



## Fictional Absence - Chapter 4: After the Funeral

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*In Fictional Absence, which has been slightly revised for publication here, Pete Lowman considers the presence and absence of God in English literature.*

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Yet, even if God had died in English fiction, He still did not quite stop moving. Supernaturalism did not disappear altogether. To the Christian reader, this comes as no surprise: if human beings are 'built' for relationship with a God, then denial of that God will not lead to total forgetfulness, but rather to a hunger that will resurface from time to time. It would seem that the imaginations of a number of leading novelists required something of the kind; and the result was various forms of 'secularised supernaturalism'. Miriam Allott comments that:

*Paradoxically, it is in this context of doubt and scepticism that the novel acquires its most potent supernatural ambience – we are particularly aware of it in the novels of Hardy, James and Conrad, where it is associated with a vivid sense of hostile and evil forces in the world.[1]*

We also find – later in the twentieth century – the

emergence of writers with visions of Christianity that deviate significantly from biblical orthodoxy, but in whose fictions God is nonetheless doing something. Perhaps the cultural situation was now at a stage where it would be hard for a novel based on a genuinely biblical worldview to 'make it' into the literary canon, since that worldview was now becoming very much a radical minority viewpoint. But God and the supernatural could not be squeezed out altogether.

### (i) Whispers, Echoes and Metaphors

The first thing we would expect to find in a situation of 'loss of faith' is that the images of Christian supernaturalism, while no longer believed in as such, would continue to retain their attraction as a source of powerful metaphor. This tendency can be seen emerging back before the departure from a Christian pattern had become entirely dominant, in two virtually contemporary novels, Dickens' *Dombey and Son* (1846-48) and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847).

In *Dombey and Son* Dickens repeatedly makes metaphorical use of the concepts of Christian supernaturalism. Alice and Edith are both compared to fallen spirits.[2] Florence is referred to as an angel throughout the book; and when she leaves Edith, it is as if the latter's 'good angel went out in that form'[3], and she is left to the 'devil' Carker says 'possesses' her at Dijon.[4] As Edith's husband Dombey is also possessed by a 'moody, stubborn, sullen demon'[5], disaster follows. Carker has lost 'his solitary angel' with his sister Harriet's departure[6]; the full result is only reaped in his return from Dijon, drawn by 'smoking horses...as if...ridden by a demon'[7], after which he is run down by the 'fiery devil', the train.[8] This is only one of the chains of images in the novel, of course. And we are clearly involved in a process of secularization when the primary use of the Christian supernatural is as a source of metaphor on a par with explicitly "legendary" images such as 'enchantress', 'ogress', and 'good monster', which are also employed in *Dombey and Son*.

Something similar occurs in *Wuthering Heights*, where the invocation of the demonic is integral to Emily Bronte's success in building up a very real sense of evil. The demonic archetype is introduced in particular with reference to

Heathcliff, who is described as being, at his first appearance, 'as dark almost as if it came from the devil'.<sup>[9]</sup> He is portrayed as 'possessed of something diabolical' as a boy<sup>[10]</sup>, and, elsewhere, as a goblin.<sup>[11]</sup> Isabella wonders, 'Is he a devil?'<sup>[12]</sup>, and soon decides he is indeed 'a lying fiend, a monster, and not a human being'<sup>[13]</sup>; Nellie too asks herself if he is a 'hideous, incarnate demon'.<sup>[14]</sup> There are several similar references. But the demonic seems to have a share in most of the characters: Hindley is 'Devil daddy' to Hareton<sup>[15]</sup>, Catherine Earnshaw dreams of being unhappy in heaven and consequently being expelled thence<sup>[16]</sup>, and even the younger Catherine ('taking a long, dark book from a shelf') claims to have 'progressed' in black magic – 'I shall soon be competent to make a clear house of it.'<sup>[17]</sup> All in all it is hardly surprising to find *Wuthering Heights* described as an 'infernal house'<sup>[18]</sup>, and as purgatory or worse.<sup>[19]</sup>

These references are employed to give a kind of resonance; there is no unambiguous suggestion that the moors have suffered the intrusion of supernatural beings. The demonic is an archetype that is being used primarily to dramatise a quality which can come to power in the soul of the ordinary mortal. The prosaic Lockwood's unexpected and horrific dream, and the force of Heathcliff's final experiences, serve to leave just a shadow of a doubt – as if the forms invoked by the author, and the figure of Catherine contemplated so intensely at the end by Heathcliff in a bizarre kind of neo-Platonism, might just possibly have independent objective existence.

A providential view is indeed suggested as something of an alternative by Nellie: 'He trusted God; and God comforted him', she remarks in a matter-of-fact way about Edgar<sup>[20]</sup>; and she advises the latter to resign the younger Catherine to God, in view of His providence.<sup>[21]</sup> A certain ambiguity hangs over this; in a sense Nellie's faith could be said to be justified – Catherine does survive in the end. But the providential view can more plausibly be seen as Nellie's attempt to impose a 'civilising shape' on what she sees. The old retainer Joseph's Christianity does not exactly add any lustre to the faith: and Edgar's merely becomes part of the colourlessly 'safe' world of the Grange.

When Heathcliff returns to *Wuthering Heights*, Nellie remarks, 'I felt that God had forsaken the stray sheep there to its own wicked wanderings, and an evil beast prowled between it and the fold, waiting his time to spring and destroy.'<sup>[22]</sup> There is no question of prayer as a resource or grace as a solution to the problems of Isabella or the younger Catherine; and one of the most painful things about *Wuthering Heights* is the way one character after another is left at the mercy of forces that will corrupt or destroy it. God is as catastrophically absent from the world of Emily Brontë's novel as from the world of Zola. But where God is absent the demons have full power: the language of demonology provides categories for the description of an evil (or an amoral power doing much that within the Christian framework would be described as evil) that is rendered with such devouring intensity as to dwarf and distance the 'normal' world of Nellie and Lockwood; thereby almost imparting a kind of reality to the numinous world from which its metaphors are drawn.

This is similar to what takes place in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, at the end of which Hardy's tragic movement reaches a mythic culmination: 'The President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess.' Hardy is not setting up a metaphysic: the myth merely expresses an insight – or an opinion – about the nature of ordinary life. At the same time, if Hardy's coincidences are not to seem too contrived, if his reader is not to be left with too much unease about the 'dismal generalizations he illogically induces from the extraordinary actions he invents'<sup>[23]</sup>, then the support of a mythology that comes close to taking on objective reality is of some assistance. The necessary background to Hardy's vision involves a hint of supernaturalism.

In Conrad there are some clear examples of this 'secularised supernatural', the 'vivid sense of hostile and evil forces in the world' to which Miriam Allott refers. There are the hostile seas of *The Shadow Line*, where the young captain laughs at Mr. Burns' fears of the evil influence of his dead predecessor, but immediately afterwards, with 'the southern shoulder of Koh-ring ... like an evil attendant, on our port quarter', encounters 'an inexplicable, steady breeze, right in our teeth. There was no sense in it... Only purposeful malevolence could account for it.'<sup>[24]</sup>

In the end it is by *'the exorcising virtue of Mr. Burns' awful laugh'* that *'the malicious spectre had been laid, the evil spell broken, the curse removed. We were now in the hands of a kind and energetic Providence.'*[25]

In *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness* Conrad presents something persistently 'abominable' which comes almost to seem more than natural, and reveals itself in the malevolence of the universe through which Jim (in his open boat) and Harlow (in his river steamer) travel; finally culminating in Jim's temptation by Gentleman Brown – *'it was as if a demon had been whispering advice in his ear'*[26] – and Harlow's encounter with Kurtz who *'had taken a high seat among the devils of the land – I mean literally. You can't understand. How could you?'*[27] In all this Conrad remained an agnostic. But his work seems virtually to demand a transcendent ground for its metaphor. It does not assume that such a ground exists: it merely enacts Sartre's remark that a finite point, if it is to have meaning, must have an infinite reference point. The use of some kind of 'beyond' becomes essential if the 'given' is to be described. How, after all, is one to define evil in a totally relativistic universe, or disorder if there is no underlying order to give the term meaning?

Graham Greene sees something similar taking place in the fiction of James. To him, the 'crystallization' of the 'dominant theme' in James' private universe is the point in the scenario to *The Ivory Tower* where James speaks of *'the black and merciless things that are behind great possessions'*. To Greene, this is the keynote of a *'sense of evil religious in its intensity'* in James' work.[28]

*Experience taught him to believe in supernatural evil, but not in supernatural good. Milly Theale is all human; her courage has not the supernatural support which holds Kate Croy and Charlotte Stant in a strong coil.'*[29]

The ghosts in *The Turn of the Screw* are presented with a deliberate ambiguity as to whether they are to seem objective realities, or the creation of the governess' brain; at the very least they serve as 'secularised supernaturalism' in the sense of a mythic representation of evil. James himself remarked, *'I recognise that they*

*are not ghosts at all, as we now know the ghost, but goblins, elves, imps, demons. The essence of the matter was the villainy of the motive in the evoked predatory creature.'*[30]

Moving into the twentieth century, Lawrence and Forster also include such references to give depth and resonance to what they are describing. Forster writes (fascinatingly) in *A Passage to India*:

*If this world is not to our taste, well, at all events there is Heaven, Hell, Annihilation – one or other of those large things, that huge scenic background of stars, fires, blue or black air. All heroic endeavour, and all that is known as art, assumes that there is such a background.'*[31]

When Mrs. Moore encounters the 'echo' in the Marabar caves that, for her, destroys this background, Forster depicts it (one paragraph after the previous quotation) in supernaturalistic terms:

*What had spoken to her in that scoured-out cavity of the granite? What dwelt in the first of the caves? Something very old and very small. Before time, it was before space also. Something snub-nosed, incapable of generosity – the undying worm itself. Since hearing its voice, she had not entertained one large thought, she was actually envious of Adela... Visions are supposed to entail profundity but – Wait till you get one, dear reader! The abyss also may be petty, the serpent of eternity made of maggots; her constant thought was: 'Less attention should be paid to my future daughter-in-law and more to me...'*

Laurence Lerner notes *'the tact with which Forster stops just short of the supernatural, the completeness with which the newly-released evil is embodied in the book's action and yet retains a further, numinous quality'*, and proceeds to call the 'Caves' section *'one of the most brilliant and disturbing episodes in modern fiction'*. [32]

