

## ABSTRACT

The Ends of Love: Vice and Charity in *The End of the Affair*

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*The End of the Affair* offers a compelling portrait of the two possible ends of natural love. Sarah Miles and Maurice Bendrix are confronted with the choice to let their natural love be subsumed into the love of God, transformed by its inherent capacity to conduit divine love, or else to degrade their love by seeking an impossible satisfaction in it. Sarah transitions from disordered love to real charity, in the pattern of true *eros* and *agape*. In contrast, Bendrix attempts to make their love an end in itself, intentionally preventing its sublimation into the love of God. In this he demonstrates the capital vices lust and envy as described in the seven deadly sins tradition. Greene's compelling depiction of how natural love can be pulled toward both demonic vice and the love of God makes *The End of the Affair* a powerful portrayal of Catholic moral choice.

The Ends of Love: Vice and Charity in *The End of the Affair*

by

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A Thesis

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to SOCRG

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction: Graham Greene: The Man and the Critics

In England [...] people are always renouncing each other on account of being Roman Catholics. It's sometimes very sad for them. A lot of English books are about this, you know.

—Nancy Mitford, *The Pursuit of Love*

Since their publication, Graham Greene's Catholic novels have consistently elicited violent reaction—tending toward strident condemnation or almost fawning adoration. When *The Heart of the Matter* was published, the *Catholic Herald* printed a letter proclaiming that "...no good whatever can result from publicizing it, while the book's potentiality for harm is immense...If ever there was a book that should be banned surely this is it" (Qtd. in Sherry, *Vol. II* 296). The *Universe*, another popular Catholic paper at the time, printed this effusive note: "I should like to put on record the fact that one great sinner was so moved by Mr. Greene's last book that he has completely changed his way of life and returned to the practice of the Faith" (Sherry, *Vol. II* 299). The novels have been banned by the Catholic Church and proscribed by various clergy; accused equally of leading to unbelief and faith, damnation and salvation. This thesis will focus exclusively on Graham Greene's fourth and final Catholic novel, *The End of the Affair*, which was (and is) both acclaimed and derided as have been the others. In his introduction to the novel, Michael Gorra recollects first throwing the book against a wall in disgust. Norman Sherry's assessment, on the other hand, can sound like the heartfelt refrains of David Lodge's character Michael in *Souls and Bodies*—an earnest young man who parodies the curious reverence that Greene's work sometimes generates: "Michael's

interest [in Graham Greene] was more than academic: in some oblique way the credibility of the Catholic faith was underwritten for him by the existence of distinguished literary converts like Graham Greene...” (Lodge, *Souls and Bodies* 41).

As the story of an adulterous affair between a novelist, Maurice Bendrix, and the wife of a civil servant, Sarah Miles, *The End of the Affair* is controversial not because it is steeped in sex and lies, but because of its depiction of charity and sacrifice. The jarring title of *Time*'s cover story on Greene after the novel was published expresses the scandal: “Adultery can lead to sainthood.” This has been a common reading ever since—by both opponents and enthusiasts. But what exactly is the relationship between the natural—and beyond that, even sinful—love that Bendrix and Sarah share and the divine love which Sarah eventually embraces and Bendrix is haunted by? The answer to this question is necessarily complex, requiring not just an understanding of Greene's faith and theology but also of the artistic and theological tradition he engages and is occasionally carried away by. As many critics have pointed out, *The End of the Affair* offers a very compelling portrait of the way that natural and divine love are irrevocably related—with the former leading to the latter. However, within this general theological frame, there are very important caveats. Though I would argue that Sarah Miles plainly moves from a disordered, but passionate, natural love for Bendrix, to an increasingly charitable and truly sacrificial love, the course of Bendrix's love for Sarah cannot be viewed so simply or directly. In fact, the language Bendrix uses to describe his feelings for Sarah can be read as fitting with the tradition of the seven deadly sins. Though there is clearly an element of love, and we are meant to note the evolution of this love through the course of the novel, what Bendrix feels for Sarah is primarily a representation of a thick moral



conception of the capital vices. It is Greene's compellingly textured depiction of the conflicting demonic pull of lust and envy against the constant pressure of the love of God on Sarah and Bendrix's natural love that make *The End of the Affair* so powerful. In Bendrix and Sarah's love we are challenged by the moral choice confronting all natural goods: allow them to lead to the love of God in conformity with our true nature, or to make these gifts ends in themselves, to their and our own destruction. Ultimately the novel reveals that adultery does not lead to sainthood; the love of God, in which all other loves can be subsumed and made one, is the only way to the Beatific life.

### I.

For Greene, romantic and divine love were related from the time of his conversion. He became interested in the Catholic faith at the time of his engagement to the devout Catholic, Vivien Dayrell-Browning. His casual curiosity about the faith of his fiancée became unexpectedly more serious after Greene began meeting with a priest named Father Trollope. Initially attracted to the actor-turned-clergyman's charm, Greene confronted in Father Trollope what he called, "the challenge of an inexplicable goodness" (Greene, *A Sort of Life* 166). Though he took instruction and was increasingly convinced of Catholic truth, Greene was reluctant to thoroughly embrace his nascent faith. With a novelist's intuition, he recognized that abandoning himself to this 'inexplicable goodness' would have huge consequences in his life.

In writing of his conversion, Greene professed to have had more trouble believing in God's existence than in God's goodness. It is clear that in some ways his doubt had more to do with the ways in which the reality of God's existence would alter his life than with any intellectual skepticism. He acknowledged, "If I were ever to be convinced in

even the remote possibility of a supreme, omnipotent and omniscient power I realized that nothing afterwards would seem impossible. It was on the ground of a dogmatic atheism that I fought and fought hard. It was like a fight for personal survival” (Greene, *A Sort of Life* 167). In some ways it was personal survival that Greene was fighting for—or at least the kind of personal autonomy possible only in a godless universe. By acknowledging the Christian God, Greene would enter a moral universe marked irrevocably and inescapably by the requirements of its creator. He was disinclined to wholeheartedly embrace the strict demands and limitations that this would inevitably entail. This is why the story of Father Trollope’s own sacrificial faith (he eventually became an ascetic Redemptorist) came not as inspiration to Greene, but “like a warning hand placed on [Greene’s] shoulder. ‘See the danger of going too far,’ that was the menace [Trollope’s] story contained. ‘Be very careful. Keep well within your depth. There are dangerous currents out at sea which could sweep you anywhere.’ Father Trollope had been swept a very long way out...” (Greene, *A Sort of Life* 166).

Greene did apparently intend to enter and participate in the life of the Church, though he did not persist in what such a life required for long. It is easy to be skeptical about Greene’s devotion—he was notorious for sleeping with prostitutes throughout his engagement, conversion, and entire marriage; compared with his long-term affairs, these infidelities hardly even seem like betrayals of his wife or of the Catholic morality to which he consented by joining the Church. He was a heavy drinker, indulged in drugs, and was clearly obsessed with sex. For Greene to be in communion with the Catholic Church, to be able to take the Eucharist without mortal sin, he would have had to confess his infidelities and other sins with true contrition and a firm intent never to commit them

again—and thus to lose his earlier fight against the demands of faith. However, an impressive catalogue of vices does not erase the reality of Greene’s religious conversion. The fact that he did still believe is crucial to the interpretation of his Catholic novels, as is his fight against this same faith.

The tangle of faith and doubt that made up Greene’s attitude toward divine love at the time of his conversion was intimately related to his experience of natural, romantic love. During their engagement and happy early years of marriage, Greene’s romantic regard for Vivien was wholly integrated with God’s goodness and love. Writing to her in 1927, Greene effused: “I can believe that miracles will be done at your grave. Only you should be the patron saint of lovers & depose that nonentity St Valentine” (Sherry, *Vol I* 352). Though Greene did not maintain such a miraculous view of Vivien for long, he primarily associated her with the life of faith—even while being unfaithful.

It seems that Graham Greene never fully allowed himself to be swept away by his faith as fully as he was transported by sexual love. An eternally adolescent St. Augustine, Greene adhered to a “not yet” attitude regarding chastity and sanctification long enough for Father Trollope’s unconditional surrender to seem unfeasible. Michael Sheldon takes such a dark view of Greene’s life that he denies any sincerity at all in the Catholic elements of his work—claiming that Greene faithlessly employs religious themes in an almost intentionally subversive manner. Though Greene’s fiction is not in any way consistently orthodox, we shall see that in *The End of the Affair* his use of Catholic themes is not mercenary. J. C. Whitehouse is right to contend that, in his fiction, Greene is concerned

[...] with people immersed in specific, concrete, and highly individual circumstances. What matters to him isn’t so much the scoring of

ideological or theological points as the exploration of certain modes of knowing and picturing the human being in a framework within which certain—that is, Catholic—beliefs and ideas are taken both as a starting point and a final frame of reference. (Whitehouse 74)

Later, as Greene famously expressed, Catholicism became merely a pattern in the carpet of his fiction; yet in *The End of the Affair*, Catholic themes still make up the “starting point and final frame of reference” of his narrative world. His genuine conversion and struggle with faith made it possible for him to creatively engage and extrapolate (with the narrative logic of a skilled novelist) Catholic conceptions of human nature, sin, and love—even if this emphatically does not describe his later fiction, in which Greene’s ideological narrative framework becomes ever decreasingly Catholic.

The impulse to conveniently assume that Greene and his work are ideologically consistent has led to much misinterpretation. Stephen K. Land’s book-length study, *The Human Imperative*, is a good example of an effort to make Greene’s novels form a seamless whole. In *Graham Greene’s Catholic Imagination*, the theologian Mark Bosco, S.J. works hard to find the elements of reputable Catholic thought that are apparent in *The End of the Affair* also present in Greene’s later novels. Though he expertly plumbs the theological depths of the Catholic novels, Bosco clings to the vocabulary and the vaguely Catholic themes left behind when Greene finally abandoned his long flirtation with orthodoxy. He mistakes the parallel transition of Greene’s increasingly secular, political focus with the political, sociological turn of some Catholic theology after Vatican II as proof of Greene’s lifelong faithful engagement with Catholic thought.

## II.

Though I am here exclusively concerned with *The End of the Affair*, where Greene’s imagination remains truly Catholic, I cannot interpret Greene’s later fiction as if

he had never “joined the Foreign Legion” and ceased to engage Catholic ideas and traditions in the way that made his earlier work so rich. Neither would I use Greene’s later beliefs to interpret any of his Catholic novels. Greene was a wary convert, but he was still a convert—he wasn’t just looking for material. Discussing his conversion, Greene writes, “there was no joy in it at all, only a somber apprehension. I had made the first move with a view to my future marriage, but now the land had given way under my feet and I was afraid of where the tide would take me” (Greene, *A Sort of Life* 169). This cautious openness to the will of God did not last, but Greene did in fact cross the Tiber knowing that he risked being swept away.

As his marriage declined and the common hardships of twentieth century life took their toll, Greene became even less willing to float the tides. Ironically, it was while writing his Catholic novels that Greene began permanently pulling away from full communion with the Catholic Church. As he describes it:

Later we may become hardened to the formulas of Confession and skeptical about ourselves: we may only half intend to keep the promises we make, until continual failure or the circumstance of our private life finally make it impossible to make any promises at all and many of us abandon Confession and Communion to join the Foreign Legion of the Church and fight for a city of which we are no longer full citizens.  
(Greene, *A Sort of Life* 169)

Though he would have had difficulty making an honest Act of Contrition for years, it was during what Norman Sherry calls the “Time of Catherine” that Graham Greene’s “private life finally [made] it impossible to make any promises at all.” Greene’s affair with Catherine Walston altered his relationship with his family and with his Church; and, as many critics have noted, it significantly influenced his portrayal of the relationship between natural romantic love and divine love in *The End of the Affair*.

Greene had lived with his long-term mistress, Dorothy Glover, for years before meeting Catherine, but it was his passion for Catherine that ultimately separated him from his family and his God. Both Vivien and Dorothy recognized this fact to a significant degree. From Vivien's perspective, Greene's relationship with Catherine was, "a turning point. He turned into a different person. She was a bad influence on him—he became indifferent to the children and had furious and terrible tempers" (Sherry, *Vol. II* 225). Before this Greene had been "sweet" to his family (Sherry, *Vol. II* 225). Dorothy also noticed a change, and, notably, initially believed it to be religious in character. Greene wrote to Catherine that Dorothy accused him of having "changed so much in Ireland" after he returned from their first trip there together. But Dorothy believed only that Greene had "come under the influence of a pious convert!" (Sherry, *Vol. II* 232). Before Greene's affair with Catherine Walston, the only woman he strongly associated with God's love was his wife Vivien. Dorothy, and the numerous women he had brief encounters with, were generally not religious and did not engage with Greene religiously.

Catherine, however, was a recent convert to Catholicism and was bizarrely also Greene's goddaughter. Greene and Catherine met because she had read and admired his fiction and wanted him to be her sponsor as she entered the Church; Vivien, in fact, introduced them. With Catherine, Greene again experienced the heady mixture of a romantic and religious attraction. Now, however, he could not simply pursue the object of his passion directly, through the Sacrament of Marriage, as he had with Vivien. Though his rampant infidelity had to have affected his faith all along, it was Catherine who made any conciliation between his immoral personal life and his religious belief impossible.

Greene once wrote in a letter to Catherine: “I nearly slept at Mass today. How dead it was—not dead in the amusing phosphorent way of last Sunday, aware of your shoulder half an inch from mine, but just limp and meaningless and boring. I’m not even a Catholic properly away from you” (Sherry, *Vol. II* 257). The way that Greene’s highly sexual love for Catherine was related to the love of God is shown here to be extremely problematic. Feeling dead both with and without her, Greene preferred the “amusing phosphorent way” of their adultery over the encounter with God in the Mass if Catherine were absent. His romantic love did not directly lead to the love of God as it had with Vivien. Instead, it interrupted the love of God with a scab-picking sort of appeal. The constant ache of this disruption became for him more attractive than any communion with God that could happen directly. Greene wrote to Catherine: “It’s odd how little I get out of Mass except when you’re around. I’m a much better Catholic in mortal sin! Or at least I’m more aware of it” (Sherry, *Vol. II* 257). Rather than making Greene a better Catholic, his relationship with Catherine eventually prevented his full communion with the Church.

