

MICHAEL GIFFIN

# GREENE ON GRACE



I'VE NEVER RECANTED before but—as my view of Graham Greene's four Catholic novels has changed—a recantation is in order. My pre-recantation view was formed in the 1980s while studying for the Anglican priesthood at a Catholic seminary. Now there was nothing wrong with that seminary; the teaching was excellent; the lecturers were more objective—and less dogmatic or insistent—than those at the secular university where had I previously studied; where many lecturers were hostile towards Christianity and patronised Christians.

You'd have to say, though, my lecturers at seminary were concerned to impart what they believed to be the best of Vatican II; prior to which—so we were told—many if not most Catholics held heterodox views which didn't accord with the orthodoxy Vatican II wanted to stress. By the time the language of Vatican II worked its way into my psyche, my sense of Greene's theological sensibilities—often called Manichean; sometimes called Jansenist—prejudiced me against him as an author. Recently I've re-read the four Catholic novels, along with Ian Thomson's useful collection of Greene's *Tablet* journalism, *Articles of Faith* (2006), and Richard Greene's excellent *Graham Greene: A Life in Letters* (2007). I now realise my sense of Greene's pre-Vatican II heterodoxy was overstated or misapplied and as a result I misunderstood his Catholic novels.

Greene has survived as a much-admired but much-criticised author whose work evokes powerful emotions. Frank Kermode, usually a measured critic, once observed in a book review of *A Burnt-out Case* (1962) that the novel is so far below expectations questions arise as to whether the expectations were reasonable, or whether there were any previous indications in Greene's work that a failure of this kind was possible. To answer these questions, he re-read the novels since *The Power and the Glory* (1940)—and conducted an overview of what other critics had to say—before going on to write a hostile review of Greene's work. Such hostility was

in order, Kermode believed, since “it is very noticeable that the best criticism of Mr Greene is hostile.”

George Orwell was less measured. In his often-quoted essay, “The Sanctified Sinner” (in the *New Yorker*, 1948), Orwell noticed Greene's latest novel, *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), gave the impression of having been mechanically constructed, like an algebraic equation, with no attempt at psychological probability.

Moreover, many things about Greene's Catholic novels annoyed Orwell intensely, including the suggestions that only Catholics understand Christian doctrine; it's better to be an errant Catholic than a virtuous pagan;

there's something distinguished about being damned; Hell is a high-class night club, apparently reserved for Catholics, since the non-Catholics are too ignorant to be held guilty, like the beasts that perish. “This cult of the sanctified sinner seems to me to be frivolous,” Orwell wrote, “and underneath it there probably lies a weakening of belief, for when people really believed in Hell, they were not so fond of striking graceful attitudes on its brink.”

The hostility of Kermode and Orwell towards Greene has been balanced by more recent assessments from equally distinguished author-critics. In his 2004 introduction to *Brighton Rock* (1938), J.M. Coetzee suggests Greene's romantic conception of Catholicism provides a necessary counterbalance to a prevailing pagan sensibility both then and now. In his 1990 introduction to *The Power and the Glory*, John Updike calls the novel a masterpiece and argues its energy and grandeur derive from Greene's will towards compassion, mirrored in his political sympathies. William Golding believes Greene will be remembered as “the ultimate chronicler of twentieth-century man's consciousness and anxiety”.

What do we make of this more recent phenomenon, in which those outside the Church have a strong sense of what's good or bad about Greene's novels—and by implication good or bad about his theology—which amounts to a vicarious sense of what the Church should

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or shouldn't be? What about those within the Church? Does their opinion matter, and, if it does matter, is their opinion uniform? The pre-Vatican II Church placed *The Power and the Glory* on the List of Prohibited Books (*Index Librorum Prohibitorum*); however, Paul VI, the pope who abolished the *Index* in 1966, was an admirer who once told Greene there would always be things in his books which would offend some Catholics so he shouldn't be bothered about what they thought. For every Catholic who objects to Greene's theology, there's another Catholic who thinks Greene's theology is just fine. More importantly, irrespective of his theology, his stories still resonate in the minds of readers within and without the Church.

