

Exploring the Childhood Trauma in Graham Greene's *The Fallen Idol* and *Brighton Rock*

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Graham Greene is one of the leading exponents of the English psychological fiction. This prolific writer used his pen to arouse the conscience of the world. His literary career began in 1925 with the publication of a volume of poems, *Babbling April*. This was followed by novels, autobiography, plays, short stories, travel books, and other non-fiction. Greene traces how the innocence is corrupted in childhood through various influences. His writings are marked with simplicity and leaves an effective vision of the novelist's art. To Greene, the world seems to be a place full of corruption, evil and seediness. To portray this world, Greene develops a style which suitably communicates the complexities of life.

The Fallen Idol published in 1951, demonstrates Greene's ability to craft intricate narratives that delve into the moral dilemma and psychological complexity of his characters. The novel is about Philip Lane, a small boy whose parents have gone for holidays for a fortnight. He is left alone without parental clutches in the house with Baines and Mrs. Baines, the household servants. Mrs. Baines is very stern and never lets Philip to be himself at home. Innocent Philip is soon drawn into the world of sexual intrigues of the adults –

Mr. Baines and Emmy, his niece. When Baines and Emmy are caught red handed by Mrs. Baines, Philip becomes aware that he is tormented by the adults around him and “It wasn’t fair the walls were down again between his world and theirs” (121). In her anxious search for Mr. Baines and Emmy, Mrs. Baines goes over the bannisters, falls down and dies. When the Police inquires about Mrs. Baines’ sudden death, Philip is caught in a web of conflict. He overcomes it, not being afraid and says with courage, “‘It was all Emmy’s fault’, he protested with a quaver which reminded Baines that after all he was only a child” (130). What Baines does not realise is that his actions thrust this innocent child into the world of stress, fear and deceit. “A kind of embittered happiness and self- pity made him cry; he was lost; there wouldn’t be any more secrets to keep;” (122). This incident makes Philip lose the innocence of his childhood.

In this novel, Graham Greene portrays the innocent seven-year-old boy who finds pleasure in playing Meccano set but, is filled with fear-stricken thoughts and anxiety. He has also vividly brought out the loss of innocence of Philip unaware of the intricacies of the adult world. M. Scott Peck in *The Road Less Travelled* rightly points out that, to the child, abandonment by its parents is the equivalent of death. He asserts:

All children are terrified of abandonment . . . This fear of abandonment begins around the age of six months, as soon as the child is able to perceive itself to be an individual, separate from its parents. For with this perception of itself as an individual comes the realization that as an individual it is totally dependent and totally at the mercy of its parents for all forms of substance and means of survival (24).

In the case of Philip, the absence of his parents significantly paves way for numerous trouble which Philip had to deal with the problems of adults. These kind of adverse childhood experiences, feelings of shame and guilt impact the individual's relationship with others in adulthood. Greene's strong opinion is expressed in these words, "Let grown-up people keep to their world and he would keep to his, safe in the small garden between the plane trees" (122). Greene further asserts saying, "In the lost childhood of Judas, Christ was betrayed" (123).

The American Psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan has developed a comprehensive personality theory, which argues that people develop their personality within a given social context. In *Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life*, Harry Sullivan rightly opines, "the infant is completely depended on 'Significant Others' (e.g., parents and siblings) for meeting all physical and psychological needs, lack of love and care lead to an insecure and anxious human being" (72). The social, emotional, and cognitive developments in infants depend on the attachment relationship with parents. The increasing instances of neglect and parental lack of love lead to psychological complexity in every child.

The role of early childhood relationship shapes the self- concept in every child. According to Sullivan, the pressures of the socialization process and the continual appraisal by others lead a child to label some personal tendencies as the good-me and others as the bad-me. It is the bad-me that is associated with anxiety, frustration and agony. With time, the individual attribute much to maladaptive behavior. This is more evident in Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*.

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky, the Russian psychologist emphasizes the importance of culture and its impact in the development of child's understanding of meaning in his Socio-Cultural Theory. It is through this lens, Greene's character Pinkie Brown has been analysed. This paper underscores the similarities between the precepts of the theory and the Greenian character Pinkie in

Brighton Rock. Pursued by the memories of unhappy childhood, Pinkie develops a profound sense of violence in his later life. M. Scott Peck rightly avers, “If a child sees his parents day in and day out living without self-restraint or self-discipline, then he will come in the deepest fibers of being to believe that, that is the way to live” (21). Thus, the behavioristic impact of parents plays a significant role in the early development of a child.

Brighton Rock chronicles the story of Pinkie Brown who was slum-bred. Right from his childhood, he was filled with hatred and anger against the world. The novel begins with the murder of Kite, who was much respected like a father by Pinkie. Fred Hale, the journalist in *Daily Messenger* was believed to be the cause for Kite’s death. In order to revenge against Hale, Pinkie murdered him. The individual of this type is frequently swamped by the unresolved conflict within which originates from the malevolent situations of the childhood. Pinkie was not fostered in the right environment. Greene himself uses slum landscape like Nelson Place, Peacehaven’s Lodgings as the setting in *Brighton Rock*. Every tragic episode in Pinkie’s childhood days continue to influence him and thus, Pinkie lacks grip on himself and on God which give way to resentment, anxiety and sinful practices. Andrew Elphinstone in *Freedom, Suffering and Love* observes that “the infantile and post infantile calculation forms the basis of what should become the ability to make the mature assessments and responsible judgements of adult life” (IX).

In the course of the novel, Pinkie kills his friend Spicer and attempts to marry Rose in order to ensure her silence, when the police investigate. Mixed emotions of fear and anger engulf him. He is ashamed to present himself as a murderer before the world. In *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman declares thus:

Violent acts are more pernicious than natural catastrophes ... victims of violence feel themselves to have been intentionally selected as the target of malevolence. That fact

shatters assumptions about the trustworthiness of people and the safety of the interpersonal world. Within an instant, the social world becomes a dangerous place, the one in which people are potential threats to your safety (202).

Greene has finely crafted *Brighton Rock* and *The Fallen Idol* to underscore complexities that the protagonists Pinkie Brown and Philip Lane undergo during their childhood. Every child is vulnerable and innocent. They rely on adults to meet their emotional, physical and mental needs. When they are exposed to traumatic events including seedy environment, domestic violence, neglect, lack of parental care and affection, their development will be eventually hampered. This paper advocates that developing resilience in children to bounce back after the challenges and traumatic agony will help them to journey on the road to understanding their self.

References:

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