D.H. Lawrence almost takes a step further into outright paganism, for example in the powerful section at the close of *St. Mawr*. Lou, weary of men and of sex, resolves to *'give myself only to the unseen presences'*, like a Vestal Virgin, *'woman weary of the embrace of incompetent men ... turning to the unseen gods, the unseen*

*spirits, the hidden fire, and devoting herself to that, and that alone.* [33]

She buys a ranch in the wilds of New Mexico; the previous owner had given up the struggle against the 'aroma and the power and the slight horror of the pre-sexual primeval world'[34], where there was 'always some mysterious malevolence fighting, fighting against the will of man. A strange invisible influence coming out of the livid rock fastnesses in the bowels of those uncreated rocky Mountains, preying upon the will of man, and slowly wearing down his resistance, his onward-pushing spirit.[35] This alien force has its own attraction, however:

*The same when a couple of horses were struck by lightning. It frightened her...and made her know, secretly and with cynical certainty, that there was no merciful God in the heavens. A very tall, elegant pine tree just above her cabin took the lightning, and stood tall and elegant as before, but with a white seam spiralling from its crest, all down its tall trunk, to earth. The perfect scar, white and long as lightning itself. And every time she looked at it, she said to herself, in spite of herself: 'There is no Almighty loving God. The God there is shaggy as the pine trees, and horrible as the lightning.' Outwardly, she never confessed this. Openly, she thought of her dear New England Church as usual. But in the violent undercurrent of her woman's soul, after the storms, she would look at that living, seamed tree, and the voice would say in her, almost savagely: 'What nonsense about Jesus and a God of Love, in a place like this! This is more awful and more splendid. I like it better.'... There was no love on this ranch. There was life, intense, bristling life, full of energy, but also, with an undertone of savage sordidness... Nay, it was a world before and after the God of Love.[36]*

Lawrence is a superb writer, and the power that has left the pine tree 'tall and elegant' but with a 'perfect scar' is conveyed to the reader as real, daunting, in the strict sense awesome. As it happens, what Lawrence creates is something not entirely removed from the vision of the God of power, of 'otherness', that appears in some of the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 45:7 for example: 'I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things'). The Christian reader may feel that

Lawrence – like many another – is right in what he affirms, while hopelessly wrong in what he denies. Anyway, it is – perhaps disturbingly – to this power that Lou surrenders herself a couple of paragraphs from the book's close:

*There's something else even that loves me and wants me. I can't tell you what it is. It's a spirit. And it's here, on this ranch. It's here, in this landscape. It's something more real to me than men are, and it soothes me, and it holds me up. I don't know what it is, definitely. It's something wild, that will hurt me sometimes and will wear me down sometimes. I know it. But it's something big, bigger than men, bigger than people, bigger than religion... It's a mission if you like. I am imbecile enough for that! – But it's my mission to keep myself for the spirit that is wild, and has waited so long here: even waited for such as me. Now I've come! Now I'm here. Now I am where I want to be: with the spirit that wants me... And it doesn't want to save me either. It needs me. It craves for me.[37]*

On the far side of the Enlightenment, 'secularized supernaturalism' comes to the very edge of turning into a new animism. It is still, probably, a myth: a reification of the disparate forces of the 'other', of the natural world. But to make such a comment is to run the risk of 'demythologizing' Lawrence into something more comfortable, more humanistic. Certainly Lawrence is here speaking to parts of the human psyche seldom stirred since the 'loss of faith'; imaginative capacities that could have reached forth in worship to the God of the *unabridged* biblical revelation. Worship, devotion, is what Lawrence gropes after here: if only, alas, for something that is no *more* than power, that finally rises no higher than the Baals, the nature gods denounced in the Old Testament.

A more directly Christian supernaturalism is toyed with, for other purposes, in Faulkner and Fitzgerald. In 'The Bear', the central story in William Faulkner's masterly *Go Down, Moses*, the saint-hero, Isaac McCaslin, gives a theistic interpretation to the history of the American South, and proceeds at some cost to base his whole life on that. On the other hand, he does not pray, and the theistic content of his opinions are really (once again) biographical data, intended to say more about him than about history. Providential reference is likewise employed to

indicate America's existence beyond the possessiveness of any particular group of human beings in Fitzgerald's *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz*. Here the significantly-named Braddock Washington has built his personal empire on ruthlessly selfish exploitation of the enormous natural resource he has discovered – a mountain that is one solid diamond. But his empire collapses; and the rejection of his last proud bribe by the Creator of the diamond on which his wealth and power are based – the God behind the 'Providence' that supposedly led him to the diamond in the first place [38] – is a device emphasising Washington's lack of any real title to the resources he has used with massive and deliberate egoism. But the objective existence of a Creator is not absolutely essential to the point Fitzgerald is making[39]; the Creator, like the diamond mountain, is part of Fitzgerald's fable. Fitzgerald's real attitude to providence, one suspects, is exemplified by the hero of *The Great Gatsby*, who can find no reality anywhere to match the grandeur of his Platonic dream; the 'act of God' for which Daisy sends Nick Carraway to watch does not take place[40], and the only eyes watching over the valley of ashes are the expressionless, unthinking, heedless eyes of the advertisement for Dr. T.J. Eckleburg. The man who appeals to these as divine authority[41] goes off and kills the wrong person as a result[42]; it is a powerful image of a world adrift.

## (ii) Deviant Visions: 'Brideshead Revisited'

Of course the 'loss of faith' did not render the depiction of a supernaturalistic causality utterly impossible; and there have been authors who have attempted to fly in the face of the dominant convention. Two that deserve particular attention are Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene.

Not much of Waugh's work is relevant here[43], but *Brideshead Revisited* (subtitled 'The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder') undoubtedly is. Its theme, according to Waugh's own 1959 preface, is '*the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters*'. In this respect, the central passage is the conversation between Ryder and Cordelia that gives the title to Book Three, 'A Twitch Upon the Thread':

*'Still trying to convert me, Cordelia?'*

*'Oh, no. That's all over, too. D'you know what papa said when he became a Catholic? Mummy told me once. He said to her: "You have brought back my family to the faith of their ancestors." Pompous, you know. It takes people different ways. Anyhow, the family haven't been very constant, have they? There's him gone and Sebastian gone and Julia gone. But God won't let them go for long, you know. I wonder if you remember the story mummy read us the evening Sebastian first got drunk – I mean the bad evening. "Father Brown" said something like "I caught him" (the thief) "with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread."'*[44]

The various characters are indeed gone away from God to '*the ends of the world*'. Ryder, the narrator, has passed beyond his 'Arcadia' phase of illusions, aestheticism, alcohol and Oxford:

*"I have left behind illusion," I said to myself. "Henceforth I live in a world of three dimensions – with the aid of my five senses."*

*I have since learned that there is no such world, but then, as the car turned out of sight of the house, I thought it took no finding, but lay all about me at the end of the avenue.*[45]

Since that moment of naturalistic optimism he has roamed the jungles – of Central America, painting the geographical '*ends of the world*'. Of the Brideshead family, Julia has married a divorcee, and then become deeply involved in an adulterous liaison with Ryder after his return from Central America (the moral '*ends of the world*'); Sebastian has settled in Morocco and become an alcoholic; and Lord Marchmain himself has been living in Venice for years, again in an adulterous relationship. How exactly the '*twitch upon the thread*' operates for these people is something that Waugh leaves unclear. Sebastian finds some sort of equilibrium in Morocco, and goes '*back to the Church*'[46], for reasons that are not particularly obvious, apart from the fact that he was looked after by Franciscans when he was ill. Finally, still something of an alcoholic, he attaches himself to a monastery in Tunis. Cordelia (a member of the family who has remained a committed Catholic) predicts that '*one morning, after one of his drinking bouts, he'll be picked up at the gate dying, and show by a mere flicker of*

*the eyelid that he is conscious when they give him the last sacraments. It's not such a bad way of getting through one's life.*[47] Julia's return begins when she simply starts to think in Catholic categories again. She tells Ryder:

*I've been punished a little for marrying Rex. You see, I can't get all that sort of thing out of my mind, quite – Death, Judgement, Heaven, Hell, Nanny Hawkins, and the catechism. It becomes part of oneself, if they give it one early enough. And yet I wanted my child to have it... now I suppose I shall be punished for what I've just done. Perhaps that is why you and I are here together like this...part of a plan.*[48]

It is difficult to avoid an impression that the 'divine grace' that is Waugh's theme functions primarily as *sacramental* grace, even though what is being stressed in this immediate context is Catholic *teaching* rather than infant baptism. At any rate, the idea seems basically to be 'once a catholic, always a Catholic'. As time goes on, Julia becomes haunted by a feeling that *'all mankind and God, too, were in a conspiracy against us But we've got our happiness in spite of them.... They can't hurt us, can they?' 'Not tonight; not now'*, her lover Ryder reassures her. She replies uneasily, *'Not for how many nights?'*[49] The same idea of inevitable re-conversion recurs when – after an embarrassing passage where Julia waxes hysterical about sin and damnation in pastiche Eliot – Ryder says:

*'Of course it's a thing psychologists could explain; a preconditioning from childhood; feelings of guilt from the nonsense you were taught in the nursery. You do know at heart that it's all bosh. don't you?'*

*'How I wish it was!'*[50]

The process continues: Julia's relationship with Ryder fades slowly but inevitably. Nineteen pages later, a page after the account of Sebastian's return to the Church, Ryder (who has learned through talking with Cordelia to stop thinking of her piety as 'thwarted passion') glimpses Julia wearing a *'thwarted look that had seemed to say, "Surely I was made for some other purpose than this?"'*[51]

Cordelia's faith, not Julia's secularity, begins to appear the norm. And then the final, conclusive

*'twitch upon the thread'* comes with the return to England of the dying Lord Marchmain. Brideshead, the eldest son, a convinced (if somewhat dense) Catholic, arranges for his father to be visited by a priest. Ryder is outraged: *'No one could have made it clearer, all his life, what he thought of religion... How can we stop this tomfoolery?'* Julia *'did not answer for some time; then: "Why should we?"'*[52] Waugh seems to be setting up a direct opposition in both Julia's life and her father's between a more or less predestined grace (*'Papa doesn't want him yet'*, is Cordelia's comment on the priest (my emphasis)) and human freewill (as expressed in Lord Marchmain's lifelong rejection of religion, and Julia's 'wish' that Catholicism should be untrue).

