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## The Love Of God In Graham Greene's The End Of The Affair

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### **Abstract:**

*The End of the Affair is a pathos-laden examination of a three-way collision between love of self, love of another, and love of God. The End of the Affair doesn't involve a love triangle; it involves a love rectangle; the four lovers being Sarah Miles, her husband Henry, Maurice Bendrix, and God. Thinking that Bendrix has been killed, Sarah, who is an agnostic, sinks to her knees and promises God that if Bendrix lives she will give him up. She is indeed involved with another lover for whom she has left Bendrix: God. She rationalizes that if God doesn't really exist then she is free to do as she pleases. In order to try to convince herself of God's non-existence, she begins studying with a notorious atheist intellectual. Unfortunately, atheist arguments against the existence of God only convince Sarah that God is real and that she must keep her promise. After finding out that his girlfriend left him for God, who then proceeded to take her away permanently, Bendrix, who has been an atheist, hates God. Bendrix realizes that he cannot hate God and remain an atheist since hate is just the other side of love. In order to hate God, Bendrix must first believe in Him. A big theme of The End of the Affair is the nature of faith.*

Graham Greene has chosen a theme that can never die. Graham Greene tells anew the same story. The story of a soul in its search for happiness is of universal appeal and the theme is the highest and holiest that the human mind can conceive - the love of God for man; the love of the Almighty for poor, weak, sinful man. The kind of love he offered to Bendrix. Greene asks how many Bendrixs are there in the world, who feels they have a reason for hating God? The peace and love he holds out to Bendrix is refused for hatred was in his brain,

You're a devil, God, tempting us to leap. But I don't want your peace and I don't want your love . . . I hate you, God, I hate you . . . (p. 236)

Greene's The End of the Affair portrays souls that know the love of God yet flee it because they are led astray by false lights. In the novel it symbolizes man's journey through life, and more important, it dramatizes the words of St. Augustine, "Thou modest us for thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee". (St. Augustine, Confessions, p. 21)<sup>1</sup>

The characters in Greene's novels know St. Augustine's prayer yet they are always bound by a dilemma; the dilemma of a man refusing perpetual happiness for temporary happiness. The tragedy of his characters is not that they could not find happiness, but that they looked for it in the wrong places; they had only to succumb to the Hunter. Sarah's fears prevented her from accepting his love, "I know I am only beginning to love, but already I want to abandon everything, everybody, but you: only fear and habit prevent me . . ." (p.54)

The Hound of Heaven pursues his quarry relentlessly and in the end Sarah will have her fears and habits swept aside and will have made the leap that Bendrix feared. God pursues his creatures more assiduously than Ida Arnold pursues Rose. He tracked the whiskey-priest through the jungles, in and out of jail, more doggedly than did the police lieutenant; He "fled" Scobie down to the very last breath he took; he follows Sarah to her adulterous bed - these he followed, letting each know his love and above the tumult of the chase each heard his words, "All things betray thee, who betrays Me" - Sarah, Rose, Scobie, hearing him were fearful that in loving him they would lose the love of their Bendrix, Pinkie, and Louise.

In The End of the Affair God pursues all. He is the jealous God so often mentioned in the Bible Who will tolerate no less than everything and everyone - Smythe, Parkis, Henry. Often man thinks he is feeling or acting from one set of motives while in actual fact feeling and acting from another set. For each creature is a person at war with himself - and none more so than Sarah and Bendrix. As,

alternately, they pursue each other, so each of them is pursued inwardly; down the arches of the years and down the labyrinthine ways of their own minds; all Greene's characters are always hares pursued by Grace.

In the Hound of Heaven's quest for the souls of men, the hunted is fully aware of his complete and utter dependence on God's love.

If I loved God, then I would believe in His love for me. It's not enough to need it. We have to love first, and I don't know how. But I need it, how I need it. (p.108)

God, who is Justice, is also the one and the same God who is Love. He is a God "who loves desperately". It follows that if a man were to succumb to this God who loves desperately the only answer is for a man to love God desperately. This means "giving up" some phase of life which man holds dear. The desires of man always seek a good even though a higher emphasis may be placed on the "created" rather than on the Creator. Sarah Miles in a moment of professed dependence accepts the fate that goes with the desperate love of God. She learns that giving up her Maurice is not enough; she must go a step further and reject "everything" from her mind and heart. And in her confused thinking she wonders how she will "exist" if she eliminates "everything". She is neither ready nor willing to return God's love desperately even though she needed it desperately.

Greene is aware of the pain and the darkness that comes with loving God. Did not God the Son call out to his Heavenly Father from the depths of his Pain and his darkness, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me"? Terrible, Indeed are the demands made upon the human soul that subjects itself to the desperate love of God for their seemingly can be no worldly pleasures left,

. . . I thought, God has more mercy . . . only its such an odd sort of mercy, it sometimes looks like punishment . . . I fought belief for longer than I fought love, but I haven't any fight left. (P.178)

It is this fear that causes Sarah to choose other pleasures; sex and wine.

