CREED AND CREDIBILITY:
AESTHETIC CONSEQUENCES OF FAITH IN THE FICTION OF GRAHAM GREENE

by
GILLIAN NEWMAN
B.A. (Hons), Rhodes University, 1969

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
Department of English

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
July, 1978
© Gillian Newman, 1978
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of ENGLISH

The University of British Columbia
2075 Wesbrook Place
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1W5

Date 1 September 1978
ABSTRACT

Beliefs a writer holds dear clearly influence the selection and treatment of ideas in his fiction: the purpose of this study is to examine the effect of Greene's religious sensibility on theme, mode, and characterization in a representative selection of his novels.

From the late 30's to the early 50's, Greene's novels deal with dilemmas of faith that beset his Catholic characters. In *The Power and the Glory* (1940) he achieves startling and dramatic effects from the religious paradigms at the core of the novel. After the contentious success of the so-called 'Catholic' trilogy, *The End of the Affair* (1951) illustrates the difficulties to which an overzealous concern with specific issues of doctrine can lead when religious premises conflict directly with artistic requirements. From this point on, the perspective of Greene's novels is less and less specifically religious as he turns to considerations of a wider moral and social kind. In *The Quiet American* (1955), Greene explores the more existentialist questions of the freedom of choice and the responsibility of individual existence; however, his long preoccupation with Catholicism still intrudes in ways detrimental to the established development of the fiction. With the publication of *The Comedians* (1966) it is evident that Greene has moved even further away from the crises of faith that hounded his earlier characters as he focuses on an uncommitted anti-hero surrounded by an assortment of ideologies and forms of commitment.

The development in Greene's religious vision has made him see and respond to the world of experience differently so that the themes:
and techniques of his fiction have changed accordingly. The broadening of his religious concerns has resulted in fiction that is less doctrinaire, less controversial, and perhaps more accessible. The negative presentation of the necessity of any form of faith through an anti-heroic central character has meant some loss of the intensity he could achieve as a novelist of urgent spiritual conflicts in his 'Catholic' period: it has also meant he could transcend specific issues of doctrine that could be so binding on his literary imagination, enabling him to create a more detached and witty representation of his broader religious ideas.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1:</td>
<td>The Power and the Glory</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2:</td>
<td>The End of the Affair</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3:</td>
<td>The Quiet American</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4:</td>
<td>The Comedians</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

With the death of James the religious sense was lost to the English novel, and with the religious sense went the sense of the importance of the human act.

Graham Greene, "Francois Mauriac"

No writer organizes the material of his fiction from a purely aesthetic perspective: beliefs define selection and treatment, and if we aim to see a work as a whole, one of our tasks as reader-critics is to determine the way in which a writer's beliefs inform and affect the raw material of his art.

The writer's task, according to Conrad, is to "render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe . . . to reveal the substance of truth through the senses."¹ Human situations and relationships are the writer's only means of penetrating to some image of a transcendental reality, if this is what he sees as the ultimate meaning behind the visible universe. By its very nature, a religious conviction can lead a writer very easily into the realm of abstract discussion or didacticism, imposing tight external control over a work. The raw material may be manipulated to conform to a vision the writer holds dear. On the other hand, if the writer uses as his reference point a belief that has qualities of survival because the patterns of behaviour it postulates are seen to recur in human experience, such a

belief can be the means of achieving universality. A specific belief can provide a framework for the facts of experience as long as credibility inheres in the events themselves and not in a belief held outside the work by the author. It is this question of how beliefs make a writer see and respond to the world of experience and how artistically viable his religious perspective is that will be my concern in this study of Graham Greene.

Like Conrad, Greene considered one of the tasks of a novelist "to tell the truth as he sees it . . . characters must not go white in the face or tremble like leaves, not because these phrases are clichés, but because they are untrue."² This responsibility to reflect accurately the manifestations of human behaviour implies an artistic responsibility to explore carefully the reasons behind such patterns of behaviour. The Catholic writer, for instance, might work from the concept that original sin is the reason for the corruption observed in individuals and society. Greene's conversion to Catholicism in 1926 did not significantly affect his early writing, but gradually the confirmation of intellectual convictions in his own emotional experiences and observations led him to become increasingly concerned with dilemmas of faith in his novels. It was not until 1938 that Greene began to make overt use of Catholic doctrine in his work. He explains how this came about:

More than ten years had passed since I was received into the church. At that time, as I have

written elsewhere, I had not been emotionally moved, but only intellectually convinced. I was in the habit of formally practising my religion, going to Mass every Sunday and to Confession perhaps once a month. . . . My professional life and my religion were contained in quite separate compartments, and I had no ambition to bring them together. It was 'clumsy life again at her stupid work' which did that; 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.

I think it was under these two influences and the backward and forward sway of my sympathies that I began to examine more closely the effect of faith on action. 

In that year, Greene published *Brighton Rock*, a novel that explores the mysteries of God's grace to the undeserving. This was to become the subject of three subsequent novels—*The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), and *The End of the Affair* (1951)—as he attempted to explain in artistic terms Eliot's paradox that

so far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least, we exist. It is true to say that the glory of man is his capacity for salvation; it is also true to say that his glory is his capacity for damnation.

It is in the exploration of this theme that Greene found his artistic métier and established himself as a novelist of some note. The mystery stories written before this time seem to have been cartoons

---


for mystery stories of a theological kind. In his novels of the late 30's and 40's, the tension between two systems of values, between opposing forces involves a supernatural dimension that extends and deepens the conflicts. Actions take on a new significance for characters as they perceive them affecting their ultimate salvation or damnation.

If we follow James (a writer whom Greene greatly admires), and "grant the artist his subject, his idea, his donnée," our task as critics is to determine the success with which Greene realizes his concept of reality as affected by his beliefs. Beliefs per se cannot be extracted from a work and judged as true or false, good or bad: literary criticism must concern itself with the artistic reality and coherence of the writer's beliefs as they exist in his work. The writer has to reconcile religious and didactic premises with the sense-perceptible and imaginative demands of a work of art: although a novel derives its experience and norms of conduct from the real world, as a work of art its credibility depends on the relevance, consistency, and coherence of the life experience it creates. Therefore, if the writer has to mould philosophical and aesthetic considerations into a unified whole, the critic should concentrate on the interdependence of these aspects and not try to separate them. In arriving at a literary judgement, he ought not to use some external normative standard to determine the strength and weakness of a particular

creed: he should assess the success with which the belief accounts adequately for the experience and situation of the novel's world, whether or not he finds such beliefs personally palatable. With this in mind, I shall examine the effect of Greene's religious convictions on four novels that represent the spectrum of his serious writing—The Power and the Glory (1940), The End of the Affair (1951), The Quiet American (1955), and The Comedians (1966)—to determine the aesthetic consequences of any development in the religious premises of his fiction.
CHAPTER 1

THE POWER AND THE GLORY

The greatest saints and sinners have been made
The proselytes of one another's trade.

Samuel Butler, Miscellaneous Thoughts

In Brighton Rock, Greene discovered the dramatic potential that
a religious dimension could add to his fiction. He achieved a reversal of anticipated values and sympathies in the novel despite the repugnant nature of his villain-hero, Pinkie; such a notion was to be central to the drama of The Power and the Glory. In Brighton Rock, Greene attempted to illustrate "the . . . appalling . . . strangeness of the mercy of God."\(^1\) by confounding conventional notions of 'right and wrong' with the divine distinctions between 'good and evil': in The Power and the Glory he achieves a heightened sense of this same conflict by narrowing the apparent discrepancy between the two different designations. The mercy of God is still strange but not appallingly so. Brighton Rock is the first of Greene's novels to explore the possibilities of a religious theme within the conventional structure and devices of a thriller; The Power and the Glory utilizes thriller devices to dramatize a fiction that is rooted and grounded in an archetypal religious framework of pursuit, betrayal,

\(^1\) Brighton Rock (1938; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1977), p. 246. All subsequent references to Greene's novels will be taken from the Penguin editions and will be documented parenthetically within the text.
and death, the very impact of the novel proceeding from the incongruities that constantly appear in the juxtaposition of the tale with its model. Such a disparity establishes the ironic tone of the novel's structure and texture and is the paradigm from which all else proceeds.

The story relies for its effect on the structure following closely the pattern of events in the story of Christ's Passion. Like Christ, the priest is hounded by officialdom and welcomed by the common people; but, unlike Christ, who openly and boldly preached and taught, the priest exists in constant fear of capture, and can only be true to his vocation furtively, through an inner compulsion he cannot deny. This undercover existence is first apparent in the priest's encounter with Mr. Tench who discovers that the lurid book he carries with him is actually a breviary wrapped in the cover of a book suggestively entitled *La Eterna Mártrir*. His sense of vocation, weak and fearful as it is, becomes apparent for the first time when he misses an easy opportunity to escape the state in order to minister to a dying woman "as though unwillingly he had been summoned to an occasion he couldn't pass by" (p. 16). The structural parallels to the events leading to Christ's crucifixion become more apparent as the legally innocent priest is aligned with a common criminal by the advocates of the status quo: on the wall in the lieutenant's office is a "picture of James Calver, wanted in the U.S. for bank robbery and homicide" (p. 21); nearby hangs the picture of the priest at his first communion party, his face ringed, halo-like, to stand out from the surrounding crowd. The criminal's name, the hanging of the two portraits
together, and the suggestions of the Last Supper in the picture of the priest re-inforce structurally and semantically the gradually developing echoes of the Christian story, with parallels and contrasts constantly juxtaposed to reveal ironically the priest's shortcomings and strengths.

When the priest arrives at a small village looking for rest and drink during his time of escape and hiding, he is recognized and eagerly welcomed because of his role as a priest. He realizes he cannot escape his vocation easily, and cries out angrily when he is pestered to hear confession and celebrate mass: "I am your servant" (p. 45). Exhausted from his travels and angry at having no rest and peace, the priest breaks down and weeps; the old man sees him crying and announces to the villagers: "He is a very holy father. There he is in my hut now weeping for our sins" (p. 45), drawing yet another ironic parallel of the priest to Christ who gazed over Jerusalem and wept for her sins. The events preceding the crucifixion are further paralleled by the sound of a cock crowing in María's village: during the tension of a potential betrayal scene, as the lieutenant pleads with the villagers to reveal the whereabouts of the priest, a cock is heard to crow twice. The third cock-crow is heard only later as the priest and the mestizo near the village of Carmen where the priest knows that he will be betrayed to the authorities by his companion whom he has already likened in his own mind to Judas. "Across the dark hut (he) saw the yellow malarial eyes of the mestizo watching him. Christ would not have found Judas sleeping in the garden: Judas could watch more than one hour" (p. 92).
Christ-like, the priest rides a mule, but he sees no parallel between himself and the model whose story he involuntarily re-enacts. He can only see later his failings when he observes that his ride back to the capital, prior to execution, is "no triumphal procession" (p. 200). Like Christ, he is given no fair trial, yet he is told after a day in prison, "you've been tried and found guilty" (p. 205). After his part in the sentencing, the lieutenant echoes the sentiments of Pilate at Christ's condemnation when he walks firmly away "as if he were saying at every step 'I have done what I have done!'" (p. 220).

The man whom he recognizes as Judas betrays him to the authorities, but the priest feels no anger or resentment towards him as he feels no indignation against his murderers before his execution: he can only mutter feebly "a word that sounded like 'Excuse'" (p. 216), echoing obscurely the final plea for forgiveness of his murderers that Christ uttered at his crucifixion. The structure of the plot is built around such parallels that establish a delicate balance of similarity and difference between the original and its copy. The similarities create startling and powerful echoes; the differences make these echoes credible and generate patterns of irony in structure, character, and texture essential to the meaning of the novel. The Passion paradigm sets up expectations that are not met or are met in ways quite different from those anticipated, but it is the very presence of the pattern that gives the actual outcomes their significance, either in their divergence from it or in their identity with it. The spiritual growth of the priest illustrates this concept as it occurs through a series of events and experiences whose actual and anticipated
outcomes are noticeably disparate.

Only through his exposure to and experience of human sin does the priest learn the full meaning of divine love and compassion. While protected from the realities of suffering in his role as an overfed and adulated priest, he knows only the longings of pride and ambition: exposed to the raw experience of the peasants and forced to face the horror of his venial and mortal sins, the priest begins to understand the selflessness and commitment required in his vocation and his own unworthiness to fulfill such a role. During his night in jail, in the midst of filth and sordidness, the priest experiences his first real sense of community and love, realizing how much he shares with the guilty and sinful around him.