Indeed, Ryder's attitude to the *'tomfoolery'* is unmistakably endorsed by Lord Marchmain: *'I have not been a practising member of your Church for twenty-five years. Brideshead, show Father Mackay the way out.'* But Waugh throws a subtle aura of doubt on Ryder as the embodiment of objective wisdom:

*I felt triumphant. I had been right, everyone else had been wrong, truth had prevailed ... and there was also – I can now confess it – another unexpressed, inexpressible, indecent little victory that I was furtively celebrating. I guessed that that morning's business had put Brideshead some considerable way further from his rightful inheritance.*[53]

This 'indecent' hope that the family mansion would go to Ryder's beloved Julia is so easily understandable, like Julia's sense of being thwarted; and yet both of these imply some norm by the standards of which they are incomplete.

Next, Waugh succeeds paradoxically in making the Catholic belief about the reality of grace in the ritual of last rites seem all the more strong by appearing absurd.[54] Ryder asks for the rationale of the priest's visit to the dying man to be explained:

*Brideshead told me at some length, and when he had finished Cara slightly marred the unity of the Catholic front by saying in simple wonder, 'I never heard that before.'* [55]

That the steady commitment of the dour

Brideshead and the admirable Cordelia, not to mention the erratic Sebastian, should have stayed loyal to such a faith, seems almost to demand the existence of a power of divine grace such as that in which they believe.

Lord Marchmain suddenly worsens. Brideshead and Cordelia are absent: Julia is forced to take action, and calls in the priest, even though the doctor says the disturbance might kill her father. The priest anoints Lord Marchmain and pronounces words of absolution, asking him to make a sign that he is 'sorry for his sins'. It is a taut moment: Julia and Cara (Lord Marchmain's long-term mistress) are kneeling, and then, very credibly, Ryder follows suit:

*Then I knelt, too, and prayed: "O God, if there is a God, forgive him his sins, if there is such a thing as sin" ... I suddenly felt the longing for a sign, if only of courtesy, if only for the sake of the woman I loved... Suddenly Lord Marchmain moved his hand to his forehead; I thought he had felt the touch of the chrism and was wiping it away. "O God," I prayed, "don't let him do that." But there was no need for fear; the hand moved slowly down his breast, then to his shoulder, and Lord Marchmain made the sign of the cross. Then I knew that the sign I had asked for was not a little thing, not a passing nod of recognition, and a phrase came back to me from my childhood of the veil of the temple being rent from top to bottom.[56]*

It is the miracle that authenticates Waugh's 'grace'; in that room, where the cool, objective narrator Ryder is praying – praying for reasons immediately explicable in emotional terms, yet in praying putting the emotional force of the narrative point of view firmly behind Julia and the priest – it all seems very logical, very credible. Within a page the action moves swiftly to an equally logical consummation. Lord Marchmain dies, *'proving both sides right in the dispute, priest and doctor'* (a shrewd move on Waugh's part, implying that the novel is not *really* seeing things only from the Catholic angle); and Julia bids farewell to Ryder, recognising that as a Catholic she cannot marry him. The logic of the movement of events – under grace, perhaps – is emphasised to the end:

*"I don't want to make it easier for you," I said; "I*

*hope your heart may break; but I do understand."*

*The avalanche was down, the hillside swept bare behind it; the last echoes died on the white slopes; the new mound glittered and lay still in the silent valley.[57]*

With that marvellous final image the book's main section closes. It is an image Waugh used earlier for Ryder's sense of being threatened by Cordelia's and Julia's faith[58]: a vast mound of snow building up behind an arctic trapper's hut, about to crash down and destroy it. In so many ways it is admirably suited to depict grace – powerful, huge, overwhelming, glittering, silent, dangerous. There follows an epilogue depicting Ryder's return to the mansion years later, along with what seems to be his own *'twitch upon the thread'*.

Again, no reasons are given; we only know (from the prologue) that in the intervening years he has grown disillusioned with the Army in which he now serves. He simply tells us, without comment, *'I said a prayer, an ancient, newly-learned form of words'*, as he visits the chapel. The house has been desecrated by its military occupants; but still there is a lamp burning in the chapel. Ryder's words again draw out the sense of an irresistible power of grace:

*Something quite remote from anything the builders intended, has come out of their work, and out of the fierce little human tragedy in which I played; something none of us thought about at the time; a small red flame – a beaten-copper lamp of deplorable design relit before the beaten-copper doors of a tabernacle... It could not have been lit but for the builders and the tragedians, and there I found it this morning, burning anew among the old stones.[59]*

Despite the desecration of the mansion; despite the 'tragedy' of Ryder's own relationships; something of grace continues. Ryder leaves *'looking unusually cheerful'*. Here, then, is a twentieth-century novelist attempting to depict the operations of grace. The twin images of the avalanche and the *'lamp of deplorable design'* (one depicting the irresistible strength of grace, the other the weakness, indeed tawdriness, of its physical expression) are crucial to Waugh's success. But the less successful aspects of the work have to be recognised too. *Brideshead*

*Revisited* is a book in which Waugh's Catholicism cannot be disentangled from his other positives. To this reader, at any rate, the values of the opening 'Et in Arcadia Ego' section, narrated with loving remembrance and with all the colour and glamour of Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, become distasteful when one is forced by the introduction of the Catholic theme to consider them in moral categories rather than in aesthetic detachment. The problem is, essentially, that Waugh really tries to have both the aestheticism and the Catholic vision; the aestheticism is gone beyond recall, but the Catholicism is not distinct from it. Sebastian, to the end the alcoholic of 'Arcadia', yet nonetheless (according to Cordelia) 'holy'[60], embodies this attempted fusion.

And there are parts of that 'Arcadia' which (although tongue-in-cheek) read distastefully today:

*'Ought we to be drunk every night?' Sebastian asked one morning.  
'Yes, I think so.'  
'I think so too.'* [61]

*I remember Sebastian looking up at the Colleoni statue and saying, 'It's rather sad to think that whatever happens you and I can never possibly get involved in a war.'* [62]

Sebastian's undergraduate mixture of aestheticism and Catholicism is represented by his praying 'like mad to St. Anthony of Padua' to find his lost teddy bear, and his indignant assertion that he is 'very, very much wickeder' than Ryder.[63] That is acceptable, viewed benevolently through an alcoholic haze: the difficulty is that Waugh later asks us to believe in Sebastian's 'holiness' without him showing too much sign of having matured.

An important aspect of the problem is that Waugh's Christianity seems to possess little in the way of ethics. The savouring of alcoholism or of the dubious morality of the 'Old Hundredth'[64] merges with the dilettante proto-fascism ('Jean...claimed the right to bear arms in any battle anywhere against the lower classes'[65]), with Ryder's scathing treatment of his wife, and his bitter hatred of the twentieth century, which is sometimes satirically effective but almost entirely lacking in anything positive or constructive. An overall mood is produced that is never quite affirmed as admirable, but is narrated with relish

(in the passages of indulgence) or at least with feeling (in the passages of bitterness) – and never really transcended. Grace, the author seems to suggest, fits very well with this kind of dilettante elitism.

And finally there is the sacramentalism. Waugh's refusal to indicate any kind of 'conversion' at the level of ideas would appear to present grace as something a Catholic possesses from birth. Sebastian and Julia never quite lose it and eventually (we are invited to believe) drift back into it. It is one sentence after Lord Marchmain is anointed with sacramental oil that he 'suddenly' makes his sign.[66] But it is very hard to accept such an isolated deathbed gesture – dramatically effective though it undoubtedly is – as a real, heartfelt repentance. Yet Lord Marchmain has accepted the sacrament; and his condition matches the state Cordelia predicts Sebastian will die in, 'after one of his drinking bouts', showing 'by a mere flicker of the eyelid that he is conscious when they give him the last sacraments.' However, the problem at this point is not literary: it is theological, a matter of whether the reader can accept a presentation of salvation by sacraments that seems to leave so little room for meaningful exercise of faith.

### (iii) Deviant Visions: Greene's Religious Trilogy

But among twentieth-century fiction it must surely be Graham Greene's work that most obviously requires our careful examination. Greene is the most famous post-war 'religious novelist'; and his novels concede a great deal to the convention of the absence of God. Yet, as we shall see, this absence is by no means total, and some of his fictions take the activity of God more seriously than any other writer who can be regarded as an indisputable member of the century's literary 'canon'; even if, in the end, Greene's underlying vision is heterodox in a peculiarly contemporary way.

*The Heart of the Matter* is perhaps Greene's most impressive novel; and, along with *Brighton Rock* and *The Power and the Glory*, it forms a kind of trilogy of religious novels. It is set in wartime West Africa. Its hero, Scobie, a police officer, falls into adultery with a young and rather helpless widow named Helen Rolt, while his wife Louise is

out of the country. Scobie's attitude towards Helen is neither love, nor lust, so much as pity for her loneliness and bewilderment; and that same pity prevents him breaking off the affair when his wife returns. But at the same time he does not want to hurt Louise, and rather than admit the affair to her he takes the sacrament in a state of mortal sin. But this, too, he cannot endure repeating, and he commits suicide.

Greene has become famous for the depiction of a drab, frustrating and above all seedy world that his critics call Greenland. (Reading Greene's novels, and being plunged into this world, can be a depressing experience: to this reader at any rate there is scarcely any other author who implants in the mind such an overwhelming sense of weariness and futility.) The West Africa of *The Heart of the Matter* certainly falls into this category:

*Nobody here could ever talk about a heaven on earth. Heaven remained rigidly in its proper place on the other side of death, and on this side flourished the injustices, the cruelties, the meanness that elsewhere people so cleverly hushed up. Here you could love human beings nearly as God loved them, knowing the worst.*[67]

'The injustices, the cruelties' and particularly 'the meanness' are what Greene gives us as the book proceeds. From its opening, in which Wilson, 'almost intolerably lonely'[68], shares a balcony (which overlooks a street full of schoolboys pimping for the local brothel) with an Indian fortune-teller, the totally disenchanted Harris, and a vulture, we are presented with a setting where the dominant features seem to be corruption, sweat and fatigue. 'What an absurd thing it was to expect happiness in a world so full of misery', reflects Scobie. 'Point me out the happy man and I will point you out either egotism, evil – or else an absolute ignorance.[69] Helen describes 'Everybody on the beach...pretending to be happy about something'[70]; Harris 'felt the loyalty we feel to unhappiness – the sense that that is where we really belong'.[71] Consequently, 'It seemed to Scobie that life was immeasurably long. Couldn't we have committed our first major sin at seven, have ruined ourselves for love or hate at ten, have clutched at redemption on a fifteen-year-old deathbed?'[72] Death is indeed, in Hamlet's phrase, 'a consummation devoutly to be wished': Scobie's daughter is dead and 'safe now,

for ever'[73], and the problem of suffering presents itself to him at Pende in the form of the question he asks God: 'Why didn't you let her drown?'[74] 'But it is all right. She will die. [75]