Greene wrote to Catherine constantly about the peace he felt when he was with her, and his desire somehow to marry her in the Church, but his clear penchant for placing Catherine before God overpowered any willingness to re-order his love for her to the love of God. Once, after attempting confession with a priest other than his usual confessor, Greene wrote to Catherine about his experience: “You’ve never heard anything so fantastic [...] about ‘adultery’—I was agreeable to say I’ll try, try, try till the cows come home. But he wouldn’t allow that. I must promise from this moment to give up seeing you etc. Finally I said, I’m sorry, Father, I’m afraid I must find another

confessor' and walked out" (Sherry, *Vol. II* 278). Though this priest may have been harsh, it is not completely "fantastic" that he would insist on a penitent's genuine intention to reform before offering absolution. The Act of Contrition requires it: "I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin." Some priests were willing to work with Greene in ways he could accept, but he inevitably abandoned the effort to "try, try, try" and simply joined what he later called "the Foreign Legion of the Church."

These controversial aspects of Greene's private life are clearly present in much of his work, which is saturated in the kind of unhappy relationships, failure, and betrayal he experienced himself. The details of his affair with Catherine Walston are embarrassingly apparent in *The End of the Affair*, which was dedicated to her. Knowledge of the relationship between Greene's biography and his fiction is essential for interpreting his fiction, yet this causes many critics to succumb to an overly biographical reading of Greene's novels. In his exhaustive, three-volume biography, Norman Sherry falls so deeply into this trap that he depicts entire periods of Greene's life by using only extensive quotations. (Reading Sherry's biography, it is occasionally difficult to remember that Greene did not commit suicide like Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter*, and that Sarah's diary in *The End of the Affair* was not in fact Catherine Walston's.) Though I wholeheartedly agree that Catherine Walston was the inspiration for Sarah Miles, I do not intend to interpret the novel in exclusively biographical terms, by equating people in Greene's life with fictional characters. Rather, in selectively exploring Greene's romantic relationships and the evolution of his faith through the time he was writing his



Catholic novels, I aim to provide insight supporting my reading of how natural romantic love and divine love are related in *The End of the Affair*.

### III.

Unlike most of Greene's fiction, *The End of the Affair* is a first person account mediated through the consciousness of an unreliable writer, Maurice Bendrix. Through shifts in time and contradictory assessments, the story of Bendrix's affair with and subsequent separation from Sarah Miles gradually unfolds. He originally pursues Sarah as a source of information about her husband, the civil servant Henry Miles, for a book he plans to write. However, after their first encounter, the two fall passionately in love and begin a long-term affair characterized by physical abandon, jealousy, and obsession. Their affair ends abruptly when a bomb is dropped outside of Bendrix's home during the blitz of London. Sarah believes that Bendrix has been killed, and in a spontaneous acceptance of previous, vague religious musings, she prays for his life with the promise that she would give him up forever if her prayer were granted. Bendrix is ambiguously revived and Sarah, believing this to be the action of God, fulfills her promise to stay away. Two or three years of complete separation pass, in which Bendrix hatefully believes—with no understanding of her vow or the reason for their separation—that Sarah has left him for a rival.

The lovers are reunited when Henry ironically confides to Bendrix that he believes Sarah is having an affair. Against Henry's wishes, Bendrix hires a personal investigator named Parkis to expose Sarah's affair. Parkis is eventually able to steal Sarah's diary, which makes up the deeply moving third section of *The End of the Affair*. Bendrix learns that his rival is not a new lover, but God himself. The man Parkis had

identified as Sarah's potential lover was in fact Richard Smythe, an evangelical rational atheist whom Sarah had been meeting in attempts to free her from her vow but who (like Bendrix) merely served to convince her of God's existence, increasing both her Christian faith and virtue of charity. Learning that Sarah still loves him, Bendrix callously attempts to win her back—chasing her in the rain while she is ill and attempting to avoid him. Resisting Bendrix's advances and the temptation to break her vow, she dies suddenly of pneumonia at the very moment when Bendrix believes he can finally possess her. The novel ends ambiguously with the knowledge that Sarah had been receiving instruction to be received into the Catholic Church, with a series of apparent postmortem miracles, and with Bendrix's tortured struggle over the existence of God and the question of his potential future faith.

Many of the details in Bendrix and Sarah's relationship are borrowed from Greene and Catherine's own affair. However, more important than their code words for sex (onions and onion sandwiches) or the name of the jilted husband (Henry and Harry), are the brutal tensions of an adulterous love triangle, with God himself threatening as a second rival—an experience which Greene knew firsthand and masterfully narrates. *The End of the Affair* is so compelling because it explores the subtle and dangerous meeting point of sin and virtue within a human love that, to be true, can constitute no barriers to the divine. To write it, Greene engaged not just his own experience in vice and infidelity, but his experience in faith as well. His psychologically complex depiction of Sarah's growth from a compromised adulterous love to a truly virtuous charity, as well as Bendrix's painfully descending love, lust, envy, and hate, are possible only because Greene intuitively draws on the deep reserves of a traditional Catholic understanding of

both vice and virtue; of the ways that natural love undergoes contradictory magnetic pulls—drawn downward into vice and death, or else upward into hope for eternal life in the love of God.

Critics tend to debate whether *The End of the Affair* is Bendrix's or Sarah's story. A.A. Devitis, Francis Kunkel, Maria Couto—like Greene himself—all believe that the novel belongs to Sarah; others, like Frank Kermode, David Pryce-Jones, Herbert Haber, and John Atkins, hold that the narrative centers on Bendrix's journey (Bosco 170). I argue that, in the context of a Catholic view of human nature, the moral choice latent in any natural human love serves as Greene's "starting point and final frame of reference" in the novel. Both Sarah and Bendrix shape *The End of the Affair*—Sarah by faithfully choosing to accept the love of God latent in all natural goods, and Bendrix by viciously refusing it. The destructive vitality of sin depicted in *The End of the Affair* proves to be an example of evil as *privatio boni*. This Catholic moral framework may best be described in the words of Greene's friend François Mauriac:

Darkness covers all the earth you describe, but what a burning ray crosses it! Whatever happens, we know we must not be afraid; you remind us that the inexplicable will be explained and that there remains a grating to be put up against this absurd world. Through you, we know the adorable limit to the liberty that Sartre grants to men; we know that a creature loved as much as we are has no other liberty than that of refusing that love, to the degree to which it has made itself known to him and under the appearances it has been pleased to assume. (Mauriac 78)

Behind the terrible freedom that allows Bendrix and Sarah to damage themselves and each other lies this ultimate, distilled moral choice: to accept the love of God or to refuse it. For all of the sin and turmoil with both the natural world and human love in *The End of the Affair*, there is an assurance of divine goodness that human perception cannot alter, though it may be pursued, denied, or ignored.

As Michael Torre articulates, “the single most important task we each face in our life is whether we will give ourselves, or not give ourselves, over to the One who made us and who seeks our *fiat* to the life and destiny He has vouchsafed us in the mystery of His wisdom and love” (Torre 68). In my second chapter I will explore the quality of Sarah’s *fiat*—her yes to the love of God in “the degree to which it has made itself known [...] and under the appearances it has been pleased to assume.” I will argue that Sarah’s acceptance and reciprocation of God’s love emerge in a *via negativa*, through sinful love’s inability to satisfy, but also through the inexorable divine referentiality of human love. Her natural love with Bendrix can be understood only as a disorder of the pattern of God’s *eros* and *agape* that is most clearly exhibited in the crucifixion.

The following discussion of *eros* and *agape* may seem only peripheral to Bendrix’s dysfunctional, vice-ridden love in *The End of the Affair* and so in my third chapter I will turn to the self-destructive consequences of Bendrix’s refusal of the love of God by attempting to make his love with Sarah absolutely satisfying. By dramatically working out the consequences of his ultimate moral choice to accept God’s love in virtue or to reject God’s love in vice, Greene exhibits a profound understanding of a Catholic view of human nature.

## CHAPTER TWO

“The spade hasn’t touched rock”: Sarah Miles’s *Eros* and *Agape*

Perhaps all our loves are merely hints and symbols; vagabond-language scrawled on gate-posts and paving-stones along the weary road that others have tramped before us; perhaps you and I are types and this sadness which sometimes fall between us springs from disappointment in our search, each straining through and beyond the other, snatching a glimpse now and then of the shadow which turns the corner always a pace or two ahead of us.

—Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*

For the natural love depicted in *The End of the Affair* there are two possible ends, one in the two senses of the word. Sarah Miles and Maurice Bendrix are confronted with the choice to let their natural love be subsumed into the love of God, transformed by its inherent capacity to be a conduit for greater love, or else to degrade their natural love by seeking an impossible satisfaction in it. The focus of this chapter is on Sarah’s decision to choose the end of natural love as a goal, an aim, a *telos* found only in God. Though *The End of the Affair* is narrated through the voice of Maurice Bendrix, a man deeply in thrall to several deadly sins (as I will demonstrate in the next chapter), it is actually Sarah Miles’s love of God, including Bendrix’s response to it, that gives the novel its moral and religious shape. Most critics comment on the relationship between natural and divine love in *The End of the Affair*, but many miss what is perhaps Graham Greene’s most perceptive, subtle, and imaginative engagement with Catholic theology—his embodiment of *eros* and *agape* in the relationship between Sarah and Bendrix. Using the intricate pattern of *eros* (or ascending, possessive love) and *agape* (or descending, self-giving love) apparent in the Catholic theology of his contemporary M.C. D’Arcy, Greene offers

a moving portrait of how natural love can be reordered and subsumed into the love of God.

### I.

The presence of God in *The End of the Affair* is difficult for many secular critics to interpret, leading to encumbered and distorted readings. In his introduction to the centennial edition, for example, Michael Gorra employs “the Church’s ability to say ‘Thou shalt not’” as a way to locate *The End of the Affair* within its particular moment in the history of the novel as a form: to leave the question of Greene’s personal faith aside, and to ask instead about the *usefulness* of Catholicism for a novelist of his period” (Gorra xv-xvi). Though brilliant, Gorra’s mechanical assessment of Greene’s “governing philosophy” in *The End of the Affair* falls short in ways that are typical of much Greene scholarship. Primarily, Gorra fails to take God into account; both as an actual, active presence in the novel and in the way he depicts Greene’s own faith. His views concerning the nature of fiction and the nature of humanity prevent him from recognizing the successes and failures of *The End of the Affair* on its own terms.

For Gorra, Greene’s Catholicism is a tool necessary for his art. In the time of the world wars, when all meaning seemed to have died on the battlefields of the bloodiest century in history, the next generation of novelists was scrambling to find their own path away from the giants of modernism. They could not brazenly claim that “art makes its own world” when so many lives had been ruined and damaged; these artists required a real foundation from which to work (Gorra xvi). Some chose the governing philosophies of Marxism or psychoanalysis; Greene chose Catholicism. This religious identity gave him the tools needed to deal with the “internal problematics of the novel as a form” and a

“theoretical justification for a return to pre-modernist conditions of narrative” (Gorra xvii). What Gorra means by a “pre-modernist” narrative is one that is quasi-realistic, with traditional protagonists and antagonists living in a concrete world they do not create themselves. From Gorra’s highly sociological and secular perspective, Greene required the use of a governing philosophy in order to justify the traditionalist sensibility of his art.

Gorra makes the astute observation that “*The End of the Affair* uses the injunctions of religious faith as a way to discipline the boundaries of social behavior, in a way that allows Greene to write an apparently old-fashioned novel of adultery in a world where such infidelity no longer seems a matter of overwhelming importance” (Gorra xviii). Certainly, Sarah’s adultery is not the religious act of social rebellion of a nineteenth-century character, nor is it an example of the personal betrayal that is featured in later twentieth-century fiction. However, Gorra goes on to claim that Sarah’s adultery is also not a sin: “Indeed in later life, [...] Greene ‘scotched the idea of sexual sin altogether’ [...] What matters instead is Sarah’s private and rather Protestant bargain with God, her promise to give up her lover; the promise that serves in itself to convince her that God exists” (Gorra xx). On the contrary, Sarah’s promise, or the fear of breaking it, reveals her faith in God. Sarah’s commitment to her promise, according to Gorra, makes her a defining character for our age:

though her actions correspond with what Greene insists is God’s plan, Sarah does indeed make her own law. She would pay in her conscience were she to break her vow, but the novel offers no suggestion of any other payment at all, and perhaps Greene’s novel defines a period in which one can *only* pay in the conscience. Sarah’s bargain with God is above all a bargain with herself. Which is, in the end, to say that *The End of the Affair* stands as a religious novel of a fundamentally secular age. (Gorra xx-xxi)

This reading builds in some ways on Ian Gregor's virtually canonical claim that "any moral aura which surrounds the bargain is an illusion. It is the promise itself, not the nature of the promise, which is imperative" (Gregor 121).

There are several problems with this interpretation. Indeed, what Gorra misses in his reading is far more representative of our "fundamentally secular age" than *The End of the Affair*. The most blatant flaw in his argument is his casual dismissal of the idea of sin. Greene may have eventually abandoned the moral concepts apparent in *The End of the Affair*, but the novel itself remains saturated in them. A full understanding of how Greene engages the rich tradition of the seven deadly sins (as discussed in the next chapter) is not necessary to recognize Greene's ubiquitous use of terms drawn from the tradition of virtues and vices. Gorra joins many critics in overlooking not just the complicated evolution of Greene's theology, but, consequently, entire layers of meaning in his fiction. To shelve the concept of sin with no justification other than coherence with Greene's later views reveals a significant blind spot to what Greene believed at the time he wrote the novel, to what Catholic morality actually consists of, and to how that moral outlook functions in *The End of the Affair*.

Like Ian Gregor before him, Gorra exhibits the common attitude that Catholic morality functions like a dead list of rules and that conscience is a fancy word for our feelings of guilt (Gregor 121). Sarah's promise is allegedly amoral because she doesn't *feel bad* about her adultery and is unwilling to break it unless her petition is divinely granted. To be fair, even many nominal Catholics share this limited perspective. However, the deep traditions of moral thought which Greene engages in *The End of the Affair* are more complex and dynamic than this—essentially because they hinge on the



belief that God is a living person with whom we are capable of forming relationship. There is more to Catholic morality, therefore, than personal feelings of guilt. Catholic morality is built on the objective reality of God's loving presence in his created world. This is the lynchpin of the entire novel, as even the unbelieving Bendrix recognizes: "For if God exists [...then sainthood is] something He can demand of any of us" (*EA* 159). If God exists, then all of the complicated edifice of Catholic morality can be summarized and concentrated in one decision: to accept and embrace God as author of our good in conformity with his moral order, or else to reject and fight futilely against God's existence, to our own destruction.