That was another mystery: it sometimes seemed to him that venial sins--impatience, an important lie, pride, a neglected opportunity--cut you off from grace more completely than the worst sins of all. Then, in his innocence, he had felt no love for anyone; now, in his corruption he had learnt ... (p. 139)

What he learns is not verbalized; it becomes apparent through his actions as the novel proceeds. Ironically, the abolition of Catholicism in this Mexican state has not seen the termination of religious belief: for the priest it has meant the end of his secular ambition to advance in the hierarchy of the church and the beginning of his real faith in the God he has misrepresented for so long. While in power, the priest, like the church he represents, is seduced by power and wealth and status: "the trite religious word upon the tongue, the joke to ease the way, the ready acceptance of other people's homage" (p. 22) is his daily round. The spiritual strength of the
church seems to be in inverse relation to its material well-being, functioning best when it is on the side of the oppressed, not the powerful, and when it makes demands on its priests, not when it confers bounties on them. Thus, instead of stamping out the last vestiges of the faithful in outlawing the church, the state has encouraged the real growth of one of its most unlikely champions by curbing all the mechanical and hierarchical trappings of the church.

When we first meet the priest, he is still clinging to the vestiges of his old life in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. He carries his breviary disguised as a popular novel, has an altar stone which he carries for use in celebrating mass, and keeps a scrap of paper testifying to his priestly ordination. Without these he feels he will be nothing, and yet it is only as he discards these trappings one by one that he finally comes to face the stark reality of his vocation, realizing that the church is much more than her symbols and rituals. Thoughts of evading capture and escaping to the asylum of a sympathetic state motivate the priest's movements through the course of the novel's action, believing, as he does, that crossing the border means a return to freedom and the opportunity to practise his vocation in safety. Instead he discovers how easy it is to be enticed by comfort and corruption, and realizes the temporality and brittleness of such a life: "The shiny magazine leaves crackled as they turned" and "a tulipan tree blossomed and faded daily at the gate" (p. 161) as he takes refuge at the Lehr's. With their concern for propriety and order, the Lehrs represent another version of the good life the priest had known. As a Lutheran, Mr. Lehr is quick to criticize the
hypocrisy of the Catholic Church, indulging its desire for luxury while the people starve, yet he himself is "cunning in the defence of the good life" (p. 161). As the priest indulges in the little luxuries offered him," he could feel the old life hardening around him like a habit . . . a stony cast" (p. 167) while "memory was like a hand, pulling away the cast, exposing him" (p. 168). The time he spends with the Lehrs and his contact with the corruption of the people practising their faith in relative comfort contribute to the necessary disillusionment the priest has to experience before returning to the state where he is outlawed, preparing him for his final capture which he can no longer resist or avoid. Earlier he had felt that "he wasn't ready yet for the final surrender," deluding himself with the opportunities inherent in political freedom and trying "to bribe God with promises of firmness" (p. 83). Yet, paradoxically, it is only in his final capture that he is finally free, free to choose death, however unwillingly, as his only viable alternative, and free for the first time to confront openly the lieutenant, representative of the opposing regime.

The reality of the priest's last moments as he is helped to the execution wall because "his legs were not fully under his control" (p. 216), contrasts vividly with the romantic and unreal death of the martyr, Juan, whose pious story has been woven through the action of the plot in stark contrast to the weak-kneed progress of the priest towards death. While still a boy, young Juan "was noted for his humility and piety" (p. 26), and practises a faith that is ludicrous in its perfection. He is never tempted, he never does wrong, and he
chooses to "creep away with a holy picture-book" (p. 26) instead of playing with other children. While "saint" Juan piously looks towards death in consciousness of his martyrdom and sainthood, "calm and happy and smiling at the Chief of Police" (p. 217), the priest is conscious only of his own sin and inadequacy, feeling finally that "only one thing that counted--to be a saint" was beyond him and that he would have "to go to God empty-handed, with nothing done at all" (p. 210). However, the picture of actual sainthood implicit in the priest's death, with all its admissions of the limitations of fallen human nature, becomes far more plausible by contrast, and certainly impresses and affects the boy, Luis, more deeply than the artifically heroic death of the "ideal" saint, whose story, ironically, had to be smuggled illegally into the state in order to be read as an example of piety and purity. The little girls to whom the story is read fondly imagine that "this was life" while the mother impresses upon them that the whiskey priest was "a traitor to God" (p. 26).

It is "a quintessential irony that only through his sin does the priest reach anything like the selflessness and devotion he feels to be required of the saint." Only through deprivation and suffering can the priest grow in understanding of his own unworthiness and need of grace and thereby become something of a saint as he finally gives up his life for his faith. By means of structural contrasts and parallels throughout the novel--implicitly through the tenuous likening

---

of the priest to Christ, and explicitly through the contrasts of his life to that of an "ideal" saint's--Greene achieves a dimension that a bald narration of action could never accomplish. The tension of the priest's attempt to escape the lieutenant is heightened as we recognize it as an attempt to flee from God and martyrdom. It is the interweaving of the natural and supernatural pursuit, echoed against Christ's passion and the idealized Juan's imitation of it, that provides the paradoxes and ironies of structure central to the novel's meaning.

The constant juxtaposing of similarities and differences in the movement of the priest with the last episodes in Christ's life establishes the pattern of the novel as one of counterpointed opposites. The action of the novel is structured around the three meetings of the lieutenant and the priest: at their first meeting in a village, the lieutenant neither recognizes nor arrests the priest; at the second meeting in the capital, he arrests the priest but does not recognize him; at the third and final meeting, the lieutenant arrests the priest because he has recognized him and the pursuit is thus over. As the action depends for its advancement on these movements of convergence and separation, so the characters and vocations of the two are seen to be ironically alike in their differences. This link is first forged in the reader's mind in chapter one when the priest sees himself "like the king of a West African

tribe, the slave of his people, who may not even lie down in case the winds should fail" (p. 19). Immediately after this we meet the lieutenant, walking in front of his men as they return to the capital, "with an air of bitter distaste. He might have been chained to them unwillingly" (p. 20). The link to the priest is further forged by seeing in the lieutenant "something of a priest in his intent observant walk" and noticing that his room is "as comfortless as a prison or a monastic cell" (p. 24). Both men are described on separate occasions as looking like a "dark" or a "black question-mark" (pp. 15 and 35), and both experience similar sentiments of longing they find difficult to express: on enquiring into the well-being of his illegitimate daughter, the priest's "heart beat with its secret love" (p. 62); earlier the lieutenant had walked away after his awkward encounter with Luis "carrying his secret of love" (p. 56). Both see Brigitta as a symbol of their own hope: the lieutenant describes her as being "worth more than the Pope in Rome" (p. 75) as he tries to persuade the villagers to divulge the priest's whereabouts so that their children might be freed from the bondage of Catholicism in the state; the priest sees his attitude to Brigitta as being "more important than a whole continent" (p. 82) when he muses over the differences between the political ideology for the state and the religious concern for the individual. The fact that each uses as a point of comparison an aspect of the other's philosophy is further evidence of Greene's ironic method of highlighting the difference between the two by juxtaposing and often equating their disparate ideologies and roles. In fact, the lieutenant often appears to be
everything that a priest should be. He is fired with a sense of mission and is determined to abolish completely the trappings of hypocrisy he associates with the church, remembering the "demands made from the altar steps by men who didn't know the meaning of sacrifice" (p. 22). He thinks of himself as a mystic who has a certainty of vacancy instead of God, and believes "against the evidence of his senses in the cold empty ether...spaces" (p. 25). He is willing to sacrifice anything for the welfare of his society, especially for the children: "it was for these he was fighting. He would eliminate from their childhood everything which had made him miserable, all that was poor, superstitious, and corrupt" (p. 58). His pity and love for the oppressed and poor are ironically apparent in his acts of kindness towards the priest, representative of the oppressor he hates so vehemently. Unaware of the priest's real identity, he gives him five pesos on his release from prison, a gift that astonishes the priest who can only blurt out, "You're a good man" (p. 140). After the lieutenant has captured the priest and discovered how he had been deceived by him on two previous occasions, he is still moved to compassion by the priest's plight: the night before his execution he goes personally to fetch Father José to hear the priest's final confession, and brings him a bottle of brandy to calm his nerves, both actions being against the law. The priest is also seen as a kind, compassionate man (having recognized the mestizo as his potential betrayer, he still sacrifices his mule to the man and walks the stony road with bleeding feet), but Greene is careful to show how different is his motivation and source of conviction. Whereas the
lieutenant is moved by the sight of suffering and motivated by the desire to
create a free and contented society on earth, the priest is moved by
the recognition of the common sinfulness of man and his awareness of
the importance of each individual in God's sight:

Christ had died for this man too: how could he pre­tend with his pride and lust and cowardice to be any
more worthy of that death than the half-caste? This
man intended to betray him for money which he needed,
and he betrayed God for what? Not even for real
lust. (p. 99)

This same sense moves him to return in high fever to protect the old
woman he had left alone on the plateau when he remembers the American
gunman at large:

He was tormented by ideas; it wasn't only the woman:
he was responsible for the American as well: the two
faces--his own and the gunman's--were hanging to­gether on the police station wall, as if they were
brothers in a family portrait gallery. You didn't
put temptation in a brother's way. (p. 156)

The priest, in his fall from power and authority, can share and under­stand the suffering from which he had separated himself in his posi­tion of privilege in the church. The lieutenant, in his rise to au­thority, is determined to eradicate the fear and suffering engendered
by the church, but can only replace it with a totalitarian regime that
de­pends for its continuance on autocratic authority and fear. He
wants to abolish from society every trace of corruption that he
associates with the corrupt, established church, but he cannot recog­nize that the seeds of corruption exist in human nature regardless of
the established power. He believes that changing social conditions,
educating people to develop their reasoning powers, and abolishing
superstition will wipe out all misery and suffering from society.
Corruption comes from outside of man, he believes, and he longs to wall in his land "with steel until he had eradicated from it every-thing which reminded him of how it had once appeared to a miserable child" (p. 25). The priest, on the other hand, recognizes the limita-tions of man's nature, and knows that no amount of social reform can create a perfect society. His concern is that man should recog-nize his innate sinfulness and thus see his need of God above all else. He has no faith in the healing power of social change: the same corruptions will remain but in new leaders and in new forms.

While listening to the mestizo's confession, he muses:

Man was so limited he hadn't even the ingenuity to invent a new vice: the animals knew as much. It was for this world that Christ had died; the more evil you saw and heard about you, the greater glory lay around the death. It was too easy to die for what was good or beautiful, for home or children or a civilization—it needed a God to die for the half-hearted and the corrupt. (p. 97)

Because of this understanding, the priest cannot feel the hatred for his oppressors and betrayers that the lieutenant feels, knowing the corruption that tempts the powerful: "he bore no grudge because he expected nothing else of anything human" (p. 198). It is this under-standing of his own sinfulness that gives him the humility the lieu-tenant does not display.

The lieutenant's delusion of a society purged of impurity is made dramatically and ironically manifest when the priest attempts to buy wine in the capital. Disguised in a shabby drill suit, he has no dif-ficulty in discovering a source of illicit drink through the governor's cousin, a high-ranking representative of the state on whose behalf the
priest is arrested later for possession of illicit liquor. The purity of the priest's intention and his measure of self-sacrifice in obtaining the wine is poignantly illustrated through his helpless witnessing of the Governor's cousin and the jefe indulging themselves on the wine he has purchased at such a high price for use in celebrating mass. Ironically, the taste of the wine (whose purpose is unknown to him) reminds the jefe sentimentally of taking communion wine in the church as a child. After his arrest, the priest is questioned cautiously by the sergeant about the source of the spirits he had purchased, and treated approvingly for not identifying the seller who is already well-known. The fallacy of the lieutenant's vision of a pure state, purged of the corruptive influences of the church, is apparent.

The full force of the corruption under a militantly secular authority provides an early dramatic enactment of the discussion the lieutenant and the priest have, after the final capture, about the nature and use of power. The priest points out to the lieutenant that the goodness of his secular ideology depends on the goodness of its ruling agents; once corrupt men are in power, "you'll have all the old starvation, beating, get-rich-anyhow" (p. 195). By contrast, he says, God remains the same as he is divine and perfect, despite the corruption or cowardliness of his ministers. He uses himself as an example of such poor representation, and yet, ironically, it is his actions, far more than the strong, well-intentioned lieutenant, representative of the secular, humanist ideology, which have the most marked effect on the largely secular bystanders in the final analysis. From the beginning, it is the connection of these bystanders to the
central action that re-inforces or highlights the similarities and differences between the priest and the lieutenant. It is the noticeable effect that the priest has on this cross-section of individuals that makes convincing the unconscious power of his stand.

