corrupted is a recurrent one in Greene’s writing. As we have seen, the early influences in Greene’s own childhood and adolescence are to a great extent responsible for his preoccupation with this theme. In *Journey without Maps*, describing his early experiences, Greene says that the first things he could remember at all was a dead dog at the bottom of his pram. The nurse had put it at the bottom of the pram and pushed him home. There was no emotion attached to the sight. It was just a fact. Another fact was the man who rushed out of a cottage near the canal bridge and into the next house; he had a knife in his hand. The people ran after him shouting. The man wanted to kill himself.  

Greene states that when he was fourteen, he suddenly realised the pleasure of cruelty. He says: "I wasn’t interested any longer in walks on commons, in playing cricket on the beach. There was a girl lodging close by I wanted to do things to; I loitered outside the door hoping to see her. I didn’t do anything about it, I wasn’t old enough, but

I was happy; I could think about pain as something desirable and not as something dreaded. It was as if I had discovered that the way to enjoy life was to appreciate pain.*

Thus, Greene was aware of the presence of cruelty, pain and evil long before religion could give him any explanation for it. Greene, in his works, tries to explain this problem from the point of view of theology as well as from the point of view of psychology.

THE BASEMENT ROOM, which was published in 1936 and was reissued under the title, THE FALLEN IDOL in 1950, after it had been filmed, shows how a small boy was brought into violent contact with adult corruption by the one grown-up he trusts. This story has childhood and lost innocence as its theme. Mrs. Baines who comes home unexpectedly knowing that her husband was "carrying on" with a girl, questions Philip about this and drags him into their horrifying world. Greene remarks: "It wasn't fair, the walls were down again between his world and theirs, but this time it was something worse than merriment that the grown-up people made him share; a passion moved in the house he recognised but could not

2. JOURNEY WITHOUT MAPS, p.31.
Greene points out that certain things that happened to Philip on that day were to condition him for the rest of his life. He witnessed certain things which made an unforgettable impression upon him. One of them was the sight of Mr. Baines sitting in the tea-shop with the girl. When he was dying, sixty years later, he asked, "Who is she? Who is she?"

"The conviction that one emotionally charged incident in childhood can leave its mark on the whole of later development is the moral basis of the story."

In "THE HINT OF AN EXPLANATION", the Catholic makes a comment to the agnostic traveller on the train. The traveller tells the Catholic, "When you think what God -- if there is a God -- allows. It is not merely the physical agonies, but think of the corruption, even of children...." The Catholic replies, "Our view is so limited. Of course there is no answer here. We catch hints."

Greene points out that the unhappy childhood persists, acting on later life like a malignant germ. Childhood has the blessed gift of innocence which, however, is lost soon. While the gift

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It has the power to transmute even the most sordid experiences and circumstances into something pure and beautiful.

The man in the story entitled, "THE INNOCENT", finds the drawing which he had made and believed to be innocent in his childhood, now obscene. He says, "I had believed I was drawing something with a meaning unique and beautiful; it was only now after thirty years of life that the picture seemed obscene". But any attempt to prolong the innocence is doomed to failure. None can escape from the lure of corruption.

Greene believes that the corruption of human nature is the result of original sin. The tendencies towards corruption, according to him, originate in childhood. Kenneth Allot and Miriam Parris point out that "a terror of life, a terror of what experience can do to the individual, a terror at a predetermined corruption, is the motive force that drives Greene as a novelist."

As we have already seen, there is evidence in JOURNEY WITHOUT MAPS, THE LAWLESS ROADS, and in essays like "THE

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REVOLVER IN THE CORNER CUPBOARD*, to show that Greene's outlook on the world must have been shaped in his unhappy childhood much earlier than his conversion to Catholicism, which took place in 1926. Even before Greene had learned from the Penny Catechism that man is prone to evil from his childhood, he had "looked round and seen that it was so." 8.

According to Greene, there is a parallel between human development away from the primitive and the individual loss of innocence in childhood. For instance, towards the conclusion of his journey to Liberia, Greene remarks: "This journey, if it had done nothing else, had reinforced a sense of disappointment with what man had made out of childhood. Oh, one wanted to protest, one doesn't believe, of course, in the visionary gleam, in the trailing glory, but there was something in that early terror and the bareness of one's needs. The sense of taste was finer, the sense of pleasure keener, the sense of terror deeper and purer." 9.

