

Chapter - I: INTRODUCTION :

A

Graham Greene is a very prominent novelist and playwright of the twentieth century. He saw the dehumanized moral qualities in the society of our age and began to write about good qualities in society by taking the support of his Christian religion. His reaction to the collapsed traditional values is seen in his choice of man's fall as his central theme. I was attracted to Greene for his deep concern of the state of contemporary man and his emphasis on the importance of moral values. His works are very interesting and worth studying from the viewpoint of ethical aspect of society.

Graham Greene has usually been seen by his critics as a contemporary religious writer. They have studied and expressed a lot about religious views reflected in most of his novels and entertainments. David Price-Jones has discussed the religious man in his novels. John Atkins's criticism is chiefly biographical. A.A. DeVitis has produced a study of religious themes as reflected in his works. R.W.B. Lewis thinks that Greene has drawn on acute mental distress and strains of modern man which are the determining features of his work. J.P. Kulshrestha examines Greene's characters in terms of his sensibility

and traces recurrent patterns of human feelings and behaviour in the novels which seem to derive from the facets of the author's psyche. Gangeshwar Rai has shown the existential approach of Greene. / John Spurling discusses the aesthetic and moral topography. So far as Graham Greene's plays are concerned, some critics have made passing comments on the major themes in Greene's plays in their books and only a few short notices on his plays have appeared in periodicals. But, it is witnessed that by and large his themes in his plays have not been studied exhaustively. Although he has treated almost the same themes both in his fictions and plays, his approaches to the themes as a playwright differ. Hence it is intended in this dissertation to study the dominant themes in his plays.

Graham Greene started his literary career as a novelist in 1930s. After gaining considerable experience in his novel writing he shifted his interest to writing plays in 1950s. In his plays he takes man as the centre of his themes and discusses mainly sin and salvation. The themes of sin and salvation might also have percolated into his writings as result of the ideas that were in the air in 1950s. But, as a convert to Catholicism, the main source of such themes seems to lie in his own experience and personal vision. We can find that there is also a gradual shift in his themes but they are linked to each other. Greene discusses sin and its consequences and shows there is a dire need of having divine grace. The concept

of (the theme of) sin is correlated with such ideas as mental perversion, moral deprivation, weaknesses, guilt, betrayal etc. All these symbolize or dramatize the evil which permeates Greene's world and are abundantly witnessed in speeches and actions of various characters in his plays. When man does not show his inclination to earn the divine grace there is his condemnation. When man becomes frustrated, he finds no other way for his absolution and, finally, in his chaotic condition, commits suicide. This theme of suicide is a major theme which comes as an upshot of many psychic and physical irregularities. Even these irregularities as frenzy, dreaminess, licentiousness etc. become minor themes.

God has granted us emotions like love and fear. We have to use them for good purposes and for the benefit of the whole human kind. Greene very subtly finds out the weaknesses in the mind of man and shows very effectively in his plays how there is conflict between love and fear of human mind. ^{He} Greene emphasizes man's pure love for man which arises from his direct personal and emotional experience and which is not derived outside himself. At the same time he warns mankind to fear the evil that corrupts the society. When man adores the evil things in him he becomes spiritually and morally dead. Greene's preoccupation with evil is undoubtedly linked with his religious consciousness, his obsessive awareness of God and His mercy. ^{He} Greene exhibits not only sin, evil,

corruption in man, but at the same time he exhibits love, charity, self-sacrifice which make man turn to God. Some characters do die, sometimes spiritually or morally but at the same time they are revived. They have the movement from death to life. This theme of resurrection is based, no doubt, on paradox as far as Greene's Christianity is concerned. And he uses such paradoxes quite often through his characters in his plays. ^{He} Greene emphasizes the need of resurrection to have the holy and moral life. Therefore, his themes like sin, grace, suicide, love, fear, death and life are very subtly used in his plays. The drama of such conflicting emotions as love, fear of death, fear of the loss of social dignity, frustrations etc., are at the back of all the activities of the characters in the plays.