In Part I, these bystanders are introduced one by one through the first three chapters that cover 'The Port', 'The Capital', and 'The River', and are linked by structural contiguity in the final chapter of this section, 'The Bystanders'. These bystanders represent various forms of isolation, loneliness, and pain, and are linked to the priest and the lieutenant in their common sense of desertion. Going back to his room after the priest leaves, Mr. Tench reflects that "loneliness forced him there, vacancy. But he was as accustomed to both as to his own face in the glass" (p. 18). The boy, Luis, shifts restlessly apart from his sisters as he hears his mother read the story of Saint Juan, and later his father reflects on "the extent of their abandonment" (p. 28). Father José shuffles helplessly back to his nagging wife as the local children taunt him, thinking ruefully that "there was no respect anywhere left for him in his home, in the town, in the whole abandoned star" (p. 30). Mr. and Mrs. Fellows, too, experience this same sense of abandonment and isolation: "They were companions cut off from all their world: there was no meaning anywhere outside their own hearts" (p. 39). The links are forged between the bystanders first through this sense of isolation, and in the next section through the experience or recognition of pain: "Mr. Tench was used to pain: it was his profession" (p. 47); Coral, "in her woman's pain" (p. 54), stares at the crosses the priest has chalked on the
barn floor; and the lieutenant, attempting a gesture of affection towards the boy, Luis, "saw him flinch away with the pain" (p. 58).

The pain Father José experiences as a renegade priest contrasts sharply with the suffering the whiskey priest experiences in his attempts to be faithful to his vocation. He and the whiskey priest have moved in quite opposite directions since the days when the church was in power: in contrast to the ambitious complacency of the whiskey priest, Father José had been "so humble that he was ready to accept any amount of mockery" (p. 94) and had been "filled with an overwhelming sense of God" (p. 95); having chosen marriage in preference to execution, Father José lives a wretched and tormented life, taunted by the local children, unable to trust anyone, and feeling utterly abandoned and alone in the "contempt and safety" (p. 49) he has chosen. He illustrates the solution the lieutenant sees to the hypocrisy of the church: "leave the living witness to the weakness of their faith" (p. 25). Yet Greene paints him with sympathy as a man who feels himself so far steeped in sin that to repent is impossible. He is the foil to the whiskey priest who chooses persecution above safety and is willing to sacrifice his own life rather than compromise his faith.

The two girls, Coral and Brigitta, are contrasted in their natures and in their responses to the priest. Coral has "a look of immense responsibility" (p. 33), and readily takes over from her father in organizing a hideout for the priest and committing herself to his protection. His own daughter, Brigitta, is also seen as a girl that belies her years, but instead of being aged by responsibility, the priest recognizes in her "a devilry and malice beyond her age."
A young woman stared out of the child's eyes" (p. 63). Seeing her next to the rubbish heap at his departure was "like seeing his own mortal sin look back at him, without contrition" (p. 67); she is the being who reminds and convicts him of his fallen nature while arousing in him a love of his own kind that he had not known before. She moves him to the point of risking his own damnation for her salvation: "O God, give me any kind of death--without contrition, in a state of sin--only save this child" (p. 82). While he laments the corruption already evident in his own child, and recognizes her easy ability to betray him to the authorities, he admires the innocent maturity of Coral and relies on her sense of responsibility to protect him. When he returns to the banana station and finds it deserted, "he realized how much he had counted on this child" (p. 141); in his final dream it is Coral who serves him wine at the altar and interprets for him the coded message he hears as the good news he is responsible for carrying.

Through their common experience of isolation and pain, the bystanders are linked to the central, archetypal story of pursuit, betrayal, and death. These motifs, that are linked structurally and thematically by echoing or paralleling each other, are brought together dramatically during the priest's overnight experience in jail, where the story of his own life appears in microcosm: a woman is jailed because of the rules of religious intolerance, an old man bewails his fate of having an illegitimate child that hates him, and in the squalour of the cell, a couple copulates indulgently. This episode forms a turning point in the novel as the priest becomes aware of the nature of divine compassion for the sinful and guilty.
His own compassion is manifest in the way he endures cramp in order that the old man may sleep quietly on his shoulder, and his effect on his fellow prisoners, who do not reveal his real identity to the sergeant next morning, presages the effect that he has on the bystanders in the end. His faith is concretely condoned: the lieutenant and his devotee, Luis, are significantly affected by the priest. For the lieutenant, "the dynamic love which used to move his trigger-finger felt flat and dead" (p. 220), and, with the hunt over, "he felt without a purpose, as if life had drained out of the world" (p. 207). This feeling is an ironic echo of the explanation the priest gives to the Governor's cousin for his tears as he watches the communion wine, the symbol of Christ's blood, disappear: "I see . . . all the hope of the world draining away" (p. 133). Having heard of the shooting of the priest who had taken shelter in their house for twenty-four hours, Luis feels an attraction to the priest and a repulsion from the formerly-admired lieutenant. Luis recognizes the cruelty of killing a man who has committed no civil crime other than believing in God and practising his vocation, and sees the lieutenant as the representative of a heartless order. Having originally followed the soldiers with "excited and hopeful eyes" (p. 52), Luis realizes, watching the lieutenant march by while thinking of dead heroes, that "it was people like the man out there who killed them. He felt deceived" (p. 220), and indicates his new-found insights by spitting on the lieutenant's rifle butt. This incident prepares Luis to take on the role of Coral when a new fugitive priest seeks asylum in their home that night. Through Mrs. Fellows we learn that Coral had asked strange questions and
behaved very differently after her contact with the priest, despite her father's recognition that she shared "more in common with the lieutenant" (p. 35). Even Mr. Tench feels an "appalling sense of loneliness" after witnessing the death of the priest, remembering that "the little fellow had spoken English and knew about his children. He felt deserted" (p. 217). Paradoxically, it is the priest's humanity that finally achieves a triumph for the spiritual. But the very similarities in attitude and the hope for others that the priest and lieutenant share are what create the delicate balance of tension throughout the novel, achieving a dialectic of the sacred and the secular in concrete, visible form.

With the pattern of Christ's persecution, betrayal, and death as the paradigm for the relationships and conflicts of the novel, Greene has established the central focus of his work, and created a balance of similarity and contrast in structure, characterization, and style that gives the novel its unity and effect. The paradigm establishes the tension between events as they appear and actually are, between characters who are different despite their similarities, and between expectations and actual outcomes. The model is not used didactically: its viability in the fiction is apparent in the probable and logical sequence of action within a setting that forms and defines the characters and attitudes of the priest and the lieutenant. The whiskey priest retains the reader's sympathy throughout because, as Alan Grob concludes, "however grave the priest's offenses, they are to us substantially mitigated by hardship and finally absolved by the heroic
fidelity of his last acts." The priest's very humility, emanating from his sense of total inadequacy for the part he is called to play, redeems him for the kingdom to whose power and glory he has unconsciously served as witness.

The Catholic paradigm of The Power and the Glory provides the terms for the conflicts, pursuits, betrayals, and sacrifices central to its narrative, theme, and structure. The drama of the novel springs not only from the action but also from the paradox of the sinner as saint, the whiskey priest's weakness making his ultimate decision for martyrdom more impressive than if he had been a saintly man. The heroic mode of the novel contributes to its powerful impact despite, or even because of, the unheroic character of the priest. Greene achieves textual richness and depth from the specific Catholic focus of the novel so that the Catholicism presented is

not a body of belief requiring exposition and demanding categorical assent or dissent, but a system of concepts, a source of situations and a reservoir of symbols with which he (Greene) can order and dramatize certain intuitions about the nature of human experience.5

In seeing the whiskey priest as sinner-saint and the lieutenant as altruist-executioner, Greene dramatizes the conflicts within each character as well as the conflicts that arise from their similar yet


different ideologies. The focus on this central antithesis within an environment of religious persecution that shapes and defines it gives the novel its aesthetic unity and intensity.
CHAPTER 2

THE END OF THE AFFAIR

The greatest saints have been men with more than a normal capacity for evil.

Graham Greene, "Frederick Rolfe: Edwardian Inferno"

The paradigmatic qualities of The Power and the Glory gave way to a more realistic approach in Greene's next novel, The Heart of the Matter (1948). This work deals with the moral and psychological effect of adultery on the central character, Scobie, whose guilt as a believing Catholic, and whose sense of pity for the two women he is hurting, lead him finally to despair and suicide. This novel completed the so-called 'trilogy' of Greene's Catholic novels, but, in fact, the cycle was not complete: the notion of the sanctified sinner implicit in The Power and the Glory was to become the explicit theme of his next novel, The End of the Affair (1951). Whereas the effect of The Power and the Glory arises directly from the counterpointing, paradoxes, and ironies that issue from the religious motif at its centre, the problems of The End of the Affair arise directly from the intrusion of religious dogma into the imaginative bounds of the realistic novel. When Greene introduces God as a character and solves human problems by grace, as he does in The End of the Affair, he moves out of the domain of the novel and into an area better handled discursively by theologians. The problems of The End of the Affair can be attributed to the unsuccessful reconciliation of
religious convictions and didactic premises to the realistic and sense-perceptible requirements of the novel.

An author is essentially free to write of anything he wishes, but once having set the creative process to work, he must allow characters the freedom to think, decide, and act according to their own natures and not according to a preconceived plan of his own. Characters cannot be manipulated by an author into positions or actions that are effective for his religious statement but improbable artistically. Characters in *The End of the Affair* are almost programmed to move in a certain direction because of the religious premises propelling the novel forward: Sarah's conversion, for instance, is in part attributed to her Catholic baptism as an infant. Although such an argument may be doctrinally defendable, it creates problems of credibility for a reader who demands imaginatively probable reasons and resolutions in a novel. Psychological complexity cannot be sacrificed to the claims of orthodoxy. Predestination takes over from choice, characters exist to embody theological doctrines, and thus emerge as puppets being awkwardly handled to illustrate a preconceived pattern of events. Glicksberg states the problem as follows:

> If a novel is to retain its underlying dramatic power, if it is to give a faithful and dynamic portrait of the dilemmas of the human situation, it must focus attention on the contradictions of human nature, its irrational impulses, the effort of people to live up to their faith, etc. otherwise the novel turns into a religious tract in which the dogma is theologically sound but artistically useless.¹

In *The End of the Affair*, Greene creates for himself the difficulty of dramatizing Sarah's internal conflicts and spiritual struggle, and eliminates fairly early in the progress of the novel the more easily depictable external conflicts with Bendrix. After her passionate meetings with her lover, it is difficult to infuse her struggles to love God and to come to terms with Him with the same immediacy and urgency of her actual human contact with Bendrix. Sarah's keeping of a diary is the means Greene chooses to reveal something of her struggle, but this method is manipulated too conveniently for credibility: it is not a little surprising that Sarah should not notice the absence of so intimate and precious a possession, and that her personal maid, entrusted with varying responsibilities (see p. 125), should happily hand over the document to a stranger.

Greene ingeniously develops the idea of the existence of a continuum of human-divine love, suggesting that Sarah's desire for God is a natural extension of her desire for her lover. Caught up as she is with passions of the flesh, Sarah frequently makes mention of the carnal aspects of Christ's image—"could anybody love him or hate him if he hadn't got a body?" (p. 112). Bendrix unconsciously reinforces this notion of the continuum between the two apparently opposite forms of love when he writes that "her abandonment touched that strange mathematical point of endlessness, a point with no width, occupying no space" (p. 51). Ironically, he also speaks of the similarities between human and divine love from the opposite extreme, using the example of the Old Testament writers, who were "fond of using the words 'a jealous God', and perhaps it was their rough and
oblique way of expressing belief in the love of God for man" (p. 42).

Although such notions are designed to prepare the reader for Sarah's transference of allegiance, Bendix is unprepared for the change and so naturally assumes that the scrap of paper discarded by Sarah is part of a letter written to her new lover:

I have no need to write to you or talk to you, you know everything before I can speak, but when one loves, one feels the need to use the same old ways one has always used. I know I am only beginning to love, but already I want to abandon everything, everybody but you; only fear and habit prevent me. Dear...... (p. 53).