Again, on reaching the civilization of Grand Bassa, Greene states: "I am glad, for here is iced beer and a

8. THE LOST CHILDHOOD AND OTHER ESSAYS, p.15.
9. JOURNEY WITHOUT MAPS, p.278.
wireless set which will pick up the Empire programme from Daventry, and after all it is home, in the sense that we have been taught to know home, where we will soon forget the finer taste, the finer pleasure, the finer terror on which we might have built." 10.

Greene's thesis is that we leave childhood by the wrong turning and become vicious. He emphasizes this idea again and again in *Journey Without Maps*. Describing the natives of Liberia, Greene remarks that they were really much less separated from the true primitive than we. The primitive world was at their back, it was not centuries away. If they had taken the wrong road, they had only to retrace their steps a very little distance in space and not in time. 11. Again, describing the civilization of the Coast, Greene says that it is nearer the beginning. Like Monrovia its building has begun wrong, but at least it has only begun; it has not gone beyond repair. 12. He states that when we see to what unhappiness and to what peril of extinction centuries of cerebration have brought us, we sometimes have a curiosity to discover if we can, from what we have come and to recall at which

At the conclusion of his journey to Liberia, Greene remarks that this urge to go back and begin again has always been felt by modern man and that this explains the fascination of the explorers like Livingstone and Stanley for "the dirt, the disease, the barbarity and the familiarity of Africa." He says that it is Freud who has made us conscious as we have never been before of those ancestral threads which still exist in our unconscious minds to lead us back.

Greene stresses how soon innocence is threatened even in childhood and how quickly and inevitably the capacity for simple happiness disappears. He points out the corrupting influences in the childhood of Anthony Farrant in ENGLAND MADE ME, Raven in A GUN FOR SALE, Pinkie and Rose in BRIGHTON ROCK, and Rose Cullen in THE CONFIDENTIAL AGENT.

Anthony's depraved innocence has its roots in his Berkhamsted school days. He remembers the misery of those days: "Feet on the stone stairs, running, scrambling,

13. JOURNEY WITHOUT MAPS, p. 10.
14. JOURNEY WITHOUT MAPS, p. 311.
pushing, up to the dormitory. Not a moment of quiet even at night, for always someone talks in his sleep the other side of the wooden partition." 15. The misery and unhappiness he experienced during his school-days has a lasting effect on Anthony.

Raven's childhood and his later life were conditioned by his father's execution and his mother's brutal suicide. He could never forget "the kitchen table, the carving knife on the linoleum, the blood all over his mother's dress," 16. and the Christmas spent in the Institution. That is why when he grew up," murder didn't mean much to Raven. It was just a new job." 17. Raven exclaims: "This isn't a world I'd bring children into..............It's just their selfishness. They have a good time and what do they mind if someone's born ugly? Three minutes in bed or against a wall, and then a lifetime for the one that's born." 18.

As in the case of Raven, Greene relates the perversions, despair and violent death of Pinkie in BRIGHTON ROCK with his early childhood experiences. The image of the "Saturday

18. A GUN FOR SALE, p. 156.
night movements" of his parents, one of the earliest memories
of Pinkie from his childhood, constantly recurs like an
obsession in his dreams and thoughts. This childhood experience
produced a feeling of loneliness in him. Another memory of
his childhood was that of an unmarried girl of fifteen who
killed herself because she was going to have a baby for a
second time. On his wedding morning, he tells Dallow of
this girl who was at school with him: "She was going to
have a baby and she knew what it was like. She'd had one
two years before, and they could have pinned it on twelve
boys". 19. Greene points out that these memories of his
childhood and the other corrupting influences of Nelson
Place where he was born and where he spent his childhood,
turned Pinkie into a gangster.

In THE CONFIDENTIAL AGENT, 'D' is haunted by the
spoilt youth of Rose Cullen, the daughter of the millionaire
coal-owner, and Else, the hotel-maid, and the "knowingness"
of the young. On meeting Rose Cullen for the first time,
he feels "immeasurably sad that one so young should have
seen so much fraud." 20. He feels great pity also for the
little hotel-maid, Else, who responds to his kindliness
with passionate devotion. The combination of innocence and

worldly knowledge in her, fills 'D' with horror. He thinks; "Fourteen was a dreadfully early age at which to know so much and be so powerless. If this was civilization... he preferred barbarity, the bombed streets, and the food queues: a child there had nothing worse to look forward to than death". 21. 'D' is overwhelmed with pity for this lonely child. "What a life when a child had to fix her love on an old foreigner and a prostitute for want of anything better," 22. he wonders.