It's traditional to draw a line between Greene's Catholic novels, which use his understanding of Catholicism to frame his response to the fiction of modernism (and hence the philosophy of modernity) and his later novels which seem to have less of a Catholic underpinning. There may be many reasons for this arbitrary division; his novels may have stopped being explicitly Catholic once he realised his status as a theologian-apologist wasn't easily defended or widely appreciated; his Catholic underpinning may have become more implicit rather than explicit thus more inductive than deductive; his faith may have changed once he came to regard himself as a Catholic agnostic; finally, he may have simply matured as an author over the years.

These issues don't concern me here. I want to share my re-assessment of the Catholic novels, to show how unique each is, and to suggest that it's perverse to dismiss all of them as heterodox, as I once did myself. *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.*

**I** STILL BELIEVE GREENE'S theological underpinning is most improbable in his first Catholic novel, *Brighton Rock* (1938). Perhaps Greene came to share something of my view, when he became a Catholic agnostic. In his introduction to the 1970 edition, he admitted to thinking the novel "began as a detective story" and continued "as an error of judgment" because it involved "a discussion, far too obvious and open for a novel, of the distinction between good-and-evil and right-and-wrong" and the mystery of "the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God". In retrospect he thought the first fifty pages—all that remains of the detective story—should have been removed and the novel revised from the beginning of what's now called Part Two. "A lost thing could I never find," he quoted from Belloc, "nor a broken thing mended."

There's a high degree of probability about *Brighton Rock*, if read purely as a story about the dark side of organised crime in Brighton during the 1930s; however, let's look at the theological underpinning—the tropes

and the discourse—which an older and wiser Greene wished he had reworked, as it's an excellent example of where Orwell's hostility is coming from. On one hand, there's the superbly delineated pagan character, the attractive middle-aged Ida, a realistic portrayal of a secular Westerner in the early-twentieth century Anglosphere. On the other, there are the novel's two teenage characters, the sociopathic gang-leader Pinkie and mousy waitress Rose; both unattractive and sexless tropes for damnation and redemption; both tribal Catholics who precociously insist on being different from the rest of society. Ida is a convincing description of a human being and we recognise millions like her; Pinkie and Rose aren't convincing as human beings but this may not be important in a religious allegory.

Ida is the cleanest character in the novel; the only character seen to wash herself. Greene gives her an opulent and sensual body, through which she enjoys the physical aspects of life: eating, drinking, having sex. She has a kind heart, something neither Catholic character has; she also has instincts they don't have, which tell her whenever there's "something odd, something which didn't smell right", which allow her to sniff out right and wrong. Her instincts are important to her, as she admits to being "a stickler where right's concerned". Ida is a happy pagan who can't be saved, in Greene's scheme of things, but then she cares nothing for whatever he means by salvation. Her motto is "it's fun to be alive". She places the highest value on keeping death at bay.

Although Ida is the closest thing the novel has to what we now recognise as a moral hero, Greene never intended this, and the reader isn't meant to sympathise with her morality or her heroism. According to the narrator, there's something dangerous and remorseless about Ida's optimism, desire to know the truth, "ruthless vitality", and capacity for vengeance when her sense of what's right has been violated. Her pagan morality is of no significance to Greene, even though it's the only grounded morality the novel offers; he's primarily concerned to describe her lack of affinity with—and dangerous opposition to—the sociopathic Pinkie and mousy Rose. Ida is meant to be nothing more than an earthy pagan foil for Greene's ethereal Catholic tropes.