Such an assumption is also a natural consequence of Sarah's consistent reference to Maurice as 'You'--"She had always called me 'you'" (p. 18)--and is obviously designed by Greene to re-inforce the idea that Sarah's conversion is not unlike an affair. However, the acceptability of such an idea is undermined by the precarious nature of the Sarah-Maurice affair, which runs such an uneven, unhappy course for much of its duration that it gives little promise of permanence and satisfaction if Sarah's subsequent "affair" with God is to be merely a natural extension of her affair with Bendix. The very word affair denotes something temporary, and has connotations of doubts, misunderstandings, resentments, and jealousies. Bendix expresses this misgiving when he speaks of "the word affair with its suggestions of a beginning and an end" (p. 57). Having established the idea of this continuum to make Sarah's commitment credible, to make her struggles dramatizable in a human-like way, Greene in fact minimizes the force and effect of divine love, and, by making Sarah give up Maurice for God, in fact implies that carnal and divine love are
mutually exclusive or even interchangeable, and not a shading of one into the other. Compare the similar yet different situation in *The Power and the Glory* where the priest's experience of corrupt human love leads him to a deeper understanding of the nature and extent of God's love for man and how this realization is consequently reflected in his concern for the human beings around him. There is no implication of discontinuity: love of God and love of man are intimately related.

The novel is essentially a record of Bendrix's reluctant move towards faith, but, because his growth is directly dependent on what happens to Sarah, it is essential that Sarah's conversion be credible and not a weak link in the chain of events. However, the process of Sarah's self-surrender is inadequately prepared for. Bendrix tells us that she was able to throw herself into her affair with him with a great sense of abandonment and "unhaunted by guilt. In her view when a thing was done, it was done: remorse died with the act" (p. 50). Her moral logic is confused: she feels a strong obligation as Henry's wife not to desert him (are we meant to believe that, like her baptism, she has been conditioned by reception of a sacrament?), yet she suffers no guilt or remorse in committing adultery. "The moment only mattered" (p. 51) for her, and she lives neither on memory nor hope. Bendrix is not her first lover, and her desire for him is so strong that "sometimes she would come in between two queues, and we would make love between the greengrocer's and the butcher's" (p. 34). Yet this is the same women that Parkis revered, and of whom the priest can say, "She was a good woman" (p. 180). There seems to
be a peculiar discrepancy here between goodness and virtue. The apparently arbitrary nature of the grace extended to Sarah undermines its dramatic power in the novel: in life one may accept the mysterious ways of God, but in fiction they must be explicable in moral logic or at least in terms of psychological need. Greene's conviction that "the greatest saints have been men with more than a normal capacity for evil" made him create a saint of Sarah with insufficient reason to justify such an action in terms of the logic the novel sets up for itself. Her easy surrender and response to human love is meant to be seen as a presage of her surrender to divine love, but when Bendrix says to her, "you simply haven't caught up yet on ordinary human emotions" (p. 55), he is summing her up more accurately than Greene probably intends. The priest may believe that Bendrix has "a very strange set of values" (p. 155), but they are certainly understandable in human terms: it is Sarah's values that are strange.

Two things are puzzling about Sarah's vow to God during the bombing raid. First, she has never shown any guilt for her way of life (cf. pp. 50 and 51 quoted earlier), nor has she expressed a need for some sort of spiritual identification. Why should she suddenly and unexpectedly make such a sacrificial promise to God? That she was baptised a Catholic as a two-year old is possibly meant to explain the dormant conviction ready to spring to life, but this is not

---

sufficient cause or explanation psychologically. Bendrix repeatedly affirms Sarah's habit of living for the moment only; therefore, why should Sarah make a vow in a moment of crisis and remember it and struggle to maintain it once the crisis is over? She makes the vow on the assumption that Bendrix is dead, and when he walks into the room hurt but alive, she accepts his 'return' as a miracle. With no previous history of spiritual longing or curiosity (as far as we are told), it is surprising that Sarah so blindly accepts the situation as a 'miracle' instead of realizing that it was a misconception of a moment perfectly explicable in rational terms afterwards: Bendrix had merely been knocked unconscious. She herself recognizes later the possibility that her perception was due to "hysteria" (p. 94).

Sarah perseveres with her commitment to God despite the controversial evidence of an apparent 'miracle', and despite her strongly sensual nature. Her relationship with God offers her no apparent pleasure or abiding peace—"pain belongs to You as happiness never does" (p. 122)—and the suffering expressed in her diary certainly indicates that she was happier sinning than in a state of grace. Because of this lack of any strong psychological incentive, Sarah's persistence in the relationship is insufficiently explained. There seems little rational or emotional basis for continuing her commitment, and this inability to resist it or make a reasonable choice about it is re-inforced by the imagery of infection used to describe Sarah's state. She tells Bendrix in a letter that she "has caught belief like a disease" (p. 147); Mrs. Bertram tells him that she had always hoped Sarah's baptism "would 'take'. Like vaccination" (p. 164),
while Henry likens it to "an infection" (p. 187). The one possibility of presenting a viable rational alternative to faith to force Sarah into examining her own reasons for belief is not given a fair hearing. Smythe, the rationalist preacher, is never allowed to put forward a cogent case for atheism, thus undermining the dramatic power Sarah's leap of faith could have if she had opted for it despite rigorous rationalist argument. The priest who appears after Sarah's death seems indifferent or opposed to argument and explanation: "Father Crompton produced a formula. He laid it down like a bank note. 'We recognize the baptism of desire'" (p. 153), so that later Bendrix can say, "I believe I was annoyed chiefly by his complacency, the sense that nothing intellectual could ever trouble him" (p. 180). Perhaps Greene wanted to illustrate the belief that reason is ultimately irrelevant to faith, a fact possibly true to faith in life, but insufficient for the credibility of faith in fiction. In fiction it is not sufficient to be given a fait accompli; it is the process of reaching that end that gives a novel its essential conflict and credibility. Without a rational basis for faith in fiction, conviction can appear to be delusion. Sarah's sanctity finally rests on statement rather than demonstration and relies for its credibility on an extra-fictional understanding of Catholic doctrine. It seems that the basic credibility of the novel suffers as a result of detaching Sarah from her established logic as a personality and manipulating her to serve a function within the author's intentions but outside her authenticity as a character. There has been insufficient portrayal of Sarah's 'saintly' life to prepare for her miraculous powers, and to convince
us imaginatively rather than doctrinally of the concept of a 'sanctified sinner'. Morton Dauwen Zabel states the problem of such fiction succinctly:

Grace is always held in reserve as a principle of salvation, a principle which soon becomes too arbitrary and convenient to find justification in conduct or purpose. It descends like a Christianized deus ex machina to redeem its vessels when they have driven themselves into the impasse or sacrilege that would, on moral grounds alone, be sufficient to damn them . . . grace is called upon to do the work that normally would be assigned to moral logic and nemesis. 

Or, as the reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement at the time of the novel's publication put it perhaps more wryly:

The common-sense point of view is surely that whatever the inward marks of sanctity, the overruling outward one is that in some way the candidate's life should be more than ordinarily edifying. Is a married woman who gives up her lover for the love of God a saint? As Ibsen's Nora says in almost the opposite context: "Thousands of women have done so."  

Closely connected to the problem of the credibility in fictional terms of Sarah's sanctification is the validity of the so-called 'miracles' in the novel. As Sarah's beatification depends more on acceptance of Catholic doctrine than on the limits defined in the world of the novel, so the miracles depend for their acceptance on an extra-fictional reality. Even if they are perfectly possible in terms of Greene's faith, the miracles fail to be an organic part of


the novel, and strike the final blow to the credibility of the action and agents of the plot. We are not prepared for them either by an adequate portrayal of Sarah's saintly life to justify their occurrence, or by the creation of a context that suggests, by an accumulation of explicable co-incidences, that the events could be interpreted as miracles: the final miracles of healing leave no room for interpreting them as anything other than miraculous intervention by a dead saint. As the miracles depend on Sarah's sanctity for their occurrence, and our conviction of Sarah's sanctity rests finally on the acceptance of these miracles, we are caught in a circular argument that collapses on its own premises.

The miracles in the novel are of two kinds: those that are apparently caused by God's intervention in events before Sarah's death, and those that occur as a direct result of Sarah's saintliness after her death. The former are better handled because of the open-endedness of their interpretation. In the case of Bendrix's 'miraculous' revival after the bombing, the reason for his escape from death is significant in the way it is perceived by Sarah and the change this perception has on her subsequent behaviour; whether it is viewed by the reader as a miracle is not a vital aspect of the credibility of the plot. More important is the scepticism the reader experiences that a woman like Sarah should suddenly believe in miracles. Because Sarah herself viewed it as miraculous, this event could be used by God to fulfill his divine purpose for her life. If this is what Greene intended, the series of subsequent events, explicable as co-incidences within the framework of the novel, can also be interpreted
in the light of one another as indicative of divine intervention. Through Sarah's diary we learn that, after the bombing raid, she had challenged God by phoning Bendrix, vowing, "If he answers, I'll go back tomorrow" (p. 100). A young girl answers and tells Sarah she is borrowing Bendrix's flat while he is away for a few weeks. God's answer to Sarah's challenge or a perfectly acceptable co-incidence? When Bendrix takes Sarah out to lunch two years after she has left him, a fit of coughing prevents them kissing at an opportune moment (p. 33). The cough has been mentioned previously and is therefore a possible and likely occurrence, but is it the one thing vitally necessary at this stage to prevent Sarah from tasting the pleasures of sensual contact with Bendrix again? After this occasion, Sarah records in her diary that she had followed Maurice one day to the Pontefract Arms and once again challenged God: "If he turns around and sees me, I told God, I'll go in, but he didn't turn around" (p. 116). She then returns home, deciding not to worry about God any more and declaring: "I'm going to make him (Bendrix) happy, that's my second vow, God, and stop me if you can, stop me if you can" (p. 116). She writes a letter to Henry telling him that she is leaving him for Maurice, packs a suitcase, and is about to leave when Henry unexpectedly returns early after an emotional confrontation with Bendrix about Sarah. His plea to Sarah not to leave him elicits from her the response "I won't leave you. I promise" (p. 119), and so once again circumstances and co-incidences prevent her returning to Maurice. Taken together, these events can be interpreted as minor miracles, the intervention of God in the events of life, even though
Greene seems to be relying too heavily on a superstitious style of faith.

The same explanations can be given for the appearance of Mrs. Bertram at Sarah's funeral, at the moment when Bendrix, hating himself for having become entangled with a reviewer's girlfriend, implores Sarah, "Get me out of it" (p. 159). However, it is the final two miracles of healing that leave one in doubt about the possibility of their occurrence within the context of the novel. Parkis's boy is healed overnight of acute appendicitis, and the doctor is told that "it was Mrs. Miles who came and took away the pain--touching him on the right side of the stomach . . ." (p. 178). Smythe phones Bendrix to tell him that nobody had treated the mark on his face; "It cleared up, suddenly, in a night. . . . It was a . . ." (p. 188). He is not given a chance by Bendrix to label it a miracle, but Bendrix remembers "his clenched right hand" (p. 189) containing a lock of Sarah's hair, and knows well enough why Smythe thinks the healing is a miracle. Both these healing miracles occur without any leeway for alternative explanations, and depend entirely on accepting the dubious premise of Sarah's sanctity. Zabel sums up the effect of these miracles on the novel as follows:

... the introduction of the miracle ... risks the dissolution of the entire conflict in an arbitrary conclusion. The symbolic effect that might make such an event convincing is weakened by the realistic basis on which the drama is built; it ends . . . in an unprepared shift from realism to didacticism, an arbitrary change of moral (and consequently of dramatic) premises which has the
effect of detaching the characters from their established logic as personalities and forcing them to serve a function outside themselves.\(^5\)

Greene himself was obviously not happy with the miracles in *The End of the Affair*, and made some changes to the 1974 edition of the novel. He explains the reasons for this move in the Introduction:

The incident of the strawberry mark should have no place in the book; every so-called miracle, like the curing of Parkis's boy, ought to have had a completely natural explanation. The coincidences should have continued over the years, battering the mind of Bendrix, forcing on him a reluctant doubt of his own atheism.

So it is that in this edition I have tried to return nearer to my original intention. Smythe's strawberry mark has given place to a disease of the skin which might have had a nervous origin and be susceptible to faith healing.\(^6\)

This change does not solve the problem of Sarah's sanctity as a reason behind the cure, but does indicate the novelist's perception of the problematic nature of the miracles and their dubious effect on Bendrix.

The character of Bendrix is, in fact, one of the strong points of the novel. He is convincingly and consistently portrayed through his first person narration, and his scepticism as narrator provides the dramatic tension necessary in a story of growth towards spiritual belief. As a novelist he constantly stresses his desire for the truth, and it is to this influence that Sarah attributes her own turning to the "truth" in the letter she writes before her death:

\(^5\) Zabèl, p. 46.

