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Research Papers



THE FUNCTION OF IMAGERY IN GRAHAM GREENE'S MAJOR NOVELS: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Greene's use of imagery places him in a modern tradition whose roots reach back to Flaubert and to the nineteenth-century naturalists. By focusing upon Greene's use of imagery, this study launches a new understanding of his fiction. Through close scrutiny, the paper demonstrates how patterns of imagery in Greene's major novels are related to each other, as well as they support other formal elements like themes, characterization, point of view and locale. With careful analysis I have tried to demonstrate how certain images like desert, decay, filth, beasts, violence, disease and sexual behavior recur in almost every novel and provide a multilayered perception of the human condition on this Godforsaken planet. For the purpose of precision and brevity, I have chosen a few major novels to analyze the function of Imagery in each novel.

Keywords: Imagery, Structure, Decay and Filth.

INTRODUCTION:

Imagery is often used by poets and authors to help the reader imagine what is happening and helps the reader to become absorbed in the article/book and allows the reader to see what is in the author's mind. "Imagery" (that is, "images" taken collectively) is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other work of literature, whether by literal description, by allusion, or in the vehicles (the secondary references) of its similes and metaphors.

The present research paper is an attempt to analyze Greene's facility in employing motifs and ways in which imagery reveals a vision of the contemporary world that sets him off from the great modernists and also from recent writers. Since insufficient attention has been directed towards Greene's development as an image-maker and the structure of image patterns in individual novels, this study shall provide a new understanding of his technique and narratology.

By focusing upon Greene's use of imagery, I have tried to highlight upon a new understanding of his fiction. Through close scrutiny, I have demonstrated in my paper how patterns of imagery in Greene's novels are related to each other as well as how they support other formed elements like themes, characterization, and point of view and locale.

One of Greene's deepest intuitions is of the predicament which enforces upon man the necessity of some conclusive action. Such a predicament in the life of a Greene hero arises partly from the collective forces of the society and partly from his own moral constitution. The conjunction of the forces within and without produces the sense of an invisible necessity which seems to govern the actions of the protagonist at crucial moments. He is impelled by his childhood experiences, by a religious or moral code

or by obsessive fears and desires. He finds it impossible to resist the force of social injustice, cruel institutions, poverty and violence which represent the maiming power of the evil. The freedom of Greene's protagonists is severely limited by their own compulsive action and reactions and also by chance encounters and happenings. They have a curious 'stillness' in that they are haunted, like ancient heroes, by a sense of fatality. Greene conveys through his own sense of inexorability, his ironic awareness of the pendulum about to swing. This does not, however, mean that Greene swallows determinism whole. There is at any rate no 'stark causality' in his novels, how so ever marred the lives of his character may be. Even Pinkie, whose every move seems predetermined, is not ultimately denied the freedom to choose God instead the devil. Others too, like the whisky-priest, Scobie and Sarah, Querry and Plarr are at some time or the other allowed an act of free will (notwithstanding an implacable pattern unfolding in their lives) to reject past commitments and to transcend the confinements of the human condition.

Happiness is just an occasional episode in Greene's world of the odd events. The exceptional character and the extreme situation where the expected is ever ambushed by the unexpected. A sense of doom hovers over his lovers and readers for one never knows when the pendulum may swing and the blow may fall. Squalor, dirt, disease, poverty, pain and loneliness play their dirty game to strip life of all its illusions. What further alienates his characters is moral squalor – the purity of the spirit – in a world ruled by the forces of death and destruction. The sense of menace within and without, overwhelms some of his characters who like Andrews in *The Man Within*, holds it a mistake of life to go on. The guilt-ridden heroes or victims of Greene are often hunted to their doom not by the police or state but by their own conscience or the hounds of heaven.

His Protestants include saints and sinners, priests and policemen, Catholics and communists, criminals and crooks, the alienated and the isolated. Infect blighted by the shadows of love and lust, the world of Greene's novel is very like our own-troubled, violent, sordid and seedy. If alienation, isolation, corruption, guilt betrayal and men hunt are familiar trials of our world, they are the re-current themes in Greene's fiction. His protagonists are lovely and alienated men who grope for some faith to live by. As victims of the human predicament, they have their intimations of evil quite early in life. Experience to them as the corruption of the innocence and their existence is be lighted by the terror of life. Caught in the contradictions of love and life, they are at the loss to understand the ways of God and man. If some despair of the love of God, others realize the chronic difficulty of understanding another human being, their divided loyalties often result in a tragic dead lock where they are denied the consolation of choosing even a lesser devil. The choice between the fleeting love and lasting despair can hardly be called a choice. It is like choosing between death by drawing and death by dehydration. In the raging dual between the flesh and the spirit, inborn instincts and acquire influence, private dreams and public opinions, they oscillate between two worlds and end up by souring both. So divine love is hardly compatible with human love and the lover is rarely a life giving emotion. If love doesn't quench the soul's thirst, sex fails to satisfy the body's hunger. And hence the violence, seediness, sterility prevail in his novels.

CONCLUSION

Having looked carefully at the function of imagery in these novels, one can see its contribution to Greene's dominant view of man and his predicament in the modern world. *The Man Within* introduces the basic structure of body/soul schism in the modern world. Humanism slowly occupies the space earlier given to God, faith or spirit. The God- forsaken planet earth begins to look more and more like a waste land with violence, sickness and death imagery dominating the scene. There is enough evidence to prove the impact of Eliot's Waste landish imagery on Greene's fiction.

With careful analysis I have demonstrated how certain images like desert, decay, filth, beasts, violence, disease, sexual behavior and religious rituals recur in almost every novel, and provide a multilayered perception of the human conditions in this godforsaken planet.

In general, it must be emphasized that Greene was quite deliberate in his handling the novel's imagery. His controlled use of imagery allows him to focus upon preserving the distance between himself and his material.

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