The sociopathic Pinkie is an exiled soul trapped in a material body; in other words, he's a trope within Greek cosmology rather than Scriptural cosmology. Since Vatican II the Church thinks it necessary to at least notice this paradigmatic distinction—between what's Greek and what's Scriptural—which Greene was apparently unaware of in the 1930s. Pinkie looks old even though he's still a teenager; his eyes are touched with "the annihilating eternity from which he had come and to which he went." His telephone number is 666. Because he's an exiled soul, he isn't happy being in the world. His only sensual pleasure comes from touching a

bottle of vitriol—a concentrated oil of sulphuric acid—which gives him the power to disfigure and destroy human bodies. The novel consistently portrays Pinkie as intent on fulfilling some disembodied Greek logic—rather than any embodied Scriptural logic—and this is what makes the theology of Greene’s first Catholic novel seem more heterodox than the other three. Pinkie must sabotage Rose’s redemptive love for him, as Greene doesn’t want Pinkie to be saved. In an overly-formulaic way, Greene’s theology depends on Pinkie’s damnation.

The theological trap the pre-Vatican II Greene falls into is portraying moral Ida as nature unperfected by grace while simultaneously portraying immoral Pinkie as nature impervious to the grace conferred at his baptism. Greene’s point is that Ida can’t experience grace because she hasn’t been baptised and therefore her morality is worthless, while the immoral Pinkie can experience grace (if he chooses) because he’s a tribal Catholic who has been baptised. It’s here Orwell’s secular hostility towards Greene’s theology resonates, even with religious critics. In relation to Pinkie, Greene forgets that baptism operates on human beings not on Greek tropes making their eternal return to and from old fashioned notions of Hell. In relation to Ida, Catholics are no longer encouraged to believe people like her are destined to spend an eternity in Limbo, unloved by and separated from God, simply because they haven’t been baptised.

To be fair to Greene, though, I’ve come to believe his mission is to describe the indelible nature of the sacraments and the lifelong internal struggle each person has with understanding or experiencing the grace of the sacraments they have received. That mission becomes more successful with each Catholic novel, as “the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God” gradually takes precedence over the “the distinction between good-and-evil and right-and-wrong”.

**I**N A LETTER to the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, written in the early 1950s, the Secretary of the Holy Office advised that *The Power and the Glory* (1940) had been “denounced to this Sacred Congregation”. On investigating the denunciation, the Holy Office concluded that the novel portrays a state of affairs so paradoxical, extraordinary, and erroneous as to disconcert unenlightened persons, who form the majority of readers; also, the novel injured the priesthood, as a man’s wretchedness carries the day. Greene was instructed not to permit further editions or translations.

There are several implications here all of which

probably overlap. First, the phenomenon of individual Catholics bypassing local and regional jurisdictions—parishes, dioceses, provinces—and asking the Vatican to act on their personal grievances is widely known. Second, the Holy Office may have used the terms paradoxical, extraordinary, and erroneous to refer to its pre-Vatican II perception of the novel’s theology and Greene’s status as a convert and self-proclaimed theologian-apologist. Third, in the early 1950s, the Holy Office believed it had a duty of care to protect the majority of Catholic readers, who it believed weren’t capable of grasping theological contexts or nuances. Fourth, the Vatican’s political role isn’t always understood or appreciated; although the more violent state-sponsored persecutions of the Church in Mexico had passed by the time the novel was published in 1940—by 1934 over ninety per cent of the clergy had been eliminated by emigration, expulsion, and assassination; by 1935 seventeen states had no clergy at all—the anti-clerical provisions of the Mexican constitution weren’t removed until 1992; the Vatican may have had diplomatic concerns over the novel’s implications for Christians still living in Mexico, in those parts of the world where they are persecuted, and in those parts of the world that don’t care whether they are persecuted.

Fifth, although priests are persons, and the Church accepts and accommodates their clerical fallibility, there’s a popular perception that priests are holy or should be holy; thus there are broader implications with Greene making a “whisky priest” the protagonist of his novel. For Catholics, clerical fallibility is officially expressed in a technical phrase, *ex opere operato*, which means the efficacy of a sacrament derives from the sacrament itself not from the merits or holiness of the priest as a person. For Anglicans, the principle of *ex opere operato* is conditional and depends on worthy reception of a sacrament. This is officially recognised in Article XXVI of the Thirty-nine Articles, which states that sacraments aren’t administered in the name of the priest and neither is their effect taken away or diminished by the sinfulness of the priest.