Though Graham Greene is not a major playwright, very little attention is paid to his plays by the critics. Especially, nobody has carried out a special thematic study of his plays. However, a few critics like Philip Stratford, David Lodge, Jacob H. Adler, Mesnet, DeVitis, Gangeshwar Rai etc. have only referred to these themes in their books and articles. As I have mentioned earlier, the present study examines only the dominant themes in Greene's plays, occasionally glancing at the same themes reflected in some of his novels and short stories. Each major theme is first defined and then discussed in terms of his plays. There is

no attempt to examine the technical study of the plays. The chronological study of the plays has been omitted. (The minor themes in the plays have also been omitted; and only passing remarks on such minor themes like pity, nobility, marriage, miracle, sex, adultery, fornication, faith, innocence etc., have been made. His childhood experiences and the search made about the outer and inner worlds during his adulthood have made Greene the kind of playwright he is.) They must be taken into account before we proceed to examine his plays at large.

It is hoped that, in the variety of approaches and emphasis, these themes will stimulate interest in and an understanding of the vitality of all the plays of Greene. < Thus, through his major themes, I have tried to appreciate Graham Greene's plays, which contain the search of reality independent of established ethics and values.

B

Graham Greene in his fifties began to write plays which were staged. He points out in his autobiography:

"...the theatre offered me novelty, an escape from the everyday. When a novelist has produced a play for the first time in middle age, it is natural to assume he has come rather late to the theatre".¹

(Graham Greene achieved great reputation as a novelist.)

This mature novelist has entered the theatre with mature thoughts and experiences about life. Although all his plays received popularity, little critical attention has been paid to his plays in comparison with his novels. (His shift in interest from novel to drama is very significant.

A.A. DeVitis aptly points out:

These ventures into drama are not surprising when one remembers that Greene was very much preoccupied with dramatic presentations in several of his later novels, especially in The Power and the Glory and The Quiet American....In the later novels, however, his themes have been developed with a careful eye for dramatic possibilities engendered in and by the action.²)

nature of dramatic conflict to be discussed.

Greene uses a theological concept in his plays. As A.A. DeVitis observes: "Greene's dramas are interesting because they add to the theatre a dimension which might be termed religio-philosophical dilemma".³ His work has become crystallized with his acceptance of the Roman Catholic faith, but he says he was not converted since his was an intellectual conviction and not an emotional one.

a good suggestion ✓

(Born on 2nd October, 1904, the son of Charles Henry Greene, the Headmaster of an English Public School, Berkhamsted, Greene attended his father's school. In this environment of Conventional Anglican middle-class he was

thrown upon resources of his own imagination to fight the boredom and despair which harassed him. In his autobiography he says:

Only in the clouds ahead I could see that there was no luminosity at all. Yet anything, I felt, anything, even a romantic death, might happen to save me before my thirteenth year struck.⁴

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evidence

It is obvious that Greene was bored, full of pain, terror and disgust in his mind. Even in his school days he felt it a horrible confinement. He never wanted to return to school. Finally, he expressed his rebellion by the simple act of running away. He was then sent to a psychoanalyst but still he was fixed in his boredom.

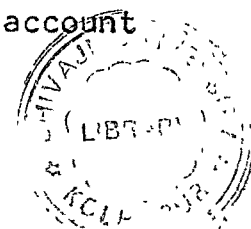
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From childhood onwards, every event, every experience is important to a novelist - consciously or unconsciously the reflection of this is seen in his literary nourishment. Greene's works establish the truth of this statement. It is because of the experience communicated in his works which flows from Greene's memories, his unhappy childhood. It is possible to gather from his early life evidence of "flight, rebellion and misery during those first sixteen years when the novelist is formed".⁵ ^{He} Greene refers to the school dormitories and the family rooms - separated by green baize door. He writes in the Prologue to The Lawless Roads:

Two countries just here lay side by side... One was an inhabitant of both countries : on Saturday and Sunday afternoon of one side of the baizedoor, the rest of the week of the other. How can life on a border be other than restless? You are pulled by different ties of hate and love. For hate is quite as powerful a tie: it demands allegiance. In the land of the sky-scrapers, of stone stairs and cracked bells ringing early, one was aware of fear and hate, a kind of lawlessness - appalling cruelties could be practised without a second thought; one met for the first time characters, adult and adolescent, who bore about them the genuine quality of evil.⁶

The life lived on the border of subdivided opposite worlds into two parts has become important in Greene's work. The image of the green baize door in his works separates the world of hate from the world of love and fear, the world of the evil from the world of the good, the world of the adolescent from the world of the adult. Greene takes the view of two worlds as heaven and hell and shows how man has discarded God's presence from his life; and depicts how man is caught in the web of mental anguish and physical pain, the intensity of sin and the dissappointments of life, immorality and irreligiousness that inflict upon the mind a sense of a profound mystery which is beyond human solution. Any interpretation of his work must, therefore, take account

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of the school life which so deeply affected his outlook; and the duel in his mind about hell and heaven, evil and good have found explanation through his intellectual conversion in the Roman Catholic Church.