Greene's most insightful critics recognize this choice at the heart of *The End of the Affair*: "Ultimately there can perhaps, 'at the end' of us, be only two alternatives: a void, or our true nature" (Whitehouse 60). The Church's "Thou shalt not" that Gorra finds so fascinating is no end in itself, no useful social boundary, no mere checklist. Rather, it is a byproduct of what Christ demands: the entire self. The construal of Sarah's conscience as a stubborn insistence on autonomously keeping her word removes God's presence from the novel. It also defies reason, as Ian Gregor points out (Gregor 121). Sarah's faith is not a self-sustaining product of her own promise; instead it springs from her rational recognition of God's incontrovertible action in saving Bendrix. She keeps her promise, not in order to stay true to herself, therefore, but because God's active, personal existence requires it. Yet, even before making her promise, Sarah is increasingly aware of God's presence and its disruptive implications. Bendrix rightly discerns that when Sarah makes her promise "she [is] already under a stranger's [i.e., God's] influence" (Greene, *EA* 54). Later she reveals that it was Bendrix himself who

“cleared the way” for her acceptance of divine truth (Greene, *EA* 121). Living in a Catholic world ordered by God, Sarah and Bendrix eventually must recognize the truth of his existence and the moral choice entailed in their adulterous relationship.

Ian Gregor and Cates Baldrige see the connection between Sarah’s love for both Bendrix and God as somehow degrading to God—reducing, or “humanizing” the Divinity to just another one of Sarah’s many lovers (Baldrige 77). For Gregor, this limitation seems to stem more from a belief that God is “necessarily unknowable” than from the novel itself (Gregor 121). Greene’s attempt to depict anything involving God’s action is impossible, according to Gregor, due to the divine nature and the nature of fiction itself. Cates Baldrige is more willing to admit God as an active presence in *The End of the Affair*, but he emphatically does not understand God’s action as the foundation of the Catholic morality at work in the novel:

This is a novel fueled almost exclusively by the frisson of blasphemy—by Bendrix’s continued insistence that God is nothing more than his sexual rival. [...] Without this conception, there could be no tension, no suspense, no narrative momentum of any kind, and when Bendrix at last concedes that it is a fiction, the novel has no choice but to end then and there. Before he eventually concedes defeat, however, Bendrix appears to wrestle with a randy angel who might just lose. (Baldrige 77-8)

Though Baldrige recognizes the analogy between Sarah and Bendrix’s natural love and God’s supernatural love, his interpretation is marred by Bendrix’s unreliable narrative voice. Bendrix reduces God to a sexual rival, but only because he focuses entirely on his own threatened, envious love rather than the true relationship between natural and divine love. In the Catholic view, natural love is exalted by its analogy to the divine; divine love is not degraded by its relationship to the natural.

## II.

The necessary relationship between natural, particularly romantic, love with divine love in *The End of the Affair* is not Graham Greene's literary invention. Rather, Greene fruitfully engages the tradition of Catholic mystics, theologians, and artists spanning from the *Song of Songs* to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which love between men and women signifies and leads to God's love for humanity. In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI provides a winsome and insightful analysis of natural love between men and women as it relates to God's love: "Biblical faith does not set up a parallel universe, or one opposed to that primordial human phenomenon which is love, but rather accepts the whole man; it intervenes in his search for love in order to purify it and to reveal new dimensions of it" (Benedict 27). Many critics recognize the ways that Sarah and Bendrix's natural love echoes and leads to God's infinite and eternal love, but few grasp the significance of its initial impoverishment, as well as Sarah's eventual embrace of its purification.

Michael Gorra reductively states that "the book suggests—and for its date, scandalously—that [Sarah] has been led to belief by sex itself. Erotic experience has brought her to a knowledge of the divine and even into a state of grace" (Gorra viii). Mark Bosco construes their obsessive carnality with more theological flair: "the sexual fulfillment and loss that [Sarah] knows with Bendrix [becomes] analogously rendered into an erotic mysticism of love for the suffering body on the crucifix" (Bosco 61). This is eventually true, but Bosco does not capture the philosophically rich Catholic theology of love that Greene is able to explore and incarnate through Sarah's relationship with Bendrix. Neither fully discerns what the present Pope makes evident—namely, that

though “there is a certain relationship between love and the Divine: love promises infinity, eternity—a reality far greater and totally other than our everyday existence.” It follows that Sarah and Bendrix cannot “attain this goal [...] simply by submitting to instinct.” Instead, “[p]urification and growth in maturity are called for; and these also pass through the path of renunciation” (Benedict 17-8). With a love inherently limited and damaged by its adulterous nature, Sarah and Bendrix must be willing to renounce almost every external aspect of their natural love in order to see it purified and made lasting. J.C. Whitehouse gets this matter exactly right: “Bendrix tries to exclude an awareness of God from human love, seeing Him as an impediment to it, an external factor making demands that are incompatible with it, while Sarah sees that meeting those demands is necessary if human love is not to fail” (Whitehouse 67). Sarah becomes increasingly willing to undergo what Benedict XVI calls the “purification and growth in maturity” necessary not only to elevate her natural love, but also to save it from destruction. Bendrix, by contrast, refuses to amend his conception and experience of sexual love long after his definition of it has proved unsatisfactory.

Sarah and Bendrix’s sinful natural love does “promise infinity” and thus leads to Sarah’s conversion, but much of this good becomes tempered for Sarah through the frustration and dissatisfaction of sin. Sarah has initially tried to find fulfillment in the physical act of sex just as much as Bendrix. She engages man after man in “affairs that meant nothing at all (except possibly the unconscious desire to find that final spasm Henry had so woefully failed to evoke)” (Greene, *EA* 42). At this stage in Sarah’s life, she believes that neither she nor the world she inhabits have any metaphysical dimension. She is thus drawn to the pleasure of sex for its sensual comfort and pleasure. Beyond this

deficiency in Sarah's physical and emotional abandonment to Bendrix, there can also be seen a disorder of the *eros* and *agape* pattern of love which Benedict XVI describes, and which M.C. D'Arcy claims is apparent in all of creation. In fact, Pope Benedict XVI engages many of the same ideas that the philosopher of love, D'Arcy (a mentor of both Evelyn Waugh and Catherine Walston), incorporated in his opus *The Mind and Heart of Love: Lion and Unicorn: A Study in Eros and Agape* during Greene's early career. *Eros* (possessive or ascending love) and *agape* (oblative or descending love) are meant to exist in a holy reciprocity—in which, according to Benedict XVI, *eros* “seeks God” and *agape* “passes on the gift received” to others (Benedict 25). Within these distinctions, Benedict XVI insists that “Fundamentally, ‘love’ is a single reality, but with different dimensions; at different times, one or another dimension may emerge more clearly. Yet when the two dimensions are totally cut off from one another, the result is a caricature or at least an impoverished form of love” (Benedict 27). Those who love each other must be imbued with both *eros* and *agape*, or else their love will lead to destruction.

In his dense but beautiful philosophical treatment of these different loves, D'Arcy develops detailed conceptions of *eros* and *agape* which he sees patterned throughout all of creation. His understanding of this pattern of love is distinct from the way that many theologians treat the terms *eros* and *agape*. Most people use the term *agape* as synonymous with God's love or the virtue of charity, or *caritas*. D'Arcy's use of *agape* is more similar to what C.S. Lewis calls “gift-love” in *The Four Loves*—which can be selfish (Lewis 48-51). D'Arcy's *agape* is patterned after an element of God's love (as is *eros*), but (like *eros*) can be perverted. In my treatment of *The End of the Affair*, I will adhere to D'Arcy's definition of these terms and use the word *caritas* instead of *agape*

when referring to God's perfect love and our participation in that through the virtue of charity. D'Arcy warns that *eros* and *agape* "must never be separated" and summarizes the degradation which inevitably occurs when these two loves are isolated from one another:

One love takes and possesses; the other love likes to be beside itself and give. One is masculine, the other is feminine. The two are necessary for one another, and together they tell us what we are and whither we are going. To neglect either is to court death. If the self becomes entirely self-centered [exhibiting only *eros*] a monstrous egoism follows, but as the self is now living on its own conceit and without external nourishment, the inflation is followed by collapse, a period of melancholia and death. If, following the opposite line, the self abandons itself in ecstatic love [experiencing only *agape*], it moves like a moth to the candle, or passively, like the musk rose, it gives forth a stronger perfume in the dark to entice the robber visitant of the night. It has chosen to be a victim, to die of love and to find its sole joy in self-immolation. (D'Arcy 313)

In this passage, the consequences of separating D'Arcy's active *eros* from passive *agape* are described in ways chillingly reminiscent of Sarah and Bendrix's early relationship. The lovers court death by separating these loves in their relationship—Bendrix offering *eros* almost exclusively and Sarah beginning with only *agape*.

The triumph of a disordered *eros*, in which "a monstrous egoism" lives briefly "without external nourishment" and is then tortured by "a period of melancholia and death"—thus described by D'Arcy—can be seen in Bendrix's every attitude towards Sarah. Instead of ordering his love to divine love, as in a healthy *eros* balanced by the desire to have a sustaining love for Sarah through *agape*, Bendrix seeks to isolate and consume her in an act of utterly selfish, possessive love. He constantly refers to his love in terms of possession and even Sarah recognizes that he wishes to "drive [her] into such complete isolation that [she] would be alone with nothing and nobody" and that "if the time came he would refuse [her] even a glass of water" (Greene, *EA* 73). Essentially, in

his mad, leonine, acquisitive love, he positions himself as Sarah's God. This passion to possess is indeed followed by a deflated "melancholia and death" in which Bendrix recognizes the futility of his desire to replace God, inevitably contemplating and even working to accomplish the death and destruction of what he loves: "It were as though [their] love were a small creature caught in a trap and bleeding to death: [he] had to shut his eyes and wring its neck" (Greene, *EA* 25). No critics mistake the annihilating caricature of love produced by Bendrix's isolated and unhinged *eros* as anything other than impoverished.

Sarah's complimentary disordered *agape*, however, is often misinterpreted as a positive form of true, sacrificial *caritas*. Though Sarah's love is undoubtedly purified through the course of the novel, it begins as a willing and perverse self-immolation to Bendrix's unbounded *eros*. In his possessive, destructive love, Bendrix is drawn to Sarah's isolated, utterly self-abandoning *agape* as any "robber visitant of the night" would be attracted to the musk rose:

I felt that afternoon such complete trust when she said to me suddenly, without being questioned, 'I've never loved anybody or anything as I do you.' It was as if, sitting there in the chair with a half-eaten sandwich in her hand, she was abandoning herself as completely as she had done, five minutes back, on the hardwood floor. We most of us hesitate to make so complete a statement—we remember and we foresee and we doubt. She had no doubts. The moment only mattered. Eternity is said not to be an extension of time but an absence of time, and sometimes it seemed to me that her abandonment touched that strange mathematical point of endlessness, a point with no width, occupying no space. (Greene, *EA* 39)

Michael Brennan describes this caricature of loving sacrifice a "prelapsarian ability to live only for the 'moment' and without any doubts or moral scruples" (Brennan 94).

Though I would qualify his interpretation of Greene's intentions, Ian Gregor more accurately intuits that "At the heart of Sarah's warmth there is something which Greene

seeks to persuade us is divinity, but its features uncomfortably resemble inhumanity” (Gregor 115). True sacrificial love does not lose itself in Sarah’s kind of abandonment. Instead, “Love is indeed ‘ecstasy,’ not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, and ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God” (Benedict 22). Sarah begins in intoxicated abandon, but through a process of purification begins to love with true knowledge of herself and of God.

Though Sarah never completely outgrows these troubling elements in her love, to conflate her later, consciously sacrificial love with her early tendency to throw herself away in self-abandonment degrades Greene’s fictional embodiment of what Benedict XVI calls the path of Jesus—which leads, he declares,

through the Cross to the Resurrection: the path of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies and in this way bears much fruit. Starting from the depths of his own sacrifice and of the love that reaches fulfillment therein, he also portrays in these words the essence of love and indeed of human life itself (Benedict 22).

Sarah does not intend her initial abandonment as a sacrifice for the sake of the fruit it might bear, but her later renunciations do exhibit this truly selfless (rather than self-destructive) quality. Mark Bosco and, following him, Michael Brennan rightly affirm that Sarah’s *via negativa* through the desolation of sin is reminiscent of the idea of renunciation and spiritual ascent found in Saint John of the Cross and Saint Catherine of Genoa (Brennan 94-5). In Bosco’s words,

The novel’s theological aesthetic pushes most explicitly the spiritual *via negativa* of John of the Cross, a mysticism consisting essentially in a passionate exchange of love with God through a process of purification, trials and temptations, and deliberate detachment from external things. The ‘dark night of the soul’ entails the experience of utter abandonment by



God, the person's spiritual identification with the absence of God felt by Christ at the crucifixion. (Bosco 61)

However, these critics fail to distinguish the ways in which Sarah's *agape* is initially distorted before being purified through rightful renunciation. Bosco wrongly conflates Sarah's eventual true sacrifice and willing detachment from sin with her early, mindless abandonment to secondary love as a valid participation in Christ's suffering. He claims, "The loss and abandonment that [...] Sarah face[s] lead[s her] to put [her] faith in signs of divine presence in the least likely of places: [...] in an affair, the sexual fulfillment and loss that she knows with Bendrix analogously rendered into an erotic mysticism of love for the suffering body on the crucifix" (Bosco 60-1). If this reading were accurate, then *The End of the Affair* would certainly "explore the theological idea [of participation in Christ's mystical substitution on the cross] in the extreme, transgressively pushing it to its ultimate dramatic potential" (Bosco 42). However, Bosco flattens Greene's engagement with this profound theological concept by overlooking much of the novel's subtle engagement with the pattern of *eros* and *agape* D'Arcy elucidates. Greene's transgressive treatment of mystical substitution is transformed (at least in *The End of the Affair*) by the growth of Sarah's character from an initial disorder to a gradual re-ordering.

D'Arcy explains that "Both self-love [*eros*] and disinterested love [*agape*] have to be kept straight by truth, and by truth is meant here what conforms with the essential nature of the self and the whole order of being to which it belongs" (D'Arcy 324). Sarah's sexual relationship with Bendrix begins her *via negativa* by the necessity of its sacrifice, but Bosco's reading inverts the process wherein Sarah comes to recognize the divine presence. Sarah recognizes the need for God not in sexual fulfillment, but in the

unfulfillment of an adulterous sexual relationship that is inherently immoral. As a human being whose body and soul form an integrated whole, Sarah intuitively feels that her submission to sexual instinct and the resulting isolation she finds in Bendrix's love, cut off from union with the love of God, will ultimately fail to fulfill her true nature. As she reflects before her conversion:

Sometimes after a day when we have made love many times, I wonder whether it isn't possible to come to an end of sex, and I know that he is wondering too and is afraid of that point where the desert begins. What do we do in the desert if we lose each other? How does one go on living after that? (Greene, *EA* 72)

By isolating sexual experience in the destructive manner Benedict XVI warns against, reducing her body to "a mere object that [she] attempts, as [she] pleases, to make both enjoyable and harmless" she does not find lasting bodily satisfaction. This satisfaction is impossible because her pursuit of sex is actually "a debasement of the human body: no longer is it integrated into [her] overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of [her] whole being" (Benedict 19-20). As I shall explore in more depth in the next chapter, Sarah and Bendrix cannot find the lasting fulfillment they seek so desperately in lustful sex because they are not merely physical beings—independent from a higher moral order.