Greene obtained background for *The Power and the Glory* in the late 1930s, while on assignment in Mexico researching the effects of anti-religious laws in Chiapas and Tabasco, states where many priests had been executed or imprisoned. Updike hails the novel as Greene’s masterpiece and wonders whether its success is because there’s something un-English about the Catholicism which infuses—with its Manichean darkness and tortured literalism—his most ambitious fiction. We can agree with Updike to a point, as

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Greene is merely describing human nature outside the Anglosphere, which is essentially the same as human nature inside the Anglosphere. Updike's reference to Manicheism becomes irrelevant once readers see the novel as reminding them of fundamental human truths. The more one reads *The Power and the Glory*, the less one can accuse it of being paradoxical, extraordinary, or erroneous. We still live within its moral universe.

At the beginning of the novel, we are introduced to the unnamed "whisky priest" dressed in civilian clothes. He's apparently the last priest in his fictional Mexican state, on the run from the authorities, who are looking for him and want to kill him, because their aim is to wipe out the Church. He has arrived in a small port town, hoping to escape by cargo boat; however, as a local British dentist waylays him, the boat leaves without him; apart from that, the local conduit to whom he was referred—who had assisted other priests to escape and who would have assisted him to escape—has been liquidated.

Throughout the novel, instead of doggedly seeking to escape—and always just as he approaches another chance to escape—the "whisky priest" allows himself to be side-tracked whenever he is made aware of the presence of laypeople requiring the sacramental ministry only he can provide. He even allows himself to be tempted by a Judas figure—a half-Indian peasant who insists on befriending and guiding him—even though he's aware, from the moment they meet, that this man will at some point betray him and hand him over to the authorities.

The "whisky priest" doesn't see himself as a good or holy man—he's an alcoholic who has fathered a child; in his younger days he was complacent and conceited—but the focus of the novel isn't his person; it's his functional role as a priest; it's the indelibility of his ordination and the sacraments he mediates. Orwell dismissively speaks of the priest's "belief in his own thaumaturgic [magical or miraculous] powers" and thus completely misses the one point of doctrine on which denominations that claim apostolic succession agree: through ordination, priests are given particular gifts of the Holy Spirit. To those who believe in this doctrine, there's nothing heterodox about Greene's focus on "the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God", which is much greater and more convincing in *The Power and the Glory* than it is in *Brighton Rock*.

As a story about religious persecution, it's easy to forget that the situation Greene describes did happen, and there may be more parallels than we care to admit between Mexico in the 1930s and Australia now, since a significant proportion of Australians—including some within the Church—would destroy the Church if they could (and are busily having a go at it). As a theological reflection, about the struggle to understand or experi-

ence the objective reality of the sacraments, the moral of the story still applies. Not all Christians, including many Catholics, will agree with or accept this proposition, even though Greene's theology in this novel can't be dismissed as heterodox; it exists within the mainstream of Catholicism, and also Anglicanism once reception is accommodated. None of this, however, accounts for those secular readers and critics who defend *The Power and the Glory* more than those within the Church. That phenomenon deserves further consideration.

**G**REENE'S THIRD CATHOLIC novel, *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), is inspired by his familiarity with Church teaching about the indissolubility of marriage, in relation to his loyalty to his marriage vows, throughout his many extramarital relationships. The novel is more theological than autobiographical, though; even if the novel reflects something of his plight at the time, he never confused his plight with what he was trying to achieve in his novel. In 1979 he wrote to Anthony Burgess, thanking him for a flattering radio lecture, given on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday, but correcting an apparent error:

Just to put the record straight about your very generous broadcast: it was not *The Heart of the Matter* which was condemned by the Holy Office but *The Power and the Glory* and it was *The Power and the Glory* that Paul VI had read. It does make a good deal of difference because in my opinion *The Heart of the Matter* would quite rightly be condemned but not *The Power and the Glory*.