Dreams have been an important body of his writing. About his dreams John Vinocur writes in The Times of India:

"...He makes entries into the journal he keeps of his dreams. There are more than eight hundred pages and they are indexed by letter, like the phone book, so that he can find a dream about the sea or a hotel or Krushchev or Haiti. 'It passes the time when I'm not writing', he says."⁷

Dreams form an idea in his mind and have a subtle effect on his writings. They give material to his imagination. Greene says: "Two novels and several short stories have emerged from my dreams, and some times I have had hints of what is called by the difficult name of extra-sensory perception".⁸

The P.S.

From Berkhamsted, Greene went to Balliol College, Oxford, and at the end of his Oxford career, in 1925, he published a collection of poems "Babbling April". In Oxford, he was a member of Communist party in a contemporary small group. After leaving Oxford, he worked as a reporter for Nottingham Journal in 1925-26. [Received into Roman Catholic Church in February, 1926, when he was

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working as subeditor for The Times in London - giving up the job his real literary career started with his first novel The Man Within, (1929).] Greene, therefore, reached maturity with deep insight - and independence, as a writer at the beginning of the nineteen-thirties.

The literary movement of the 1930s is frequently considered as something unequally involving a handful of poets with contemporary politics; as if the prose writers of the day had been somehow disconnected from the same events. But Greene's early novels can be seen as a part of the thirties and reflection on those years.

The subject matter of his novels until the outbreak of the Second World War includes smuggling, destruction of a dictator, the death sentence passed on a Communist, international Capitalism, Civil war etc. R.W.B. Lewis says:

"Greene has drawn a peculiar human anguish and a peculiar tension which are the determining features of his work".⁹

Greene's obsession is religion. His characters illustrate his preoccupations - his deeply personal vision is of a man caught in the dilemma of this age, but they make place for themselves in an experience of life which, ultimately, they control.

His novels can be divided into three groups: First political, then Catholic and then political again. The first period (1929 - 1935) includes, The Man Within (1929),

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It's A Battlefield (1934), and England Made Me (1935).

They deal with crime studied from a social and political stand-point. His initial experiments in dealing with psychology of his character are vividly witnessed in these novels.

The treatment of his religious problems as worked out in his novels to be combined with the religious themes of these plays in his plays

The second period (1935 - 1951) includes, Brighton Rock (1938), The Power and the Glory (1940), and The Heart of the Matter (1948). This is Greene's middle period about religious writings with central themes such as sin and salvation, man's relationship with himself, society and God. Greene explores the nature of evil and the spiritual dimensions with the possibility of man's redemption.

The third period (1955 - 1970) of his career includes, The Burnt out Case (1961), The Comedians (1966). But The Quiet American (1955), though not specifically religious in theme it deals with destruction of a human being who is apparently doomed by a kind of moral innocence.

'Novel' and 'Entertainment' are Greene's terms for differentiating his serious and light fiction respectively. So also he wanted to have change from serious novels. He says in his autobiography:

It was as though I wanted to escape from the vast liquidity of the novel and to play out the most important situation on a narrow stage where I could direct every movement of my characters.¹⁰

x His 'entertainments' include Stamboul Train (1932), A Gun for Sale: (U.S. title: This Gun for Hire) (1936), The Confidential Agent (1939), The Ministry of Fear (1943), The Third Man (1950), The Fallen Idol (1950), Looser Takes All (1955), and Our Man in Havana (1958). In The Lost Childhood, Greene talks about the thrills and the disillusionment that he experienced as a boy, while reading various tales of adventure. He had already experienced moments of disillusionment while witnessing the drama of actual life itself. (The technique used in entertainments are immense and worth studying.) However, his post-war fiction The Heart of the Matter is the best book which gave him more fame because of its subject economy and evenness of style.