\(^6\) *The End of the Affair* (London: Heinemann and Bodley Head, 1974); p. ix.
You took away all my lies and self-deceptions
like they clear a road of rubble for somebody to
come along it, somebody of importance, and now
he's come, but you cleared the way yourself.
When you write you try to be exact and you taught
me to want the truth, and you told me when I
wasn't telling the truth. (p. 147)

An ironic commentary that the sceptic should be an agent of belief!

It is his occupation as a novelist that makes Bendrix doubt his own
perceptions of life too:

If I were writing a novel I would end it here:
a novel, I used to think, has to end somewhere,
but I'm beginning to believe my realism has been
at fault all these years, for nothing in life
now ever seems to end . . . so what an optimist
I would be if I thought that this story ended here.
(p. 147).

At the end of the novel, his own belief is prepared for by his percep-
tion of God's ways as being akin to the methods of a novelist:

I can imagine a God feeling in just that way about
some of us. The saints, one would suppose, in a
sense create themselves. They come alive. They
are capable of the surprising act or word. They
stand outside the plot, unconditioned by it. But
we have to be pushed around. We have the obstinacy
of non-existence. We are inextricably bound to the
plot, and wearily God forces us, here and there,
according to his intention, characters without
poetry, without free will, whose only importance
is that somewhere, at some time, we help to furnish
the scene in which a living character moves and
speaks, providing perhaps the saints with the op-
portunities for their free will. (pp. 185-186).

The comparison is an unfortunate one for the reader, however: in
this case it is the saint who never comes alive and who is pushed
around by God. God is the arch-novelist only in the sense that
his influence on Bendrix alters radically the story Bendrix originally
planned to write, moved by his anger and hate. Hate is frequently
seen by Bendrix as being much nearer to love than to indifference
("Hatred seems to operate the same glands as love: it even produces the same actions" (p. 27)), and his own scepticism and hate are the major factors in his final hint of capitulation to belief at the end—"0 God ... I'm too tired and old to learn to love, leave me alone for ever" (p. 191)—thus providing the reader with the necessary balance to Sarah's unprepared and rapid conversion. The style of Bendrix's account of events (the frequent contradictions, apostrophes, rhetorical questions, and cynical comments) reflects clearly the "spiritual turmoil of the writer, who should be objective, betraying himself into subjective analyses;" but the very nature of Sarah's vow prevents the range of suggestion and insight that Bendrix's counterperspectives could have created in her, as the nature of the priest's struggles are highlighted and influenced by the lieutenant's contrary views in The Power and the Glory.

Greene has taken to an extreme in this novel a theme basic to The Power and the Glory: the greater capacity for love and compassion that is paradoxically the attribute of the sinner. The unconvincing nature of the sinner-saint, Sarah, and the extent to which divine intervention usurps and contradicts the role of natural explanation is the stumbling block to the credibility of the novel.

Religious orthodoxy, after all is not synonymous with artistic merit. And in this particular case there seems an intimate connection between its religious emphasis and what we must regard as its literary failings ... There is no a priori reason why successful novels should not be written

about the life of grace, about saints and sinners. But their success will depend on their power of communicating their drama in human terms; in art there is no other perspective.  

The concept underlying the narrative is daring and compelling. Bendrix's scepticism provides the necessary doubt about the allegedly miraculous occurrences recorded, and his implacability establishes what there is of the central tension of the novel as his cynicism and disbelief are challenged. However, the authorial manipulation of Sarah's character diminishes the literary worth of the novel. Catholicism has provided Greene with his theme in *The End of the Affair*, but is has also conditioned his imagination to follow closely the extra-fictional terms of its doctrine to the detriment of the work of art.

---

CHAPTER 3
THE QUIET AMERICAN

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Yeats, "The Second Coming"

With the publication of The Quiet American in 1955, it seemed that Greene had abandoned the religious concerns that had become so explicitly Catholic in The End of the Affair. Set in Indo-China, the new novel deals with political and ideological conflicts and is frequently referred to as Greene's "political" novel. Critical opinion on the nature and meaning of the novel differs quite widely. David Lodge contends that "The Quiet American is far from being a purely secular novel... the conflict is dramatized and analysed in terms that are consistent with Greene's earlier theological perspective; and the agnostic narrator, Fowler, is left in the end, like Bendix, troubled and dissatisfied with any purely human explanation of experience."¹ This opinion is echoed in a number of other critics' assessments of the novel: Miriam Allott states that "in spite of its non-Catholic central characters, it gives a fresh focus to themes which Greene explores in his 'Catholic' novels²... where the author

¹ Lodge, pp. 35-36.

is occupied with the allied problems of pain and of how far man is justified in risking damnation for the sake of relieving the suffering of his fellow creatures." R.W.B. Lewis refutes the claim made on the dust-jacket of the American edition of the novel that Greene "has entered a new vein where religion plays little or no part," asserting that "the absence of religious understanding and the hovering possibility of acquiring it play a vital part." However, there are as many Greene critics who see the novel as essentially moral or ethical rather than specifically religious. Pryce-Jones sees Fowler as "Greene's first serious attempt for twenty years to draw a man who is in a moral predicament without religious resources" and A.A. de Vitis notes the influence of Sartrian existentialism on Greene's conception of Fowler's ethical dilemma. This point is developed further by Robert Evans who also sees the raison d'être of the novel in existentialist terms: "the story is not religious, for Fowler is no nearer to God at the end that he was at the beginning," and "Fowler is not incapable of feeling pain, though he experiences nothing remotely resembling Christian remorse . . . The suffering is

3 Allott, p. 198.

4 Lewis, p. 270.


6 de Vitis, p. 116.

existentialist; there is no remorse and he would not undo what he has done." A careful examination of the growth of Fowler's moral awareness and ethical anguish demonstrates that the novel is certainly "non-religious" in comparison to its more doctrinaire predecessors, while being still essentially "religious" in the broader terms that Greene presumably meant in calling the novel "a kind of morality about religion." 

The Quiet American has more in common with its immediate predecessor, The End of the Affair, than may at first be apparent, and thus invites comparison with it. Both novels deal with the theme of adultery and betrayal, and trace the spiritual growth, however minimal, of a man involved in a complex triangle. Fowler and Bendrix, as respective narrators, both claim a sense of objectivity and detachment as part of their approach to life, springing from their involvement in writing or reporting. The line between detachment and cynicism is a fine one for both men; likewise, love and hate seem to be fused and inseparable in many of their outbursts of emotion or inner reveries. Fowler betrays Pyle yet says, "Am I the only one who really cared for Pyle?" (p. 22), and Bendrix sets out to tell his story as "a record of hate far more than of love" (p. 7), yet ends up pleading with God, "You've robbed me of enough, I'm too tired and old to learn to love, leave me alone for ever" (p. 192). Both

8 Evans, pp. 244-45.

pray to a God they do not believe in while longing for a solution to the problem of their emptiness and uncertainty. The narrative technique of the two novels is the same: both are stories told on reflection, arising from a need to see purpose and pattern in events, and both are seen through the eyes of a narrator subjectively involved. Dreams, reveries, flashbacks, and letters are used in both novels to fill in gaps of the narrative, to reveal motivation, and to throw light on relationships and struggles. A bomb explosion provides the dramatic turning point in both narratives. However, despite the similarities that demonstrate something of a continuum in the development of Greene's writing, it is the use of explicit Catholic doctrine as a controlling force on the narrative that sets The End of the Affair apart from The Quiet American where the specifically spiritual issues which are peripheral for most of the novel are manoeuvered into central focus at the end without sufficient preparation for such a change.

In The End of the Affair, Greene deals with the predicaments of human beings within a specifically Catholic framework. In The Quiet American he uses a political situation in order to portray the moral and ethical dilemma of his central character. Fowler's growth is not dependent on one woman's incredible conversion and the miracles subsequent to it, but rather develops logically through a series of events and encounters, and within a framework of war that creates a heightened awareness of life, commitment, and social responsibility. Instead of battling for his lover against an unknown rival who turns out to be God, Fowler is forced to take sides in a war where a friend turns out
to be rival in love and advocate of a heartless political extreme in
war. He learns that motivation for action is never pure, and that
human beings are only capable of action which is evil to a lesser or
greater extent. This slow revelation of the nature of human motiva-
tion and action leaves Fowler at the end longing for the existence of
"someone to whom I could say I was sorry" (p. 189). We are confronted
with no doctrinal difficulties in this novel; we are, however, asked
to believe that Fowler has come to recognize his need for God when,
on the basis of his character development through the novel, he is
a man far removed from a specific religious commitment.

At the beginning of the events recounted in the novel, Fowler
constantly affirms his belief in his own non-involvement, using his
profession as a journalist to justify and confirm his apparent objec-
tivity. In an attempt to dissuade his employer from recalling him to
England for promotion, he writes, "I wasn't suitable, I told him,
for a foreign editor--I was a reporter, I had no real opinions about
anything" (p. 72). He repeats this stance to Pyle--"I'm a reporter.
I'm not engaged... I don't take sides" (p. 96)-- and tries to
clarify his innocence in Pyle's murder finally by telling Vigot, "I'm
not involved. Not involved" (p. 28). However, such claims to
detachment are undermined and revealed as delusion by his frequent
expressions of reaction to the war when he is thrust into a confron-
tation with the suffering it causes. On seeing a dead mother and
child in a narrow ditch near the battle-front of Phat Diem, Fowler
thinks to himself, "I hate war" (p. 53); on a bombing raid with
Trouin he recalls this reaction vividly as he watches a sampan blown
apart (p. 150), painfully conscious of the unnecessary killing of
innocent people in the cause of war. Even the innocent Pyle has
to remind Fowler of his claim to non-involvement, responding to his
mention of "our side" with "I thought you didn't have a side" (p. 100).
Fowler's apparent detachment and cynicism are revealed early in the
novel to be his way of coping with his vulnerability and sense of
the impermanence of human relationships. He tells us

From childhood I had never believed in permanence,
and yet I had longed for it . . . I envied those
who could believe in a God and I distrusted them.
I felt they were keeping their courage up with a
fable of the changeless and the permanent. Death
was far more certain than God, and with death there
would be no longer the daily possibility of love
dying. (p. 44)

The thought of human inability to fully understand another human being
later makes him say:

Perhaps that's why men have invented God—a being
capable of understanding. Perhaps if I wanted to
be understood or to understand I would bamboozle
myself into belief. (p. 60)

Fowler makes clear his opinion that God is an invention of human beings
in their effort to alleviate a sense of the impermanence of life and
to compensate for the imperfect love and understanding of their fel­
low human beings. Yet he cannot help but long for the comfort of the
absolute and the permanent that people derive from their faith. His
Catholic wife, Helen, makes her decision not to grant him a divorce
on the grounds of faith and not on reason or emotion. She tells him in
a letter:

. . . Thomas, your truth is always so temporary.
What's the good of arguing with you, or trying to
make you see reason? It's easier to act as my
faith tells me to act—as you think unreasonably—and simply to write: I don't believe in divorce: my religion forbids it, and so the answer, Thomas is no--no. (p. 119)

Despite his criticism of his wife's religion and his inability to accept such a "cage", he confesses: "sometimes I envied her" (pp. 87-8). His own peace he can only find temporarily in the escape offered by opium, and in Phuong, "the promise of rest" (p. 12). Fowler could possibly have continued indefinitely in this rather vacuous state of noncommitment had it not been for the arrival of Pyle in Saigon.

Pyle is everything Fowler is not—youthful, idealistic, innocent, and committed. Initially his innocence arouses in Fowler an instinct of protection towards the man:

It never occurred to me that there was greater need to protect myself. Innocence always calls mutely for protection when we would be so much wiser to guard ourselves against it: innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm. (p. 37)

Fowler cannot help feeling a strange affection for the man as he witnesses his naïveté and sense of propriety in the raw environment of war-torn Vietnam, but as they are brought together through the vagaries of love and war, Fowler learns more and more about the real nature of Pyle's "innocence" and the implications of his commitment. He repeatedly tells Pyle, "'I'm a reporter. I'm not engaged'' (p. 96), but slowly learns the impossibility and irresponsibility of such a stance. Pyle's uninformed commitment to his cause makes Fowler realize the serious dangers involved in idealism devoid of experience, an "innocent" idealism arising from moral arrogance and a lack of
imaginative understanding of its implications. Pyle's idealism is
governed by the York Harding-inspired abstractions of "Democracy and
Honor" (p. 90) which blind him to the concrete reality of the human
suffering involved in single-minded pursuit of ideals; the very suf­
fering is sanctioned by the concepts that inspire it. When Pyle
risks his life attempting to find Fowler at Phat Diem, Fowler recog­
nizes that "he was so incapable of conceiving the pain he might cause
others" (p. 62); it is this realization that becomes the stimulus to
Fowler's conscience to become involved. "I thought, 'What's the
good? He'll always be innocent, you can't blame the innocent, they
are always guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate
them'" (p. 163). Through his experience of Pyle, Fowler realizes
the discrepancies that exist between motivation and action, between
a humanitarian idealism and the brutal actions it sanctions. He
realizes the inadequacy of good intentions to redeem human suffering;
ends cannot justify any means as innocence is no excuse for condoning
wrong action.