In her disordered *agape*, Sarah has allowed Bendrix to take the place of God and found him wanting. In his exclusive *eros*, Bendrix lets his "monstrous egoism" accept Sarah's unholy self-sacrifice as the nourishment he should find in God alone. The fraught dissatisfaction born of attempting to fulfill an eternal need with temporary relief leads Sarah to occupy an internal desert where she intuitively recognizes why monks, mystics, and the desert fathers seek such desolation: "If one could believe in God, would

he fill the desert?" (Greene, *EA* 72). Where Bendrix would refuse her even a cup of water in this desert, God might provide for her every need. Like Saint John of the Cross and other ascetic mystics who strip away all false consolation, Sarah discerns the only source of ultimate fulfillment: "God loves you, they say in the churches, God is everything. People who believe that don't need admiration, they don't need to sleep with a man, they feel safe" (Greene, *EA* 72). Though she does not intend to seek God in the desert, she cannot ignore him with no one else around. It is in this desert that Sarah comes to recognize the true end of mortal love, which is actually an eternal beginning.

When Sarah prays for Bendrix's life and he is in turn revived, she is finally and irrevocably convinced of God's existence. She recognizes immediately that since God is real she must not only keep her promise to him, but must also believe what "they say in churches"—namely, that "God is everything." And so, even with their impending separation, she can tell Bendrix: "You needn't be so scared. Love doesn't end. [...] People go on loving God, don't they, all their lives without seeing Him?" (Greene, *EA* 54). While Bendrix never comes to admit this eternal quality of love, maintaining at least that, "That's not our kind," Sarah simply replies, "I sometimes don't believe there's any other kind" (Greene, *EA* 54). Sarah has discovered the unity of love and, with this revelation, the meaningless void she had confronted at the end of her being is permanently transformed into the meaningful space God is meant to fill in her life. She knows that "this *is* the desert, and there's nobody, nothing, for miles and miles around," and she complains that there cannot be "a merciful God and this despair." Even so, she recognizes the irreversible choice she has made to direct her love away from the void:

If I went back, where would we be? Where we were yesterday before the sirens went, and the year before that. Angry with each other for fear of the

end, wondering what we should do with life when there was nothing left. I needn't wonder any more—there's nothing to fear any more. This is the end. But, dear God, what shall I do with this desire to love? (Greene, *EA* 74)

Love as she has known it (impoverished and unfulfilling) has come to its end, and she must now direct her desire to love towards its true *telos* instead of seeking Bendrix's burning erotic love like a moth drawn to flame.

Though her increasing assurance of the unity of love does not necessarily make this purification easier, and though she fights against the pain of renunciation that true love requires, Sarah cannot escape the all-defining reality of God's existence:

So that's it. I begin to believe in you, and if I believe in you I shall hate you. I have free will to break my promise, haven't I, but I haven't the power to gain anything from breaking it. [...] You let me sin, but you take away the fruits of my sin. [...] What do you expect me to do now, God? Where do I go from here? (Greene, *EA* 80)

### III.

Sarah recognizes that she can sin, but she cannot reconstruct reality in order to make her sin satisfying. She is frustrated by this new understanding of limitation and shrinks from the pain of what she must sacrifice, yet ultimately knows that the illicit love she blames God for ruining has never been more than a distraction and a lie. She has sought the fulfillment of lust merely because the admiration of men brings “an illusion for a moment that there's something to admire. All my life I've tried to live in that illusion—a soothing drug that allows me to forget that I'm a bitch and a fake” (Greene, *EA* 81). It has always been easier for Sarah to wholly disregard herself by way of an unhealthy *agape*, offering herself up in the perverted bodily sacrifice of sinful sex, than to seek the true fulfillment of her love in a holy *eros*.

When Sarah is a willing victim to Bendrix's disordered *eros*, her seeming sacrifice does not bear fruit—it neither satisfies nor helps him. This is because true sacrifice does not annihilate the self, but rather unites with Christ's ultimate expression of the union of *eros* and *agape* in his life-giving crucifixion. In an unholy self-sacrifice Sarah can offer Bendrix nothing, but in a healthy, balanced love she can seek God through *eros* and pass the real good of God's love she receives on to Bendrix in a fruitful, ordered *agape*. D'Arcy describes this true form of sacrifice with great insight:

The God-man is given back to give new life, to be the mode of union between God and mankind. That is to say, that instead of losing his self, man has that self exalted into a new unity, whereby he can live the life of God Himself. 'And the glory which Thou hast given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, as We also are one: I in them, and Thou in me; that they may be made perfect in one.' It is in this reciprocal love that losing one's life is saving it, that to give is to receive, that death is swallowed up in victory. And the language, as is only fitting, is the language of persons, of 'I' and 'Thous'; we have passed away from the philosophy of objects, from pantheisms and monisms. Persons do not die when love is mutual; they live more fully each in the other's love. But when it comes to the infinite love of God for man, man, so far from having anything subtracted from his being, has the personal joy of giving back to God something of that infinite love which has taken possession of him. It is this mystery of love which the Christian sacrifice figures forth. (D'Arcy 246-7)

Christ's offering on the cross, and our capacity to enter into his sacrifice, is what gives meaning to the pattern of *eros* and *agape* in human love. Though Sarah's initial abandon with Bendrix is here revealed as severely lacking in mutual love, the way that Sarah is prepared for God's loving sacrifice through her disordered relationship with Bendrix can also be seen.

Despite the pain and anger of a thwarted illusion, Sarah recognizes that her true identity and the fulfillment she has longed for might be found in God: "When [God] looks at me, does he see something I can't see? It must be lovely if he is able to love it.

That's asking me to believe too much, that there's anything lovely in me" (Greene, *EA* 80). One of the most difficult elements of Sarah's conversion is the acceptance of her identity as a human being made in God's image and loved by him. She has asked, "If I'm a bitch and a fake, is there nobody who will love a bitch and a fake?" She has found not only that God loves even bitches and fakes, but that behind her fallen identity lies an infinite worth rooted in God's love (Greene, *EA* 75). Only when Sarah begins to seek God and in turn to give this gift to another in a healthy *eros* and *agape* does her love become truly sacrificial.

Sarah's relationship with God begins with the same self-annihilating desires as her relationship with Bendrix:

I hated the statues, the crucifix, all the emphasis on the human body. I was trying to escape from the human body and all it needed. I thought I could believe in some kind of a God that bore no relation to ourselves, something vague, amorphous, cosmic, to which I had promised something and which had give me something in return—stretching out of the vague into the concrete human life, like a powerful vapour moving among the chairs and walls. One day I too would become part of that vapour—I would escape myself forever. And then I came into that dark church in Park Road and saw the bodies standing around me on all the altars—the hideous plaster statues with their complacent faces, and I remember that they believed in the resurrection of the body, the body I wanted destroyed forever. I had done so much injury with this body. How could I want to preserve any of it for eternity... (Greene, *EA* 87)

The particularity of love required by our nature as integral human beings consisting of bodies and souls initially offends Sarah. Just as she desires the narcotic illusion of sexual indulgence, Sarah longs to "escape [herself] forever" in an obliterating fusion with the divine "vapour." However, true divine love, as well as natural human love, exists only in the embodied particularities of 'I' and 'Thou.' As Benedict XVI articulates: "man can

indeed enter into union with God—his primordial aspiration. But his union is no mere fusion, a sinking in the nameless ocean of the Divine; it is a unity which creates love, a unity in which both God and man remain themselves and yet become fully one” (Benedict 32). Love becomes transcendent and sacrificial only through particular loves. Greene’s vision of love in *The End of the Affair* is thus not found on the hardwood floor of Sarah’s study, but in the nails pressed into her palms through love, and ultimately in the “cheap ugly” crucifix she buys and contemplates almost despite herself. Sarah’s love for Bendrix forces her to recognize the terrifying, embodied particularity (and thus responsibility) of the love patterned in the crucifixion: “And so I thought, do I want that body to be vapour (mine yes, but his?), and I knew I wanted [Bendrix’s] scar to exist through all eternity. But could my vapour love that scar? Then I began to want my body that I hated, but only because it could love that scar” (Greene, *EA* 88). In this recognition Sarah finally accepts that love will not serve as an escape from pain or from fear, but instead demands her willing participation in the purification these trials bring.

In his short but insightful article “Greene’s Saints,” Michael Torre recognizes the element of scandal in holding up the adulteress Sarah Miles as a beatific example of this kind of supernatural charity. He rightly asks, “Is not true heroism found elsewhere: in [...] men and women who see a painful marriage through and triumph over their daily hurts, offering them up patiently to God? Why look to [...] a libidinous and adulterous woman as hero or saint? Is this not all too literary?” (Torre 66-67). Torre astutely answers that Sarah is believable in her holiness because she exhibits the theological virtue of charity:

[T]heological virtues are deeper, harder, and greater than the cardinal virtues, and because our soul at its depth is involved in a direct struggle

with God, these virtues thus go the heart of our soul and personality. There is nothing better than our love for God and nothing worse than our hatred of God [...] the struggle to hope and to ward off despair (and its twin, presumption) tells the story of our inner being more than our efforts to be temperate, to be brace or practically wise. (Torre 67)

Though Sarah never intends to be chaste and does not truly understand chastity, she is led to chastity's source—divine love. She recognizes the disordered love in her relationship with Bendrix, the ways in which that relationship falls short of God's love, and she chooses instead to accept the love of God, fulfilling her true nature by becoming its instrument.

Sarah may never appear as a conventional exemplar of Catholic morality, but she understands its heart and affirms the true end of all natural loves and secondary goods: “If I could love [God], I'd know how to love them” (Greene, *EA* 96). All of the commandments and restrictions of the Church are coherent consequences and workings-out of the greatest commandment, the one Sarah intuitively comes to understand: “Love of God and love of neighbor are [...] inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first” (Benedict 46). Since Christian charity is the highest virtue, in which external causation creates internal space for formation, the time Sarah spends constrained by her promise helps to habituate her in love. The more she loves God, the more her disordered *eros* and *agape* conform to recognizable Catholic patterns of morality and *caritas*:

The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself. Then self-abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy. (Benedict 44)



Greene's depiction of this process of purification in Sarah's gradual sanctification probes the living source of Catholic morality—a "Thou shall" rather than a "Thou shalt not." In *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, St. Augustine writes that "virtue is nothing other than the perfect love of God" (Qtd. in DeYoung 27). The goal of Catholic morality is not restraint but the perfect freedom of rightly ordered loves—loves that do not violate, but enable and fulfill each other. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: "Love grows through love. Love is 'divine' because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a 'we' which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is 'all in all'" (Benedict 47). Despite all of her faults, Sarah recognizes that to be virtuous is not a restriction but a fulfillment of her whole nature. At the end of her corrupted natural love, then, she is not left alone in the desert but finds it filled with the love of God.

### CHAPTER THREE

“That’s not our kind of love”: Maurice Bendrix’s Lust and Envy

The whole earth is our hospital  
Endowed by the ruined millionaire,  
Wherein, if we do well, we shall  
Die of the absolute paternal care  
That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere.

The chill ascends from feet to knees,  
The fever sings in mental wires.  
If to be warmed, then I must freeze  
And quake in frigid purgatorial fires  
Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars.

—T.S. Eliot, “East Coker”

When confronted with the same love that Sarah Miles embraces in *The End of the Affair*, Maurice Bendrix attempts desperately to avoid it. To a lesser extent, Bendrix recognizes the disordered pattern of the *eros* and *agape* in his romantic love with Sarah, but he refuses to see it purified through the renunciation that Sarah has accepted and even embraced. Instead, to the detriment of his character and the degradation of his true nature, Bendrix prefers to allow the egoism, melancholy, and destruction of his unfettered *eros* become the *telos*, or end, his of love. He will not allow his love to be changed, qualified by, and subsumed into the love of God, and so instead he will see it burn. We have explored the consequence of Sarah’s moral choice to embrace the love of God—an increasingly purified love in charity and sacrifice. In this chapter we will see how Bendrix’s inversion of that process lies in his refusal to remember that, as Pope Benedict XVI points out, both *eros and agape* are meant to be sacred. He pursues possession of a secondary good in his romantic love with Sarah over its true source in God’s love and

displays the rich Catholic tradition of the seven deadly sins. Employing a Catholic understanding of human nature within the limitations of a first person narration, Greene portrays the subtle movements of vice (particularly lust and envy), in Bendrix and, to a lesser extent, in Sarah as well. This creative interaction with the seven deadly sins tradition provides insight into the motivations and workings of Bendrix's character. It also provides a *via negativa* toward religious faith in Bendrix similar to that of Sarah discussed in the last chapter; his lust and envy are what lead him to the knowledge of God's reality, though, I will argue, not necessarily to an eventual faith. Maurice Bendrix's horrified realization that his envy is prompted by the existence of an all-demanding God (extinguishing his hope to possess Sarah Miles completely) is where his love ends.

#### I.

As many critics have noted, including Michael Brennan most recently, *The End of the Affair* is strongly influenced by François Mauriac's 1932 novel, *Vipers' Tangle*. Another first-person story of hate, *Vipers' Tangle* is an explicit record of the capital vices of avarice and envy. Though the stories differ in many ways, of course, Greene begins with the same conception of human nature that he claimed made Mauriac able to produce characters with "the solidity and importance of men with souls to save or lose" (Greene, *Essays* 92). The eternal consequence of human action is absolutely crucial for a proper understanding of *The End of the Affair*. It also clarifies his claim that his characters in this period "are not [his] creation but God's. They have an eternal destiny. They are not merely playing a part for the reader's amusement. They are souls whom Christ died to save" (qtd. in Waugh, *Essays, Articles and Reviews* 361). This stems clearly from

Greene's Catholic understanding of human nature: we are made in the image of God, created to love and serve him and each other in the freedom of our wills; yet, after an "original calamity," suffering under the power of evil through both demonic authority and an internal tendency to sin, called concupiscence. What Greene says of Mauriac's characters is true of his own: they "exist with extraordinary physical completeness [...] but their particular acts are less important than the force, whether God or Devil, that compels them" (Greene, *Essays* 94). *The End of the Affair* tracks the influence of these two compelling forces (working internally and externally) in the love relationship (patterned in *eros* and *agape*) of Maurice Bendrix and Sarah Miles.