Later on, during their evening together, 'D' learns about Rose's life, spent in the corrupt world of her father's mistresses and business associates. For the second time that day, 'D' gets a shock. He remembers the child in the hotel. He thinks: "You learned too much in these days before you came of age."

In a happy life the final disillusionment with human nature coincided with death. Nowadays they seemed to have a whole lifetime to get through somehow after it. 23.

Greene repeatedly points out that the presence of evil is the first thing we apprehend in our lives, and the theme

22. THE CONFIDENTIAL AGENT, p. 54.
23. THE CONFIDENTIAL AGENT, p. 64.
of lost innocence, of the influence of our early impressions upon our late behaviour, and of children doomed to an early knowledge of corruption and evil, is recurrent in Greene's work. As a Catholic who believes in Original Sin, Greene points out to us that the corruption of childhood is inevitable from the point of view of Christian theology. We shall see, later on, how Greene brings home to us the fact that the loss of innocence and the corruption of childhood are in consonance with the teachings of modern psychology also.

In Greene's works there are innumerable references to the universality of man's sin. For instance, in THE POWER AND THE GLORY, on seeing his illegitimate daughter, Brigitta, in Maria's hut, the priest remembers his own childhood. He remembers how far he has travelled from those days of innocence and how soon he has reached a state of mortal sin. He knows that he will not be able to save his child from the sin and corruption which are inevitable in this world.

"The child's snigger and the first mortal sin lay together more closely than two blinks of the eye. ................

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?" 24. Again, the priest thinks, "The world

was in her heart already, like the small spot of decay in a fruit." 25.

Greene stresses the idea that it is very difficult to find innocence in this world. "You had to go back a long way further before you got innocence; innocence was a slobbering mouth, a toothless gum pulling at the teats; perhaps not even that; innocence was the ugly cry of birth." 26.

Greene believes that the condition of sin is the result of man's corruption of himself. Ever since the Fall, man carries within himself this curse. Without God's grace, man will follow his own will in the doing of evil, and lead himself to destruction. Ever since the Fall, sin exists as a disease in man. Grace is the only medicine which can control this disease. In the absence of Grace, sin will destroy man in one way or another.

With great psychological insight Greene shows that once a sin is committed, it leads to a sense of guilt and fear. The sinner feels himself threatened both externally and from within himself. He seeks every possible means to make himself secure. For instance, in BRIGHTON ROCK, Pinkie, after murdering Hale, fears that Spicer may betray him to the police and murders him so that he may be safe. Next he

26. BRIGHTON ROCK, p. 188.
fears that Rose may give evidence to the police against him. To prevent this, he marries her. But still he does not feel any security. He tells Dallow: "Things aren't too good. People are getting wise to a lot of things. Christ,........... I killed Spicer and I married the girl. Have I got to have that massacre?" 27. Pinkie adds: "If we don't do something quick it looks to me as if all Brighton'll know we killed Fred. All England. The whole God-damned world". 28.

The desire for security leads him to commit more sins and makes him lose all peace of mind. Thus a sinner is forced to proceed from one evil act to another. He plunges headlong into the most frightful wickedness, which would at first have filled him with horror. Eventually, the conscience dies and the sense of horror with it. In BRIGHTON ROCK, Greene describes how Pinkie, to ensure his security, decides to kill Rose who loves him blindly and is ready even to be damned for his sake. He tells Dallow: "It ought to be easy to quiet her. We quieted Fred and Spicer, and she is only a kid..........." 29. Even a hardened criminal like Dallow is shocked on hearing about Pinkie's cruel plan. Dallow tells him, "Don't be crazy. You can't go on like that." 30.

27. BRIGHTON ROCK, p.270.
28. BRIGHTON ROCK, p. 272.
29. BRIGHTON ROCK, p. 272.
30. BRIGHTON ROCK, p.272.
The Christian understanding of sin has contributed much to Greene's characterisation of Pinkie, Scobie, the whisky priest and others. Greene has presented very vividly the degeneration of the human soul brought about by sin.

