

Yin (Good) Yang (Evil) Formula in the Power and the Glory by Graham Greene

Jegr Salam Hussein¹

**/Assistant lecturer/Ministry of Education/Kurdistan
jegr_english@yahoo.com**

Assistant: Halima Ismail Radam²

University of Diyala, Basic Education College, Department of English

Puneshamery@gmail.com

Abstract

From the very beginning, human started to understand things on the base of opposites. This label of understanding his or her surrounding leads him or her to contemplate on the essence of this understanding and the big question of what good and evil are and how do they work and how do they affect human life is among the cardinal ones. That is why, the struggle between good and evil (Yin and Yang) is the fundamental question of all human activities. Among all human activities, literature concerns with the question more than any other fields. Therefore, the present paper sheds light on the conflict between good and evil through a philosophical icon which is known as “Yin Yang”. From this perspective, the struggle is dealt with on different levels in Graham Greene’s masterpiece, *The Power and The Glory*.

Thus the present paper is divided into four sections. The first section is an introduction. The second section depicts the philosophical icon of Yin (Good) Yang (Evil) formula. The third section studies the Yin Yang formula in the novel. Finally, there is a conclusion.

Key words: Yin Yang, good and evil, religious system, secular system, Graham Greene, the Power and the Glory

I. Introduction: Greene and Human Nature

Graham Greene was probably the most gifted British storyteller of his generation. Nobody could taut plan, exciting action better than he; nobody possessed a sharper inside to the kinds and fissures of human personality. By the time he was 23 he had been very busy member of Communist party, then he became a convert to Roman Catholicism (Vignery 890). So, the influence of religious world view and his secular ideology are transparently seen in his works.

Greene himself divided his work into two categories: 'serious' novels, and 'entertainment' or 'literary thrillers'. In the former Greene created characters facing dilemma of choosing

between right and wrong, but where the choices are not clear-cut and morality is an ambiguous value. (Martin and Robert 58)

In his novel, *The Power and the Glory*, there are bunches of religious images and symbols. These images and symbols have misled the scholars to regard him as a pure Catholic novelist who talks about redemption. But, these religious signals should not overshadow our understanding of Graham Greene's true philosophy. His use of religious allegories is like the use of the damnation story of Adam and Eve by Milton in "*Paradise Lost*". By a scanning reading one may believe that it is a pure Catholic novel, as many critics think. Most of the critics have pinned their eyes on Greene's religious message. A few number of them, investigated his human psychological struggle. Dues to those misunderstanding as Sanders says "the novel was condemned as 'paradoxical' by the Holy Office ... *The Power and The Glory* was as much about doubt and failure as it was about faith"(Sanders: 590). His novel is a novel of ellipsis. The reader has to read between the lines. Background is not enough to interpret Greene's principal characters and messages. One has to decode them. This novel should be considered from different angles because of the diversity of his message. But focusing on his religious background narrows one's perspective on his masterpiece. A deeper reading reveals that the theological allegories are symbolic items to convey his true belief in the formula of Human nature.

Also, it seems that he had a longing for both his ideology and his religion. That is why he looks at the bright -sides of both. Being a Roman Catholic writer overshadows his idea of human imperfectness. In an interview he says "It was under this to influence- and the backward and forward sway of my sympathies- that I began to examine more closely the effect of faith on action" ...he farther more says "my professional life and my religion were contained in quite separate compartments, and I had no ambition to bring them together.....on one side the socialist persecution of religion in Mexico and on the other General Franco's attack on Republican Spain inextricably involved religion in contemporary life (Qtd. in Jassam 36).

In his view, there is no pure devil or Saint. As the saying goes every saint has a past and every sinner has a future. There is no black or white, there is grey too. In his view, God created human, an imperfect creature, neither angels nor an animal or a devil. From there, he elaborated his philosophy of good and evil. The novel depicts the conflict between good and evil in the outer physical world as well as the inner world of the human psyche. Ramji Lall aptly argues that:

The domain theme in Greene's fiction is the conflict between good and evil. This theme was stated, tentatively, in his first novel, and has appeared again and again throughout his work, becoming crystallized with his acceptance of the Roman Catholic faith. This was the turning point in his career; from then onwards the conflict between good and evil that takes place daily within a man's soul tend to become more and more crystalized within the terms of Greene's own faith (11).

This self-conflicts of the moral is confusing for him. His ideological moral “plus his wavering theological faith bring him to a paradoxical and ambivalent view of life” (Qtd. in Jassam 32). From the very beginning of the novel, Graham Greene handles the conflict artfully.