The second view is finding evil in pain itself. Such a view likewise refuses to see in pain any redemptive values. Sarah asks, ". . . can one have a merciful God and this despair". Christ could have but thought of redeeming the world and it would have been, but he chose the ignominious death of the Cross with its physical and spiritual pain and suffering in order to redeem man. Greene says that man must accept pain and suffering as the effect of evil in the world and realize that only through pain can he be redeemed. Sarah realized that she must accept pain and agony,

Dear God, I said - Why? Why? . . . I shut my eyes tight, and I pressed my nails into the palms of my hands until I could feel nothing but the pain, and I said, I will believe. Let him be alive, and I will believe . . . and then he came in at the door and he was alive, and I thought now the agony of being without him starts. . . (p.112, 113)

Sarah needed only to remember that the Cross came after sin, not before. The thought of loving God created an agony in Sarah's mind. If he is love, should not she embrace him? If not him, who? Sarah could not solve her problem, "But, dear God, what shall I do with this desire to love? (p.112)

God's love is such a strange thing to man that he is afraid to embrace him; he is afraid that in giving God his finger he will seize the hand. Bendrix does not fear goodness, but rather the pain which is its price. He fears God's grasping his hand.

If I ever loved like that, it would be the end of everything. Loving you I had no appetite for food, I felt no lust for any other woman, but loving Him there'd be no pleasure in anything at all with Him away. I'd even lose my work. I'd cease to be Bendrix. (p.225)

Bendrix's dreaded spiritual goodness demanded a painful relinquishing of what is evil? The human lover wants his beloved perfect in all things so the Hound of Heaven wants all souls perfect. At first glance God seems to be taking away man's happiness but in the moment of surrender, man discovers that he deceived him. He has merely taken away the dross to give man the gold of his eternity.

One of the greatest dramas of life is the Hound of Heaven in pursuit of a soul; attempting to give man an eternity of happiness. When God pursues the soul he proves a relentless lover, who will never leave the soul alone until he has won it or been conclusively denied. The End of the Affair is such a story, the story of God in pursuit of the soul of Sarah Miles. The theme of this novel is the wrestling with the love and grace of God of a very ordinary man and an apparently completely pagan woman, but one with immense spiritual potentialities. It is not the story of sanctity through adultery, it is the story of a woman torn between two loves, and it is told in terms of Greene's view of reality.

At the head of the opening chapter of The Man Within appears a passage from Traherne which provides a clue to Greene, not only to The Heart of the Matter but especially to The End of the Affair for the quotation provides a concise synopsis of Greene's view of reality.

o ye that stand upon the brink whom I so near me through the chink, with wonders see: what faces these, whose feet, whose bodies, do we wear? I my companions see in you, another me. They seemed others, but are we: Our second selves those shadows be. (p.50)<sup>2</sup>

There is always the idea of the double man in Greene, "There's another man within me that's angry with me"; there is always this duality in man's nature that Greene is concerned with. With Sarah it is the duality of the known physical desire and the unknown spiritual love fighting for supremacy of her soul.

The End of the Affair, however, reverts to "type" in its portrayal of Greene's obsession. Greene once wrote that every creative writer must have an obsession and up to Brighton Rock his has been with failure, but in The End of the Affair his obsession has changed to hatred. This novel is heavy with hatred and it is probable that it was a product of some personal crisis. Hatred is one of the escape valves through which Greene's intense emotional feelings escape.

Greene, through the medium of his novelist-character Bendrix, writes out of bitterness born of hatred. "What a dull, lifeless quality this bitterness is. If I could write with love, but if I could write with love, I would be another man: I would never have lost love". But not all of Bendrix's bitterness comes from hatred; some of it comes from frustrated love. There is, however, a display of unnecessary spite and cruelty which cannot be attributed to either hatred or frustrated love. The petty spite is inborn and is failing in character. Bendrix behaves toward Parkis, the pathetic old detective, with consistent nastiness. Bendrix is a person with a considerable store of unpleasantness which has been nurtured by hatred and has been aggravated and stimulated by his frustrated love affair with Sarah,

The sense of unhappiness is so much easier to convey than that of happiness. In misery we seem aware of our own existence, even though it may be in the form of a monstrous egotism; this pain of mine is individual, this . . . belongs to me and no other . . . as though I loved in fact what I hate. (p.47)

Bendrix knows he is hateful for he says so frequently, "Hate and suspicion and envy have driven me so far away." But after Bendrix had got Sarah's note informing him she could no longer see him, his hatred becomes a passion. He begins to treat Sarah like a prey. He follows her through London, exulting over her fear. When she dies and his hatred has lost its object he changes it and begins hating God. God had taken his Sarah and he should be hated as bitterly as Henry and Smythe had been. Bendrix's hatred has left him near insanity and at the end of the novel he is a near-man. After Bendrix's talk with Henry and the priest it becomes clear that Greene had intended it this way - Bendrix has been nearly destroyed with hatred and frustrated desire. He rationalizes his hatred by declaring it was just to defend him and yet he knew "grief and disappointment are like hate! They make men ugly with self pity and bitterness".

