

ABSTRACT

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AND COMPANIONSHIP IN GRAHAM
GREENE'S FICTION

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This dissertation examines the role of sexuality in Graham Greene's fiction. Instead of compartmentalizing Greene's description of sex as an element of his Catholic perspective, this study reverses this view and argues that sexuality is at the center of Greene's spiritual and moral life. Greene examines facets of sexuality that are often considered perverse or aberrant; his encompassing view of sexual life informs the political, moral, and religious issues of his novels.

Key texts include *The Man Within* (1929), *The End of the Affair* (1951), *The Quiet American* (1955), *Travels with My Aunt* (1969), *The Human Factor* (1978), and *Monsignor Quixote* (1982), as well as selected short stories. These texts, as well as Greene's autobiographies and travel writings, reveal a performative, polymorphous, and conflicted sexuality. The chapters of this project discuss sexuality of pain; scopophilia and exhibitionism; the role of fertility and sterility; confession and sexual talk; and the relationships between men.

Ultimately, Greene's evolving depictions of sexuality assume a central role in his work and become the most important way that his characters make meaning in a postwar, post-Eliot world. Rather than accept the view of modern life as a wasteland, Greene reinvests it with drama, danger, and existential importance through his exploration of sexuality. His interest in pain, scopophilia, adulterous or triangular relationships, and other forms of unusual sexuality simultaneously normalize these forms by suggesting that they are functional parts of erotic life, and present a radical view of what normative life really is. Rather than arguing that there is no such thing as perversion or aberration, Greene suggests that even ordinary erotic life—inasmuch as there is such a thing—places us in touch with our most existential fears, carries the possibility of creation and the prospect of our own replacement and death, and challenges our metaphysical senses of selfhood and religious belief.

EROTIC TRANSGRESSION: SEXUALITIES AND COMPANIONSHIP IN
GRAHAM GREENE'S FICTION

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Introduction: An Eternal Act

In Graham Greene's novel *Brighton Rock*, Ida Arnold argues that life is about sensory experiences and excitement: "Life was sunlight on brass bedposts. Ruby port, the leap of the heart when the outsider you have backed passes the post and the colours go bobbing up. Life was poor Fred's mouth pressed down on hers in the taxi, vibrating with the engine along the parade."¹ Ida, whose determination and moral certainty drive her to investigate Hale's mysterious death, takes pleasure in her own uncomplicated sexuality:

Then she got up slowly and began to undress. She never believed in wearing much: it wasn't any time at all before she was exposed in the long mirror: a body firm and bulky: a proper handful. She stood on a deep soft rug, surrounded by gilt frames and red velvet hangings, and a dozen common and popular phrases bloomed in her mind--'A Night of Love,' 'You Only Live Once,' and the rest.²

Ida makes love as some people might enjoy a slice of cake: pleasant, even delicious, but transient, biological. Greene dismisses Ida's carefree brand of sexuality by summarizing her emotional life in popular songs; her "relation to passion," as he calls it, is the same as "a peepshow."³ Ida's ethical worldview is simple, stark, unquestioning, and—to Greene—irresponsibly absolute and reductive. Her pragmatic view of sexual pleasure reflects her moral landscape.

¹ *Brighton Rock*, Collected Edition. London: William Heinemann and the Bodley Head, 1970, 41.

² *Brighton Rock*, 181.

³ *Brighton Rock*, 181.

Rose, by contrast—the heroine of this tale—is a virgin until she and Pinkie consummate their marriage. She and Pinkie have a wedding night (a painful affair for Rose), and that is all: Pinkie, about to be arrested for murder, commits suicide the next day rather than be caught by the police. This single act of sexual intercourse irrevocably changes Rose. The day after the wedding, she realizes, “There was no end to what the two of them had done last night upon the bed: it was an eternal act.”⁴

Linking sex to eternity is one of Greene’s most enduring literary habits: sex is forever. His characters describe sex as an unbreakable bond. Some of them even see sexual intercourse as a form of marriage: after he and Anna-Luise consummate their relationship, Jones in *Dr Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party* says, “There was no legality in our kind of marriage and therefore there could be no divorce. We took each other for good and all.”⁵ He places more importance on this encounter than on their official marriage.