That godly and demonic forces influence Greene's characters is not to say that they are in their tyrannical grip without freedom of will. In the Catholic world of *The End of the Affair*, free will is depicted as a (grace-enabled) power of choice—not as the impossible desire to self-determine an autonomous life in a vacuum devoid of transcendent influence. As seen in the last chapter, true freedom in *The End of the Affair* is a freedom to choose the good. Though Sarah initially resents God's moral commands, she eventually recognizes that her vices provide only an illusion of the true fulfillment which she might find in God alone. Yielding to demonic forces is a willing embrace of slavery and bondage.

By depicting the detailed development of vice in the character of Maurice Bendrix, Greene in some ways fulfills Morton Dauwen Zabel's claim that: "To define and objectify the evil, to extricate it from the relativity of values and abstractions—arbitrary justice, impersonal humanitarianism and pity, right and wrong, good and bad—is the ultimate motive of Greene's work" (Zabel 35). Graham Greene's emphasis on evil

hardly needs to be pointed out. Critics commonly assume that the vital presence of evil is one thing that travelers in “Greeneland” can agree upon. It has been called “the most pervasive force in the world in terms of Greene’s vision” (Rao 50). Though demonic evil and human vice are aggressively present in *The End of the Affair*, it is surprisingly misunderstood among critics. Some see a limited God, or else a clear Manicheism; others completely overlook the significance of Greene’s particular portrayal of evil, focusing exclusively on the relationship between natural and divine love discussed in the last chapter.

Behind this mapping of evil is Greene’s belief that “novelists who are Catholics” (rather than Catholic novelists) should take John Henry Newman as their patron because of his art-saving claim that: “from the nature of the case, if Literature is to be made a study of human nature, you cannot have a Christian Literature. It is a contradiction in terms to attempt a sinless Literature of sinful man” (Qtd. in Greene, *Letters* 152). The fallen nature of humanity requires the inclusion of darkness and sin in any literature involving human characters. Mark Bosco helpfully recognizes Newman’s influence on Greene’s conception of sin, though perhaps claiming a greater conformity to Newman’s thought than is reasonably apparent. For example, Newman would have been astonished by Greene’s notion of evil found in the famous essay on his tortured childhood development:

Goodness has only once found a perfect incarnation in a human body and never will again, but evil can always find a home there. Human nature is not black and white but black and grey. [...] religion might later explain it to me in other terms, but the pattern was already there—perfect evil walking the world where perfect good can never walk again, and only the pendulum ensures that after all in the end justice is done” (Greene, *Essays* 17).

Michael Gorra refers to this quality of Greene's childhood imagination as the "Manichean cast" of his mind. Many critics comment on the Manichean elements of Greene's fiction and, considering the quotation above, it is not difficult to credit their complaint. However, considerations of evil in *The End of the Affair* must begin and end with the novel itself and, though this chapter focuses on the black, the last chapter should definitively prove Bendrix and Sarah's story cannot be described merely as "black and grey."

In Cates Baldrige's chapter on "Greene's Conception of God" in *Graham Greene's Fictions: The Virtues of Extremity*, he argues that, "God's grace [...] resembles nothing so much as a fixed quantity of precious fuel liable to depletion, a finite charge imparted now and again to the soul's battery" (Baldrige 65). Even worse, God himself is

[...] depicted as being *subject to entropy*, no less so than the universe He presumably created. Divine grace, at the moment of its introduction into Greene's world, takes the shape of a spontaneous and distributive spiritual power to awaken, but from that moment on it begins to behave like more conventional types of energy, rapidly dissipating over time. (Baldrige 65)

According to Baldrige, Greene's world is not created and sustained by grace, as in the Catholic understanding of reality, but rather exhausts it. This misreading results primarily from Baldrige's refusal to separate an authentic understanding of the Christian God at work in the novel from Bendrix's distorted regard for him. The fact that Bendrix reduces God to a sexual rival reveals his own lust, envy, and pride; it emphatically does not make God "a randy angel who might just lose" (Baldrige 78). Such a characterization belittles both Greene's technical mastery of the first person, unreliable narrator and the insightful depth of his most impressive characters.

Frank Kermode's classic essay "Mr. Greene's Eggs and Crosses" still offers the best treatment of evil's characterization in the novel. He recognizes that Bendrix is

the hero Mr. Greene has needed: a natural man who sees this God as a natural man would, as unscrupulous rival, corrupter of human happiness, spoiler of the egg; and a novelist who hates Him as a superior technician. [...] And we get for the first and only time the real Satanic thing, the courage never to submit or yield. (Kermode 136)

This is the essential point for a correct interpretation of Maurice Bendrix's character, as well as the two ends of natural love in *The End of the Affair*. As a natural man—of a consciously godless, pagan variety—Bendrix recognizes what is at stake in acknowledging God's existence. He fights against belief in God because he realizes how it would affect—contextualize and diminish—the relationship that he enjoys as an end in itself. In Flannery O'Connor's words, Maurice Bendrix is one who "knows what the choice is" for eternal souls living in a Catholic universe. Like O'Connor's Misfit in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," Bendrix is

marked out for the Lord—or at least marked out as one who will have the struggle, who will know what the choice is [...]—either throw away everything and follow Him or enjoy yourself by doing some meanness to somebody, and in the end there's no real pleasure in life, not even in meanness. (O'Connor 350)

As Kermode recognizes, Bendrix chooses to seek an impossible enjoyment. Though he does not initially wish to "do meanness" to Sarah in the manner of O'Connor's infamous Misfit, the more Bendrix refuses to submit and yield to a higher good, the more viciously destructive his natural love becomes. Bendrix's satanic pride, his "I will not serve," actually opens the door to an increasing demonic bondage. For Bendrix, the end of love is found in "the real Satanic thing."

Despite the overwhelming presence of demonic language and the novel's clear engagement with the seven deadly sins tradition, many critics simply cannot recognize the devil when they see him. In his recent book, *Graham Greene: Fictions, Faith and Authorship*, Michael Brennan characterizes Bendrix as a man "with the spiritual identity of an earnestly doubting individual who is caused genuine regret by his own failings but is also capable of occasional glimmerings of divinely inspired hope" (Brennan 93). He bizarrely references "Greene's well-worn image of the duality of a Manichaeian divinity, conjoining the potential for both good and evil" on the very same page he discusses Greene's idea that "an awareness of Satan is all the more important since the eternal struggle between good and evil has become a defining element in international affairs" (Brennan 99). As I will discuss later, love and hate, good and evil are clearly related but never conflated in *The End of the Affair* (with the possible exception of Bendrix's ambiguous fate at the conclusion of the novel).

As many critics have pointed out, Graham Greene's use of the first person narrator in *The End of the Affair* allows him to harness the power of his distinctive narrative voice while escaping many of its limitations. This is what enables his most successful, and also his most orthodox, portrayal of evil. By entering into the consciousness of his unreliable narrator Maurice Bendrix, Greene is able to explore the working of evil with more clarity and subtlety than in his customary cinematic third person. The influence of and conflict with cosmic forces occurs not in the terrifying open world, rife with indecipherable ambiguity, but within the narrable consciousness of one sinful man. In Bendrix we are able to see the intricate mess of selfishness, transcendence, compulsion to habit, and even supernatural influence that lies behind even a simple



thought or action. What we see, in fact, is a rich and insightful portrayal of a soul who has, through habit and surrender to concupiscence, developed the pattern of thoughts and behavior of several capital vices. Almost every critic uses the language of vice in describing Bendrix, but few ever fully engage with the revealing details of the seven deadly sins tradition.

I am not, however, the first to explore the complexity of a Graham Greene character by way of the seven deadly sins tradition. In his 1962 essay on the subject, Evelyn Waugh used the protagonist of *A Burnt out Case*, Querry, as an illustration of “the man of Sloth, in all his full theological implications” (Waugh, “Sloth” 58). Since their development in the fourth century, the seven deadly sins or capital vices have been used as guides for examining one’s conscience before receiving the Sacrament of Penance. Though they have been reduced to caricatures, or trivialized as antiquated themes to ridicule in popular culture, they form in fact a very rich and dynamic Christian tradition designed for deep moral reflection on the source of sin and disorder in human lives. The seven deadly sins offer perhaps the most subtle and detailed account of human vice available in the Catholic tradition. Such a tool is undoubtedly valuable for the analysis of Greene’s tortured characters, created within a Catholic conception of human nature.

The seven deadly sins or capital vices originated in the thought and practice of fourth century monastics commonly referred to as the desert fathers. These people of God willfully removed themselves from “everyone and everything” in their compromised, even decadent, popular Christian culture in order to eradicate sin through ascetic self-denial and thus more fully to experience God. The vices were first set in writing as a list of eight ‘thoughts’ or ‘demons’ by Evagrius of Pontus (346-399 AD). In

some ways the established list of seven used by St. Thomas Aquinas, vainglory, envy, sloth, avarice, wrath, lust, and gluttony, are labels for patterns of behavior, but they are also traditionally characterized as oppressive demons with particular personalities. For example, sloth, or *acedia*, is traditionally called “the noonday devil” because it commonly assailed its victims during the despairing lethargy of midday in the desert. The quality of the relationship between willful human sin and independent demonic forces, and the reason for their conflation in the tradition, is actually expressed with keen insight within *The End of the Affair*:

I have never understood why people who can swallow the enormous improbability of a personal God boggle at a personal Devil. I have known so intimately the way that demon works in my imagination. No statement that Sarah ever made was proof against his cunning doubts, though he would usually wait till she had gone to utter them. He would prompt our quarrels long before they occurred: he was not Sarah’s enemy so much as the enemy of love, and isn’t that what the devil is supposed to be? I can imagine that if there existed a God who loved, the devil would be driven to destroy even the weakest, the most faulty imitation of that love. Wouldn’t he be afraid that the habit of love might grow, and wouldn’t he try to trap us all into being traitors, into helping him extinguish love? If there is a God who uses us and makes his saints out of such material as we are, the devil too may have his ambitions; he may dream of training even such a person as myself [...] into being his saints, ready with borrowed fanaticism to destroy love wherever we find it. (Greene, *EA* 47)

Bendrix’s nascent sense of faith originates in his recognition of evil. He personifies envy as the desert fathers do sloth, making it recognizable as a transcendent force of evil in which vice is rooted. This does not mean that Bendrix is blameless for his enslavement. Just as Sarah both actively chooses to fight for and suffer the cost of her holiness while at the same time freely receiving it as a grace, Bendrix opens the door for his sin and then succumbs to its control. There is a virtual call-and-response relationship between Bendrix’s self-conscious will and the demonic force of envy. Sometimes

Bendrix will “set that demon in [his] mind at work again” (Greene, *EA* 2); sometimes “that devil in [his] brain prompt[s] the thought” (47); and sometimes the devil seems to wholly possess him: “the demon took charge of my brain” (4). The more Bendrix complies with the vice, the more control it has over him and the more susceptible he is to other vices.

This increase in demonic control occurs because, like virtues, the seven deadly sins are not single acts but qualities of character cultivated through repetition. As Rebecca DeYoung explains in her excellent introduction to the tradition:

the vices are corruptive and destructive habits. They undermine both our goodness of character and our living and acting well. [...The vices] eat away at our ability to see things clearly, appreciate things as we ought, live in healthy relationships with others, and refrain from self-destructive patterns of behavior. (DeYoung 14)

The seven deadly sins or capital vices are not the most terrible sins one can commit. Some of the sins they lead to are actually worse than the seven themselves—murder, for instance, is certainly worse than anger—which it can lead to or express. The seven are distinctive because they distort the entire person. Vainglory, envy, sloth, avarice, wrath, lust, and gluttony (with pride as the source of all) are singled out not for their severity, but because they twist people away from a true *telos* in God toward a secondary good, like sex or the good opinion of others. The ends of each vice are not inherently vicious, as DeYoung points out:

All the vices are distorted or excessive attachments to good things. [...] Vice happens when our pursuit of these goods gets twisted, that is, when we try to make them fill gaps and needs in our hearts that only God can fill, and when we define happiness in terms of them, rather than appreciating them as (finite) blessings from God. (DeYoung 167)

All secondary goods are meant to be in some way ordered and transparent to their source in the absolute good of God. To make them a new *telos* effectively disorders the entire self, leading to countless other sins.

Sarah expresses the damage that inexorably follows from her choice to have an affair with Bendrix by discerning that their distorted love can only mimic true love:

What are we doing to each other? Because I know that I am doing to him exactly what he is doing to me. We are sometimes so happy, and never in our lives have we known more unhappiness. It's as if we were working together on the same statue, cutting it out of each other's misery. But I don't even know the design. (Greene, *EA* 73)

The capital vices are deadly because they are sins against charity that effectively sever the sinner enthralled to them from both God and neighbor. Sarah's lament shows what happens when she is cut off from the source of love: we must work instead with the limited and increasingly stagnant supply we have left in what we have chosen. Thus isolated from God and neighbor, Sarah and Bendrix are left with nothing but each other. As noted in the last chapter, they inhabit a spiritual desert in which Bendrix's monstrous *eros* would lead him to "refuse [Sarah] even a glass of water" (*EA* 73). This failure of fallen human love is what I believe Cates Baldrige mistakes for the failure of grace itself. It is not divine grace but an idolatrous secondary good that is indeed a "fixed quantity of precious fuel liable to depletion" (Baldrige 65).

Preferring a secondary good to all else, making it opaque to God's love, is like damming a river: the dam will not only cause flooding and stagnation at its own location, but will also disrupt the flow of other tributaries. St. Gregory the Great uses a far more powerful military image to describe how the demonic seven capital vices cause collateral damage. He writes:

For all faults do not occupy the heart with equal access. But while the greater and the few surprise a neglected mind, the smaller and the numberless pour themselves upon it in a whole body. For when pride, the queen of sins, has fully possessed a conquered heart, she surrenders it immediately to seven principal sins, as if to some of her generals, to lay it waste. And an army in truth follows these generals, because, doubtless, there spring up from them importunate hosts of sins. Which we set forth the better, if we specially bring forward in enumeration, as we are able, the leaders themselves and their army. (*Moralia* 31.45.87)

In a perverse echo of the unity of the virtues, the vices are intimately related in a martial hierarchy. Pride is the queen of the capital vices because she makes them possible—behind each vice is the ultimate, prideful self-assertion that *I* can decide what is best for my life, *I* can chose my own *telos*; this is Kermode’s “real Satanic thing.” Once this demonic victory is won, the capital vices are free to suggest the secondary natural goods that should replace the love and service of God (avarice suggests wealth; lust, sex; etc.). Countless smaller sins follow, like hordes, in seeking to attain the (inevitably impossible) goals of their demonic commanders. One cannot defeat sin without eradicating the seven capital vices: to go after the hordes is to treat symptoms instead of the disease.