From the first glimpse of the novel, the reader feels that Graham Greene attempts to focus on the dark side of Human nature. When the plot is at its exposition stage as the witches at the beginning of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (Act I, Scene II) say “Foul is fair, fair is foul” (1), things are not straight forward. But through the discourses, he makes it clear in the course of the novel that what is important for him is the light spot within the characters. The spot which gives us the hope that human being is still worth hoping. He still has hope in human goodness. Greene said, quoting the English poet Robert Browning, that all his novels explored the characters of ‘the honest thief, the tender murderer, / the superstitious atheist...’ (Martin and Robert 58). Greene’s characters mirror the same paradoxical features of Browning’s character. Therefore, Greene’s main characters encapsulate good and evil in the form of Yin and Yang formula. When the space of goodness is broadened the realm of evil is decreased and vice-versa. It is just like two sides of a balloon. When one side is forced, the pressure of the air goes to the other side.

II. Yin (Good) Yang (Evil)

There is a Chinese mythology that says at the beginning of the existence the universe was in the form of a cosmic egg which contained the perfectly opposed principles of balanced Ying Yang. “Out of primeval vapour two gods formed and divided into the cosmic powers Yin and Yang. They produced all living things, and humans were created from primeval vapour” (Cotterell 181). And a much later version of this myth which was probably a cultural diffusion from Tibet in the third century C.E., relates that at the beginning of time primeval matter was like a chicken's egg. After 18000 years this matter separated, and sky and earth opened out, the Yang, ethereal matter rising to form the sky, the Yin, heavy matter falling to become earth. Between the two unfolding elements the first semi-divine human, Pan Gu, was born and he went through nine metamorphoses, growing as divine and wise as sky and earth. The three attained their maximum development 18000 years later, and formed the trinity of Heaven, Earth, and Humankind (ibid 183). In this way human being was seen as the outcome of these two opposite forces.

 An ancient Chinese symbol for the universe that has become integrated in Western ideography. This icon illustrates the two opposing dimensions that give the world its dynamics: yin and yang. Yin presents the passive, receiving, recipient, malleable, matter and is symbolised by the broken horizontal line, --. Yang presents energy, activity, warmth, spirit and is symbolised by an unbroken short horizontal lines (Liungman 357). In this, the sign from Chinese philosophy and cosmology, the world's most basic relationships are perceived as a balancing act between two opposing forces, yin (the white) and yang (the black). Everything in the universe (symbolised by the outer circle) embodies both yin and yang. Nothing exists in the universe that is all Yin or all Yang (this fact is symbolised by the two smaller circles within the sign) (ibid 20).

It is not like that evil is in one side and the good is on the other side. They are not two different entities. They are two sides of the same coin. In another word, they complete each other. They are fundamental dualism of reality. According to the Stoics, there was no sharp division between good and evil. Their doctrine (Manichean) was half religion and half philosophy, asserting that the world consisted of a dualism of good and evil, light and darkness, spirit and matter. (Gaarder: 147). Ramji Lall believes that in his work “Greene suggests the Manichean heresy: namely, that good and evil fight over man continually, and we are never sure who wins” (156). The philosopher, Spinoza, almost declares the same idea as he argues “as for the terms good and bad, they indicate nothing positive considerable in themselves for one and the same thing can at the same time be good bad and indifferent. (Qtd. in Durant 223)

Thus, Yin Yang is the formula by which the balance that keeps the world moving. It is the eternal force that keeps world's wheel move anyhow. “For Greene, the action that matters is the eternal spiritual war between good and evil, and the novels are thus legends of the battlefield”(Lall 10). So, a careful reading of the text, on the base of the formula, is essential for a proper understanding and appreciation of the novel, *The Power and the Glory*.

III. Yin Yang Formula in the Novel

The struggle between Yin and Yang is widespread throughout the novel on different levels. In the novel, Yin and Yang formula is analyzed in three main dimensions: the title of the novel, the protagonist; the Priest and the Lieutenant:

First, the title is taken from the Bible, but it is not used as its biblical notion. It denotes the opposing forces of the novel. The idea of conflicting forces flourishes the entire novel; for example the title, “the Power” is the symbol of the secular system which is represented by the Lieutenant and “the Glory” is the religious organization which is represented by the Priest.

Man desires a world where good and evil can be clearly distinguished, for he has an innate and irrepressible desire to judge before he understands. Religions and ideologies are founded on this desire (Kundera 7). both secular ideology and religious institution do their best to distinguished good and evil from that perspective. But in doing so, they turn their eyes way from seen the other side's goodness. In this novel, Graham Greene tries to create a mutual tie between them i.e. to see the bright sides of each other. Therefore physical and spiritual sides of human are two complementary sides of each other. They are like block games. One is incomplete and the other completes it. Each wants goodness that they forget the importance of other side.