It is a world that is very far from being 'very good', as Genesis has it: and religion, instead of being a transcendent source of joy, is an integral part of the depressingly futile whole. Prayer, to Scobie, is formal, purposeless, and a duty, certainly not part of a joyous and creative relationship with God: "'I neglected my evening prayers". This was no more than admitting what every soldier did – that he had avoided a fatigue when the occasion offered.' As he continues praying he falls asleep.[76] As his despair grows he finds that 'The Lord's Prayer lay as dead on his tongue as a legal document'[77]: and the idea of prayer is further undercut by its employment by the fat Portuguese captain, dripping 'gently with sweat in the stuffy cabin' as Greene's characters tend to do, and praying his way around the contraband traffic: "'When the moment of Grace returns [our prayers] rise", the captain raised his fat arms in an absurd and touching gesture, "all at once together like a flock of birds."'[78]

Scobie's visit to confession is similarly a well-meaning but shallow piece of routine. He has no real sense of sin (and accordingly no real sense of holiness); and the Church can supply only 'a formula...a hocus-pocus'.[79] In fact the Church seems to be very little use anywhere; we are shown the restless Father Clay 'with his breviary and a few religious tracts. He was a man without resources'[80]; and Father Rank – 'For twenty-two years that voice had been laughing... Could its cheeriness ever have comforted a single soul? Wilson wondered: had it even comforted itself? It was like the noise one heard rebounding from the tiles in a public baths'[81] – a superb image. 'When I was a novice, I thought that people talked to their priests', reminisces Father Rank gloomily – the fact that even this doesn't occur doubles his tragedy – 'and I thought God somehow gave the right words. Don't mind me, Scobie, don't listen to me... God doesn't give the right words, Scobie.... [82]

Consequently, when Scobie finds himself trapped, as he does in some of the most effective scenes in the book[83], he is left to find his own way out: he may be a Catholic, but God is not a 'very present

*help in trouble*'. There is no dynamic of grace and faith. Scobie is as lonely and 'abandoned' a man (in a religious sense) as any tragic hero could be:

*He would still have made the promise even if he could have foreseen all that would come of it. He had always been prepared to accept the responsibility for his actions, and he had always been half aware too, from the time he had made his terrible private vow that she should be happy, how far this action might carry him. Despair is the price one pays for setting oneself an impossible aim.*[84]

It is presumably because Greene is a Catholic, because he has a strong sense that God ought to be present, that he can render the absence of God and the loneliness of moral decision with such power and poignancy. That absence becomes particularly significant in the crucial passage at the end of Part One when Scobie's entire spiritual destiny is at stake. Here he slips into adultery with Helen Rolt more or less accidentally: he is completely unwarned, God is not mentioned. It is, admittedly, not the strongest aspect of the book; why Scobie's morality so suddenly and drastically collapses – and why a committed Catholic proceeds from an impulsive kiss to fully-fledged adultery – is very unclear. (Why his adultery should then, of necessity, have to be repeated, receives even less explanation; Helen 'needs' him, it seems, and that need cannot be satisfied by anything short of further adultery.) But it is striking that, despite the many earlier references to religion, God is unmentioned[85] in this vital scene when Scobie's fate is more or less sealed (for Scobie will take communion in a state of mortal sin, and finally commit suicide, because of his inability to abandon either Helen or his wife Louise). Instead of a God who *'with the temptation will provide the way of escape also*[86], there is in the world Greene creates a sense of inevitability at the moment of crisis, by which God is implicitly denied.

Even when God does step into the action in *The Heart of the Matter*, it is in a highly paradoxical manner, as we may see from the occasions when Scobie's prayers receive answers. His first prayers – that Louise will not lose Wilson's friendship by patronizing him or being absurd[87], and that he himself will die before retirement[88] – are both fulfilled, but with a strong element of

paradox: Louise keeps Wilson's friendship to the extent that he attempts an affair with her, Scobie dies before retirement because he commits suicide. Scobie has prayed for peace, and when Louise leaves, he believes he is getting it; but only at the cost of compromise with the dishonest Syrian, Yusef: *'He thought... It's terrible the way that prayer is answered. It had better be good. I've paid a high enough price for it.*[89] We may well feel that this answer to prayer that has been won from God with such difficulty and at such cost – and that consequently Scobie displays neither joy nor thankfulness at receiving[90] – is in actual fact the product of his own efforts; besides, his peace lasts only until Helen Rolt enters his life, bringing with her the eventual temptation to a fatal adultery. His next prayers are prayed at the bedside of a dying child who reminds him of his own dead daughter. First he prays, *'O God, don't let anything happen.'* But despite this the child worsens:

*Looking between his fingers he could see the six-year-old's face convulsed like a navy's with labour. 'Father', he prayed, 'give her peace. Take away my peace for ever, but give her peace.' The sweat broke out on his hands. 'Father...'*[91]

The prayer is answered: the child is given peace – that is to say, she dies. Death is the blessing by which Greene's God keeps His side of the bargain – and in exchange for which He does indeed take away Scobie's peace for the rest of his life. In a letter to Marcel More, Greene wrote:

*Obviously one did have in mind that when he offered up his peace for the child it was genuine prayer and had the results that followed. I always believe that such prayers, though obviously a God would not fulfil them to the limit of robbing him of a peace for ever, are answered up to the point as a kind of test of a man's sincerity and to see whether in fact the offer was merely based on emotion.*[92]

However, it would seem that providence overplays its hand, as it were, given that the eventual consequence of Scobie's loss of peace is one mortal sin after another, and finally suicide. If the teaching of Greene's own church is meant to be seen as any guide at all to the wishes of providence, then the bargain would seem to have gone wrong for both parties. His next prayer – 'O

*God, I have deserted you. Do not you desert me*[93] – he unsays later.

Then soon afterwards he prays, *'The dead can be forgotten. O God, give me death before I give them unhappiness.*[94] This is answered in part (God seems to answer when the prayer is for death); but nonetheless Scobie is not to die before making both Louise and Helen miserable over his affair; and his death will make matters worse for both of them.

Next he prays to be convinced of God's will, and goes into the confessional hoping that *'a miracle may still happen. Even Father Rank may for once find the word, the right word....*[95] But he doesn't. It is a tragic scene, and Greene handles it well; but it is tragic because the motive power that marks every aspect of Scobie's world and drives him into an ever deeper dilemma is a moral awareness, and the God (and the church) that are the source of that morality are unwilling or unable to assist him. This absence of God creates a spiritual dilemma to which Greene's description of the discomfort of the airless confessional-box, and the sweat dripping into the priest's eyes, give striking concreteness. Scobie comes out of the box:

*It seemed to Scobie that for the first time his footsteps had taken him out of sight of hope. There was no hope anywhere he turned his eyes: the dead figure of the God upon the Cross, the plaster Virgin, the hideous Stations representing a series of events that had happened a long time ago.*[96]

Scobie's damnation then progresses unhindered. He takes the sacrament in a state of mortal sin. Only a miracle can save me now, Scobie told himself, watching Father Rank at the altar opening the tabernacle, but God would never work a miracle to save Himself... For a moment he dreamed that the priest's steps had indeed faltered: perhaps after all something may yet happen before he reaches me: some incredible interposition... But with open mouth (the time had come) he made one last attempt at prayer, *'O God, I offer up my damnation to you. Take it. Use it for them,'* and was aware of the pale papery taste of an eternal sentence on the tongue.[97]

It is only after this, as Scobie chooses suicide as the only way out, that God appears to take action. Scobie visits the church for the last time, and, as it were, informs God of what he is going to do. The monologue turns into a dialogue:

*He couldn't keep the other voice silent; it spoke from the cave of his body: it was as if the sacrament which had lodged there for his damnation gave tongue. You say you love me, and yet you'll do this to me – rob me of you for ever. I made you with love. I've wept your tears. I've saved you from more than you will ever know... and now you push me away, you put me out of your reach.*[98]

This is effective; the voice of God – assuming, as we probably can, that it is intended to be God and not altogether a projection of Scobie's mind – is neither a piece of tasteless melodrama nor an embodiment of religious jargon. There is real passion in its reply to Scobie's farewell. But what it cannot do is persuade Scobie:

*So long as you live, the voice said, I have hope. There's no human hopelessness like the hopelessness of God... But no, he said, no. That's impossible. I won't go on insulting you at your own altar. You see it's an impasse, God, an impasse, he said, clutching the package in his pocket. He got up and turned his back on the altar and went out. Only when he saw his face in the driving mirror did he realize that his eyes were bruised with suppressed tears.*[99]

Like the promotion to the Commissionership that could have prevented all his problems[100], God's intervention comes to Scobie too late. And so he comes to his last night. This chapter has at times an almost unbearable power. A suicide is, of course, good raw material for a writer: and Greene makes the most of it. Scobie's mental condition remains calm, and the situation is reported with cool awareness:

*Everything he did now was for the last time – an odd sensation. He would never come this way again, and five minutes later taking a new bottle of gin from his cupboard, he thought: I shall never open another bottle. The actions which could be repeated became fewer and fewer. Presently there would be only one unrepeatable action left, the action of swallowing.*[101]

Scobie forces himself to display an interest in the future so as to leave his suicide unsuspected, while at the same time taking his farewell of Louise:

*Bed-time came, and he felt a terrible unwillingness to let her go. There was nothing to do when she had once gone but die. He didn't know how to keep her – they had talked about all the subjects they had in common.... People said you couldn't love two women, but what was this emotion if it were not love? This hungry absorption of what he was never going to see again? The greying hair, the line of nerves upon the face, the thickening body held him as her beauty never had.[102]*

God, too, is present at last:

*Though the voice was no longer speaking from the cave of his belly, it was as though fingers touched him, signalled their mute messages of distress, tried to hold him...[103]*

The first edition adds, 'He had never before known so clearly the weakness of God.' The weakness of God, however, is not, in Greenland, stronger than men. Louise goes to bed with a perfunctory kiss and a casual caress, and Scobie is left alone with his poison. And God: for 'solitude itself has a voice' which urges him to throw away the tablets he has saved. "'No", Scobie said, "No".' Even now, however, it is not all over; there seems to be quite a flurry of divine activity when it is too late; not enough for Scobie to be able to pray, but enough for this:

*It seemed to him as though someone outside the room were seeking him, calling him, and he made a last effort to indicate that he was here... All the time outside the house, outside the world that drummed like hammer blows within his ear, someone wandered, seeking to get in, someone appealing for help, someone in need of him.[104]*

Scobie 'strung himself to act' and responds to that need with a final prayer that gets as far as 'Dear God, I love...' before he slumps to the floor. Under the ice-box – a final touch that keeps the atmosphere from getting too highly-charged – tinkles a medal of a 'saint whose name nobody could remember'.