Fowler's complacency is first threatened when the possibility
arises of Phuong leaving him for Pyle. After Pyle has solemnly pro­
posed to Phuong through the medium of Fowler's translations, both
men are astonished when Phuong decides the issue for them with a simple
'no'. Influenced by her sister's desire for social status, she
later chooses to transfer her devotion to Pyle, but her return to
Fowler after Pyle's murder illustrates how one choice can ultimately
be defeated by a choice exercised by another. In Phuong's situation,
Fowler recognizes how all human beings are implicated in a common lot,
and how a decision in one area reverberates in another so that individual and social existence are inseparably fused. With his personal security threatened, Fowler's social conscience is stirred into action when Pyle's blind convictions lead to the deaths of innocent people who are involved in political action against their own volition. Witnessing the suffering and death of people who are given no choice in the matter, Fowler realizes the seriousness of Pyle's "innocent" interference strengthened by opportunities that his own policy of non-involvement allows: his own delusion of objective non-involvement is in fact as dangerous as Pyle's innocence. He is moved to question human reality not by the direct intervention of God, but by the more plausible device of human influence. There are no glib or easy solutions: Fowler feels a social responsibility to remove Pyle when he witnesses the horror he is capable of causing, yet this feeling is complicated by his strange affection for the man and his desire to retrieve his own comfort with Phuong. These conflicts are not merely stated; they are developed dramatically through narration that makes us see and feel what Fowler experiences: "the legless torso at the edge of the garden," and the woman "on the ground with what was left of her baby" (p. 162) rouse Fowler to question his attitude of non-involvement, not any abstract philosophical or theological reasoning. It is pity that finally makes it impossible for him to remain uninvolved.

This recognition of the necessity to become engaged is forced upon Fowler not only through the presence of Pyle, but also through encounters with various people during the time recounted in the novel.
When he visits Phat Diem, he meets a priest in the bell tower of the Cathedral reading his breviary away from the noisy crowd of refugees below. When the priest tells him "we are neutral here. This is God's territory" (p. 49), Fowler assumes his words imply a stance of non-involvement, but when he discovers the priest is the only available surgeon and notices that "his soutane was speckled with blood" (p. 49), he realizes that non-partisanship does not mean detachment from the human condition. This same priest's words to him on this occasion when they talk about confession, "I expect you are a good man. I don't suppose you've ever had much to regret" (p. 50), are an ironic anticipation of the emotions Fowler experiences once he has become engaged.

After Phuong's desertion of him, Fowler tries to escape his misery by going north, but he cannot escape the ideas of involvement that plague him. Trouin tells him, "One day something will happen. You will take a side" (p. 151), and "We all get involved in a moment of emotion and then we cannot get out" (p. 152). Fowler is reminded of this conversation later when he visits Heng to discuss Pyle's removal, and Heng tells him, "Sooner or later one has to take sides. If one is to remain human" (p. 174). But Fowler is terrified of committing himself to a side, and during Pyle's last hours of life, he recalls that he hoped chance or "that Somebody in whom I didn't believe" (p. 180) would relieve him of the burden of decision, just as chance had always been the convenient controlling factor in winning or losing a game of cards. He feels justified in participating in the American's murder when Pyle lightly says that the casualties in that morning's bomb explosion "died in the right cause" (p. 179). When Pyle upsets
his glass and it smashes on the floor, Fowler is reminded of "the bottles in the Pavilion bar dripping their contents" (p. 180); Pyle's mention of having "warned" Phuong he might be out with Fowler that evening provides yet a further grim reminder to Fowler of the morning's events and the two American girls who escaped massacre because they had been warned. Yet still he dallies: "There was no harm in giving him that one chance" (p. 180), he thinks as he assures Pyle that it does not matter if he gets caught at the Legation and is too late for their dinner appointment. His final sense of failure and guilt after Pyle's death is not so much in having caused the death as in deluding himself that chance bears the ultimate responsibility for it; he tries to evade the existentialist responsibility of accepting the consequences of exercising his free choice, and he must suffer accordingly.

Fowler has been faced with the pangs of guilt many times before, despite his claim to non-involvement in the human condition: "What distant ancestors had given me this stupid conscience?" (p. 130) he asks, feeling guilty while thinking of his deceit to Pyle in his letter and his unjust treatment of the man over Phuong. This same conscience prompts him to make his rescuers investigate the condition of the guard who had cried out in pain from the ruined tower: "I was responsible for that voice crying in the dark" (p. 113), he reflects, and knows that his own sense of peace is contingent upon the peace of the two men unwittingly involved in the ambush he and Pyle had caused. Fowler's desire to evade the knowledge of his part in Pyle's end is apparent in his reaction to Granger's request to step outside
with him at the Vieux Moulin:

I was in no mood to fight with him but at that moment I would not have minded if he had beaten me unconscious. We have so few ways in which to assuage the sense of guilt. (p. 184)

When he is first called to Vigot's office in connection with Pyle's murder, he anticipates Vigot's main question with the response, "Not guilty", adding "I told myself it was true" (p. 18), and later in the interview: "I told myself again I was innocent" (p. 20). After his third and final interview with Vigot, the French officer leaves with the words, "I don't suppose I'll trouble you again" (p. 170), but, "at the door he turned as though he were unwilling to abandon hope--his hope or mine" (pp. 170-71). The Catholic Vigot hopes that Fowler will confess his part in the crime, not only to solve the case, but also to relieve him of his burden of guilt. Such an action would be an illustration of the deliberate intent to shift moral responsibility that Sartre sees inherent in the Catholic rite of confession, and would deny Fowler's responsibility to accept what he has done, whatever the attendant anguish.

At the beginning of his story, Fowler had derided people who "invented God--a being capable of understanding" (p. 60), expressing envy of such a means to escape human fallibility and frailty, yet distrusting their "fable of the changeless and the permanent" (p. 44). He is caught in a dilemma of longing for the benefits afforded by a formal faith while knowing that he cannot believe in and accept the existence of God. His freedom from any belief that would direct his moral choices imprisons him in the dilemma of doubt and uncertainty
that is the source of his existential anguish as his story progresses. However, towards the end of the story, Greene introduces a new direction in Fowler's thoughts that is insufficiently prepared for by preceding events and influences: Fowler begins to manifest a capitulation to faith. This is first apparent during Pyle's last visit to him when, in his inability to commit himself to bringing about Pyle's death, he says:

I handed back the decision to that Somebody in whom I didn't believe: You can intervene if you want to . . . You cannot exist unless you have the power to alter the future. (p. 180)

After he is questioned by Vigot and returns to his flat and Phuong, he finds a telegram from his wife, who confesses she has been "acting irrationally" (p. 188), and has therefore decided to begin the divorce proceedings she had previously refused to consider on grounds of faith and reason. Her faith is thus seen to be contrary to the humanitarian concern she feels for her estranged husband, and should thus be confirmation to Fowler of the irrationality and inconsistency of faith in humanitarian terms: "a Roman Catholic believes in quite a different God when he's scared or happy or hungry" (p. 94) he had earlier told Pyle. Instead, he can only long sentimentally for the amelioration of the rites of faith: "how I wished there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry" (p. 189). He does not actually express remorse for what he has done; he merely desires the relief from his guilt that he sees inherent in the act of confession. Having been forced out of his indifference to a state of being engagé, Fowler's last words are an evasion in humanitarian terms of
the ethical anguish he must face and live with as a committed man.

The issues confronted in the novel are created by the political setting, but go beyond the politics to include the wider and more permanent moral problems of awareness, choice, and action. Fowler is a prime example of the tragedy of the existentialist hero: when compelled to exercise his free will and act, he is as troubled living with the consequences of his action as he had been living with the denial of his freedom to choose and act. But Greene undermines the suffering Fowler must experience in such a dilemma by introducing religious considerations that are neither natural consequences of who or what has gone before nor a logical conclusion to the moral development of Fowler. It seems that Greene could not entirely forego a Catholic flavouring. He has three Catholic characters: in the novel—Vigot, the priest at Phat Diem, and Fowler's wife—whose Catholicism is not integral to shaping Fowler's moral awareness, yet we are asked to imagine that Fowler's existential anguish has become something of a Catholic quest as he expresses the need for confession and forgiveness at the end. Such a conclusion undermines the suffering and torment Fowler experiences as he becomes engagé despite his desire for an easy and uncommitted life.

Apart from this unprepared shift of focus in the final section of the novel, there is little evidence for the critical opinion that Greene has a specifically religious focus in the novel. Fowler's lack of understanding of religious faith accentuates the anguish he experiences as he tries to make decisions on the authority of his own individual response to situations. His freedom from any belief or
commitment that might direct his moral choices imprisons him in the
dilemma of constant doubt and uncertainty that is at the heart of
the novel. This view concurs with Pryce-Jones's assessment of
Fowler as a man in a moral predicament without religious resources.
The effect of the novel relies on the convincing portrait of a man
cought in such a crisis; however, Greene's sympathetic presentation
of Fowler's longing for confession and forgiveness at the end seems
to be an attempt to provide an unwarranted theological solution to
Fowler's psychological condition. Fowler's desire to escape the
burden of responsibility for his action is a precarious basis for
seeking faith, and undermines the development of Fowler's awareness
that he must accept and bear the responsibility for the decisions and
actions that commitment entails "if one is to remain human" (p. 174).

The Quiet American shows evidence of Greene's maturing crafts­
manship in writing: the novel is developed through a carefully struc­
tured flashback technique that creates effective juxtapositions of
the present and the past, and exhibits a more sophisticated use of
imagery than is apparent in the more self-conscious imagery of his
earlier novels. It also shows evidence of broad religious concerns
rather than specific Catholic doctrine; however, in the final analysis,
its credibility suffers from the intrusion of Greene's Catholic

10 Compare "He could feel his prayers weigh him down like un­
digested food" (p. 151), and "He drank the brandy down like damnation"
(p. 169) in The Power and the Glory with "Now his illness came like
a mercy, reprieving me from the treadmill of private anxiety" (p. 122),
and "Another cup was rinsed on the floor and put like a live coal into
my hands--the ordeal by tea" (p. 126) in The Quiet American.
leanings in the finale of the novel.
CHAPTER 4

THE COMEDIANS

If only we had been born clowns, nothing bad would happen to us except a few bruises and a smear of whitewash.

Graham Greene, Our Man in Havana

The Quiet American deals essentially with the nature of social commitment thrust upon individuals in a critical war situation. In this novel, remaining detached means bearing responsibility for the suffering of the innocent, while becoming involved means carrying a sense of guilt for the death of one man who causes suffering. Circumstances force Fowler to question the implications of innocence and experience: in Greene's next novel, A Burnt-Out Case (1961), the central figure, Querry, tries to escape the world at large and involve himself anonymously at a leproserie in the Congo in an attempt to discover for himself the point at which innocence and hope are lost to be replaced by cynicism and despair. In his dedication, Greene states that the novel is "an attempt to give dramatic expression to various types of belief, half-belief, and non-belief": after close contact with all three conditions, Querry is last heard saying, "This is absurd or else . . ." (p. 205). The suggestion that the universe may be, after all one's quests and questions, merely absurd is central to the theme of Greene's next novel, The Comedians, in which he likewise studies the spectrum of belief and commitment.
The Comedians, like The Quiet American, "is essentially a political novel"¹ according to Greene. The return to a setting of political persecution and terror recalls The Power and the Glory, but, whereas in the earlier novel the setting provides the conditions for the priest's discovery of his vocation under God, in The Comedians, the horror of Haiti is the backdrop for the black comedy that is enacted to illustrate various forms of political and social commitment. Political commitment in The Power and the Glory is seen as dramatically opposed to religious conviction, and much of the tension of the novel is generated by the conflict between these antithetical forces as seen in the persons of the lieutenant and the priest. In The Comedians, the central character, Brown, while not unsympathetic to those whom the regime persecutes, is uncommitted to either a political or religious ideology, and exists in a limbo observing other people's attempts to live according to their different commitments or dreams. Greene's concern is apparently to examine the viability of these creeds within the conditions imposed by a cruel dictatorship: as none quite succeeds or survives in Haiti, is he therefore trying to say that human beings are powerless in the face of irrationality and evil, or that some other force is the only solution to it?