Second, there are profound Yin and Yang messages which could only be grasped through an analysis of the main character, the Priest. Graham Greene creates a protagonist, the Priest, who is not a traditional one. The priest is portrayed in a very significant way. He is without a proper name. Graham Greene did not give names to the main characters in order to tell the reader that his message is universal. The Priest is proud and arrogant; he has committed adultery and has an illegitimate child. He is liquor addicted. Above all, he is coward. Therefore, he is devoid of all the characteristics of a traditional protagonist, but he is not

devoid of all goddesses. He sacrifices himself for his belief. He is dirty outwardly, but he is kind and good hearted inside like the book he holds at the beginning of the novel. The Priest is not a perfect hero, but he steps forth in a place where each person resembles every others. He makes action in spite of his imperfection. He stays spiritually alive in a country where everyone surrenders to the State, to the totalitarian regime. Eventually, he is the unity of opposites.

The Priest's internal Yin-Yang formula works exactly as his ego and superego conflict. One drags him to its own boarder and the other to its own direction. There's no peace of mind in his personality as it does not exist in the course of Greene's tremendous novel, namely *The Power and the Glory*. Susan C. W. Abbotson, in commenting on *The Crucible* by Miller, writes: "he (Miller) sees evil as being at large in the world, and he believes that everyone, even the apparently virtuous, has the potential to be evil given the right circumstance" (88). The same is true for Greene's main characters especially the Priest. But in his work, Greene is more concerned with the bright side of the spectrum, i.e. goddesses of human.

As Will Durant in his book, *The Story of Philosophy*, aptly writes whenever anything in nature seems to be evil, it is because "we have but a partial knowledge of things, and are in the main ignorance of the order and coherence of nature as a whole, and because we want everything to be arranged according to the dictates of our own reason; what our reason pronounces bad is not bad as regards the order and laws of universal nature, but only as regards the laws of our own nature taken separately"(223). When one reads the Priest, he is regarded as bad, because of one's partial knowledge and by the passage of time when one gets to know him; he is not what one has believed. He is brave and coward at the same time. He is brave because he faces the secular power for the sake of his religious duty. He is coward because he is afraid of death while he is supposed not to be. The greater image of him we see, the more we respect him as a human being with all his goodness and vices. He defines himself clearly "I'm not saint... I am not even a brave man" (195). So, these are the features of this character that makes Graham Greene a craftsman of characterization. Greene wants to create a true modern character. He does not polish a good romantic one. Just like the Priest, Human is the only creature that encapsulates all the paradoxes as love-hate, kindness-brutality, etc.

Will Durant argues that "Under (political subjection) herd-morality, love of danger and power give away to level security and peace" (547). This kind of reality overshadows other members of the Priest's society, but he is the only person who steps forward and decides to challenge. Though he thinks it is out of his selfishness that he does the action, but the reader knows it is from his good sense of responsibility.

His self-knowledge raises him to the level of a hero, because he is completely aware of what a true human being is. At different stages of his life he decides consciously to choose the opposite of his interest for the sake of people. He does his best to make his Yin win over his Yang. He is not a puppet in the hand of his destiny. For example he could get to Vera Cruze, but he rejects to go in order to help people. He could escape the prosecution and go to Las Cases, but he chooses to stay in order to help the dying Yankee. It makes clear that

humans are not emptied of souls. He is a priest who by sacrificing himself to his duty at the last possible moment buys back a lifetime of personal failure. "Much of Greene's work is a prolonged brooding of the eleventh hour: the moment at which a rider, in fallings, has time not only to face the reality of his dilemma, but to take a last desperate action as well" (Vignery 890). Therefore the Priest is the personality of the "eleventh hour".

Milan Kundera aptly says "Making a character "alive" means: getting to the bottom of his existential problem" (35). The reader can get to the bottom of the priest's problem. He confesses and declares:

"O God, forgive me- I'm proud, lustful, greedy man. I have loved authority too much. These people are martyrs- protecting me with their own lives. They deserve a martyr to care for them- not a fool like me, who loves all wrong things" (P&G, Part 2, Ch. 1, p, 112)

He knows that he is not an ideal priest. He is aware of his fault and he tries to make some corrections. Still he's completely aware that he's human. He has a troubled conscious which keeps eating him from inside.