It is a very moving scene, a powerful example of fiction that presents God within its narrative; and apart from the dialogue with God in Scobie's last visit to the church, it is the first unambiguous divine intervention in the book. But God's deliverance has been absent or ambivalent, and heaven has remained 'rigidly on the other side of death', until it is too late. Such is Greene's conception of the workings of providence – real, capable of depiction in his novel, but paradoxical. The consequences can only be left to the mercy of God that Father Rank is sure he knows nothing about.[105]

This picture is what we find again in the opening book of Greene's trilogy, *Brighton Rock*. This is set in Brighton, but Brighton is part of Greenland, and Greenland remains quite like Hell. 'This is Hell, nor are we out of it', says the crooked lawyer Prewitt, quoting Faustus, to the boy gangster Pinkie.[106] There is little need: Pinkie is Mephistophiles' nearest kinsman among Greene's characters, his eyes 'touched with the annihilating eternity from which he had come and to which he went'.[107] His creed is 'Credo in unum Satanum'[108], and although hell is to him a self-evident fact, the existence of heaven is merely a dubious inference from the existence of its opposite.[109] (Actually, the same could be said of much of Greene's work in general.) Pinkie is an ascetic who had once vowed to become a priest[110], but his devotion does not belong to heaven: instead he is one who enjoys 'the finest of all sensations, the infliction of pain'[111], and thinks of 'all the good times he'd had in the old days with nails and splinters: the tricks he'd learnt later with a razor-blade.[112] In Pinkie's life, even more than in *The Heart of the Matter*, Heaven stays 'rigidly in its proper place': 'Hell lay about him in his infancy'[113], and grace never seems to have broken through the infernal monopoly.

*An awful resentment stirred in him – why shouldn't he have had his chance like all the rest, seen his glimpse of heaven if it was only a crack between the Brighton walls.... He turned as they went down to Rottingdean and took a long look at Rose as if she might be it – but the brain couldn't conceive...[114]*

But things are little different for the other denizens of this God-abandoned part of Greenland. Greene disposes early on of one of the alternatives to

Pinkie, that of the 'modernist' religion represented by the clergyman at the funeral of Fred Hale, killed by Pinkie early in the book. Pinkie is convinced of hell, but has only a dubious concept of heaven: the clergyman has dispensed with hell, and heaven into the bargain. Greene makes short work of this particular target in the *'bare cold secular chapel'* with its

*impoverished jam-pots of wilting wild flowers. Ida was late. Hesitating a moment outside the door for fear the place might be full of Fred's friends, she thought someone had turned on the National Programme... 'We believe,' the clergyman said, glancing swiftly along the smooth polished slipway towards the New Art doors through which the coffin would be launched into the flames, 'we believe that this our brother is already at one with the One.' He stamped his words like little pats of butter with his personal mark. 'He has attained unity. We do not know what that One is with whom (or with which) he is now at one. We do not retain the old medieval beliefs in glassy seas and golden crowns....' He touched a little buzzer, the New Art doors opened, the flames flapped and the coffin slid smoothly down into the fiery sea. The doors closed, the nurse rose and made for the door, the clergyman smiled gently from behind the slipway, like a conjuror who has produced his nine hundred and fortieth rabbit without a hitch.[115]*

The 'wilting' flowers, the confusion with the 'National Programme', and the pompous nonsense of *'Our brother is at one with the One... He has attained unity'*, matched by total vagueness as to what these words actually mean, combine to make a competent piece of butchery on Greene's part. A page later it turns out that what Fred Hale has become 'part of' is *'the smoke nuisance over London'*; although the references to his being *'launched into the flames... the fiery sea'* hint that there might be some reality to the *'old medieval beliefs'* too. (Pinkie would certainly have thought so.) Having jettisoned these beliefs, however, the clergyman, with his coffin sliding smoothly down, is really no more than a conjuror producing rabbits 'without a hitch'; and God is nowhere to be found.

The other alternatives are represented by Ida Arnold and by Pinkie's wife Rose. Ida is the person who finally brings retribution on Pinkie, very much a woman of the people, easy-going in

her morals, sharing the popular pleasures and the popular superstitions, simplistic and egoistic in her attitudes to right and wrong:

*"I'm going to work on that kid every hour of the day until I get something." She rose formidably and moved across the restaurant like a warship going into action, a warship on the right side in a war to end wars, the signal flags proclaiming that every man would do his duty. Her big breasts, which had never suckled a child of her own, felt a merciless compassion.[116]*

As the novel progresses Ida's ideas of 'right and wrong' are set against the different universe of Pinkie and Rose, of evil and good. *'You can see she don't believe a thing.'* says Rose of Ida; *'... You can tell the world's all dandy with her.[117]* The world is God-deserted; Pinkie knows it, Rose knows it; to Ida, however, it's *'all dandy'*. *"Right and wrong"*, Rose says later with contempt. *"Oh, she won't burn. She couldn't burn if she tried."* *She might have been discussing a damp Catherine wheel.[118]* The universe Ida knows is very far from that of Pinkie and Rose (or of God): *'She was as far from either of them as she was from Hell – or Heaven. Good or evil lived in the same country, spoke the same language, came together like old friends.'*[119] God would seem to have even less to do with this secularised *'damp Catherine-wheel'* of a woman than with Pinkie himself.

And then finally there are the saints. Rose, it would seem from the references to *'good or evil'*, should be classed among these. But her sainthood does not amount to much: a concern that Pinkie should go to mass, an occasional attendance herself, a loyalty to Pinkie based on hardly any foundation (but then the girls in the restaurant where she works seem fairly desperate for husbands[120]), a willingness to be damned with Pinkie, and a rosary in a handbag. It is not very difficult to be a saint in Brighton Rock, it would seem, providing you are born that way.[121] But the relationship of all this to salvation through grace is nearer parody than enactment. In practice it seems that Rose, too, has no contact with God.

Thus, although Greene's novel sets up the spiritually conscious – Rose and Pinkie – as the characters that are fully alive (*'She's just nothing'*, says Pinkie caustically of the sublunary Ida[122]),

none of them have any real relationship with the divine. All of them are deistically predestined to their own class. They belong to a Brighton that is devoid of God: except, perhaps, in the mass – offstage, so far as the novel is concerned. Rose, in her desire to be damned along with Pinkie, worries that *'you couldn't tell what life would do to you in making you meek, good, repentant... You could win to the evil side suddenly, in a moment of despair or passion, but through a long life the guardian good drove you remorselessly toward the crib, the "happy death."*[123] But we do not see such a process occurring. Pinkie is damned from his birth; Rose, it seems, can do nothing to jeopardise her salvation; and Ida remains a nullity, without the contact with the spiritual universe that would make her human. It is not surprising that Greene has found himself accused of sharing the rigid Jansenist view of predestination.

And yet there is again a hint of the supernatural behind it all; and, as with *The Heart of the Matter*, the supernatural element moves finally into the picture at the book's culmination. Ida and her companion have a chance meeting with the gangsters on the pier: *'It's fate'*, says Ida.[124] Whether it is fate or not, Ida's persistent investigation gives Pinkie (who wants to get rid of his wife) a pretext for urging Rose to commit suicide; and they go out into the country, with Rose thinking it to be a suicide pact involving them both. They call at a pub for a drink and Pinkie feels *'the prowling presence of pity'*. [125] The latter is imaged as something locked outside:

*He had a sense that somewhere, like a beggar outside a shuttered house, tenderness stirred, but he was bound in a habit of hate. He turned his back and went on up the stairs... Life would go on... The huge darkness pressed a wet mouth against the panes....*

This is image and metaphor, of course, and refers primarily to what is going on inside Pinkie: and yet Greene contrives by his use of the 'outside' image to hint at something external and objective, some embodiment that is more than metaphor. The image is repeated when downstairs Pinkie watches two travellers making a contemptuous pass at Rose: *'Tenderness came up to the very window and looked in. What the hell right had they*

*got to swagger and laugh...if she was good enough for him.*[126] But she isn't: he wants to be *'free again'*, and he and Rose drive on. She asks if he had hated her for sleeping with him.

*He hadn't hated her.... There had been a kind of pleasure, a kind of pride, a kind of – something else.... An enormous emotion beat on him; it was like something trying to get in; the pressure of gigantic wings against the glass. Dona nobis pacem. He withstood it... If the glass broke, if the beast – whatever it was – got in, God knows [sic] what it would do. He had a sense of huge havoc – the confession, the penance and the sacrament – and awful distraction, and he drove blind into the rain. He could see nothing through the cracked stained windscreen.*[127]

This seems successful as a symbol of grace, hovering between mere metaphor and the mental embodiment Pinkie gives to something with external existence. Possibly it is a final revelation, Pinkie's last chance.

But it stays on the other side of the glass; and Pinkie leaves Rose, having given her a pistol and instructions to shoot. Rose, however, wants to live; that urge produces a verbalization of itself which, as in the suicide in *The Heart of the Matter*, might just possibly be her 'guardian angel'. [128] If it is, then, again as in *The Heart of the Matter*, it achieves nothing; it is the arrival of Ida that prevents her shooting herself, not the inner voice. And if the apparition of grace beyond the windscreen was to prevent Pinkie from having an attempted murder on his conscience, it has failed there too; failed where the easy, shallow force of Ida Arnold succeeds. Pinkie attempts to use his vitriol bottle, scalds his own face, then in agony – and mortal sin – leaps over the cliff. Rose, longing to be damned with Pinkie, goes back to the shivering priest, with his *"appalling...strangeness of the mercy of God... We must hope"*, he said *mechanically, "hope and pray."*[129] But the ending of the book shows the hope he has 'mechanically' offered as being very fragile; Rose walks off towards *'the worst horror of all'*[130], a taped message that is the proof of Pinkie's hatred for her.