## II.

Interestingly, many critics insist that Greene includes no moral judgment of sexual sin in his depiction of Sarah Miles and Maurice Bendrix’s adulterous, sex-obsessed relationship. Ian Gregor claims there is no morality in the novel at all. Michael Gorra also asserts that, “The sex is inconsequential” (Gorra xix). For Gorra, the novel’s ubiquitous sex has a heretically low moral significance because it is peripheral to the central moral dilemmas in the novel—Sarah’s individual adherence to her conscience. Though one might argue that Greene intentionally causes scandal by the way he chooses to treat sex in *The End of the Affair*, it is still laden with an inescapable moral

significance. Sarah and Bendrix rarely consciously acknowledge the guilt of their sexual sin, so that sex seems like a tangential issue, but the consequences of sexual sin are still subtly played out in the course of the novel.

One reason that critics might overlook the presence of sexual sin in *The End of the Affair* is a failure to understand its place in Catholic moral thought. A common fallacy is the vague idea that for Catholics sex itself is considered evil. Though there are certainly Catholics who at least imply this through imprecise moral teaching or a misreading of theological works such as Augustine's *Confessions*, this has never been the teaching of the Church. Sex is a human good like any other—designed with a noble purpose compatible with human dignity yet, like all other goods, having a potential for vicious misuse in a fallen world. The basic good of sex is twofold—the union of a man and woman in marriage and the pro-creation of children. In the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “The spouses’ union achieves the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life” (2326). The appeal and pleasure of sex are not evil—when rightly ordered, they attract us to and reward us for the goods they are meant to. It is when the pleasure of sex becomes an end in itself, pursued with an explicit intent to avoid or frustrate the true purposes of sex that it sinfully devolves into lust.

This sinful misuse of sex has grave consequences. The Catholic emphasis on sexual sin reveals how damaging this misuse and disorder is—to relationships, to individuals, and also to our very understanding of what it means to be human. The Catholic Church's infamous mandate against contraception is not just a bizarrely antiquated disdain for bodily pleasure, but stems inexorably from doctrines of the unity of

body and soul, the resurrection of the body, and how sex relates to this understanding of humanity. For physical-spiritual beings made in the image of God, sex has extreme consequences for both good and evil. It binds people together through a mutual giving of the whole embodied self—this is why the Sacrament of Marriage is not actually complete until it has been consummated. Oddly, it now also needs to be pointed out that sex has the good purpose of procreating people as well. Michael Gorra’s claim that Greene artificially constructs a “Thou shalt not” situation mimicking the social boundaries put in place by an antiquated nineteenth century social norm (that adultery is an act “as consequential as murder”) reveals this common ignorance. Adultery can be an act of social revolt as Gorra suggests, but to a pre-birth control culture it is also truly a matter of life and death—and remains so for Catholics who observe the Church’s teaching on human sexuality expressed above. Greene may not have ever fully accepted these ideas, and he certainly rejected them later, but in *The End of the Affair* they can be seen tagging along with his very Catholic portrayal of human nature as an indivisible body and soul. Greene’s unflinching, straightforward treatment of the physical sex act might be shocking, but his casual tone does not alter the significant moral consequences of sex in his characters’ lives. Specifically, the traditional Christian understanding of the capital vice of lust is clearly apparent in Sarah and Bendrix’s sexual relationship, regardless of Greene’s personal preferences and practices.

Part of the reason that both Sarah and Bendrix can seem so flippant about their sex-life is because it makes up only one aspect of the relationship that Sarah struggles to rightly leave behind and that Bendrix strives to hold on to and possess. Compared with this contest of wills, sex seems a minor concern; and, especially for Bendrix, perhaps the

most innocent, selfless sin to condemn. Like gluttony, lust originates in a love of pleasure. It is a vice of weakness more than malice, and so it is easy to excuse or pity in its early stages. Lust can at least offer echoes of love. In the last chapter we have seen how lust is a disorder of the love of God itself. Dante places it on the highest level of Purgatory, just before entrance into Earthly Paradise—is it such a bad thing for Sarah and Bendrix to give themselves to each other in this way? Isn't this, perhaps "the weakest, the most faulty imitation of [God's] love," still good enough to cause devils anxiety (Greene, *EA* 47)? Even when Bendrix, a thoroughly hateful man, believes Sarah to have chosen another lover he can still think: "She had committed nothing but love" (Greene, *EA* 48). He elsewhere comments, "aren't lovers nearly always innocent? They have committed no crime, they are certain in their own minds that they have done no wrong, 'as long as no one but myself is hurt,' the old tag line is ready on their lips, and love, of course, excuses everything—so they believe, and so I used to believe in the days when I loved" (Greene, *EA* 16). This "'no-injury' objection" to sexual sin is so ancient, Rebecca DeYoung points out, that even St. Thomas Aquinas addresses it in his treatment of lust during the thirteenth century (DeYoung 170). Despite these objections, it becomes clear in *The End of the Affair* that to participate in the life-uniting and life-giving act without a proper ordering or in a situation innately opposed to its true end still causes the damage that theologians such as St. Gregory the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas recognized hundreds of years ago.

Lust is reductive: it reduces sex to the physical act, turning complex human beings with bodies and souls into objects that can be used. It refuses to acknowledge its source in the God-given pattern of true *eros* and *agape*. This annihilates both the pro-



creative and unifying purposes of marital sex. The fact that sex has the intractable potential to create human beings must be ignored, which also makes this a vice against charity—Sarah and Bendrix’s afternoon trysts have the potential of bringing an innocent human life into an inevitably unwelcoming, if not hostile, environment. Most of the time when Bendrix speaks of love, he seems to reduce it exclusively to the ecstasy he experiences in bodily intercourse with Sarah, isolated from every other element of human relationship. Even when lamenting his supposed defeat to Sarah’s husband Henry, Bendrix’s idea of the relationship is extraordinarily flat and dispiriting: “Henry—that name tolled through our relationship, dampening every mood of happiness or fun or exhilaration with its reminder that love dies, affection and habit win the day” (Greene, *EA* 58). How small must this man’s love be to exclude affection and habit? Love for Bendrix—something fun and exhilarating—is almost always reduced to the ecstasy of intercourse, rather than regarding sex as a by-product of a full, charitable relationship. Lust flattens this rich experience to “that final spasm,” and undermines itself in the process. For, if pleasure is a by-product, then it cannot be attained as an end in itself. Lust becomes so unsatisfying, and so prone to escalation, because it demands far too much from a pleasure isolated from its source: “Being able to appreciate physical goods requires that we not try to use them to satiate our spiritual needs” (DeYoung 166). Instead of exalting the good it obsesses over, lust can only degrade those who engage in it.

Both Bendrix and Sarah initially try to find fulfillment in the secondary good of sex. Sarah seeks disordered comfort, but Bendrix’s lust is from the beginning objectifying and tinged with the classic affliction of envy: inferiority. In his words:

“beautiful women, especially if they are intelligent also, stir some deep feeling of inferiority in me. [...] I have always found it hard to feel sexual desire without some sense of superiority, mental or physical” (Greene, *EA* 17). It does not take Sarah and Bendrix long, however, to recognize what DeYoung discerns: “Trying to make the physical union of sex alone do all the work of fulfilling us is a strategy doomed to fail. Trying to get sexual pleasure to fill our fundamental yearning for human happiness is a recipe for disappointment” (DeYoung 167). Bendrix futilely daydreams about eternity being an endless extension of one’s final moments before death, for he would have chosen “the moment of absolute trust and absolute pleasure, the moment when it was impossible to quarrel because it was impossible to think” (Greene, *EA* 55). Unfortunately for Bendrix, the obliterating self-gratification he finds in sex is not in fact absolute.

If men and women were solely material beings, then perhaps the act of sex might be ultimately fulfilling—at least until they were too old to indulge. For the God-created world of *The End of the Affair*, however, sex is a secondary good which lust distorts when it damages the intended holy reciprocity of *eros* and *agape*. No matter how exultant or ecstatic Sarah and Bendrix’s disordered love happens to be, no matter how successful at mimicking spiritual fulfillment, it is rooted in a vice which inherently fails to truly satisfy. As human beings with both bodies and souls, Sarah and Bendrix become intuitively terrified that their sexual *telos* will fail to fulfill them. Both refer to this impending emptiness as “the end of love.” They are right to fear, for there is indeed an end to a lust-driven love: it is found where lovers discover that their capacity for satisfaction in each other, and in sex itself, is finite. As Sarah reflects on the matter before her conversion:

Sometimes after a day when we have made love many times, I wonder whether it isn't possible to come to an end of sex, and I know that he is wondering too and is afraid of that point where the desert begins. What do we do in the desert if we lose each other? How does one go on living after that? (Greene, *EA* 72)

Clearly, her curiosity is genuine and actually open to an answer; she wonders, "If one could believe in God, would he fill the desert?" (Greene, *EA* 72).

Whereas Sarah can imagine the end of love opening to an alternative vision of a God-centered life, Bendrix aggressively refuses to do so. He rejects a divine fulfillment of desire because he is enslaved to lust and its desire for a godless, physicalist universe built on self-determined pleasure. As DeYoung points out, "Here lust's connection with pride reveals itself. Lust is the habit of trying to engineer my own happiness for myself, on my own terms. In lust, my own pleasure is the goal, and I decide where to get it, and when, and with whom" (DeYoung 169). Early on, Sarah and Bendrix "agreed so happily to eliminate God from [their] world" because God's presence would undermine their ability to find fulfillment in each other alone (Greene, *EA* 54). This clearly exhibits what St. Gregory the Great would call the "progeny" of lust: "from lust are generated [...] hatred of God, affection for this present world, but dread or despair of that which is to come" (*Moralia* 31.45.88). Such a gritty sin produces something so abstract as hatred of God or despair because it is God's reality and the eternity he has planted in human hearts that limits lust with the inevitable cessation of sexual ecstasy—or, the end of love. As Sarah and Bendrix know, the reality of God's existence ruins the fulfillment of lust by exceeding its possibilities. Lust may start as an over-appreciation of pleasure but it requires sex to eclipse every other good, and this leads all the way to hatred of the divine and a degradation of human nature itself.

The effects of lust are clearly severe. However, as strange as it may seem in such a sexually charged novel, lust is not the most damaging vice in *The End of the Affair*. Or, rather, the damage it produces generally derives from Bendrix's ruling vice: envy. Sarah and Bendrix's affair might start in pursuit of pleasure, but it almost immediately becomes a relationship burdened and ruled by jealousy. Even in their first encounter, lust and jealousy take root together. The attraction Bendrix feels to Sarah seamlessly transitions to jealousy in the knowledge that their moments of pleasure are not unique—"It was as though all the men in the past and all the men in the future cast their shade over the present" (Greene, *EA* 35).

Bendrix lustfully objectifies Sarah into something he desires to own and pursues sex increasingly as an act of possession rather than pleasure. In some ways this is a new vocabulary to describe the consuming *eros* which we have earlier seen to characterize everything about Bendrix's relationship to Sarah (before, during, and after the separation caused by Sarah's vow). To Bendrix, in his "monstrous egoism," Sarah is an object to be won; even after he has lost her completely in death, he finds comfort only in the memory of his ownership of her. In one of the most disturbing passages of the entire novel, Bendrix attempts to use this memory against God himself: "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 here 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" (Greene, *EA* 79). The reductive physicalism, objectification, and hatred of God that lust causes here clearly employ the language of envy. There are moments when

Bendrix transcends, or at least contradicts, this vicious attitude, but they are rare and, I will argue later, not without their own vice-laden qualities.

The articulation of envy in the seven deadly sins tradition sheds light on Bendrix's motivations and character. St. Augustine's confessional manual offers a list of the ways that the capital vice envy can be expressed:

[...] feeling offended at the talents, successes, or good fortune of others; selfish or unnecessary rivalry and competition; pleasure at others' difficulties or distress; ill will; reading false motives into others' behavior; belittling others; false accusations; [...] initiation, collection, or retelling of gossip; arousing, fostering, or organizing antagonism against others; scorn of another's abilities or failures; teasing or bullying; ridicule of persons, institutions, or ideals; and prejudice against those we consider inferior, who consider us inferior, or who seem to threaten our security or position. (Qtd. in DeYoung 46)

Readers of *The End of the Affair* hardly need Bendrix's relationship to this vice to be explicated or defended. Bendrix is offended by Sarah's husband Henry's good fortune; he enjoys seeing Henry uncomfortable; he wishes Sarah ill after she leaves him; he thinks Sarah is cheating and lying; he is condescending towards the investigator Parkis; he constantly accuses Sarah of lying when they are together; he's not much of a gossip, but he does incite Henry's suspicions towards Sarah; he scorns God's failure to possess Sarah as he himself has possessed her; he bullies and teases Parkis, Smythe, and Henry (and even suggests that this is due to envy); he ridicules the persons, institutions, and ideals of Christianity; and he is prejudiced against God himself due to his constantly shifting sense of inferiority and superiority. Greene could very well have been using this Augustinian manual while creating Bendrix. None of this is surprising; Bendrix is effusive concerning his jealousy, envy, and hate (a "progeny" of envy)—the words themselves are ubiquitous in the novel.

Bendrix's adherence to a list of traditional envy-attributes is not as important as the insightful way Greene creatively teases out the subtle details of the traditional vice in his character. Bendrix admits himself that the entire novel can be read as a documentation of his shifting, consuming jealousy: "I am a jealous man—it seems stupid to write these words in what is, I suppose, a long record of jealousy, jealousy of Henry, jealousy of Sarah and jealousy of that other [meaning God]" (Greene, *EA* 42). This confession is repeated throughout, as are his justifying denials and gestures toward repentance. Though Greene uses them fairly interchangeably, there is a distinction to be made between jealousy and envy. Before Sarah's vow, when they are in an actively adulterous relationship, Bendrix's feelings towards Sarah are jealous rather than envious. Jealousy occurs when one possesses a belonging or lover insecurely, as Bendrix points out: "Insecurity is the worst sense that lovers feel[...] Insecurity twists meanings and poisons trust" (Greene, *EA* 43). Bendrix can love Sarah when they are together because he is convinced that she is securely his. The moment she is out of sight, however, he becomes obsessively aware of his insecurity—his inability to possess his (married) lover completely. Even Sarah recognizes this: "He is jealous of the past and the future. His love is like a medieval chastity belt: only when he is there with me, in me, does he feel safe. If only I could make him feel secure, then we could love peacefully, happily, not savagely, inordinately, and the desert would recede from sight. For a lifetime perhaps" (Greene, *EA* 72). Bendrix also makes the claim that if only he could be secure with Sarah they would be happy for a lifetime due to "her loyalty and [his] desire" (Greene, *EA* 42).