Critical opinion on this issue is divided. Michael Routh

argues that "in The Comedians it is clear that there is, in fact, no power capable of redeeming the destructive impulses at work both within man and within society." Charles Muller, on the other hand, sees the novel as a subtle triumph for Greene's religious themes:

For Greene the tragic vision of The Comedians, therefore, becomes an important illustration that life without God must remain empty--must, in fact, remain absurd . . . He portrays a world ruined and rendered absurd by Original Sin, a world in which man can do nothing to save himself without the intervention of Grace . . . The absence of any ultimate form of salvation is sufficient to illustrate the dire hopelessness of the world . . . and in this very paradoxical way Grace, or the goodness of God is again vindicated and affirmed by Greene.  

Such a conclusion presumes that the various forms of social and political commitment in the novel (or lack of either) have been challenged by a specific and positive religious dimension. While "the absence of any ultimate form of salvation is sufficient to illustrate the dire hopelessness of the world" it takes something of a leap of faith to presume that "Grace, or the goodness of God" is the answer Greene postulates to such hopelessness without evidence of such an answer in the novel itself. Recourse to the whole canon of Greene's work for an answer to the questions posed by The Comedians can only be valid if substantiated by arguments developed within the novel. As I have attempted to show, Greene has moved steadily away from Catholic concerns (first apparent in Brighton Rock and culminating in The End

---


3 Charles Muller, "Graham Greene and the Absurd," Unisa English Studies, 10, No. 2 (1972), 44.
of the Affair) to a broader religious view of the universe, and there is little in The Comedians to suggest a reversal of this trend. Muller's argument cannot therefore be substantiated by reference to a consistent religious concern in Greene's work because this has changed quite radically, nor can it be corroborated by evidence from the text, as Catholicism (or any form of faith in God, for that matter) is not developed by Greene as a force strong enough to counter the other convictions or indifference apparent in the novel.

Brown, in fact, attributes his prevailing indifference to the Jesuit education he received as a boy in Monte Carlo. He tells us:

> When I was a boy I had faith in the Christian God. Life under his shadow was a very serious affair. I saw Him incarnated in every tragedy. . . . Now that I approached the end of life it was only my sense of humour that enabled me sometimes to believe in Him. Life was a comedy, not the tragedy for which I had been prepared . . . (p. 31)

Having experienced the irrationality and absurdity of life, Brown can no longer believe in the existence of a benign, omniscient God responsible for its creation and preservation. In his lighter moments he can only believe in God as the arch-joker who directs the comedy of life. He can perceive no meaning or reason behind existence; therefore, the only solution to the problem of being born into such a world is to pretend there is purpose and act accordingly. He dates the understanding of life as a comedy in which we all play a part to a school production of Romeo and Juliet in which he played Friar Lawrence. Up until this time, Brown relates, he believed himself to be destined for the vocation of priesthood, but "the interminable rehearsals, the continual presence of the lovers and the sensuality
of their passion . . . led me to my breakout" (p. 60). He bluffed his way into a local casino one afternoon, and attributes his ability to pass as an adult to the dramatic director of the play who had "taught me adequately enough the secrets of make-up" (p. 60) which "on a winter's afternoon, in the light of the lamps, had passed for genuine lines" (p. 61). As the mistress he acquires during this escapade wipes off his lines and wrinkles in the bathroom "where lay her lotions, her eyebrow pencils, her pots of pomade" (p. 61), Brown recognizes the situation for the comedy that it is and says, "We might have been two actors sharing a dressing-room" (p. 61). He is forced to leave the college after he is discovered dropping a roulette token into the collection bag at mass and his escapade is made known. Instead of showing disappointment, Brown says the fathers seemed to feel "a grudging respect" (p. 62) for his exploit of playing a part without being unmasked. Many years later he tells Martha that, because he and Luis were brought up by the Jesuits, "we know the kind of part we play now" (p. 163). He distrusts and resents what he had been led to believe by the fathers: reminded of their story about the devil displaying all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus when Jones offers him an opportunity to become a possible millionaire, he wonders "whether the devil really had them to offer or whether it was all a gigantic bluff" (p. 197); after witnessing a Voodoo ceremony, Brown caustically comments, "I told myself that I hadn't left the Jesuits to be the victim of an African god" (p. 181), implying that he had managed to escape being a victim of the Jesuits' belief.

He cannot, however, fully escape the Catholic notions that are
ascribed to him by others because of his background or his attitudes. In his discussion with Concasseur at the brothel about capitalism and communism, Concasseur says to Brown, "You speak like a Catholic," to which he replies, "Yes. Perhaps. A Catholic who has lost his faith" (p. 147). Martha, presuming Brown's Jesuit education makes him a Catholic, tells him, "I envy you and Luis. You believe in something. You have explanations," and draws from Brown the response: "Have I? Do you think I still believe?" (p. 162). On another occasion he tells Martha that he envies Dr. Magiot's belief in communism, adding, "I left all such absolutes behind me in the Chapel of the Visitation" (p. 225). Although unable to believe ardently in any creed because of his rational insights and observations, Brown can recognize the power of faith to lift one out of complacency and acquiescence. Martha reflects that perhaps Brown is a prêtre manqué, a label Brown recalls when reading Dr. Magiot's letter, received after his death, in which he attributes to Brown a faith beyond official Catholicism. Brown muses, "How strangely one must appear to other people. I had left involvement behind me, I was certain, in the College of the Visitation" (p. 286). Those people who know of his Catholic background seem to expect some form of belief from him: only Jones, in his ignorance of Brown, can shrewdly comment from his own observations of the man, "Of course I'm not a religious man . . . You neither I would say" (p. 40). Jones is forced into action at the end not because he believes ardently in the efficacy of such action, but because he wants to prove the truth of his deception.

As Dr. Magiot believes religion to be "an excellent means of
therapy for many states of mind" (p. 176), and therefore views Voodooism as "the right therapy for Haitians" (p. 176), Brown sees a religious creed or political faith as a "temptation" (p. 279) to some kind of false security. It is a temptation he has turned down, and he has decided instead to embrace "the whole world of evil and of good" (p. 279), a philosophy he deludes himself into believing in an attempt to ease "the never quiet conscience which had been injected into me without my consent... by the fathers of the Visitation" (p. 279). He is aware of the hollow in himself caused by his background and lack of faith in any one cause or being--"No priest had come to represent a father to me, and no region of the earth had taken the place of home" (p. 223) --yet he reveals no sense of anguish over his indifference, and confesses himself at the end "not merely incapable of love--many are incapable of that, but even of guilt" (p. 286). Such a statement is corroborated by Brown's actions throughout the novel: he is motivated to return to Haiti at the beginning of the events related because he found he missed the danger of the place and was drawn by ambition and by the hope of financial gain, not because he felt bound to the people in any way; he says he discovered he loved Martha while in New York, but their sordid affair appears to be merely a loveless habit and fizzles out once they both leave Haiti and its dangers; he is motivated to assist Jones in a political manoeuvre not because of any political commitment but because he is jealous of the affection Martha obviously feels for Jones; and he evinces no sense of guilt for knowingly leading Jones into danger and thus to his death. The priest's brief sermon at the funeral ceremony for Jones and the
Haitian patriots has little apparent effect on Brown despite its strikingly unorthodox and political nature: "Violence can be the expression of love, indifference never. One is an imperfection of charity, the other the perfection of egoism" (p. 283). Brown can only recall at this point the rituals of Catholicism, the confessions and promises of amendment, which he rejected once he had left the Jesuit college. He rejected Catholicism not only because he felt he had been deceived into believing that life was a tragedy instead of the comedy he discovered it to be, but also because Catholicism stood for reason and was thus useless in an absurd universe "driven by an authoritative practical joker" (p. 31). This point is brought home to Brown in his discussion with young Philipot:

'You are going back to Voodoo, Philipot.'
'And why not? Perhaps the gods from Dahomey are what we need now.'
'You are a Catholic. You believe in reason.'
'The Voodooists are Catholic too, and we don't live in a world of reason.'(p. 172)

The force of Philipot's final statement becomes real to Brown a few days later when he witnesses a Voodoo ceremony and sees the frenzied power the young patriots derive from the primitive rituals that extend beyond the bounds of reason. The ceremony itself is startlingly and powerfully evoked by Brown, who recognizes that Voodooism fits the irrational world represented by Haiti more appropriately than Catholicism and its alignment with reason and order. Far from being a viable force to reckon with in the novel, Catholicism is projected as a factor contributing to Brown's sense of delusion and cynicism, and to his perception of life as an irrational and absurd comedy.
Thus he builds his life around a tangible object of hope: the hotel "represented stability more profoundly than the God whom the fathers of the Visitation had hoped I would serve" (p. 251-2).

Faith in any ideal seems bound to fail in such a universe. The Smiths travel to Haiti with a mission to convert people to vegetarianism, a philosophy, says Mrs. Smith that "touches life at many points. If we eliminated acidity from the human body we would eliminate passion" (p. 21). They are undaunted by warnings of persecution in Haiti, and proceed single-mindedly with their plans to persuade the government to establish a vegetarian centre. First-hand experience of the horrors of Duvalier's regime cannot dissuade them from their ideal. Brown listens to Mr. Smith discussing his plans with the Secretary for Social Welfare "in astonishment. The dream was intact. Reality could not touch him. Even the scene in the Post Office had not sullied his vision. The Haitians freed from acidity, poverty and passion would soon be bent happily over their nut cutlets" (p. 156). Having observed cynically that Mrs. Smith's "passions had not been perceptibly weakened by the removal of acidity" (p. 36), Brown asks, "Wasn't it possibly a flaw in character to believe so passionately in the integrity of all the world?" (p. 160). But the Smiths hold firmly to their ideal which becomes for them a religion: finding a vegetarian handbook in their hotel bedroom addressed to an "Unknown Reader" from an "Unknown Friend," Brown comments, "The capital initials gave the same impression as a Gideon Bible" (p. 253). Such idealism in an irrational universe is reduced to comedy, despite the "strange dignity" that Brown feels touches their "absurdity" (p. 19), and the Smiths
are forced to leave the country, their mission adjudged a failure.

Dr. Magiot, who seems at first to be a clear-sighted, wise man holding to the tenets of Communism, is seen by Brown to be something of an idealist in his efforts to accept or to merge contradictory beliefs. He fails to recognize the maxim "Religion is the opium of the masses" as one of Marx's indictments against belief in God, and, aligning Catholicism and Communism in their common concern for humanity, he wonders whether every faith is not "the same faith under another mask" (p. 286). He believes in Communism and the "truth of certain economic laws" (p. 235), yet "in his Victorian sitting-room with a decanter of port," eating "an excellent steak and creamed potatoes with a touch of garlic and as good a claret as could be expected so far away from Bordeaux," and served by a maid in a black dress and white cap strikes Brown as "an odd setting for a Marxist" (p. 247). Feeling, after dinner, that they should retire to join "other members of the Browning society for a discussion of the Sonnets: from the Portugese," Brown realizes that the dead Hamit, representing the reality of life in Haiti, "lay in his drain a very long way from here" (p. 248). Brown's mother impressed Dr. Magiot as "a great woman" and a heroine (p. 76), as she "had convinced the fathers of the Visitation of her moral rectitude, even against the dubious background of Monte Carlo" (p. 76). Dr. Magiot is also taken in by Jones's bravado, believing him to have had the war experiences he boasts of (p. 235-6). He predicts incorrectly that Marcel will survive after Brown's mother has died, and Brown is forced to conclude about Dr. Magiot: "he proved to be a false prophet" (p. 79). Like the Smiths, his
philosophy is not a viable one in the representative world of Haiti, and ironically he loses his life for it despite being strongly opposed to martyrdom. The patriots, with whom he aligns himself at the end, do not fare much better for their convictions, the survivors being housed in an old lunatic asylum. No faith or force for good has provided any real challenge or offered a viable alternative to Brown's view of the world as irrational and absurd. What he fails to see, however, is that absence of faith results in acquiescence or selfish opting out from responsibility. At least faith of one sort or another urges one into action, and Greene makes this clear through the admirable qualities of concern and willingness to be vulnerable exhibited by men such as Magiot.