Grace may have intervened at the crisis, then; but it seems, again, to be to little purpose. The Greenland of *Brighton Rock* is a place where

human beings are abandoned until it is too late. Abandonment is also the keynote of the third book in the trilogy, *The Power and the Glory*. This is the story of how a 'whisky priest', the last priest in a particular part of Mexico, is hunted down and executed. The world of Greene's Mexico is the same as that of *The Heart of the Matter* and *Brighton Rock*; here is how the novel opens:

*Mr. Tench went out to look for his ether cylinder, into the blazing Mexican sun and the bleaching dust. A few vultures looked down from the roof with shabby indifference: he wasn't carrion yet. A faint feeling of rebellion stirred in Mr. Tench's heart, and he wrenched up a piece of the road with splintering finger-nails and tossed it feebly towards them. One rose and flapped across the town: over the tiny plaza, over the bust of an ex-president, ex-general, ex-human being, over the two stalls which sold mineral water, towards the river and the sea. It wouldn't find anything there: the sharks looked after the carrion on that side. Mr. Tench went on across the plaza.[131]*

It is a world of devitalized physical discomfort where even the vultures are indifferent. The faintness and petty destructiveness of Mr. Tench's rebellion, and the splintering of his fingernails, give a sense of the futility of all effort; and the 'ex-president, ex-general, ex-human being', like the earlier 'he wasn't carrion yet', enforce a feeling of inevitable decay and disintegration in a world divided between the sharks and the vultures. Mr. Tench makes his way to the river bank:

*Mr. Tench stood in the shade of the customs house and thought: what am I here for? Memory drained out of him in the heat. He gathered his bile together and spat forlornly into the sun. Then he sat down on a case and waited. Nothing to do. Nobody would come to see him before five.*

*The General Obregon was about thirty yards long. A few feet of damaged rail, one lifeboat, a bell hanging on a rotten cord, an oil-lamp in the bow, she looked as if she might weather two or three more Atlantic years, if she didn't strike a Norther in the gulf. That, of course, would be the end of her. It didn't really matter: everybody was insured when he bought a ticket, automatically.[132]*

Again, the overwhelming sense is of the unrewarding nature of all activity (even spitting),

the collapse of the faculties (such as memory), and, overall, decay and worthlessness; whether the particular instance is that of the *General Obregon* or of her passengers, whose insurance would be the most significant thing about their deaths. Civilization's contribution has been to automatize the insurance: nothing has been done about death or the general futility of life. Human beings and their activities are in general not very significant in Greene's Mexico. Even in religion; we find the confession of the treacherous halfcaste presented as a typical, unimportant part of 'a world of treachery, violence and lust in which his shame was altogether insignificant'[133]; God, it would appear, is not really interested. (Or at any rate the priest who is the book's central character is not; and at that point, as the priest journeys through the wilderness with his betrayer, most of what he says seems to be endorsed by his author.)

Just such a sense of the unimportance of man played a significant part in Scobie's tragedy in *The Heart of the Matter*. (Scobie's prayer, for example, was 'a formality...because it had never occurred to him that his life was important enough one way or another.[134]) It is an attitude that can appropriately be contrasted with the alert, faith-impelled responsiveness called for in the New Testament by the apostle Peter: 'Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...[135] Such a sense of spiritual reality was a motivating force in the Puritan contribution to the rise of the novel, as we noted early on in this study. But Greene's world lacks the awareness of such realities; and, in God's absence, lethargy, spiritual and physical, seems the inevitable consequence of the environment. The circumstances are to blame; it is the natural, created but Creator-less universe that is all wrong. Man's situation is determined by the forces that come to bear on him. In the absence of God, the heat is presented as the most important of these.

This depiction of man is particularly paradoxical given Greene's own insistence in his essays that the importance of the human act depends on the religious sense.[136] A greater awareness of human significance does indeed surface in

the whisky priest's last desperate words to his illegitimate daughter –

*My dear, my dear, try to understand that you are – so important.... You must take care of yourself because you are so – necessary. The president up in the capital goes guarded by men with guns but my child, you have all the angels of heaven....[137]*

– but unfortunately the novel's world demonstrates far more clearly the need to 'take care of yourself' than the possibility of anyone being concerned in heaven. Still, a similar faith informs the priest's compassion for the halfcaste who betrays him, despite his unconcern about the latter's sin and confession. In a sense the priest, as (we are to believe) God's final representative, is the last fitful outpost of faith in human worth: all around him is a universe hostile to man's significance.

R.W.B. Lewis quotes Greene's remarks on Conrad that 'All he retained of Catholicism was the ironic sense of an omniscience and of the final unimportance of human life under the watching eyes[138], and suggests that 'It is a paradox. and a perfectly sound and traditional one, that human life is both infinitely important and infinitely unimportant from the divine standpoint.[139] This is true: yet although Christianity is aware that man set beside God is no more than 'a drop in a bucket'[140], the main emphasis in the New Testament is that Christ's death on Calvary was the value God set on us – and on human sin, which is the point Greene raises in the passage about the halfcaste's confession. But in *The Power and the Glory*, there are few signs of the nearness and involvement of God, of 'watching eyes' that might contain love and concern for man. The priest's activities are almost the sole exception, for example in the mass[141] – but even he, like Father Rank in *The Heart of the Matter*, is not enabled to do his job properly: 'If only one could find the right word... He leant hopelessly back... But the right words never came to him.[142] In *The Power and the Glory* we are faced with a 'huge abandonment'[143], an 'abandoned star'.[144] 'It was as if man in all this state had been left to man.[145]

*The Power and the Glory* in a sense offers a definition of the ways in which it is possible for

sainthood to operate in such a situation. As such it comes as a reply to the simplistic black-and-white idealizations of the piece of hagiography that the pious Catholic woman reads to her children.[146] For, despite his fornication and drunkenness and unreliability, despite the fact that he is in a continual state of mortal sin, the whisky priest – like Scobie – is presented to us as something of a saint. When he comes to one village, he is badgered by an old man to hear confession and celebrate the Mass: the priest responds impatiently and irritably (he wants to get some sleep), and he falls asleep at the end of the confession. But his tiredness has already gained our sympathy, and we feel that his annoyance is understandable.

*His eyes closed, his lips and tongue stumbled over the Absolution, failed to finish... he sprang awake again.*

*'Can I bring the woman?' the old man was saying. 'It is five years...' 'Oh, let them come. Let them all come', the priest cried angrily. 'I am your servant.' He put his hand over his eyes and began to weep. The old man...went across to the women's huts and knocked. 'Come,' he said, 'You must say your confessions. It is only polite to the father.'*

*They wailed at him that they were tired... the morning would do. 'Would you insult him?' he said. 'What do you think he has come here for? He is a very holy father. There he is in my hut now, weeping for our sins.' He hustled them out...[147]*

Here all our sympathy is engaged on the side of the priest's weariness. (The reader may well feel sympathy by this stage with any character who is tired: there can be few novelists with Greene's ability to make the reader feel and share in the enervated exhaustion of his world.) So what is conveyed is not the discrepancy between the old man's description 'He is a very holy father' and the reality we have seen, even in this episode, but a sense that possibly, paradoxically, the old man might be right: that anyone who does anything like their duty in such a 'huge abandonment' deserves our respect. And as he weeps, although it may be from tiredness and vexation and not 'for our sins' as the old man imagines, he wins our compassion.

To this end Greene makes use of hinted parallels with Christ (the man who preaches to the poor is betrayed by a Judas-figure: 'He knew. He was in the presence of Judas[148]); and there is the

symbolic identification when the priest and an American gangster figure in the 'wanted' posters – *'Somebody had inked round the priest's head to detach him from the girls' and the women's faces: the unbearable grin peeked out of a halo*[149], where *'the unbearable grin peeked'* saves the halo from being obtrusively portentous. More importantly there are his actions: his mention in the jail of the price on his head, because *'if there was an informer here, there was no reason why the wretched creature should be bilked of his reward'*[150]; his repeated compassion for the halfcaste who, he knows, is going to betray him[151]; and finally his journey back into danger across the mountains, after hardly surviving his first crossing into safety: going knowingly to his death to give confession to an American gangster dying in mortal sin.[152]

Indeed, even our knowledge of his vices is mobilised to contribute to this presentation of the whisky-priest as saint. It becomes, to use a phrase from the end of *Brighton Rock*, *'a case of greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his soul for his friend'*[153], because the priest believes his own soul is in a state of mortal sin as he goes back across the border to capture and death, and that his death will therefore mean, not a momentary suffering, but an eternity of loss. Still, there is perhaps an element of authorial sleight-of-hand at this point; for the vices Greene presents are mostly such as will not damn his hero in the reader's eyes. (Nobody in Greeneland seems to be able to do much with prayer but neglect it; and fornication and drunkenness are sins that the reader of the modern novel has been trained to treat leniently, and the lapses mostly take place 'offstage', as far as the reader is concerned.) Hence, when the priest finds himself unable to communicate with his illegitimate daughter (who is, it seems, damned from the start), it is compassion for him that the reader is led to feel, and not a sense that it is his fault his daughter is in this situation, that the price he has caused her to pay is greater than that he has brought on himself. The assessment we accept is that of his opponent: *"You aren't a bad fellow", the Lieutenant said grudgingly.*[154] In Greene's *'abandoned star'* this is the best we can expect: God is (almost) absent, and those who find themselves called to be saints must muddle on as best they can, on their own.

But again we should notice how different this is from the vision of the New Testament. Paul emphasises repeatedly that holiness and Christlikeness are unattainable in our own strength; but they may however be brought about slowly by the power of the Spirit within us.[155] The human weakness is there in Greene, certainly: but is there much more than an ironical embodiment of the 'power and the glory'? One wonders whether this rogue-saint figure, predicated as it is on God's absence or inactivity, does not owe (or surrender) a great deal to a non-Christian ethos, in its thorough reinterpretation of the notion of holiness.[156] As a presentation of the product of an individual's own unaided efforts it might be acceptable; but the postulate of omnipotent grace intervening should open up another dimension of possibility. It may be, indeed, as Mauriac and others have suggested, that sainthood is extremely hard to portray in a novel[157]; but that cannot be true of simple goodness – one thinks of Dilsey in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, for example. It is true, too, that every Christian is aware that God's strength is *'made perfect in weakness'*[158]; that is an integral part of the very idea of grace – St. Paul was very aware that apart from the power of the Holy Spirit *'the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practise the very evil that I do not wish'*.[159] So any fictional portrayal must take seriously the need for 'warts-and-all' presentation of the negatives, the failures. Still, the Christian is not expected to exhibit quite the lack of integrity of a drunken, fornicating priest – a figure which, all things considered, deserves few admirers among Christians or humanists. Accepting that, as R.W.B. Lewis insists, complexity and contradictoriness may be essential elements in the depiction of a successfully 'good' figure[160], we can nevertheless assert that goodness – even a real power and a real glory – triumphing amid very real weakness is a mark of ordinary, not particularly outstanding, mortals of our acquaintance, who can (with skill) have fitting fictional analogues. For the Christian, the possibility of goodness through the power of grace is an essential part of their vision. The Holy Spirit came to convict the world, not only of the existence of sin, but also of the existence of righteousness[161]; and the practical demonstration of this possibility was part of the charge Christ gave to His disciples.[162] Otherwise the awareness of man's failure ceases

to be part of any conceivable 'gospel' or 'good news', but rather an announcement that everybody is trapped. *The Power and the Glory* is all too much like that.

