

Graham Greene Biography

Graham Greene describes his boyhood traumas in *A Sort of Life* (1971), the first volume of his autobiography. He was born in 1904, attended a public school, of which his father was headmaster, and later he studied at Oxford. The unhappiness of his home and school life led him to attempt suicide through a variation of Russian roulette and brought about his treatment by a psychoanalyst.

Graham became a Catholic in 1926, his faith stemming in part from his deep conviction of evil in the world. Much of his life up to that point had been a nightmare, and no doubt because he has long kept dream journals, many of the characters in his novels incur horrifying dreams. The novels also reflect Greene's experiences with the seamy side of life. His protagonists' experiences, for example, often parallel his labors as a journalist (for a Nottingham paper), his government work, and his travels through totalitarian Mexico.

Greene maintains that his works fall into two categories, novels and "entertainments," though often the latter are quite serious in parts. *The Honorary Consul* (1973) is "entertaining," but it is also a profound view of terrorism and the military state in Argentina. Greene's novels are frequently characterized by their focus on (1) a hunted man as the protagonist; on (2) the discrepancy between the outer man and the inner man — in fact, his first novel is entitled *The Man Within* (1929); on (3) multi points-of-view and vivid metaphysical detail; and (4) on a nineteenth-century method of storytelling which is more reminiscent of Robert Louis Stevenson than, say, of a modern writer such as James Joyce. Setting also plays a pronounced role in Greene's novels, whether it is an abandoned section of Africa, as in *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), or a leper colony, as in *A Burnt-Out Case* (1961).

Many of his works focus upon religious themes, and the protagonist is almost always the sinner, the spiritual outcast. Greene's milieu is the fallen world, and he has been criticized for focusing on the eccentric believer, rather than on the conventional believer, and for combining theological strictures with somewhat lurid, perhaps overly personal, views of sex. *The End of the Affair* (1951), for example, is as much a study of hate as it is a study of triangular love.

Greene died April 3, 1991, at La Providence Hospital in Vevey, Switzerland. He was 86. *Lord of the Flies* author William Golding commented, "The best of his novels will be remembered as literary perfection." Novelist John Le Carre described Green as his "guiding star."

During his lifetime, Greene was honored by Queen Elizabeth II, but never won a Nobel Prize despite several nominations by colleagues. He was fond of traveling all over the world, seeking out such trouble spots as Vietnam, Israel, Chile, and South Africa. "I like to keep my eye on world politics," he said.