So we need to ask: Condemned for what? Speculation tends to focus on the suicide of the central character, Scobie, rather than the series of human failings that preceded and motivated it. To explore this further, let's look briefly at the antithetical perspectives of two early reviewers: Orwell and Waugh.

In his hostile review, "The Sanctified Sinner", Orwell parodies the novel's plot as ridiculous before describing its logical flaws. First, Scobie's motives throughout the novel, assuming one believes in them, don't adequately explain his actions throughout the novel. Second, the novel's West African setting is incongruous, as everything that happens there could happen in a London suburb. Third, the Africans exist only as an occasionally mentioned background; the hostility between black and white, and struggle between coloniser and colonised, doesn't rate a mention. Fourth, although the novel is set in 1942, Scobie seldom thinks about the war and is only interested in his personal progress towards damnation. Although the improbability of all this shows up against novel's colonial setting, it's an improbability already present in *Brighton Rock*, and it stems from Greene's

need to foist his theological preoccupations upon ordinary people anywhere in the world.

Scobie is improbable, Orwell argues, because the two halves of him don't fit together. If he really were capable of getting into the kind of professional and personal mess the novel describes, he would have got into it years earlier. If he really felt adultery was a mortal sin, he would stop committing it, and if he persisted in it, his sense of sin would weaken. If he really believed in Hell, he wouldn't risk going there to spare the feelings of his neurotic wife and neurotic mistress. If he really were a man whose chief characteristic is a horror of causing pain, he wouldn't be an officer in a colonial police force. Orwell believes Greene's characters are too high-brow; Scobie is a theologian; his fool of a wife reads poetry; the detective sent to spy on him writes poetry. Curiously, though, while Orwell's hostility flows from his belief that novels should be psychologically probable, his anthropomorphic *Animal Farm* (1945) is far from a psychologically probable study of farm animals; it's just as much a secular allegory as Greene's novel is a religious allegory.

In his sympathetic review, "Felix Culpa?" (*The Tablet*, 1948), Waugh argues that Greene is at the vanguard of a shift in the *zeitgeist*, away from the fiction of modernism (and philosophy of modernity) to something else, away from sociology towards eschatology: "His eyes are on the Four Last Things, and so mountainous are the disappointments of recent history that there are already signs of a popular breakaway to join him." For Waugh, *The Heart of the Matter* complements *Brighton Rock* but poses a vastly more subtle problem. Scobie speaks of the Church as "knowing all the answers" but his life and death are a problem to which the answer is in the mind of God alone. After providing a perceptive summary of the novel, Waugh applauds Greene's technical mastery, which surpasses his earlier novels: "It is so well done that one forgets the doer. The characters are real people whose moral and spiritual predicament is our own because they are part of our personal experience."

Waugh isn't simply Greene's Catholic cheer squad. He describes the novel's subtlety in a way few critics have, which allows us to question the actual source of Orwell's hostility and motivation for his acerbic review. Scobie believes in damnation and believes himself to be damned. He dies in mortal sin as defined by moral theologians. The conclusion of the novel is that no one knows the secrets of the human heart or the nature of God's mercy; also, while it's improper to speculate on another's damnation, the question "Is Scobie damned?"

really is the heart of the matter. Scobie isn't Greene's creature, devised to illustrate a thesis. He's a man of independent soul. So Waugh asks: Can one separate Scobie's moral state from his spiritual state? Both are complex and ambiguous: because of his professional delinquency, his adultery, the murder of his servant, his sacrilegious communion, and his suicide. We are told Scobie is motivated by the love of God throughout the novel; however, Waugh believes the idea of Scobie willing his own damnation for the love of God is either a loose poetical expression or a mad blasphemy, for the God who accepted that sacrifice could neither be just nor lovable; and, we should add here, not the God of Scripture.