Yet, once again, the absence of God is not quite the whole story in Greeneland. It is a fair description of how the priest experiences things, most of the time; but nonetheless there is a hint of providence at work. When the priest is captured and put in jail, he muses that it was, of course, the end, but at the same time you had to be prepared for anything, even escape. If God intended him to escape He could snatch him away from in front of a firing squad. But God was merciful. There was only one reason, surely, which would make Him refuse His peace – if there was any peace – that he could still be of use in saving a soul, his own or another's.[163]

And, indeed, he is released. *'God had decided. He had to go on with life, go on making decisions, acting on his own advice, making plans.[164]* Once again, there is no sustained divine guidance involved here; the saint remains alone, with providence intervening in the hunt for him only to dictate the timing of the kill – a bizarre variant on the hound of heaven, rather than a companion through the valley of the shadow of death. We are left to guess that the point of the escape, and the unexpectedly safe journey over the mountains (*'as if Somebody had determined that from now on he was to be left alone – altogether alone[165]*), are overruled to make possible the sacrifice of crossing the border yet again on the road back to martyrdom.[166] (Perhaps, too, his escape makes possible the long ride with the lieutenant, which at least jolts the latter's atheism.) Certainly, when the double journey is completed and he is captured again, he knows there will be no further escape. He believes in miracles, but *'not for me. I'm no more good to anyone, so why should God keep me alive?[167]*

In the end, *The Power and the Glory*, like the other two novels in the trilogy, would seem to point to a 'kingdom of heaven' that remains fairly 'rigidly in its proper place' on the other side of the watertight firmament between this life and the next. Concerning that next life the priest is not hopeful: *'If there's ever been a single man in this state damned, then I'll be damned too'*, he says

to the Lieutenant. *'I wouldn't want it to be any different. I just want justice, that's all.[168]* But the reader knows that this demand for justice is discounting mercy: as the priest says just before, *'I don't know a thing about the mercy of God.'* And it seems that the priest's lack of any faith in this mercy is to be considered unimportant; for some such possibility of mercy is suggested in his last dream before his execution.

Greene's dream scenes always have a good deal of power without being particularly explicit, and this is no exception. The priest is eating a meal of six dishes, which *'did not taste of much'*, expecting the seventh to be the best, while meanwhile mass is being celebrated, ignored by him:

*At last the six plates were empty; someone out of sight rang the sanctus bell. and the serving priest knelt before he raised the Host. But he sat on, just waiting, paying no attention to the God over the altar, as though that were a God for other people and not for him. Then the glass by his plate began to fill with wine, and looking up he saw that the child from the banana station was serving him. She said, 'I got it from my father's room.' 'You didn't steal it?' 'Not exactly', she said in her careful and precise voice.*

*He said, 'It is very good of you. I had forgotten the code – what did you call it?'*

*'Morse.'*

*'That was it. Morse. Three long taps and one short one,' and immediately the taps began: the priest by the altar tapped, a whole invisible congregation tapped along the aisles – three long and one short. He asked, 'What is it?'*

*'News,' the child said. watching him with a stern, responsible and interested gaze.[169]*

What this 'means' is not clear: but it would seem that it is the priest's relationships with others, especially his love for his daughter (which *'seemed to contain all that he felt himself of repentance[170]*), that make up for what is lacking in his relationship with the God of Mexico's abandonment. Earlier in the book the girl from the banana station had promised to help him if he signalled in Morse; she seems to be presented as his spiritual daughter[171], so paralleling his physical daughter, Brigitta. Hence, while, as he thinks to himself, he has loved all the wrong things – the dishes which *'did not taste of much'* – and has neglected his prayers and religious duties, yet,

through the daughter-relationship, he can nevertheless be given the sacramental wine he has ignored and the help he has forgotten to ask for. And we may also understand the dream as implying perhaps that the priest is being assisted through the girl's prayers: she is now dead[172], and in the dream she brings the sacramental wine 'from my father's room... with a stern, responsible and interested gaze.' The priest has forgotten the Morse code for help (just as in reality he has forgotten his prayers[173]), and is 'paying no attention to the God over the altar, as though that were a God for other people and not for him' (just as in reality he believes that miraculous deliverances occur 'But not for me'[174]). Appropriately, then, when he receives the wine from the child, it is by means that do not adhere strictly to the rulebook: just like his love. The dream is a very effective way for Greene to hint that grace may be operating in this situation after all.

But, when all is said and done, few people benefit from it. By staying at his post the priest wins just one convert – the boy Luis[175]. At the end of the book Luis goes to bed feeling 'cheated and disappointed', disgusted with the lieutenant's successful extinction of the priests and the heroes; he dreams of the dead priest winking at him, and wakes straightaway to find another priest – again, 'a tall pale man with a rather sour mouth... with an odd frightened smile' – at the door. Providence has still its purposes, it seems, even in the 'vast abandonment'; but it remains that abandonment that sets the dominant tone. Grace keeps only a foothold on this side of death, and most of its activity seems devoted to bringing that foothold to martyrdom. Otherwise, the world is left to itself; which is a rather bizarre kind of Christianity.

So here we have the problem. The major religious novelist of the mid-twentieth century turns out to be building fictional worlds from which God is absent, where heaven stays 'rigidly on the other side of death' – almost. In that 'almost' lies the specificity of Greene's vision. Admittedly the real causality of the supernatural events in these novels is not entirely certain: the voice that pleads with Scobie in the powerful scenes at the end of *The Heart of the Matter* might be purely subjective; the whisky priest might be wrong about his unexpected release and escape; Pinkie might be

wrong about the 'something trying to get in' at the close of *Brighton Rock*. Of these three, *Brighton Rock* is the instance that can most plausibly be seen as mere subjective experience or mere metaphor. But neither Scobie nor the whisky priest nor Pinkie – the people who seem to know best the worlds they inhabit – would see the supernatural world as anything but real. Greene's trilogy seems therefore to invite the reader to contemplate the possible objective reality of grace; the pattern of each book suggests that the causality of its events is in fact providential, supernaturalistic. So it is not a formal difficulty that hinders the full emergence of the Christian pattern in Greene's narrative; the problem is theological.

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## References:

- [1] Miriam Allott, *Novelists on the Novel* (1959), p.39. See also T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (1934), pp.56-57.
- [2] Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (1846-48; Everyman edition of 1907), pp.613, 698.
- [3] *Ibid*, p.604.
- [4] *Ibid*, p.708.
- [5] *Ibid*, p.522.
- [6] *Ibid*, p.440.
- [7] *Ibid*, p.714.
- [8] *Ibid*, p.720, where also Carker wonders when the next train is due – 'when another Devil would come by.'
- [9] Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (1847; Penguin edition of 1965), p.77. The reasons why the causality of Emily Bronte's novel should be so different from the providentialism of her sisters' work lie beyond this study's scope. Nonetheless, it is striking to note, in Charlotte Bronte's 'Biographical Notice' for her two sisters, the emphasis on Anne's being 'a very sincere and practical Christian' in life and death, and the lack of such references when she speaks of Emily (cf.pp.34-35 of the Penguin *Wuthering Heights*).
- [10] *Ibid*, p.106.
- [11] *Ibid*, pp.149, 359.
- [12] *Ibid*, p.173.
- [13] *Ibid*, p.188.

[14] *Ibid*, p.359.

[15] *Ibid*, p.148.

[16] *Ibid*, p.120.

[17] *Ibid*, p.57.

[18] *Ibid*, p.106.

[19] *Ibid*, pp.217-18.

[20] *Ibid*, p.219.

[21] *Ibid*, p.289.

[22] *Ibid*, p.146.

[23] Herbert J. Muller, 'The Novels of Hardy Today', in *Southern Review*, Summer 1940, quoted Q.D. Leavis, 'Hardy and Criticism', in *A Selection from 'Scrutiny'*, ed. F.R. Leavis (1968), Vol.I, p.295.

[24] Joseph Conrad, *The Shadow Line* (1917 Everyman edition, with *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and Typhoon*, 1945), p.271.

[25] *Ibid*, p.299. Cf. also p.254: 'It appeared that even at sea a man could become the victim of evil spirits. I felt on my face the breath of unknown powers that shape our destinies.' Nonetheless, Conrad's preface makes it clear that the supernatural in the book exists only as metaphor (pp.207-08).

[26] Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (1900; Everyman edition of 1935), p.285.

[27] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1902; Everyman edition with *Youth and The End of the Tether*, 1974), p.116.

[28] Graham Greene, *Collected Essays* (1969; Penguin edition of 1970), p.21.

[29] *Ibid*, p.43. The argument is developed in the two general essays on Henry James in this book.

[30] Quoted Dorothy Scarborough, *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (1917), p.109. It is interesting that of all the major novelists it should be James, the supreme craftsman, who found the supernatural significant enough to introduce a ghost into fictions like *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Jolly Corner*.

[31] E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (1924; Everyman edition of 1942), p.180.

[32] Laurence Lerner, *The Truth-tellers* (1967), p.188.

[33] D.H. Lawrence, *St. Mawr* (1925; Phoenix collected edition of 1956), p.128.

[34] *Ibid*, p.135.

[35] *Ibid*, p.133.

[36] *Ibid*, pp.138-139.

[37] *Ibid*, p.146.

[38] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz* (original story 1922; Penguin collection of 1962), pp.105-06.

[39] That is, provided some humanistic values – what *The Great Gatsby* (1926; Penguin edition of 1950; p.7) calls '*fundamental decencies*' – can be invoked to replace a theistic morality. A complete relativism would leave no basis for judging Washington: in terms of the 'will to power', or the survival of the fittest, what he does is unquestionable – as Fitzgerald is aware (p.116).

[40] *Ibid*, p.112.

[41] *Ibid*, p.166.