The unlikelihood of this claim becomes increasingly evident. If Bendrix's jealousy were an atypical, circumstantial indulgence—as with Henry—then perhaps a

love-enabling security would be possible. Yet Bendrix's feelings of jealousy are not so natural; they do not spring from the disruption of his rightful place in a relationship. On the contrary, Bendrix's feelings exhibit the vicious qualities of envy—a passion for something he does not and ultimately cannot possess, a position he cannot hold:

Jealousy, or so I have always believed, exists only with desire. The Old Testament writers 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. But I suppose there are different kinds of desire. My desire now was nearer hatred than love, and Henry I had reason to believe, from what Sarah once told me, had long ceased to feel any physical desire for her. And yet, I think, in those days he was as jealous as I was. His desire was simply for companionship: he felt for the first time excluded from Sarah's confidence: he was worried and despairing—he didn't know what was going on or what was going to happen. He was living in a terrible insecurity. To that extent his plight was worse than mine. I had the security of possessing nothing. I could have no more than I had lost, while he still owned her presence at the table, the sound of her feet on the stairs, the opening and closing of doors, the kiss on the cheek—I doubt there was much else now, but what a lot to a starving man is just that much. (Greene, *EA* 31-32)

Compared to Bendrix, Henry's form of jealousy is much closer to God's jealousy—the desire for the restoration of a right relationship that has been damaged or else a preemptive desire for such damage not to occur. In the Old Testament jealousy is an analogy used to describe God's passion for Israel as his bride—his desire to regain and remain in full, pure relationship with an often adulterous wife. In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI notes that, in this marital imagery employed by Hosea and Ezekiel, God's love for Israel is at once completely *eros* and completely *agape* (Benedict 29-30). This perfect *caritas*—elective and personal in its *eros*, gratuitous and forgiving in its *agape*, should provide the pattern for relationships, but especially for marital love. Henry certainly failed to help maintain, or even create, a healthy marriage with Sarah; and he is perhaps at fault for noticing and resenting Sarah's nascent faith rather than her actual

adultery, but his feelings of jealousy do not become a ruling vice. Bendrix, however, becomes much more than naturally jealous—he has no right relationship with Sarah to defend in the first place.

Bendrix's jealousy is not Henry's. His jealousy is not a response to circumstance but a deeply rooted, habituated ruling vice. His love is disordered and enslaved by the demon in his mind—envy—so he could never develop the security that both he and Sarah desire. The insecurity Bendrix feels with Sarah is not circumstantial at root, though the nature of their adulterous affair does not help it. Rather, Bendrix's insecurity with Sarah stems from insecurity in his own identity, an unease that does not begin or end with her. Traditionally, envy is said to follow vainglory, and though Bendrix has little flashily recognizable vanity, his relationship with Sarah has everything to do with the focus of vainglory on identity (*Moralia* 31.45.89). The vainglorious are enslaved to the need for recognition; their false *telos* is the good opinion of others rather than intrinsic excellence. Bendrix is not a vainglorious hypocrite or boaster, but he is obsessed with his own value and how his accomplishments and relationships reflect on him. This explains why he does not generally desire women to whom he does not feel superior. It is also the reason that Sarah becomes momentarily less valuable to Bendrix when he believes she is having an affair with the dreary Richard Smythe, whom he finds ridiculous: “Suddenly it diminished her importance: her love affair became a joke: she herself might be used as a comic anecdote at my next dinner party. For a moment I was free of her” (Greene, *EA* 65). Sarah's value to Bendrix depends on how she affects his own sense of value.

Envy is characterized by a consumptive desire for ownership and a “passion to destroy” that which escapes possession (Greene, *EA* 13). In this can be seen the despair



of a thwarted, futile, isolated *eros*. Sarah is an object whom Bendrix desires obsessively to *own*—past, present, future, in every possible way (coveting another woman of equal “worth” would not do). Every relationship, every attachment, every interest of Sarah’s which does not involve him is a threat to his possession; Sarah notes, “he would drive me into such complete isolation that I would be alone with nothing and nobody—like a hermit, but they were never alone, or so they say” (Greene, *EA* 73). As seen in the last chapter, this allusion to the desert fathers’ experience of God is significant for Sarah’s development as a character, but it is also significant in its disclosure of Bendrix’s character. Hermits chose to live in earthly isolation in order to develop, largely through prayer and asceticism, a spiritual communion with the needy and a sacramental community among themselves. Bendrix, by contrast, would violently isolate Sarah and replace the free love of God with his own demands of ownership. Sarah could never, no matter how great her sacrifice, make Bendrix feel secure in their relationship—in a whole life extending beyond the sex act itself—because she is incapable of fulfilling the need he wants her to fulfill. In his disordered *eros*, Bendrix cannot find fulfillment in his love for Sarah because he is not seeking to order their relationship in the love of God and to pass that gift along to her in *agape*. This dissatisfaction and the self-deluded violence it produces are what makes envy such an underhandedly aggressive vice.

St. Gregory the Great lists the offshoots of the vice: “From envy spring hatred, whispering, detraction, exultation at the misfortunes of a neighbour, and affliction at his prosperity” (*Moralia* 31.45.88). The envious do not want to admit their need; they hate what they cannot have or who they cannot be. Even when they are still together, Bendrix tells Sarah, “I’d rather be dead or see you dead [...] than with another man. I’m not

eccentric. That's ordinary human love. Ask anybody [...] Anybody who loves is jealous" (Greene, *EA* 43). Once Sarah has left him, Bendrix confesses that: "nothing would have delighted me more than to have heard that she was sick, unhappy, dying. I imagined in those days that any suffering she underwent would lighten mine, and if she were dead I could be free" (Greene, *EA* 2). He quickly learns, however, that "the only way to hurt her was to hurt [himself]" (Greene, *EA* 45). This is because the "fundamental attitude of the envious is directly opposed to love. To love is to seek others' good and rejoice when they have it. To envy is to destroy others' good and sorrow over their having it" (DeYoung 51). Bendrix's passion to destroy anything of Sarah that he could not possess is representative only of a hateful envy—not of "ordinary human love."

Love is not coercive because it inherently requires freedom in order to exist. As a quality of his isolated and consuming *eros*, Bendrix's envy can meet Sarah only when she has the complimentary disorder of a self-immolating *agape*. Her initial lack of jealousy reveals this: claiming that she might make his bed for him is perverse self-surrender, not true charity. However, as her love begins to be purified, Sarah begins to seek Bendrix's good in a balance of true *eros* and *agape*. Once she knows that "Love extends itself all the time," she can recognize that what Bendrix needs is God's love and not her own inordinate sacrifice (Greene, *EA* 88).

Those who love with Christian charity are able both to give and receive with open hands because they know the source and end of love are one in God—they know that God himself is love. Their relationships are not cycles of abuse and victimhood because, even in the act of marital sex itself, they seek only God's love in *eros* and freely choose to pass on that gift received in *agape*. Those who envy can neither give nor receive.

Their inherently destructive passion to possess lies in this inability to open their clenched fists from the good they believe others have and they want:

to 'win' at envy is to destroy the possibility of love between oneself and others, and oneself and God. To be envious is to be determined to live in a way that precludes gratitude and contentment, love and happiness. Relationships of love are the only thing that will truly make us happy. The envious thus pursue happiness in a way that necessarily undermines their chances of having it. (DeYoung 53)

When Bendrix realizes that Sarah still loves him, he does not respect her decision to end their affair. Instead, he begins to pursue her to the point of damage, destroying the happiness he so desperately desires. In a way he literally chases her to death, forcing her out in the rain when she is ill. He feels “a certain pity for [his] victim” but he will not be satisfied, will not leave love free. Instead, he takes what he can as he can. The destruction of envy can be seen in what Bendrix realizes after Sarah’s death: “It was as though to save her for ourselves we had to destroy her features one by one” (Greene, *EA* 158). Bendrix fails to love Sarah “peacefully, happily” even when he is finally convinced of her love. Sadly, the “savage, inordinate” quality of envy is instead apparent.

Clearly, envy destroys what it desires, but “there is also something obviously *self*-destructive, self-hating about envy” (DeYoung 42). Again, envy is centered on an insecure sense of identity: “hatred of the rival is an elaborate cover-up, ultimately, for the envier’s sense of rejection and unworthiness—his own self-hatred. The commandment is to love your *neighbor* as you love *yourself*. The envier can do neither” (DeYoung 51). Bendrix’s envy is rooted in the poisonous knowledge that he doesn’t “possess [...] the winning cards—the cards of gentleness, humility and trust” that even Henry can claim (Greene, *EA* 18). He comes to recognize the self-hatred of his envy towards the end of the novel:

Can one really hate and love? Or is it only myself that I really hate? I hate the books I write with their unimportant skill, I hate the craftsman's mind in me so greedy for copy that I set out to seduce a woman I didn't love for the information she could give me, I hate this body that enjoyed so much but was inadequate to express what the heart felt, and I hate my untrusting mind, that set Parkis on the watch who laid powder on door bells, rifled wastepaper baskets, stole your secrets. (Greene, *EA* 151)

This cavernous self-hate would lead Bendrix to consume any good that seemed able to increase his value and to destroy any person that might make him inferior.

There is no purely natural solution to this disordered supernatural need. However, the seven deadly sins tradition can illuminate the cure for Bendrix's envy, hatred, and self-hate:

Envy's deep link to love and acceptance is important for understanding its importance, its rank among the capital vices, and its cure. Aquinas says that sloth undermines our love for God (the first and greatest commandment) and envy undermines our love for our neighbor, who is to be loved as ourselves (the second commandment, which is really another expression of the first, since we love neighbor and self well when we love them as God loves us). Being overcome by envy involves serious damage, because love is so central to being human. Overcoming envy likewise requires acknowledging a deeply human need for unconditional love and acknowledging the source of this love. (DeYoung 54)

When our ideas of what we are and what we need are twisted away from God, the only sure result is damage. Like all of the vices, envy damages our conception of human fulfillment and of human nature itself. As a sin against charity, loveless envy separates us from God, neighbor, and even self because "love is so central to being human." The only way to restore this dread disorder is to recognize the need for an eternal love that envy is never going to satisfy. This involves a complete restoration of how we view our identities; we must radically unhand whatever envy has taken the place of God-given identity and instead receive God's definition of who we are. We must begin to seek God in a holy *eros* through the secondary goods that would claim to be our *telos*. By the end

of *The End of the Affair*, Bendrix recognizes this ultimate choice—to remain caught in the vicious end of their love that he continues to experience after Sarah’s death, or to follow her example and discover another possible end of their love: to be subsumed in the love of God.

### III.

The focus of the end of the novel is on Bendrix’s choice between holding onto his hateful envy and painfully accepting God’s love. Micheal Brennan reads Bendrix’s last state as a conflation rather than a separation of opposites: “In a final attempt to dodge the infinite Mercy of God, he takes refuge in Greene’s well-worn image of the duality of a Manichaeian divinity, conjoining the potential for both good and evil” (Brennan 99). Though I do not agree with his Manichaeian interpretation, there is a troubling conflation of good and evil, love and hate, vice and virtue in this section of the novel. Bendrix’s demonic vices can still be recognized and provide insight, in conformity with the rest of the novel, but Greene’s clear engagement with the tradition becomes confused and, perhaps intentionally, leads to contradictory readings.

Earlier in the novel, Bendrix questions his hate more than he conflates it with love. When he does seem to collapse the two, he does so in more clearly problematic ways: “Hatred seems to operate the same glands as love: it even produces the same actions. If we had not been taught how to interpret the story of the Passion, would we have been able to say from their actions alone whether it was the jealous Judas or the cowardly Peter who loved Christ?” (Greene, *EA* 19). This question is possible only from one who “measured love by the extent of [his] jealousy” (Greene, *EA* 43). As a daughter vice of envy, hatred is only related to love by inversion. The difference between Peter

and Judas lies not only in their betrayal and denial of Christ, but in their responses to those sins. Peter weeps immediately in repentance and is one of the only disciples to believe the news of Jesus' resurrection. The knowledge that he has denied Christ does not produce the slightest hesitation to sprint to the empty tomb. Before Peter had even denied Christ, he was clearly instructed: "once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). In contrast, Judas was consistently impatient and envious before he betrayed Christ. When Judas realizes what he has done and regrets his betrayal, he does not weep and repent; instead, he attempts to return the silver he had been paid for his betrayal. When Judas is unable to assuage his guilt, he despairingly kills himself. Bendrix's inability to see the difference between razing self-hate and loving compunction reveals the extremely disordered understanding he has of both envy and love.

Bendrix can "really hate and love" only because his idea of love is merely a different label for the hatred born of envy. However, as *The End of the Affair* reaches its conclusion, the oxymoronic relation of love and hate becomes still more problematic:

[...] hating Sarah is only loving Sarah and hating myself is only loving myself. I'm not worth hating—Maurice Bendrix, author of *The Ambitious Host*, *The Crowned Image*, *The Grave on the Waterfront*. Bendrix the scribbler. Nothing—not even Sarah—is worth our hatred if you exist, except You. And, I thought, sometimes I've hated Maurice, but would I have hated him if I hadn't loved him too? O God, if I could really hate you... (Greene, *EA* 152).

The tension of this passage, seemingly nonsensical, is remarkably revealing of Bendrix's end in the novel. It reveals the self-hating core of Bendrix's envy, the pride (or "real Satanic thing") in his rejection of God as a natural man wishing to remain natural, and the sneaking, reverse implication that all his hatred is in fact love. To conflate the hatred

born of envy with the love it negates is absurd without a clear indication of hatred's Augustinian *privatio boni* of love. Yet, even the dust jacket to the second edition of *The End of the Affair* reads baldly, "hate is but the disguise behind which love is working." Many critics assume this conflation with a vague reference to David Lodge's famous tally of the words love and hate in *The End of the Affair* (Brennan 93). Michael Brennan makes the blunt statement that Bendrix's world is ordered by a moral polarity that "binds together love and hate for both humanity and God Himself," without sufficiently explicating his meaning (Brennan 93). All vice is indeed a disordered or excessive attachment to real good, and so in some sense all hatred is simply a distortion of proper desire for love. However, we cannot blithely disregard the gravity of evil and vice because their reality is founded, like all things, in God's love—especially in the case of Bendrix's hatred, which is embraced so knowingly. Greene may intentionally leave this passage ambiguous, but, in continuity with the rest of the vice-mapping novel, I read this supposed conflation as consistently vicious. Bendrix's recognition that there is some strange, close relationship between love and the hatred born of envy is astute, but hatred is not "but the disguise behind which love is working" any more than cancer is but a mask for properly functioning organs: a disease cannot exist without a host. Rather, hatred stymies and damages the working of love so gravely that it must be purified.