In the course of his career as writer he has travelled widely and as a result of his stays in such places as Mexico, West Africa and Indo-China he gathered much of the material for his story books, Journals, Essays and Travel books. His travel books include Journey Without Maps (1936), and The Lawless Roads (1939). He gives vivid descriptions of people, places and also discusses the religious problems found there.

Greene's essays and articles have been published in a volume called The Lost Childhood (1951); his critical work is fresh and stimulating, and throws much light on his own work as novelist. Later Greene published an interesting

? ornament to his novels, In Search of a Character (1961), which consists of two African Journals.

In 1942, he published a short book on the history of English Drama called British Dramatist. In it he set his critical theories in an historical context. As he traces its development from mystery and morality he praises those qualities in English drama that are deeply rooted in the experience of the common people: a vigorous confrontation with the hard facts of life, a sense of destiny and the dark side of human nature.

After writing serious novels he shifted to entertainments. There, too, he remained uncomplacent and turned to cinema as already he was having the knowledge of cinematographic techniques and tricks of suspense which contributed to his sense of melodrama in his early novels and entertainments. Another reason for his diverting interest for cinema is as Philip Stratford says:

The war, too, which Greene saw as an almost apocalyptic outbreak of universal violence, slaked his craving for fictional excitement. And finally, after 1945, what interest he retained in popular melodrama was diverted into a new medium, the cinema.¹¹

How has he used it in his plays?

Greene's interest in film is paralleled by his interest in, and use of, another popular art, the thriller. Many of his best-known novels are based on conventions of the thriller,

and several of them have been made into films. His A Gun for Sale, was filmed in Hollywood in 1942. Then he started writing film scripts. He wrote film scripts for Fallen Idol, The Third Man, Our Man in Havana and The Comedians. Greene is always entertaining, and his skilful use of film and thriller conventions explain a good deal of the element of entertainment in his novels. But he is never merely entertaining. He uses popular conventions in a complicated technique that transcends its components and complexly express a religious sense of existence. He was the film editor for Night and Day, in 1937. He was continuously interested in the dramatic form from 1935 to 1941. He reviewed films and plays regularly for The Spectator.

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Graham Greene's growing impatience with his novels and with films is symptomatic of his shift in interest towards the drama, so in the Preface of his book Three Plays he says:

I needed a rest from novels. I disliked the drudgery of film-writing, I had discovered what was in effect a new drink just at that period when life seemed to have been going on for too many years. At the end of this first experience of the theatre I found myself writing with an excitement which I still feel.¹²

While gaining valuable experience in cinema especially script-writing, he wrote his first play, The Living Room (1953). It was successful on the stage. This play is a 'Tragedy'. Greene's first work for the theatre, The Living Room, falls into the pattern of his prose fiction in that it is intense, suspenseful and is a further development of the themes of despair and the problem of the Catholic in relation to an impossible physical love. The play tells us about Rose, an eighteen year old orphan girl, who begins an affair with Michael, a forty five year old married psychology professor, who is her trustee. On the night of her mother's funeral Rose is seduced by Michael and a night after she comes to live in the large house of her two great-aunts, Helen and Teresa, and an uncle, James, where she finds almost all the rooms locked as the two old sisters are afraid of death and are not using any room in which somebody has died except the living room. In this large house the atmosphere is rigidly controlled by the rules of Catholicism. Rose is forbidden by her aunts to continue her affair. She secretly meets Michael at Regal Court. Michael wants to marry Rose but he is not successful. Rose's awareness of her sin and meeting with Michael's wife finds herself in despair. She craves for guidance, but nobody helps her in her moments of crisis. Even her uncle, Father Browne, cannot offer her help. All he can offer are pat theological responses. She finds herself totally abandoned and commits suicide in the living room.

forces of
repression.

As all the Brownes agreed and decided previously to close the room where somebody dies, Helen presses to close the living room, but Teresa chooses to stay in the living room voluntarily and her brother, Father Browne, too, supports her action. An atmosphere of hope is thereby created in the home. The play also opens up questions on such matters as adultery, fornication, faith, love and religion.