[42] Cf. Henry Dan Piper, 'The Untrimmed Christmas Tree: The Religious Background of The Great Gatsby', in *The Great Gatsby: a Study*, ed. Frederick J.Hoffman (New York,1962), p.333. Piper cites the short story 'Absolution' (originally planned as *Gatsby's* prologue) and suggests that the main point about the world of *Gatsby's* imagination is that there '*he was safe from God*', and so free to follow his own '*Platonic conception of himself*' (*The Great Gatsby*, p.105.) But this does not mean that *Gatsby* should be read as a (conscious) retelling of Adam hiding in Eden, the man running away from God. Rather, as Piper continues, the standards by which *Gatsby's* dream is judged, the standards of the reality that is '*not 'a rock built on a fairy's wing*' (*The Great Gatsby*, p.106), are a combination of '*fundamental decencies*' and an awareness of mortality and the irreversible nature of time (*ibid*, p.117): humanistic values rather than theistic, although they would have been theistically grounded in an earlier era.

[43] Malcolm Bradbury suggests that in most of his work, Waugh, '*despairing of God's sensible presence in modern history, feels free to represent it as chaos, as a vulgarized nonsense, without any really significant moral substance. Faith may enter, but the idea of it as a possession that redeems this world is not given; it is as often as not an attribute of those who suffer or are historically victimized, a story or a remarkably oblique alternative.*' ('Muriel Spark's *Fingernails*', in *Contemporary Women Novelists: a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Patricia Meyer Spacks (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey,1977), p.139.) Bradbury includes *Brideshead Revisited* as an example of the 'oblique' variety.

[44] Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945; revised Penguin edition of 1962), p.212.

[45] *Ibid*, p.164.

[46] *Ibid*, p.276.

[47] *Ibid*, p.294.

[48] *Ibid*, p.247.

[49] *Ibid*, p.263.

[50] *Ibid*, p.276.

[51] *Ibid*, p.295.

[52] *Ibid*, p.309.

[53] *Ibid*, p.312.

[54] It is a technique he uses throughout the novel. Cordelia is much better equipped to be the novel's mouthpiece of Catholicism for having appeared in a superbly farcical scene earlier, where she confesses having told Rex – who is methodically turning Catholic in order to marry Julia – that Catholics must sleep with their feet pointing east because that is heaven's direction, 'and if you die in the night you can walk there'; besides similar gems about sacred monkeys, and damning your enemies by giving the Church a pound note with their name on it (*ibid*, p.187).

[55] *Ibid*, p.314.

[56] *Ibid*, p.322.

[57] *Ibid*, p.324.

[58] *Ibid*, pp.295-296.

[59] *Ibid*, p.331.

[60] *Ibid*, p.291.

[61] *Ibid*, p.82.

[62] *Ibid*, p.98.

[63] *Ibid*, p.84.

[64] *Ibid*, p.112.

[65] *Ibid*, p.193.

[66] *Ibid*, p.322.

[67] Graham Greene, *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), pp.35-36. All references are to the Penguin edition of 1971, henceforth referred to as *THOTM*, unless otherwise indicated.

[68] *Ibid*, p.11.

[69] *Ibid*, p.123.

[70] *Ibid*, p.156.

[71] *Ibid*, p.166.

[72] *Ibid*, p.52.

[73] *Ibid*, p.26.

[74] *Ibid*, p.126.

[75] *Ibid*, p.120.

[76] *Ibid*, pp.115-16.

[77] *Ibid*, p.189

[78] *Ibid*, p.201.

[79] *Ibid*, p.154.

[80] *Ibid*, p.86.

[81] *Ibid*, p.68.

[82] *Ibid*, p.183.

[83] For example, after Louise's telegram (*ibid*, p.189) and her request that they go to communion (*ibid*, p.219).

[84] *Ibid*, p.60.

[85] The only exception to this is the veiled hint in

the sentences that close the chapter two pages later: 'Somewhere on the face of those obscure waters moved the sense of yet another wrong and another victim, not Louise, nor Helen' (*ibid*, p.162). (The first edition included the additional sentence, 'Away in the town the cocks began to crow for the false dawn' (p.192) – where the cockcrow probably echoes Peter's denial of Christ.) This further victim is presumably the God for whose protection Scobie will kill himself at the end of the book (cf. Genesis 1:2, 'The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters'). But the reference here is to the aftermath; God is absent from the crucial moment of need when Scobie's destiny is in the balance.

[86] 1 Corinthians 10:13.

[87] *The Heart of the Matter*, p.33.

[88] *Ibid*, p.43.

[89] *Ibid*, p.98.

[90] Cf. in contrast John 16:24: 'Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.'

[91] *THOTM*, p.125.

[92] Quoted Marie-Beatrice Mesnet, *Graham Greene and The Heart of the Matter* (1954), p.102.

[93] *THOTM*, p.181.

[94] *Ibid*, p.189.

[95] *Ibid*, p.220.

[96] *Ibid*, p.222.

[97] *Ibid*, p.225.

[98] *Ibid*, p.258.

[99] *Ibid*, p.259.

[100] *Ibid*, p.228.

[101] *Ibid*, p.262.

[102] *Ibid*, pp.262-63. He has pretended to be suffering from angina. It is, of course, appropriate that the climax of *The Heart of the Matter* should be a faked heart attack.

[103] *Ibid*, p.263.

[104] *Ibid*, p.265.

[105] *Ibid*, p.272.

[106] *Brighton Rock* (1938; Penguin edition of 1975), p.210.

[107] *Ibid*, p.21.

[108] *Ibid*, p.163. Even his phone number – three sixes (p.48) – is the mark of the beast in the book of Revelation.

[109] *Ibid*, p.52.

[110] *Ibid*, p.164.

[111] *Ibid*, pp.101-102.

[112] *Ibid*, p.51.

[113] *Ibid*, p.68.

[114] *Ibid*, p.228.

- [115] *Ibid*, p.35.
- [116] *Ibid*, pp.120-21.
- [117] *Ibid*, pp.222-23.
- [118] *Ibid*, p.91.
- [119] *Ibid*, pp.113-14. To Pinkie it seems that 'right and wrong' are controlled by the successful gangster Colleoni: '*He looked as a man might look who owned the whole world, the whole visible world that is, the cash registers and policemen and prostitutes, Parliament and the laws which say "this is Right and this is Wrong"*' (p.65) – which obviously reflects on Ida. It is, one assumes, the invisible world of Good and Evil that is outside Colleoni's control.
- [120] *Ibid*, pp.126-27.
- [121] *Ibid*, p.195.
- [122] There is a resemblance here to that other Catholic novel, *Brideshead Revisited*.
- [123] *Brighton Rock*, p.127.
- [124] *Ibid*, p.241.
- [125] *Ibid*, p.221.
- [126] *Ibid*, p.231.
- [127] *Ibid*, pp.237-38.
- [128] *Ibid*, pp.239-40.
- [129] *Ibid*, p.241.
- [130] *Ibid*, p.246.
- [131] *Ibid*, p.247.
- [132] Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (1940; Penguin edition of 1971. henceforth referred to as *PG*), p.7.
- [133] *Ibid*, p.8.
- [134] *Ibid*, p.97. A similar note is sounded by the priest at the end of *The Heart of the Matter*: 'A priest only knows the unimportant things.' 'Unimportant?' 'Oh, I mean the sins...' (*THOTM*, p.271).
- [135] *Ibid*, p.115.
- [136] 1 Peter 5:7-9.
- [137] Graham Greene, *Collected Essays* (1969; Penguin edition of 1970), p.91.
- [138] *PG*, p.82.
- [139] *Collected Essays*, p.140; quoted R.W.B. Lewis, *The Picaresque Saint* (1960), p.233. In *Nostromo* as in *The Power and the Glory* this sense is conveyed by use of the sun.
- [140] R.W.B. Lewis, *ibid*.
- [141] Cf. Isaiah 40:15.
- [142] *PG*, p.151. Indeed, the priest feels that God is totally dependent on him: '*When he was gone it would be as if God in all this space between the sea and the mountains ceased to exist*' (*ibid*, p.65).
- [143] *Ibid*, p.132.
- [144] *Ibid*, p.18.
- [145] *Ibid*, p.30. Here the effect is generalised to a statement about the world in general. The radio broadcasts from England have this function in *The Heart of the Matter*.
- [146] *PG*, p.150.
- [147] *Ibid*, pp.25ff, 49ff, 217ff.
- [148] *Ibid*, p.45.
- [149] *Ibid*, p.91.
- [150] *Ibid*, p.58.
- [151] *Ibid*, p.128.
- [152] *Ibid*, pp.95, 182, 197.
- [153] *Ibid*, p.180.
- [154] *Brighton Rock*, p.246.
- [155] *PG*, p.201. The sceptic Bendrix is used to establish Sarah's sainthood in the same way in *The End of the Affair*.
- [156] Eg. Paul's classic treatment in Romans 7 and 8.
- [157] It is worth noting that R.W.B. Lewis – who argues in *The Picaresque Saint* that the saint-figure in contemporary fiction must be at least half rogue – suggests that this '*crucial connection between sainthood and roguery – with all the attendant paradoxes*' is expressed '*beyond anything elsewhere proposed in this generation*' by the existentialist Sartre, in *Saint Genet – Comedien et Martyr* (Lewis, p.308).
- [158] Cf. Francois Mauriac, *God and Mammon*, quoted A.A. De Vitis in *Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations*, ed. Robert O Evans (Kentucky, 1963), p.117.
- [159] 2 Corinthians 12:9.
- [160] Romans 7:19.
- [161] Lewis, *op.cit.*, p.213. Cf. also Lionel Trilling: '*We think that virtue is not interesting, even that it is not really virtue, unless it manifests itself as a product of "grace" operating through a strong inclination to sin.*' ('Jane Austen and Mansfield Park', in *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*, ed. Boris Ford, Vol.V (1957; revised edition of 1969), p.116.)
- [162] John 16:8-11.
- [163] Matthew 5:16, John 13:35.
- [164] *PG*, p.129. *Ibid*, p.138.
- [165] *Ibid*, p.148.
- [166] It is possible too that the hunt does what the priest had felt only a confessor could do: '*to draw his mind slowly down the drab passages which led to grief and repentance*' (*ibid*, p.128; cf. p.210).
- [167] *Ibid*, p.201.
- [168] *Ibid*, p.200.
- [169] *Ibid*, pp.209-210.

[170] *Ibid*, p.147.

[171] *Ibid*, .pp.52-53, 214.

[172] Cf. *ibid*, pp.140ff, 211ff.

[173] *Ibid*, p.196.

[174] *Ibid*, p.201.

[175] *Ibid*, pp.219-22.

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