Having rejected any notions of an ordered universe created and controlled by a rational God, Brown sees life reflecting his vision of it as an absurd comedy. The entertainment held on board the Medea the night before arrival in Haiti symbolizes life at its comic worst with Fernandez breaking suddenly into tears before his act, the ship's orchestra creating a cacophony of music with their pots and pans, and the evening presided over in fertility-rite fashion by blown-up condoms in place of balloons. On the stairs in the Hotel Trianon a picture of a carnival procession confirms the grotesque comedy of life for Brown:

> Of a morning, when the sunlight shone through the first-floor windows, the harsh colours gave an impression of gaiety, the drummers and the trumpeters seemed about to play a lively air. Only when you came closer you saw how ugly the masks were and how the masquers surrounded a cadaver in grave-clothes . . . (p. 252)
Brown constantly refers to his own adroitness at playing a part ever since his charade when a student in Monte Carlo, and he sees those around him as fellow spectators and actors in life's comedy. When he visits the chargé, he labels him as "the perfect spectator—the spectator of whom every actor must sometimes dream," watching Brown play "the part of an Englishman concerned over the fate of a fellow-countryman." (p. 103). When the Tontons Macoute visit him at the Trianon to interrogate him, Brown realizes his "absurd position sitting there on the floor as though at an informal party. Everyone was waiting for me to do my turn" (p. 185). Of his relationship with Martha he says: "we belonged to the world of comedy and not of tragedy" (p. 161), and refers to their fractious meetings as "a curtain-raiser for the final quarrel of all" (p. 225). In his own mother he recognizes "an accomplished comedian" (p. 76), who goes by the unlikely name of Comtesse de Lascot-Villiers and who knows that "as long as we pretend we escape" (p. 253). She asks her lover, Marcel, to join her in acting and pretending "that I would die for you and that you would die for me" (p. 253). When Marcel actually does die for her, Brown comments, "perhaps he was no comédian after all. Death is a proof of sincerity" (p. 253). He wonders the same about Jones, the only real comedian of them all with his ability to make people laugh. He becomes a hero when Brown calls his bluff and he is forced into a position of command that leads to his death. Brown wonders, "for what belief did Jones die?" (p. 287); he dreams Jones answers his question with the response, "It's in my part, old man, it's in my part" (p. 287), confirming his sense that we are all
actors playing arbitrary parts in the same confused comedy "where everyone laughs till the tears come" (p. 287).

The central question of whether Brown's narrative voice is actually Greene's point of view is one that needs to be answered before deciding the purpose and point of the novel. In one of their frequent arguments, Martha fiercely accuses Brown of being a Berkleyan. My God, what a Berkleyan. You've turned poor Jones into a seducer and me into a wanton mistress. You can't even believe in your mother's medal, can you? You've written her a different part. My dear, try to believe we exist when you aren't there. We're independent of you. None of us is like you fancy we are. Perhaps it wouldn't matter much if your thoughts were not so dark, always so dark. (p. 229)

Such a tirade from Martha seems rather out of keeping with the compliant, doting mother and mistress seen so far; more important, however, is whether what she says is true. Brown certainly does have a dark view of the world where people confuse acting with action, but the other characters seem to confirm this view in their attitudes and actions. Philipot answers Brown's question whether he and Jones are both comedians with, "They can say that of most of us" (p. 133), and Luis adds,

We mustn't complain too much of being comedians--it's an honourable profession. If only we could be good ones the world might gain at least a sense of style. We have failed--that's all. We are bad comedians, we aren't bad men.

Martha fiercely denies such a view and bursts into tears, yet, alone with Brown immediately afterwards, she says,

'Perhaps we won't have to be comedians any more.'
'You said you were no comedian.'
'I exaggerated, didn't I? But all that talk irritated me. It made every one of us seem cheap and useless and self-pitying. Perhaps we are, but we needn't revel in it.' (p. 135)

From the beginning Jones admits cheerfully to being a "tart" and having "to play a toff" (p. 25) at times when it suits him, even though "it's the hardest part of all for me" (p. 26). He admits to this role-playing but only tells Brown the truth behind his other "parts" when he senses the approach of death on the road to Aux Cayes. Philipot denies that Papa Doc is a comedian, saying, "Oh no, he is real. Horror is always real" (p. 134), yet Papa Doc's representatives, the Tontons Macoute, fit into the grotesque comedy of Haiti, dressed up in strange hats and dark glasses to play their villainous role.

The direction the plot takes at the end of the novel also corroborates the black comedy viewpoint: comedy traditionally celebrates reconciliation and social continuity, but at the end of The Comedians, Jones and Magiot are dead, Brown and Martha's love affair has fizzled out, there is a funeral instead of a wedding, and Brown is left to serve the dead. There is apparently little hope in such a finale. Brown seems to represent Greene's point of view about the nature of the universe and its inhabitants, but he also illustrates the acquiescence of selfish opting out of responsibility that results from the absence of faith, however irrational. The Comedians communicates a sense of Greene's progress from fiction based on a "tragic" conflict between human and divine values, to fiction conceived in terms of comedy and irony in which the possibility of religious faith has all but retreated out of sight in the anarchic confusion of human behaviour."

"Lodge, p. 44.
It also conveys, however, that those who have faith, whether in Communism, Voodooism, or vegetarianism have at least the courage and strength and urge to act in spite of, or even because of, the "anarchic confusion of human behaviour."

The priest's sermon and Margiot's letter to Brown at the end provide the final positive, if unorthodox, word. Through the sentiments expressed by the two men, Greene advocates a humanist mystique that embraces both Communism and Catholicism. He has revised his religious vision of life apparent in the earlier Catholic novels, and uses the idea of religion in a broad, non-doctrinal, non-sectarian sense in *The Comedians*. Brown's weakness and failure result from his lack of any belief; although commitment leads to defeat or death, Greene illustrates that any conviction honestly held is protection against the terror, boredom, and cynicism in a universe perceived as absurd and meaningless. Brown accepts defeat and is ready to play its game without experiencing any illuminating or transforming moments. Unlike the priest in *The Power and the Glory*, he cannot even giggle at absurdity as he can see nothing beyond it: he is the hollow man, trapped in his own awareness and rationality with nothing to sustain him. The Catholicism, Communism, Voodooism, and vegetarianism presented in *The Comedians* are all seen to be flawed, yet the choice of any one is preferable to no faith at all. Greene shows the importance of faith as a mainspring of action, as a means of subordinating the self and inspiring commitment to others. Even though the Smith's vegetarianism is laughable, Magiot's communism inconsistent, and the patriots' Voodooism irrational, all three are preferable to the
hollowness and the selfishness that Brown's indifference generates. Brown may not stir our sympathies or remain in our memories as the whiskey priest does because of the unheroic mode of his presentation, and the wryly comic tone of the writing, but in him Greene has successfully created a negative illustration of the need for faith.

Although The Comedians has none of the paradoxes and anomalies that create such startling effects in Greene's earlier religious novels, the theme is cleverly and convincingly developed within a framework of grim comedy. Greene's talent for vivid evocation of landscape, atmosphere, and people is indisputable. The novel is acknowledged as one of his finest, mainly because of its technical maturity: at the time of its publication, The Times Literary Supplement reviewer noted "the excellence of the craftsmanship, the swift dialogue, the touch of drollery, the play of great wit and funniness"\(^5\), qualities quite different from the "distinctly memorable and imitable style—hot, sweaty, sensuous"\(^6\)—of his more fervent and less witty earlier novels. The preoccupation with one faith that provided Greene with his themes, structures, and symbols has evolved into a more catholic attitude: his representation of different forms of commitment and faith is more equivocal and detached than his representation of Catholicism in the earlier novels, and results in a quite different tone and mode of writing.


CONCLUSION

A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression.

Henry James, "The Art of Fiction"

In his novels of the late 30's and 40's, Greene discovered the potentialities of Catholic themes and characters in his fiction. He used the paradoxes implicit in the Christian faith and the conflicts between human and divine values in order to create the central tensions of these novels. The Power and the Glory demonstrates the startling and powerful effects Greene could achieve when Catholic issues were central to the development of his fiction. After the contentious success of the Catholic trilogy, The End of the Affair illustrates the difficulties to which an over-zealous concern with specific issues of doctrine can lead when religious premises conflict directly with artistic requirements. Plot and character are manipulated to illustrate the notion of the sanctified sinner, and the novel suffers accordingly.

By 1955, Greene seems to have abandoned the dilemmas of faith his Catholic characters experience, and turned instead to considerations of a wider moral and social kind. Through his narrator in The Quiet American, Greene explores the more existentialist questions of the freedom of choice and the responsibility of individual existence: Fowler desires a trouble-free, comfortable life as a detached reporter
but finds himself deeply disturbed by questions of conscience and commitment generated by political conflict. Greene's broader religious concerns that embrace moral and ethical dilemmas beyond specific issues of doctrine are apparent as well as his careful crafting of structure and more sophisticated use of imagery in the fabric of the text. However, his long preoccupation with Catholicism still intrudes in ways detrimental to the established development of the fiction:

having been forced out of his indifference to a state of being engagé, Fowler's strong urge towards confession and forgiveness at the end is an evasion in humanitarian terms of the anguish Greene must allow his main character to confront and deal with as a committed man.

With the publication of The Comedians it is evident that Greene has moved even further away from the crises of faith that beset his earlier characters: Brown begins and ends an uncommitted man in an absurd universe that defies explanation. Unable to transcend the Godless reality he perceives around him, Brown takes his place sardonically as an actor in life's grotesque comedy, determined not to see, let alone solve, any ontological enigmas. He is preoccupied with his own personal goals and driven by self-interest with no faith in either man or God. Through the presentation of various ideologies exhibited by people Brown knows and meets, Greene shows the importance of faith as a mainspring of action, as a means of subordinating the self and inspiring commitment to others, despite the apparent absurdity and meaninglessness of life.

Greene's development as a writer of religious issues in a less
sectarian sense results in a quite different kind of novel: he has a different hero, a different approach to events, a different tone, and a different mode. The broadening of his religious concerns has made his fiction less doctrinaire, less controversial, and perhaps more accessible. His style and technique are mature and sophisticated in comparison to the less assured craft of his Catholic period; however, the negative presentation of the necessity of any form of faith through an anti-heroic central character has resulted in fiction that is less moving than his earlier religious novels at their best. The disillusioned, cynical Brown fails to capture the imagination or to stir us in the way that the whiskey priest does in The Power and the Glory. Greene's concern with specific Catholic issues at the time of writing the latter novel provided him with a source of paradigms that emerge credibly from a setting of religious persecution. Such patterns and symbols enabled Greene to develop the tale of a whiskey priest's progress, betrayal, and death in a heroic mode that uses the priest's very timidity and knowledge of his sinfulness as the basis of his strength. His focus on an anti-hero in The Comedians diminishes the dramatic force he could achieve in The Power and the Glory. In his Catholic period, when Greene dealt positively with themes of heroism and martyrdom amongst very ordinary people, the possibility existed of achieving startling and dramatic effects,

1 Compare Greene's description of Coral on p. 33 of The Power and the Glory with his more terse and evocative description of Angel on p. 89 of The Comedians.
even though his Catholic themes could also lead to poor characterization and development when doctrine dominated the dynamics of the literary imagination and undermined its aesthetic credibility.

Broadening his religious scope has enabled Greene to transcend the specific issues of doctrine that provided the impetus for his early novels. With a wider vision of human affairs that embraces a variety of beliefs and ideologies, Greene's selection and treatment of ideas in his novels has changed accordingly. The fatal antinomy between human and divine claims is no longer the consistent theme of his novels, nor are characters hounded by dilemmas of faith that lead them to dramatic or tragic deaths. The central characters of Greene's more recent novels are noticeably unhelped or unhampered by the presence of God: the urgent portrayal of the certainties and agonies proceeding from the Catholic faith has been replaced by a more detached and witty representation of the need for commitment of any kind if one is to transcend the self and find purpose in life.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


---------. The Lost Childhood and Other Essays. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1951.


Secondary Sources


Haber, Herbert R. "The Two Worlds of Graham Greene." *Modern Fiction Studies*, 3 (1957), 256-68.


Muller, Charles. "Graham Greene and the Absurd." Unisa English Studies, 10, No. 2 (1972), 34-44.


---------. "The Sad Comedies: Graham Greene's Later Novels." Florida Quarterly, 1, No. 4 (1968), 65-77.


Eerdmans, 1975.