Did Greene really intend Scobie to will his damnation because he loved God? In a letter to a French scholar, written in 1950, he admitted the novel's French translation—because of the nature of the French language—didn't capture the point he was making. In the English version, Scobie's last prayer is cut off. He says "Oh God, I love ..." without adding the subject of the love. Greene wanted to create an ambiguity—in the minds of both Scobie and the reader—over whether Scobie loved God or the two women in his life. "The point I would like to make, which is probably heretical," Greene wrote to the French scholar, "is that at the moment of death even sexual love comes within the borders of charity ... when a man knows he is dying in a few moments sexual love itself becomes completely altruistic ... it is love pure and simple, and therefore there must be some confusion in the mind as to the object of love."

That point is made more fully—and most successfully—in Greene's last Catholic novel.

**A**LL GREENE'S CATHOLIC novels frame his responses to the fiction of modernism (and philosophy of modernity), but his last, *The End of the Affair* (1951), does so in an incomparable way, as idea and as art. The novel is a densely woven reflection on logical positivism—a theory that limits knowledge to what is verifiable or falsifiable—which excludes metaphysical truth from its model of reality. But Greene's response to logical positivism isn't to dogmatically insist on metaphysical truth; it's to create ironies and ambiguities that might allow the possibility of metaphysical truth. That presented him with intellectual and literary challenges which he'd never experienced previously. He thought he was partially successful in meeting the challenges but—being his own best critic—he acknowledged his failures. His

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critical measure was the distinction between the openness of life and the constraints of literature. Ian Gregor makes a useful point about this distinction, in *The Moral and the Story* (1962): In life we are continually warned against rashness of judgment—because all the evidence on which to base a judgment can never be available to us—but in literature we can demand demonstration.

Here are the plot's bare bones. Bendrix is a jealous and bitter middle-aged novelist. Sarah is the wife of Henry, a senior public servant. The novelist and the wife have a passionate affair which lasts most of World War II but ends abruptly during an air raid. Bendrix is knocked unconscious and lying under a fallen door; Sarah believes he's dead; after a few minutes he recovers, goes upstairs, and finds Sarah on her knees praying, although she has no apparent background in or memory of religious belief; she leaves the bombed house and they never meet again as lovers. The following year, Bendrix accidentally meets Henry, who confides that he's thinking about hiring a private eye to investigate his wife's frequent absences, which have continued even after the affair with Bendrix ended. In fact, being as jealous and as bitter as he is, Bendrix hires a private eye to investigate whether Sarah left him for another man. He obtains Sarah's diary, which reveals that during the air raid she made a bargain with God promising she'll give Bendrix up in return for his life. Although Sarah has ended the affair she still loves Bendrix and jeopardises her health avoiding him; she spends the rest of her short life trying to forget him and begging God for peace; she gets cold and wet running away from him and dies of pneumonia. Henry doesn't know his last rival for Sarah's love was divine rather than human. Bendrix eventually learns that his last rival was God, but this isn't proof of God's existence, it's merely evidence that Sarah is wrestling with faith.

Gregor reminds us that these events are told through Bendrix's distorted perspective, which gives the impression of emotional immediacy but makes it difficult for the reader to assess those events objectively. The difficulty is the reader can't presume anything; reasonable inferences from the plot never match its calculated indeterminacy. While the novel has the appearance of a moral story—here's what looks like adultery; there's what looks like remorse—these are false clues leading to false conclusions. In fact, the subject of the novel isn't adultery or remorse but grace.

In the earlier Catholic novels, readers take references to grace as something they are asked to observe rather than explore, in the manner of arrows in the margin of a map indicating the places where grace is located on the map. In *The End of the Affair* the reader is presented with a different kind of map; the arrows are reversed, pointing towards sections of the novel left blank, which renders problematic their relationship with those sec-

tions not left blank. In Greene's earlier Catholic maps, arrows pointing to grace give context to an area already defined; in his last Catholic map they plot the limits of the unknown, and whichever road we take we are confronted with the unknown.