Even in loving Brigita, still there is Yin Yang struggle. He loves her too much and she is the remainder of his deadly sins too. In the (P&G, Part 3, Ch. 1), the priest remorsefully confesses: "What was the good of confession when you liked the result of your crime" (176)

Furthermore, the narrator describes Brigita in a way as if she is the true formula of the icon. He says "The world was in her heart already like the small spot of decay in a fruit" (P&G, Part 2, Ch. 1, p, 95). She is a child, she is like a white board, and she is innocent. It can be regarded as the Yin side of the formula. When the narrator says that there is a "small spot of decay" in the heart of Brigita, the spot of decay is that she is the outcome of the Priest's adultery. From this perspective, it denotes the other side of the icon, Yang.

He cannot be defined as an angel. So he is ok with his personality acceptance in the society. Throughout the novel, he is in struggle with balancing his internal Yin Yang formula. It is the characteristics of the Priest that makes him a profound icon i.e. Yin Yang. Throughout the novel, Greene concerns with the Yin Yang struggle inside the priest. From his past life, one knows that Yang was in control. By the passage of the plot, the priest makes the formula upside down. His Yin controls much of his evil side i.e. Yang. Tormented between the two sides of the icon, he is about to slip away the curb from his hand. But at the end of the novel, he restores sympathy by his heroic action.

When he speaks with the pious woman in the prison, he remarks the same idea of Yin Yang "I know- from experience- how much beauty Satan carried down with him when he fell" (Part 2, Ch. 3, p130). He compares himself to Satan how Satan was a beautiful angel, according to Christianity, and then he rebelled against God. By this analogy, he fully reveals his contradictory and struggling existence.

The priest's Sainthood exists only within the border but outside the border he's only an alcoholic man. He knows that his prize is there. He decides not to cross it. The only value of his life remains inside the border. That's why he remains in spite of being coward. The priest's fully consciousness about his nature and the status of his importance makes us admire him.

Some of the critics are trying to interpret his suffering as a kind of masochism, but his suffering is not from his personal choice, it is the suffering of the world where Yang, the evil, is upper-hand. One can take this as an attack on Roman Catholic Church too which requires an incarnated angel in the priests. Above all, still priests are humans. How could one deprive them from the desire and innate nature of their species entirely? The Whisky Priest may be the portrait of Greene's own internal psychological struggle and that is to say the struggle of his intellect and his newly accepted belief. The priest is the most controversial character. Thus he is the subject for multidimensional interpretations.

Third level of Yin Yang interpretation lies in the character of the Lieutenant. The Lieutenant plays the role of the antagonist in the novel. He symbolizes the secular power which is anti-clerical in Mexico. With the creation of the lieutenant, "Greene used his global mobility ... to confront his readers with the unpleasant facts of global power" (Vignery 899). He is brutal and disciplined character. At first he appears as a ruthless and devoid of emotion. But through the course of the plot, he acts as a flat character. The reader finds out that he is also in struggle with his Yin and Yang formula. With the Lieutenant, the novelist does not give us detailed and accurate insights into his personality like the Priest. From the beginning he rejects all sorts of religious beliefs and he does not respect the Priest. He sees the priests as danger to the society. He believes so because of his own childhood experience.

When the novel begins, the Lieutenant is the resemblance of Darwinian Theory of evolution a cold broken piece of earth which is populated things; evolved from animals for no purpose. There is no emotional aspect in his personality. But with the passage of time, the reader finds out that there is a shift in his personality. The lieutenant's dialogue with the boy, Luis shows that he is not a human without the white spot. He treats him in a very friendly manner. He shows him his automatic pistol. He says: "would you like to see my gun?" the Lieutenant asked... "this safety-catch. Lift it. So. Now it's ready to fire" (Part 1, Ch 3, p 57). It is clear that he does his best to make the child happy. His concern is seen, in the Lieutenant's way. Here the ruthless and tough aspect of him fades away for his light humane side, his Yin. The narrator in (Part 2, Ch 4) describes him as:

"He could eliminate from the childhood everything which had made him miserable, all that was poor, superstitious, and corrupt. They deserved nothing less than the truth- a vacant universe and a cooling world, the right to be happy in any way they chose. He was quite prepared to make a massacre for their sakes- first the Church, and then the foreigner and then the politician"(58).

The Lieutenant in *The Power and the Glory*, as Hoskins puts it, "is a mortal enemy of the protagonist and not merely his opponent in debate, although in the end he recognizes

elements of goodness in the Whisky Priest” (267). In (Part 3, Ch 3, p 239) the Lieutenant says: “You are not a bad fellow... If there is anything I can do for you?”

