**Thumbnail**

Henry Graham Greene (1904), born in Hertfordshire and educated at Oxford, was a prolific novelist whose life and career spanned the majority of The Twentieth Century.  In 1927 he married Vivien Dayrell-Browning, and while they remained married throughout their lives, Greene had numerous extramarital affairs and several prolonged relationships with other women.   An avid traveler, Greene drew material from his excursions to form his novels.  He died of leukaemia in 1991 while living in Switzerland.  His background in journalism is apparent throughout his writing, as his realistic style, characters, and settings illustrate.  A convert to Catholicism, Greene’s novels often take up religious themes of sin, evil, temptation, and redemption, so much so, that he has been called a Catholic novelist: a label he rejected.  While critical interest in the religious elements of this writing remains consistent throughout the body of scholarship treating Greene, critics have also explored the evident concern for civil liberties and political commentary found in much of his writing. While Greene’s work has not engendered a large body of critical attention, he remains an important figure in studies of twentieth-century, British novelists.

Henry Graham Greene was born in Hertfordshire England in 1904.  Suffering from depression as a child, at sixteen he was sent to London for psychoanalysis: an unusual decision for the time period.  He attended Oxford and experimented with various forms of Ring-wing politics including a brief membership in Great Britain’s Communist Party.  In 1927, he married Vivien Dayrell-Browning, and they had two children: Caroline (1933) and Francis (1936).  An unfaithful husband, Greene had numerous affairs and left his family in 1947; however, following Catholic customs, Vivien and he never divorced.  Greene traveled widely throughout his life and did some espionage as an agent for MI6 during World War II and continued sending reports to British Intelligence until his death.  Greene moved from England to France and finally to Switzerland where he died of leukaemia in 1991.

While working as a journalist, Greene published *The Man Within*, his first novel, in 1929.  Although this novel was successful, it was not until *Stamboul Train* (1932), that Greene achieved actual acclaim, and the novel would shortly be made into the film, *Orient Express*.  Continuing to write novels as his chief occupation, Greene also wrote reviews and freelanced as a journalist.

In 1948, he published *The Heart of the Matter*, which sold widely and, along with the earlier *Brighton Rock* (1938) and *The Power and the Glory* (1940), and the later, *The End of the Affair* (1951) earned him the reputation of a Catholic novelist.  Greene himself rejected this label, but it is undeniable that Catholicism and an accompanying focus on morality permeates much of Greene’s writing.  In fact, religious sentiment seemed to take on an aesthetic quality for Greene; for instance, he asserted that “the flatness of E.M. Forster’s characters, Virginia Woolf’s or Sartre’s, for example compared with the astonishing vitality of Bloom in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, or of Balzac’s *Père Goriot*, or of David Copperfield, derives from the absence of religious dimension in the former.”

Alongside the novels, which he continued writing throughout his life, Greene also wrote short stories, plays, screenplays, and two autobiographies: *A Sort of Life* (1971) and *Ways of Escape* (1980).  Unlike many of the earlier modernists, Greene’s literary works do not tend toward the experimental.  Instead his writing display a realist, even journalistic, style that lead his contemporary, Evelyn Waugh, to describe Greene’s style “as not specifically literary.”

Greene’s life itself seems at times to have come from one of his own works of fiction.  A colorful and attractive man, Greene’s many affairs, travels, political involvements, religious faith and doubt, and espionage all contribute to a fascinating life.  A life that has engendered several lengthy biographies by Michael Shelden and Norman Sherry, who's *The Life of Graham Greene* spans three volumes and took over fifteen years to complete.  

Despite his prolific career, Greene’s work has not received the same degree of critical interest as some of his contemporaries such as Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad, or James Joyce.  Still critics have focused on the Catholic themes and commentary running throughout much of Greene’s writings and, particularly in the later fiction, on Greene’s social commentary and concern over civil liberties.

**List of Select Works**

*Babbling April* (1925)

*The Man Within* (1929)

*The Name of Action* (1930)

*Rumour at Nightfall* (1931)

*Stamboul Train* (1932)

*England Made Me* (1935)

*A Gun for Sale* (1936)

*Brighton Rock* (1938)

*The Confidential Agent* (1939)

*The Power and the Glory* (1940)

*The Heart of the Matter* (1948)

*The Third Man* (1949)

*The End of the Affair* (1951)

*Twenty-One Stories* (1954)

*The Quiet American* (1955)

*Our Man in Havana* (1958)

*A Sense of Reality* (1963)

*The Comedians* (1966)

*A Sort of Life* (1971)

*The Human Factor* (1978)

*Doctor Fischer of Geneva* (1980)

*The Tenth Man* (1985)

*The Captain and the Enemy* (1988)

*The Last Word* (1990)

**References and Further Reading**

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