Man's basic worth lies in the fact of his humanity, in his bearing the image of God. In the Christian view, man's originating sin lies in the fact that he is unwilling to remain content within the bounds assigned to him by God. He often tries to over-reach himself and this leads to his downfall. The devil in Paradise poisoned Adam and Eve with the desire to be like God. This desire to emulate God still sticks to us and leads us to our downfall. This is what we notice in the case of Scobie. Scobie's weakness lay in his inability to see himself simply as man. He arrogates to himself the position of God. Pride has always been considered by Christianity as one of the greatest sins and perhaps even as the heart of all sin. Scobie is guilty of this sin. Pride is responsible for Scobie's downfall. Pride leads Scobie even to usurp God's function and ultimately to his suicide, which, as a Catholic, Scobie knows to be the "unforgivable sin".

Greene often points out in his works that all men need to be forgiven, for all are sinners. We should be reminded by another's frailty of our own persistent need for forgiveness. We should recognise the sin in ourselves when we see the sin
in others. The knowledge of one's own sin and the need for God's grace are essentially Christian doctrines and Greene often refers to them in his works. The anonymous priest in BRIGHTON ROCK, after commenting on the strangeness of God's mercy, tells Rose: "We must hope and pray, hope and pray. The church does not demand that we believe any soul is cut off from mercy." 31. He adds finally, "Pray for me, my child." 32.

The problem of sin and pain is unfathomable and beyond man's power to solve. The explanations offered by theologians and philosophers throw only a meagre light on it. It is beyond the power of man's comprehension. Greene makes frequent references to this Catholic conception of sin in his works.

The sense of sin which is Greene's major preoccupation in his later novels, makes its first appearance in THE MAN WITHIN towards the end when Andrews is seduced by Merriman's mistress. When Andrews left the hotel after this incident, he felt a terror of life, of going on soiling himself, repenting, and soiling himself again.

31. BRIGHTON ROCK, p.332.
32. BRIGHTON ROCK, p.332.
As he walked, the first poignancy of his shame departed and the events of the night slipped away into shadow. When Andrews realised this, he stayed for a moment still and strove to drag them back. For this had happened many times before. It was the first stage towards a repetition of the sin, this forgetfulness. "How could he ever keep clean if the sense of shame was so short-lived?" 33.

As John Atkins points out, the seduction is in the true tradition of romance, but the anguish that accompanies it and the sense of sin that follows it belong to the psychological novel of our time. 34.

Greene's preoccupation with sin is seen when he describes Brigitta, the whisky priest's daughter in \textit{The Power and the Glory}. Brigitta is born in sin. When the priest meets her in Maria's hut, he feels the shock of human love. When he sees the child standing there watching him with cunningness and contempt, he remembers how Maria and he had spent no love in her conception. He remembers how it was just fear and despair and half a bottle of brandy and the sense of loneliness that had


driven him to an act which now horrified him. This "scarred shame-faced over-powering love" was the result.

To the priest, "it was like seeing his own mortal sin look back at him, without contrition." 36

Greene takes pains to point out the nature of the sin committed by Padre Jose. Greene makes it very clear that Padre Jose, in this novel, is guilty of the unforgivable sin, despair. Though the whisky priest had broken his vows and even slept with a woman, he had kept on taking the sacrament to those who needed it. He had never lost faith; he had never despaired. Thus the whisky priest, in spite of his other sins, is free from the sin of despair.

Greene's concern with sin is very intense and he believes that sin, in some form or other, is universal. The whisky priest feels "that venial sins — impatience, an unimportant lie, pride, a neglected opportunity — cut you off from grace more completely than the worst sins of all." 37 Greene also seems to consider that hypocrisy, malice, cruelty, and stupidity are worse evils than adultery, drunkenness and petty lying. This is clearly seen in his

35. THE POWER AND THE GLORY, p.81.
37. THE POWER AND THE GLORY, p.130.
depiction of characters like Louise Scobie in *THE HEART OF THE MATTER* and Rose's two great aunts in *THE LIVING ROOM*. Greene seems to have nothing but contempt for those narrow-minded and "pious" Catholics who are uncharitable and who have no insight into the human heart and no sympathy for the sufferings of other individuals. We also notice Greene's contempt for such persons in the whisky priest's remark to the pious woman who came to confess to him in Senor Lehr's barn: "Have you any love for anyone but yourself?" 38.