Just as the priest in the prison tells the Lieutenant that he's a good man, here the Lieutenant reverses the speech by saying “you (the Priest) aren't a bad fellow”. They illustrate the intermingled movement of Yin-Yang. In this chapter the Priest and Lieutenant come to a mutual understanding that in spite of their vices, have good intentions. In this section Graham Greene works as a social critic who wants to make an amendment in both secular and religious institution perspectives.

Eventually, without paradoxical feelings, there will be no human. Collecting good and evil in one frame is the typical characteristic of human. Greene presents human as human, not angels. He opposes the idea of the Church that priest are incarnated angels. They are true human being with all vices.

The Lieutenant, as the super power, tries his best to cast away the Church and its organisation all together. On the other hand, the environment is formulated in a way that the Priest is caged as the white spot in the black area. Even inside each of the characters, there is the formula. Also if they are taken as individuals, the former can symbolize 'Yin' and the later 'Yang'. Even at the end of the novel there is not transparent or clear cut triumph of any side. Practically, the Lieutenant is the one who kills the priest, but the desired purpose is not fulfilled. Supposedly the defeated side is the priest, but there is a hope. In short they complete each other.

The Lieutenant shares several attributes of the priest. The soldiers are the members of his parish and he dresses like a priest neatly. His ideal concerning law and order can be seen in his dresses too. “The lieutenant is ironically more priest-like in his habits than the priest himself: he is celibate, highly disciplined in his devotion to the duty of his belief, and ascetic in his conduct of life” (Hoskins 267).

In the Priest's world, still there are shared values. He handles to it, but the lieutenant strives to substitute it with the ideology. The Lieutenant and the Priest provide a foil for each other and one realizes that the Lieutenant needs the priest to absorb his hatred. The existence of one is the base of the balance of the other's existence just like the Yin Yang formula.

Finally, it is not the case, as Orwell writes in *Animal Farm*, "Four legs good, two legs bad!"(22). This kind of generalization is seen in the beginning; the Priest sees the Lieutenant so and vice-versa. Afterward, throughout the novel, this generalization dies out. Graham Greene's philosophy settles down when the principal characters come to terms that human is intermingled formula of good and evil i.e. Yin Yang. Thus one can see, extremism is not in Greene's dictionary. He focuses on the grey area between right and wrong.

IV. Conclusion

There is no doubt that Graham Greene's characterization in his novel is one of the most controversial parts of his art. His bottomless characters are due to the true contradictory view

he holds towards life. His characters, namely the Priest and Lieutenant, subtly depict the author's psychological and religious frame of mind. He emphasizes on subtle psychological aspect of his characters. This had a profound impact on his writings. Thus it can be concluded that the internal opposing forces are good reflection of the Chinese philosophical icon, Yin Yang. This universal conflict is seen especially through the major characters: the protagonist, the priest and the antagonist, the lieutenant. Not only cardinal the characters, but even the idea overshadows the novel as a whole.

Works Cited

Abbotson, Susan C. W. *Masterpieces of 20th-Century American Drama*. London: Greenwood, 2005. PDF.

Cotterell, Arthur. *Encyclopedia of World Mythology*. UK: Paragon, n.d. print.

Durant, Will. *The Story of Philosophy*. New York: Pocket Book, 2016. print.

Gaardar, Jostein. *Sophie's World*. London: Phoenix, 1996. print.

Greene, Graham. *The Power and the Glory*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1990. print.

HOSKINS, ROBERT. *GRAHAM GREENE: AN APPROACH TO THE NOVELS*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1999. book.

Jassam, Aseel Hatif. "Graham Greene's The Power and the Glory: A Religious Study of a Troubled Psyche." *Al- Mustansiriya Journal of Arts* 48 (2008): 31-65. web. 28 6 2019. <<https://www.iasj.net/iasj?func=article&ald=32378>>.

Kundera, Milan. *The Art of the Novel*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005. print.

Liungman, Carl G. *Dictionary of Symbols*. New York: Norton, 1991. print.

Lall, Ramji. *Graham Greene: THE POWER AND THE GLORY*. New Delhi: Raman Brothers, 2009. print.

Martin, Alex and Robert Hill. *Modern Novels*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall, 1996. print.

Mathias Adandé Mehounou and etal. "A Critical Analysis of the Priest in The Power and the Glory by Graham Greene." *IJSELL* 5.4 (2017): 1-11. web. 28 6 2019. <<https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v5-i4/1.pdf>>.

Orwell, George. *Animal Farm*. New York: Everyman's Library, 2014. print.

Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. print.

Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. New York: Dover, 1993. print.

Vingery, Katie, ed. *Adventure in English Literature*. New York: Holt, Rineheart and Winston, 2004.
print.