As the first experience of the play was successful Graham Greene started writing plays with an excitement. Though he had no ideas pressing in his mind he started writing deliberately as one tastes drink and he likes it and visits the bar often. In his autobiography he writes:

I had tried a new drink: I had liked the flavour. How I wished my glass was not empty and that it was not time to go. So I approached the bar again to order another drink. Too soon perhaps after the first. No play was pressing on me from the unconscious. I deliberately took one key abandoned novels (I had written a few thousand words of it in 1946) and fabricated The Potting Shed.¹³

The Potting Shed (1957), investigates a familiar theme, the problem of identity. Graham Greene calls it a 'Drama'. He returns to a subject within a specifically Roman Catholic context. The atmosphere of mystery, suspense and

clues to it resembles a thriller story. The play could be described as a spiritual detective story. Henry Callifer, the head of the house, is counting his last moments. The rationalist family of Henry Callifer and his friends are together except his exiled son, James, and Father Callifer, his drunken brother at 'Wild Grove'. Everybody is nervous and guilty about concealed secret concerning James. It eventually emerges that what they are trying to conceal was nothing less than a miracle. This miracle had shaken the family so much that James had been exiled in order to banish its reality. After Henry's death James learns that he was found as a child hanging dead in the potting shed, but restored to life by the prayers of his uncle, Father Callifer, who sacrificed his faith to save his life. Finally, James learns why his family abandoned him, why his marriage failed and what he wanted from life. After meeting James, the memory acts as a revelation and the priest realises why he has lost his faith and has become a drunkard. The family wants James to be committed to a mental institution, but James is in fact the most sane member of the whole group. The most striking irony of the whole play, of course, is that the horrible event which took place in the potting shed actually was a miracle containing the seeds of salvation for them all. The play opens up questions such as crude 'rationalist-belief' conflict, treatment of children, suicide, guilt and faith.

fantastical

Graham Greene was successful on stage. He met many directors who told him: "Write what you like, in as many scenes as you like. Treat a play as loosely as a film. It is my job to find a way of putting it upon the stage"; but Greene says, "I don't want a producer's play - I want an author's play".¹⁴ As a mature playwright, he went on experimenting on the stage and wrote the third play, The Complaisant Lover (1959). This is a 'Comedy'. Greene says, "Melodrama and farce are both expressions of a manic mood. So with my third play The Complaisant Lover I sought my usual escape".¹⁵ This play is lighter in tone; yet, it has under-currents of sadness caused by physical love created out or boredom. It is about a middle-aged dentist, Victor Rhodes, who is a practical joker; his wife Mary is bored with his jokes. Victor has become sexually impotent. Mary loves a young man, Clive Root, because she wants to have physical satisfaction. Clive and Mary plan to go abroad and enjoy themselves together. Mary deceives her husband by saying that she is going to Amsterdam with her friend named Jane Crane. (Clive and Mary enjoy four days in a hotel at Amsterdam.) Clive wants that Mary should divorce her husband and marry him. But because of her domestic problems she is not ready to marry Clive. Finally, she gives consent to marry him after Christmas. Clive is in a hurry to get rid of Victor. So he dictates a letter to

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his valet at Amsterdam and sends it to Victor. Victor discovers his wife's adultery from the letter. Victor sinks in heart. He thinks about suicide and goes to his garage to put an end to his life. But it is his wife's need which persuades him to abandon it. At the same time he loves her and needs her. He wants her to be happy, so he decides to be a complaisant husband and asks Clive to be a complaisant lover. Clive accepts his failure, compromises in his mind and goes away from Mary. Thus, the family is saved from disintegration. The play opens up some questions as nobility, moral code, duty towards children, marriage and sex.

His fourth play Carving a Statue (1964), is a 'Farce', Graham Greene says in the Epitaph for the play:

I have always believed that farce and tragedy are far more closely allied than comedy and tragedy. Carving a Statue was to me a game played with the same extremes of mood as The Complaisant Lover. The first act is, almost completely, farce: the sculptor was based on Benjamin Robert Haydon, who was obsessed - to the sacrifice of any personal life - by the desire to do great Biblical subjects, already, even in his day, out of fashion. You cannot read the diaries of Haydon without realizing that he had true daemon and yet he had no talent at all - surely a farcical character,

though he came to a tragic end. In my story, as I intended it, the artist lost even his tragic end... He had a greater capacity to recover than poor Haydon.¹⁶