Greene's use of Leon Sley's epigraph gives some hint of an explanation into Bendrix's character. "Man has places in his heart which do not yet exist; and into them enters suffering in order that they may have existence". Through Bendrix's suffering new ideas come to life. Intensity of suffering brought near-insanity but at the end there is more than a hint that a new and healing grace is beginning to creep into Bendrix's heart. Once the rage was over Bendrix was certainly a wiser man than he had been before it started.

Bendrix with the avowed purpose of doing research on Henry for the future novel about civil servants falls in love with Sarah. This love leads to an affair which goes on despite Henry Miles, a trusting and not to bright husband, until a bomb strikes Bendrix's apartment house and injures him. Sarah, who was present, believing that Maurice has been killed, she turns for the first time to God, and vows to surrender Bendrix if only his life is spared. He is not dead and so begins the process of her subjection to the Love of the Hound of Heaven.

The End of the Affair, Evelyn Waugh wrote in a review, "is addressed to the Gentiles. It shows them the Church as something in their midst, mysterious and triumphant and working for their good"<sup>3</sup>. In the novel Greene attempts to tell profound spiritual truths in terms of stark realism, and to prove that God is the finality of all loves, even the illegitimate love of Sarah and Bendrix.

The End of the Affair creates mysterious depths of the relation between the God of love and fallen, sinful man. Greene almost brings God into the story as one of the characters. Bendrix is openly at war with God in whom he disbelieves, "This is a record of hate . . ." Greene asks, could Bendrix disbelieve in God if he hated him?

God's love is often a "strange" kind of love. What kind of love was it for a woman who realized itself in more and more agony so that she had to pray for death since she felt herself too humanly weak to reject an "understandable" human love which grew and deepened as love itself and her love of God deepened, "For he gave me so much love . . .?"

The love between Sarah and Bendrix - lust for love cannot reside in the mind alone; our minds cannot love without a prior meeting of the flesh. All kinds of emotions and psychological states may exist before the bodies unite but they do not amount to love. "It was as if quite suddenly after all the promiscuous years I had grown up. My passion had killed simple lust for ever. Never again would I be able to enjoy a woman without love. It is simple lust that has gone from Bendrix life and in its place is love. Sarah tried to persuade herself and Bendrix that people can love without seeing each other. It is a desperate cry and Sarah convinces no one, not even herself.

She said, "People go on loving God, don't they, all their lives without seeing him?" "That's not our kind of love." "I sometimes don't believe there's any other kind, everything must be all right, if we love enough," she said. (p.86)

She thought of a scar on Bendrix's body, but what was the use of a loved scar if she was to be "only the vapors of the spirit"? Later she wrote in her diary: "We can love with our minds, but can we love only with our minds? Love extends itself all the time, so that we can even love with our senseless nails, (p.131)

Sarah's diary contains her bout with the Hound of Heaven. God had permitted her to sin but took away the fruit of her sin - He permitted her to use her free will to keep or break her promise, but she had not the power to gain anything by breaking it.

I said to God, so that's it. I begin to believe in you, and if I believe in you I shall hate you. I have free will to break my promise, haven't I, but I haven't the power to gain anything from breaking it . . . You let me sin, but you take away the fruits of my sin . . . You don't allow me to enjoy it. You make me drive love out. . . What do you expect me to do now, God? Where do I go from here? (p.118)

This "bitch and fake" cannot "hurt" God because she cannot get any pleasure from it. She sought solace in wine and sex but it did not work for she was beginning to "feel" God's love. "In this bitch and fake where do you find anything to love"? As she begins to feel God's love, she also begins to believe in Him, though not fully - ". . . not yet, I don't believe in you yet".

In her despair at having lost Maurice she finds that she now does not love anyone and God least of all. Seeking ways to escape from this God she does not believe in she goes to Richard Smythe, a rationalist street preacher and his doctrine of a Phantom God. Realizing that Smythe's Phantom God may be the result of suffering generated into hate by a disfigured face he had been branded with, she becomes disturbed and visits a "Roman" church with its plaster statues and bad art and "a material body on a material cross". She contemplates the cross and the words of Richard Smythe and thinks, "Oh God, if I could really hate you, what would that mean"? Sarah now, and Bendrix later, in their pursuits are driven to look into themselves and to recognize - if only for a moment - in whose image they have been made. Sarah's search for another love leaves in her a terrible emptiness, which is a physical loneliness brought on by the loss of Bendrix. However, there is evident a vestige of spiritual emptiness brought on by the dissatisfaction with the mediocrity of her life. Sarah's emptiness has no spiritual value for she feels an antipathy against the Hound of Heaven. Yet as she walks out of the church in "a flaming rage" she did what she had seen people do in other churches, she dipped her "finger in the so-called holy water and made a kind of cross on her forehead". God was at work but Sarah did not realize it.