Greene's deep concern with sin can be seen in his depiction of Pinkie and Rose who are obsessed with the idea that the sexual act is an act of mortal sin. On the morning of her wedding day, Rose tells Pinkie how she had a sudden wish to go to confession, because she wanted to be in a state of grace when she married Pinkie. But when she went to the priest she remembered that they were going to commit a mortal sin, and came back without confessing. & Pinkie, on hearing this, said: "It'll be no good going to confession ever again -- as long as we're both alive." 39. Pinkie and Rose are thus much disturbed

by their awareness of the mortal sin they will be committing soon after they get married.

Greene has tried to explain the evil and sin that we see around us in this world at once from the point of view of Christianity as well as from that of modern psychology. He has shown that the misery, poverty and evil of man is inevitable in the light of Christianity. At the same time he points out with great psychological insight that hidden, dark motives underlie even our apparently most altruistic deeds. The conflict that rages between the good and evil in man is so inextricably intermingled in man's flesh and soul that the disentangling of motive is almost impossible.

We see in Greene's works the deep conviction that Original Sin has caused an irreparable damage to man, and a resultant corruption in human nature. Many of Greene's characters are born Catholics, but they easily fall a prey to the temptations of the flesh. Greene believes that the corruption of human nature begins in childhood. The theme of sin is, in his works, connected intimately with the theme of the corruption of human nature. The consciousness of sin is one of the most striking features of his characters, a consciousness which never abandons them even in the most violent passions.
Pinkie, the whisky-priest, and Scobie are Catholics. They "know" and are tormented by the knowledge of the gravity of their sin. Because they believe, they know that they belong to the race of the damned. These characters can in many respects be identified with Greene himself as a study of his travel-books reveals: Greene, we feel, has translated his own experience, his sharp and early sense of evil, in terms of fiction. 40.

Greene shows, however, that man is not only doomed to sin, but is also capable of salvation. God's infinite mercy turns even evil into good. God created man in his own image, "after his likeness", and nothing can ever blur completely the image of God in man. "It is like a birth-mark that cannot be rubbed out; it is our true self, never to be realised fully in time, but always present even when concealed under superficial layers of borrowed garments." 41. The same idea crosses the priest's mind in THE POWER AND THE GLORY when he sees the religious persecution in Mexico. He thinks: "If God had been like a toad, you could have rid the globe of toads, but when God was like yourself; it was no good being content with  

40. Marie - Beatrice Mesnet, GRAHAM GREENE AND THE HEART OF THE MATTER, pp. 2-3

stone figures -- you had to kill yourself among the graves". 42.

Sin implies a consciousness of God and only those who live permanently in the presence of God can have a clear consciousness of sin. Greene repeatedly points out the dual nature of sin. Sin is an impediment to loving God. At the same time it can pave the way for greater love of God through subsequent guilt, confession, and repentance. It can finally perhaps lead to redemption. A Catholic has this special knowledge always in his heart.

In THE POWER AND THE GLORY, the priest's sins are many -- chronic alcoholism, negligence in observing religious rituals, and, worst of all begetting an illegitimate child. Still the priest becomes a martyr in the end by dying for his church and Greene leaves little doubt that he ought to be considered a saint as well. At the moment of his execution, the priest was not afraid of damnation. Even the fear of pain was in the background. He felt only an immense sense of failure. It seemed to him, at that moment, that it

42. THE POWER AND THE GLORY, p.130.
would have been quite easy to be a saint. It would only have needed a little self-restraint and a little courage. "He felt like someone who has missed happiness by seconds at an appointed place." We may believe that the priest becomes a saint because of his repentance for his sins and also his absolute resignation to God's will. In the same way, we can believe Rose to be something of a saint because of her shouldering of the burden of Pinkie's sins.

As David Pryce-Jones points out, Greene's novels are "attempts to prove the connections between sin and God's purposes. All of them have something of the moral theologian's disputation about them; they are ontological exercises." Greene has accepted the Christian doctrine of Original Sin and he tries in his works to explain man's predicament in this world as well as human behaviour in terms of this doctrine. Greene points out that there is an ontological relationship between man and God and that only in the development of this relationship can we find his real existence.

44. David Pryce-Jones, GRAHAM GREENE, p.78.