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Carving a Statue, is a new departure as it is a conscious tapping of a strain of fantasy in such a way which was rarely done before. The sculptor has given his life to making of a statue of God the Father. Everything except his dreams is sacrificed to this task but he does not know how to complete it. The sculptor is obsessed with the idea and has never been able to face life and even to look after his son. His son does not get love from his mother as she is dead and from his obsessed father. He tries to fill this gap through sex with a tart he has brought home; but his father takes her away. Then he tries to love a girl who is dumb and deaf. He wants to marry her. But she is taken away by Dr. Parker (the only name in the play) to his clinic, where she runs out into the street and meets with an accident and dies. The boy feels lonely and grieved. He finds suicide as a release to his emotional suffering. He threatens his father that he will hang himself from the neck of the statue. The sculptor humbly requests his son not to do so; and the boy leaves the thought of suicide. When the idea of God becomes too much for the sculptor he can exchange it for the idea of Lucifer. But at the end he is a changed person. He now wants to start again carving a statue of God.

Before attempting to write his fifth play The Return of A.J. Raffles (1975), Graham Greene was not intending to plot another play, but he found pleasure of writing again, as he says: ("I thought then that I would never write another play. I told myself it was not worth the candle, I was wrong of course".¹⁷ This play is also a 'farce'. For him the fate of the play is not important. Escaping solitude is important. In the play, The Return of A.J. Raffles, Raffles's loyal assistant Bunny mourns his friend's death in Raffles's chambers in Albany and claims to have been beside him when he was killed by the Boers at Spion Kop. But Raffles has cheated death as he once cheated Inspector Mackenzie. Raffles is an amateur burglar and cricketer. But he is always torn between the rival claims of burglary and cricket. Lord Alfred Douglas is a son of Marquess of Queensberry. He has a friend called Oscar Wilde. But Marquess of Queensberry had disgraced Oscar Wilde. Lord Alfred meets both Raffles and Bunny and immediately thinks that they are heaven-sent instruments and they can be used to take revenge on his odious father by robbing him for the disgrace of Oscar Wilde. And with the share of robbery Lord Alfred wants to help poor Oscar Wilde. Therefore, Raffles and Bunny agree to help Lord Alfred. They make the plan of a robbery. When they enter Queensberry's bedroom they find some cash and a gold box full of love letters. Raffles sends it through Bunny to his chambers in Albany. In the meantime Prince of Wales, a friend of Queensberry,

enters the room. He is suspicious about Raffles but later he is impressed by him. Here Inspector Mackenzie is informed that an agent of German Embassy is after the letters to publish them through German press. Therefore, the Inspector wants to arrest the German agent. The Inspector tells about it to Queensberry. The Inspector arrives in the bedroom with Queensberry to catch the German agent. But, he finds Raffles there. Raffles escapes from there before the Inspector could arrest him. But, the Inspector succeeds in arresting Raffles at his chambers in Albany. Lord Alfred tells the true story about robbery to the Inspector and requests him to release Raffles. The Prince of Wales, too, comes to rescue Raffles and explains to the Inspector that the letters were not stolen by Raffles. On the contrary, they had been saved by him from the hands of a German agent. The Inspector releases Raffles. Finally, The Prince of Wales takes a promise from Raffles that in future England will know only Raffles, the cricketer and not the burglar.

Greene has an interest in the form of the drama: Tragedy, Comedy and Farce. Greene says: "One must try every drink once".¹⁸ (He being an uncomplacent dramatist he changed his themes and dramatic forms.) As Philip Stratford says:

Within Greene's plays themselves one can observe a development of different sort. But more significantly, this development within the genre complements the chastening of style. The domestication of subject matter and the growing objectivity in treatment that we have already noted as Greene turns from narrative form to the dramatic.¹⁹

An extremely prolific writer, Greene has written many varied kinds of works, from children's stories to plays. Although not a major dramatist, he is an extremely important religious playwright, and his contribution to the theatre of ideas can well stand beside that of Mauriac, Caludel or Eliot. That is why I feel the need of studying Graham Greene's plays from the point of view of the serious religious themes which affect the modern man and his predicament. Both as serious plays and as entertainers, Greene's plays are a significant contribution to the English drama.

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