Sarah is spiritually weak. She can do nothing of herself - she needs the help of God. She needs the same special assistance God gives men to work out their salvation. Thus the Catholic Church calls Actual Grace, which is a supernatural help given by God for the special purpose of enabling man to perform some particular act which tends towards his salvation, ". . . And wearily God forces us, here and there, according to His intention . . ." (p. 80)

This grace can best be understood in terms of man's two weaknesses. The first is original sin. Adam's sin began the constant strife going on in the hearts of all men - 21 the sensuous against the spiritual. It is ". . . only through the Grace of God by Jesus Christ our Lord", that man can compensate for this fallen nature that is his by the sin of Adam. The second weakness is man's inability to rise above the plane of the natural into the supernatural. Since God can only be seen face to face by a supernatural act, it follows that some outside help is needed and this too is Grace.

God's grace came slowly to Sarah. In an entry in her diary she suspects that God might fill a void,

. . . and it was for the first time as though I nearly loved You. I walked under your window in the rain and I wanted to wait under them all night only to show that after all I might learn to love and I wasn't afraid of the desert any longer because you were there. (p. 128)

The first of God's graces to Sarah came as a gift for she had done nothing - to merit it of her own accord. Perhaps, she as Scobie before her owed this gift to the prayers of a saint whose name nobody could remember. Is Sarah, a sinner, worthy of such Grace? This question is basic to all the works of Greene. The answer he uses is found in God's own words when He tells that He came ". . . not to call the just, but sinners". Even to the worst of sinners then God gives sufficient Grace to enable them to repent. In *The Heart of the Matter* Greene maintains that a man could die with the consciousness of a threefold sin of adultery, sacrilege, and suicide weighing on his soul and still go to heaven. In *The End of the Affair* he goes a step further and says that a woman who repents all her sins before she dies is a saint worthy of formal honour.

Even though Sarah is only partly convinced that God is the answer to her problems there is still a great obstacle to be surmounted on her road to peace. That obstacle is self-discipline. God is putting Sarah through a Calvary before he will let her share in a Resurrection. She is tormented by her indecision. One day, she writes "Dear God, I've tried to love and I've made such a hash out of it. If I could love you, I'd know how to love them . . . Teach me to love. (p.143)

Two days later, however, "Dear God, I'm no use. I'm still the same bitch and fake. Clear me out of the way." (p.145)

Sarah's realization that there is an ideal love for which she has been reaching blindly and mistakenly brings her, with God's graces, to the shattering knowledge that the love she has been adulterously enjoying is empty and degrading.

I believe you died for us. I believe you are God . . . Dear God, if only you could come down from your cross for a while and let me get up there instead. If I could suffer like You, I could heal like you. (p.144)

She feels that she is no use because she has not yet understood that love is what she desperately wants. When she does surrender, God gives her the assurance that none of her pain and suffering has been in vain.

For he gave me so much love, and I gave him so much love that soon there wasn't anything left, when we'd finished, but You for either of us. I might have taken a lifetime spending a little love at a time, seeking it out here and there, on this man and that. But even the first time, in the hotel near Paddington, we spent all we had. You were there, teaching us to squander, like you taught the rich man, so that one day we might have nothing left except this love of you. (p. 156)

Even after she has surrendered she has not fully acquired the taste for God. Sarah echoes the words of St. Augustine's human cry, "Oh God, give me continence, but not yet, when she pleads, "Dear God, you know I want to want your pain, but I don't want it now. Take it away for a while and give it me another time". Evelyn Waugh wrote of *The End of the Affair*. . . . is a singularly beautiful and moving story. The heroine is consistently lovable. Again and again Mr. Greene has entered fully into a scene of high emotion which anyone else would have shirked. (p. 357)<sup>3</sup>

The *End of the Affair* is an account of a woman who gave God what he wanted, even though it killed her. Sarah's unhappiness, Father Martindale says, she is like the unhappiness of thousands of others:

. . . in England like those described here, who are sure of nothing but that they are unhappy. But also, that in all these creedless and almost codeless people there is something that God's grace is trying to get hold of, that really wants to be got hold of, but does not understand this, and so thinks it hates what it both needs and fears. (p.47)<sup>4</sup>

Sarah's fears and needs were swept aside in the one act of humility as she was swept away by the tremendous torrent of Divine Love.

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