Desire in Greene’s novels appears in different guises from book to book—indeed, from scene to scene. One constant, however, is that eros gives meaning to Greene’s characters. This does not mean that sex is a life-giving font of positive energy. In many cases, the role of sex is that of sin. For Greene, however, better a world tormented by sin than a world devoid of consequences and empty of moral or spiritual meaning. Whether he terms it sin or dysfunction, Greene evokes dark or hidden aspects of sexuality as well as its pleasures.

⁴ *Brighton Rock*, 249.

⁵ Greene, Graham. *Doctor Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980, 24.

Greene employs sex, then, to address the modern world. While Greene's so-called "Catholic novels" often term the problem of sex "sin," the senses of darkness and danger—and their allure—persist throughout Greene's *oeuvre*. Greene emphasizes eroticism as a process, lingering over the methods by which his characters synthesize their sexual practices and the ramifications of sexual love.

Many of Greene's contemporaries depicted sexuality with ever-increasing explicitness: from Joyce and Lawrence to Norman Mailer and Philip Roth, many of the best novelists writing during Greene's long career pushed the boundaries of "publishable" erotic writing. Greene's own erotic scenes, by contrast, are virtually always brief and figurative. Greene seldom describes actual body parts or identifies any particular sexual activity. The reader may assume that Greene is describing sexual intercourse, but in most cases, Greene chooses to represent the physical act through the pain of lost virginity, or by a vague phrase such as "making love" that encompasses any of a number of possible scenarios. *The End of the Affair* contains some of Greene's most detailed sexual writing, and yet when Maurice Bendrix remembers the beginning of his relationship with Sarah Miles, he thinks,

I remember the trivial details very well: how the manageress asked me whether we wanted to stay the night: how the room cost fifteen shillings for a short stay: how the electric meter only took shillings and we hadn't one between us, but I remember nothing else—how Sarah looked the first time or what we did, except that we were both nervous and made love badly. It didn't matter.⁶

⁶ Greene, *The End of the Affair*, New York: Penguin, 2004, 34.

This musing by Bendrix exemplifies Greene's focus. Sexual performance itself matters little. The details surrounding the sexual encounter, however, matter a lot, because they reveal character. Later in the novel, another sex scene between Sarah and Bendrix demonstrates this even more clearly:

There was never any question in those days of who wanted whom—we were together in desire. Henry had his tray, sitting up against two pillows in his green woolen dressing gown, and in the room below, on the hardwood floor, with a single cushion for support and the door ajar, we made love. When the moment came, I had to put my hand gently over her mouth to deaden that strange sad angry cry of abandonment, for fear Henry should hear it overhead.⁷

Even though this scene exhibits detail—the wooden floor, the open door—Greene describes very little about their bodies: only Bendrix's hand over Sarah's mouth. Near the end of his career, these scenes become slightly more detailed, but—at least by the standards of the twentieth century—even his most explicit writing is restrained.

Given that Greene was neither puritanical nor prim, it is striking that his books are so elliptical about sex. Because there is so little specific physical detail, few critics describe Greene's writing as "erotic," even though sexuality is central in his work. The characters have powerful sexual drives and desires, and his works nearly throb with an understated longing for physical love and touch. This reticence evokes the narrative gaps so common in the texts of Henry James or Joseph Conrad, two of Greene's major influences, and it reinvests sexuality with mystery that it had lost in

⁷ *The End of the Affair*, 38.

many Modernist texts. Even as Greene invites a dialogue about sexuality, his narrative restraint demonstrates that sexuality remains fundamentally indefinable.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault argues that our Western culture has no traditional *ars erotica*. Then he suggests:

...[W]e must ask whether, since the nineteenth century, the *scientia sexualis*—under the guise of its decent positivism—has not functioned, at least to a certain extent, as an *ars erotica*. Perhaps this production of truth, intimidated though it was by the scientific model, multiplied, intensified, and even created its own intrinsic pleasures. It is often said that we have been incapable of imagining any new pleasures. We have at least invented a different kind of pleasure: pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing that truth, of discovering and exposing it, the fascination of seeing it and telling it, of captivating and capturing others by it, of confiding it in secret, of luring it out in the open—the specific pleasure of the true discourse on pleasure.⁸

Greene's work shows an almost obsessive interest in such writing and such talk. The conversations his characters have about intercourse and other erotic activity, as well as their embrace of forms of sexuality sometimes called "perverse" contribute to Greene's career-long ambition of describing the range and complication of human sexuality. Greene's final refusal to describe the most mechanical aspects of sexual activity only reinforces this sense that desire is sometimes only minimally a physical experience. For Greene, the technical details of what one character does to the other

⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, New York: Vintage, 1990, 70-71.

are not particularly important unless they illustrate some form of sexual experimentation, whether it be risk-taking, the erotic charge of pain or disfigurement, or erotic dialogue—the elements that contribute to Greene’s spiritual understanding of sex.

The term *spiritual* is an ambiguous one, and in modern parlance it has become a euphemism for “religious,” used by people who want to avoid committing themselves to a creed or who want to suggest that their form of religion is unique, individual. This study, however, will use the term “spiritual,” despite its flaws, as the counterpart to “corporeal” or “temporal,” for even at its least religious, Greene’s work often focuses on eternity.

Greene describes the role of the spiritual or supernatural in this oft-quoted passage from his essay on François Mauriac:

After the death of Henry James a disaster overtook the English novel; indeed long before his death one can picture that quiet, impressive, rather complacent figure like the last survivor on a raft, gazing out over a sea scattered with wreckage.... For with the death of James the religious sense was lost to the English novel, and with the religious sense went the sense of the importance of the human act. It was as if the world of fiction had lost a dimension: the characters of such distinguished writers as Mrs Virginia Woolf and Mr E.M. Forster wandered like cardboard symbols through a world that was paper-thin. Even in one of the most materialistic of our great novelists—in Trollope—we are aware of another world against which the actions of the characters are thrown into relief. The ungainly clergyman picking his black-booted way

through the mud, handling so awkwardly his umbrella, speaking of his miserable income and stumbling through a proposal of marriage, exists in a way that Mrs Woolf's Mr Ramsay never does, because we are aware that he exists not only to the woman he is addressing but also in a God's eye. His unimportance in the world of the senses is only matched by his enormous importance in another world.⁹

Greene himself achieves the religious sense. Indeed, many critics discuss him as above all a Catholic or religious novelist. In no sphere is this more evident than in his treatment of sexuality as a nexus of moral, religious, and physical elements of human experience.

Even though Greene's sensibility in many of his novels is unmistakably Catholic the term *spiritual* has one advantage over *religious* for discussing these books: Greene's awareness of the unseen does not rely on Catholic doctrine. The formative books he so frequently cites as his childhood influences—such as Marjorie Bowen's *The Viper of Milan* or H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*—created the Manichean divide between good and evil that Greene sustained throughout his career. This opposition gives many of Greene's novels their atmospheric quality. *Brighton Rock*, for example, draws its spiritual content not from the specifically Catholic characters, but from the otherworldly presence of evil. When Greene refers to the books of childhood as “books of divination,” he invokes a pagan and supernatural world.¹⁰ His later conversion to Catholicism comes after he tells his

⁹ Greene, *Collected Essays*, New York: Viking, 1983, 115.