How does grace operate on a character like Sarah, who like all of us is an example of a fallen person? Near the end of the novel Bendrix meets an old woman at Sarah's funeral who turns out to be the mother of whom Sarah had never spoken. He takes Mrs Bertram out to dinner and discovers she's one of those "bad" Catholics who have a bob both ways and simultaneously believes and disbelieves. He's horrified to hear that this mother—an appalling role model—had her two-year-old daughter baptised during a trip to France, not for spiritual reasons but as revenge upon her Jewish husband. The baptism was a spontaneous and perfunctory event, performed in private by a priest, and Sarah never knew about the baptism herself. Bendrix doesn't take the baptism seriously, since he doesn't believe in sacraments conferring anything apart from tribal identity; that is, he doesn't believe it actually made Sarah a Christian. So he baulks about baptism:

It wasn't You that "took" [like a vaccination], I told the God I didn't believe in, that imaginary God who Sarah thought had saved my life (for what conceivable purpose?) and who had ruined even in his non-existence the only deep happiness I had ever experienced: oh no, it wasn't You that took, for that would have been magic and I believe in magic even less than I believe in You: magic is your cross, your resurrection of the body, your holy Catholic church, your communion of saints ... It's just a coincidence, I thought, a horrible coincidence that nearly brought her back at the end to You. You can't mark a two-year-old child for life with a bit of water and a prayer. If I began to believe that, I could believe in the body and the blood. You didn't own her all those years: I owned her. You won in the end, You don't need to remind me of that, but she wasn't deceiving me with You when she lay there with me, on this bed, with this pillow under her back. When she slept I was with her, not You. It was I who penetrated her, not You.

Sarah was never aware of her baptism, was never a particularly good person, and had a terrible struggle with her faith in spite of her baptism. So what does her baptism really mean?

Is Greene's point that Sarah wouldn't have eventually come to faith without her baptism: struggle or no struggle? If that is his point, is it a subject for art? Gregor makes another point here, about the novel's religious background shading into judgment about its literary

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value. Religious orthodoxy isn't synonymous with artistic merit and we need to remind ourselves of a possible connection between the novel's religious emphasis—however subtly it's made—and what many will regard as its artistic failure. While there's no *a priori* reason why a successful novel shouldn't be written about the life of grace, about saints, and about sinners, its success will depend on its power to communicate their drama in human terms. While Greene understood the intellectual and literary difficulties better than anyone else, critical judgments about his success or failure in *The End of the Affair* still depend on the reader's system of belief, or willingness to suspend their disbelief.

**G**REENE'S CATHOLIC NOVELS continue to challenge secular and religious readers alike, but it isn't possible to dichotomise these challenges as secular or religious, as the spectrum along which they occur is too broad and varied for dichotomies. Secular readers can no longer make simple appeals to their psychological improbability—or their lack of realism or rationality—without negotiating how these concepts are defined and measured and why they are appropriate to the novel of ideas. Religious readers can no longer make simple appeals to their heterodoxy, or to their orthodoxy, without considering how these are defined and measured and why they are appropriate to

the novel of ideas. The antithetical views of Orwell and Waugh are still useful, however, in framing a dialectical approach to Greene, as both are convincing in different ways. Perhaps the twenty-first century demands a sympathetic synthesis rather than adversarial hostility, though, since Greene isn't black and white and his Catholic novels deserve more from us than the literary equivalent of the banal debate between science and religion, or between evolutionists and creationists.

In this reassessment of the four Catholic novels, I find no traces of heterodoxy in either *The Power and the Glory* or *The End of the Affair*, both of which are as breath-taking as they are different. Although *Brighton Rock* makes for a good story, I believe its theological underpinning still isn't in keeping with the orthodoxy Vatican II wanted to stress, and Greene's unwillingness to acknowledge Ida's morality remains a major stumbling block. As far as *The Heart of the Matter* is concerned, I feel both Orwell and Waugh have important things to say, but a sympathetic synthesis of their views isn't easy. Perhaps the key lies in contemplating what Golding meant when he said Greene will be remembered as "the ultimate chronicler of twentieth-century man's consciousness and anxiety".

*Michael Giffin discussed **The God That Did Not Fail** by Robert Royal in the May issue.*

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## POEM