What hate reveals is the absence of proper charity—it reveals that there is something to love in what is hated. For if evil is the privation of good, then pure evil cannot exist. It must retain at least a shadow of the good. This is how Bendrix's capital vice itself leads him to the inescapable knowledge of God's existence. Bendrix is jealous of Sarah when they are together, and he envies the man he assumes had replaced him as

her lover. Bendrix's envy leads him to hate and even long to destroy both Sarah as an object of value that has evaded him, and also her supposed lover as his superior rival. Bendrix actively hates his rival before he learns that it is God himself who has replaced him. Both Sarah and Bendrix ask "if they could hate God, what would that mean" and the answer is clear: not that they actually love God, but that God exists to be loved but can instead be hated.

In the Catholic world of *The End of the Affair* there is no assurance of either salvation or damnation while a man or woman is still alive, and no ordinary way to know their fate after death. In that sense, there is hope (though not assurance) that Bendrix will come to faith as so many critics suggest. We do not know his end, but it is clear that within the novel Bendrix does not "succumb to the aura around Sarah's diary" and then become "transformed" as Mark Bosco and others contend (Bosco 60). Though he does exhibit an increasing awareness of the lesser characters' humanity, as J.C. Whitehouse notes, Maurice's affection for Henry is not significantly different than his jealous possession of Sarah (Whitehouse 64). Bendrix has not accepted his God-given identity; he has not learned how to love. Instead, at the end of the novel Bendrix can be seen oscillating between the capital vices that St. Thomas Aquinas claims undermine the charitable love of neighbor and love of God that Sarah comes to embody—namely envy and sloth:

What I chiefly felt was less hate than fear. For if this God exists, I thought, and if even you—with your lusts and you adulteries and the timid lies you used to tell—can change like this, we could all be saints by leaping as you leapt. [...] It's something He can demand of any of us, leap. But I won't leap. I sat on my bed and said to God: You've taken her, but You haven't got me yet. I know Your cunning. It's You who takes us up to a high place and offer us the whole universe. You're a devil, God, tempting us to leap. But I don't want Your peace and I don't



want Your love. I wanted something very simple and easy: I wanted Sarah for a lifetime and You took her away. With Your great schemes You ruin our happiness like a harvester ruins a mouse's nest: I hate You, God, I hate You as though you existed. (Greene, *EA* 191)

The vital, hating presence of envy is still very much alive in Bendrix. He has made his case as a natural man whose small happiness was ruined by the greater happiness offered by God. He has not let go of his passion to possess Sarah. Beneath his frustrated desire is the classic prideful hatred of things as they are—Bendrix hates who he is, how his rivals exceed him, his failure to fully control and possess Sarah, and ultimately his inability (as with lust) to determine his own fulfillment. But in this there is also the vice sloth, which some critics mistake as a good in Bendrix because it involves identification of the good.

Bendrix recognizes that the ultimate human potential of sainthood is available to all those made and then re-made in God's image. Yet, in this recognition he finds no joy. He does not desire the good that he can see is open to him. In his essay on sloth, Evelyn Waugh defines the vice as "the condition in which a man is fully aware of the proper means of his salvation and refuses to take them because the whole apparatus of salvation fills him with tedium and disgust" (Waugh, "Sloth" 58). Bendrix knows what is available to him ("Your peace" and "Your love"); he just doesn't want it. "If we are slothful," DeYoung declares, "we have chosen to reject that relationship as the way to find fulfillment and chosen to try to make something else do its work instead. We are trying to make ourselves content with being less than we really are" (DeYoung 89). Bendrix knows what he still wants and it is not God; he had wanted "Sarah for a lifetime" and now he holds onto the vicious envy and hate that she has left behind in his life.

The “tedium and disgust” Bendrix feels at the prospect of salvation (what Aquinas calls an aversion to the divine good in us) is also a result of fear. Bendrix despairs in the face of the good because the good seems too difficult, too costly. This fear can be seen in his choice to address Sarah rather than God in a near-perverse form of intercessory prayer:

It’s all very well for you to love God. You are dead. You have him. But I’m sick with life, I’m rotten with health. If I begin to love God, I can’t just die. I’ve got to do something about it. I had to touch you with my hands, I had to taste you with my tongue: one can’t love and do nothing. It’s no use your telling me not to worry as you did once in a dream. If I ever loved like that, it would be the end of everything. Loving you I had no appetite for food, I felt no lust for any other woman, but loving him there’d be no pleasure in anything at all with him away. I’d even lose my work, I’d cease to be Bendrix. Sarah, I’m afraid. (Greene, *EA* 152)

The only way for Bendrix to transform his hateful envy into love is to repent of it, let go of his hate, and embrace God’s love as the true mark of his identity. Frank Kermode recognizes that such “acceptance of God entails pain” (Kermode 132). Much of that pain lies in handing self-hate over to God and building charity on a proper love of self, originating in one’s own God-given worth. Bendrix’s sloth, by contrast, creates

resistance to the discipline and transformation demanded by our new identity as God’s beloved children, created and redeemed to be like him. The slothful [...] balk at facing the discomfort of transformation—the slow putting to death of the old sinful nature—and the discipline it takes to sustain that transforming relationship of love over the long haul. (DeYoung 92)

Like Sarah, Bendrix has learned that it is not easy to accept God’s reality of love. Like Judas, he chooses the effortless alternative.

In the end, with all of his contradiction, ambiguity, and conflation of love and hate, Bendrix leaves us with a note of finality in the last lines of *The End of the Affair*: “O God, You’ve done enough, You’ve robbed me of enough, I’m too tired and old to learn to

love, leave me alone forever” (*EA* 160). Michael Brennan believes these words “strike a note of equivocal weariness, suggesting that the progress of Bendrix’s own soul is only just beginning” (Brennan 99). For him, as with many other readers, Bendrix’s surrender to the Hound of Heaven is inevitable despite his one hundred and sixty page flight. Even J.C. Whitehouse believes “that we have been here before, with Sarah, and that the new stillness certainly marks a progression from his anger after what he had said at the climax of his hatred” (Whitehouse 61). However, Frank Kermode’s reading that “Bendrix [is] praying for the peace of the natural man, burnt out” seems to me more accurate (Kermode 137). Bendrix has turned to face his pursuer, finally addressing God directly, without the vital energy of his hate, but he has not embraced him. Bendrix has chosen his own end of love, and it is a real end—a desert he won’t allow God to fill.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion: Setting Love in Order

Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces.  
—Gerard Manley Hopkins, "As Kingfishers Catch Fire"

*The End of the Affair* is Graham Greene's greatest achievement. Despite some of the novel's troubling ambiguity, Green is able to present one of the most moving and textured portraits of human nature in the twentieth century by engaging the thick moral concepts of virtue and vice within the context of a human love whose very structure belies God's authorship. Critics too often judge *The End of the Affair* by their own conception about the limits of fiction rather than by Greene's own intentions. Partially, this stems from simple ignorance of the Catholic moral tradition, but there is also a tendency to impose certain beliefs on *The End of the Affair* that go against Greene's understanding of fiction at the time the novel was written. This becomes evident in their treatment of Sarah's miracles at the end of the novel.

The majority of critics, including the later Greene himself, find the miracles a weak, debilitating element in *The End of the Affair*. Ian Gregor reads the miracles as an instance of Greene telling instead of showing what Sarah is meant to convey: "In life, miracles are claimed to testify to a reality which has made them occur. One part of the fiction world is being made to allege the inexpressible reality of another. And to try to do this is to confuse the whole nature of fiction" (Gregor 124). Sarah is someone "whose goodness can be understood only in extra-fictional terms" (Gregor 124). This makes the

meaning of *The End of the Affair* something “unknowable in the way that human beings are, and fictional characters are not. A report on [the novel] would conclude not that the art was too remote from life, but rather that there was a failure to distinguish between them” (Gregor 125). Gregor insists on the absolute knowledge readers of fiction ought to possess concerning characters and plot, compared to the mysterious nature of real human acted upon by a truly unknowable God. Michael Gorra offers an odd inversion of this critique; he instead insists that the final scenes of *The End of the Affair* break down because they attempt to defy the simple fact that “fiction and religion speak a different kind of truth. Religion demands an absolute belief, but fiction is what James Wood has called a ‘game of not quite,’ and the kind of belief it exacts is provisional at best” (Gorra xxi). Though I agree with both Gregor and Gorra that there are problems with the end of the novel, I believe that they arise from the internal inconsistency in Bendrix’s character rather than a sudden departure from the rules for fiction. Indeed, both critics’ understanding of religion and fiction seem to overlook Greene’s own ideas expressed in a short essay on his friend François Mauriac, written six years before *The End of the Affair*. There Greene laments the English novel’s loss of “the religious sense” that had once imbued human action with meaning by emphasizing its relationship to the supernatural world.

Written in 1945, Greene’s essay on François Mauriac is a remarkably useful resource for interpreting *The End of the Affair*. Michael Gorra recognizes its significance but does not acknowledge the essential thrust of Greene’s argument. For Greene at this time, if fiction “speaks” truth, it is inherently related to the physical-spiritual world of religion. It interacts far more solidly with reality than ‘a game of not quite.’ Neither is

fiction a closed, utterly knowable world. Greene compares a novel that would try to escape such connection to a faulty children's paper maze:

He runs his pencil down avenues which must surely go straight to the circumference, the world outside the maze, where moral judgments and acts of supernatural importance can be found [...] but the printed channels slip and twist and slide, landing him back where he began, and he finds on close examination that the designer of the maze has in fact overprinted the only exit. (Greene, *Essays* 92-3)

The truth of fiction is meant to lead to truth outside its created world, “where moral judgments and acts of supernatural importance can be found.” *The End of the Affair* certainly reaches beyond the bounds of its fictional world.

For Greene in 1945, there is real loss in the loss of theological imagination: “with the religious sense went the sense of the importance of the human act. It was as if the world of fiction had lost a dimension: the characters of such distinguished writers as Mrs Virginia Woolf and Mr E.M. Forster wandered like cardboard symbols through a world that was paper-thin” (Greene, *Essays* 91). Mauriac, by contrast, can produce characters with “the solidity and importance of men with souls to save or lose” because, unlike authors of the subjective novel, “he is a writer for whom the visible world has not ceased to exist,” nor indeed, the spiritual world which makes such an objective, external reality possible (Greene, *Essays* 92). Greene does not merely praise Mauriac's accomplishment, but appropriates it in his own fiction. During this time, Greene wrote of the main actors in his serious novels: “These characters are not my creation but God's. They have an eternal destiny. They are not merely playing a part for the reader's amusement. They are souls whom Christ died to save” (qtd. in Waugh, *Essays, Articles and Reviews* 361). This claim and its implications for Sarah Miles and Maurice Bendrix are absolutely crucial for a proper understanding of *The End of the Affair*. Sarah's virtue and Bendrix's vice are

not mere literary themes. Rather, they embody the thorny moral contraries that most people experience daily: good and evil, love and hate, the acceptance or rejection of one's true nature.

Greene had no intention of respecting the boundaries between reality and fiction set by critics such as Gregor and Gorra. His transgression of such limits stems more from his understanding of human nature than the nature of fiction. Gregor claims that Greene failed in his treatment of grace, saints, and sinners because he didn't "communicat[e] their drama in human terms; in art there is no other perspective. This assertion is not humanist, but human" (Gregor 122). Yet Greene's understanding of 'human terms' in *The End of the Affair* is undeniably Catholic. This means that his human characters are made in the image of God, created to love and serve Him and each other with the freedom of their grace-enabled wills. However, after the fall, they now suffer under the power of evil—through both demonic authority and concupiscence. As with Mauriac, so does Greene create "characters [who] exist with extraordinary physical completeness [...] but their particular acts are less important than the force, whether God or Devil, that compels them" (Greene, *Essays* 94). In Greene's Catholic imagination, human terms inherently reach into the supernatural. As human characters, Sarah and Bendrix's motives and decisions reach far beyond the human bounds of their story.

Such metaphysical heights and depths enable Greene to parade every human disorder and failure of love between Sarah and Bendrix and yet still believably convey a sense of eternal charity and sacrifice with no sense of false piety. I agree with Michael Torre that "Greene makes us sufficiently feel the depth of [Sarah's] love of God so that the miracles that spring from her do not seem like a cheap device" (Torre 70). The lovers

portray perhaps the entire inventory offered by the rationalist Smythe in his reductionist dismissal:

The desire to possess in some, like avarice: in others the desire to surrender, to lose the sense of responsibility, the wish to be admired. Sometimes just the wish to be able to talk, to unburden yourself to someone who won't be bored. The desire to find again a father or a mother. And of course under it all the biological motive. (Greene, *EA* 85)

By contrast, Sarah can identify the character of what has happened: "it's all true, but isn't there something over? I've dug up all that in myself, in Maurice too, but still the spade hasn't touched rock. 'And the love of God?'" (Greene, *EA* 85). In a world whose every relational structure is patterned after the eternal giving and receiving of God's love in *eros* and *agape*, there is no threat in Freudian sublimation, the search for a surrogate father, or any other cheap imitation of God's love. "It's all true," as we have seen in Bendrix's consumptive *eros* and vice, and yet, "the spade hasn't touched rock."

*The End of the Affair* is Greene's greatest success. Greene was never able to convey compelling spiritual and moral life in his characters as effectively as he did with Sarah Miles. For the rest of his career Greene maintained an insightful presentation of the quality and development of vice in his characters, but he fails to depict both ends of human love and life. In his later fiction there is no comparable "Hint of an Explanation"; there is no divine spark, no believably unpredictable leap in characters that brings them alive. Neither is there a complex and fascinating moral engagement with the forces that might compel his characters to perform drastic acts of lust or love. Instead, Query and others plod out the paths of sin with a weighty inevitability. By engaging with the living moral traditions of Catholic theology in the *eros* and *agape* pattern of love, with the human choice between acceptance and rejection of God's love, and with the analytic



power of the seven deadly sins tradition for tracking human motivation, Greene was able to convey a true sense of human freedom in *The End of the Affair*.

Greene's convincing depiction of charity was made possible by his creative embodiment of the Catholic understanding of freedom: a freedom that does not entail personal imprisonment and erotic atrophy in the discipline and renunciation which sanctification requires, but rather a necessary foundation and supply for any free and creative action. This is the freedom for co-creation that Bendrix sees come to life in Sarah:

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 nonexistence. 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 opportunities for *their* free will. (Greene, *EA* 154-5)

Yet, even in this passage there is a reversal: the saints are free to act because they stand within the plot and *are* conditioned by it. They recognize their place in the larger narrative of divine action in the world and, through cooperation with it, they are able to participate in the movement of his will themselves. In moving away from his engagement with the Catholic moral order, Greene creates characters who cease to participate in God's artful creation and lose both the poignant guilt of Maurice Bendrix as well as the painful sanctity of Sarah Miles.

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