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Heart of the Matter : As a Psychological Novel

The 'Heart of the Matter' is one of the finest novels of the twentieth century written by Graham Greene. Greene is the leading novelist of twentieth century. He is a great creator of character and his novels are in fact fascinating character studies. His strength lies in delineating characters in depth. He excels in probing the minds of his heroes and other important characters. 'The Heart of the Matter' is the finest creation of Greene. It may be called a psychological novel. The novel is not devoid of action, external action but to study the inner mind of the protagonist, i.e., Scobie. A character is revealed by not only what he does, but also by what he thinks, what he intends, how he reacts etc. In fact, it is the thought of a person that throw light on the real motives of his actions and truer insight in to his character. This is all true of the Heart of the Matter.

The 'Heart of the Matter' is mainly a story of a man, named, Henry Scobie and two women, named Louise and Helen. The scene of the novel is a west African colony and the time is the period of the World War II. Scobie is a conscious police officer. His wife, Louise, is an unhappy and demanding woman whose ambitions and hopes to be accepted by other Brits are shattered when her husband is passed over for promotion. Scobie feels responsible for her misery and blames himself for her solitary life. He tries to borrow money from the bank but he is turned down. His overwhelming sense of pity forces him to accept an immoral offer in order to minimize his wife's sufferings. Shortly after his wife's departure, the survivors of a ship wreck arrive in the colony after a forty day struggle on the sea. Scobie is reminded of his dead child as he tries to comfort a young girl dying. His memories of the painful loss also surface when a nineteen year old widow named Helen Rott arrives too in critical condition. Fortunately she recovers quickly and Scobie who spends a lot of time in her company falls in love with her. Although being painfully aware that they are committing the sin of adultery, they start a passionate love affair. Helen is young, immature and a non believer and she fails to understand Scobie's feelings of guilt because he blames himself for hurting

God with his actions. When Louise unexpectedly returns from her trip, Scobie struggles to keep secret his relationship with Helen. But his wife indulges in to a subtle torture of Scobie as she insists that he should accompany her to mass as a good Catholic ought to do. Scobie is aware that he will be unable to receive communion in a state mortal sin. Scobie develops feeling of insecurity and suspicion about his servant Ali and commits the error to confess this to Yusuf. Shortly after, Ali is killed by teenage thieves. We are led to believe that Scobie blames himself for his killing as he believes that Yusuf arranged the death of Ali. A victim of his own guilty conscience, Scobie decides to free everyone from himself and commits suicide. His last words are: "Dear God I love..."

The novel is an interesting study in psychology. Graham Greene has used plenty of material to unfold the inner recesses of the heart and mind of Scobie. His falling in love with another woman in his married state is a mortal sin according to Roman Catholic Church. He experiences a spiritual crisis. Greene has used stream of consciousness technique to present the mental situation of protagonist. He can not make a confession because in that case Louise would come to know about his affair. He is left with no option but to commit suicide.

Interior monologue is another device used by Greene to present the thoughts of Scobie. In the monologues we come to know about unsatisfactory relationship with his wife. Besides this Scobie's sense of guilt has been brought out most effectively through several interior monologues. There is a fairly long monologue in Scobie's mind when he goes to mass with Louie. In church he feels himself quite lonely. Here the interior monologue reveals the spiritual crisis and misery in the mind of Scobie. He feels that he has no right to receive sacred things.

Scobie's debate with God is a part of psychological analysis in the novel. He justifies his idea of suicide saying that he has been insulting God by going to communion in a state of mortal sin. Greene also makes use of dreams in his novels. Critics count as many as sixty three dreams in his works out of which there are seven dreams in *The Heart of the Matter*. They are all seen by Scobie and mostly in the course of his journey to Bamba, and some of them during his brief stay there. In these dreams Scobie is haunted by his anxiety to arrange for money to meet out the expenses of Louie's passage to South Africa. In one dream, he feels that he has arranged for the money, so he tells Louie, "Louie,

every thing is all right. I've booked your passage.' These dreams are a part of the stream-of-consciousness technique used by the novelist. These dreams also throw light on the inner struggle that is going on in the mind of Scobie about the problem of money.

Hence, *The Heart of the Matter* can certainly be studied as a psychological novel. The chief interest of the novel lies in the study of the inner mind of Scobie. Though, the action of the novel revolves around the sinful behaviour of Scobie, yet it is the motives and intentions of this character that earn pity and sympathy for him.

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