¹⁰ Greene, *Collected Essays*. New York: Viking, 1983, 13.

future wife, Vivien, that he believes in “nothing supernatural.”¹¹ He chooses, however, to take instruction in her faith, and he converts to Catholicism. When he writes to Vivien, “One does want fearfully hard, something fine & hard & certain, however uncomfortable, to catch hold of in the general flux,” he reveals a desire to regain that childhood sense of good and evil.¹²

In *Graham Greene’s Catholic Imagination*, Mark Bosco presents sexuality as a process by which a few of Greene’s characters reach religious or spiritual meaning. He discusses, in particular, *The End of the Affair*, in which Sarah’s sexual involvement with Bendrix “unlock[s] a mystical, even erotic identification with God.”¹³ According to Bosco, “Greene proposes to place the doctrine of the Incarnation at the center of his realistic novel, thereby pushing the ramifications of the doctrine to extreme moments of sexual ecstasy and of intense suffering because of the loss of the beloved’s body. If God has become human flesh, the logic goes, then every finite body is a possible conduit of God’s grace.”¹⁴ Bosco suggests that Greene’s religious sensibility—one he argues as not post-Catholic, but as post-Second Vatican Council—ties in with the function of desire in his novels, and that desire is one of the ways that Greene explores religion.

This dissertation will argue that sexuality is the single most important process by which Greene’s characters attain religious, spiritual, and moral standards.

¹¹ Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume I*, New York: Penguin, 2004, 255.

¹² Sherry, *Life of Graham Greene: Volume I*, 256.

¹³ Mark Bosco, *Graham Greene’s Catholic Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 63-64.

¹⁴ Bosco, 61-62.

Furthermore, in his fiction, it is chief method of resisting the thinness and spiritual emptiness of the post-imperial world.

Greene demonstrates his preoccupation with sexual concerns in his first novel, *The Man Within*, in 1929. The hero, Andrews, has relationships with two women: the virtuous Elizabeth and the promiscuous Lucy. Andrews's guilt and self-loathing after he has sex with Lucy typify the view that sex is sin; however, even in this early novel, Greene's view is more complicated, as Elizabeth voices a desire for a sexual relationship with Andrews. He resists, arguing, "You are holy. I don't see how I can ever touch you without soiling you a little."¹⁵ Elizabeth insists that she is no saint and that she wants sexual love. She complicates the division between virgin and whore that seems at first to be the primary principle of the book's view on sexual relationships. Although this novel is troubled—stylistically purple, structurally weak—the Greene critic must consider it. It is the first example of Greene's intense interest in the questions of sin and sex. Andrews and the gangster Carlyon also have a close, conflicted male friendship that would become typical of Greene's novels.

Both *Orient Express* (1932) and *It's a Battlefield* (1934) use a variety of different narrative voices and are more modernist in style. They are also more sexually explicit than Greene's earlier novels. *It's a Battlefield* describes the erotic lives of Kay Rimmer, a promiscuous factory girl, and Mr. Surrogate, a womanizer who seduces young women at political gatherings. Kay is a sexually and financially emancipated woman, supporting herself with her own work. Greene describes her sexual appetite as solace or peace: "Her body was ready for enjoyment; the deep

¹⁵ *The Man Within*, 200-201.

peace of sensuality covered all the fears and perplexities of the day; she never felt more at home than in a bed or a man's arms."¹⁶ The tormented view of sex as sin is missing from these novels, which seem to be trying to embrace freedom and modernity; however, they depict casual sexuality as empty, especially in the case of Mr. Surrogate.

With *Brighton Rock* (1938), Greene reiterates the deep ethical and moral significance of erotic experience. Many readers consider the major novels of his "middle period" his most successful work—*Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), and *The End of the Affair* (1951). These novels are also sometimes called his "Catholic novels." Each of these plots centers on sexuality. In *The Heart of the Matter*, Scobie's moral descent begins with his adulterous affair with shipwreck survivor Helen Rolt; the whiskey priest in *The Power and the Glory* is compromised by the fact that he has fathered a child; the sexual relationship between Maurice Bendrix and Sarah Miles is the subject of Sarah's bargain with God in *The End of the Affair*. In every case, sex connects the other themes of the novel: religion, political engagement, commitment.

With *The Quiet American* (1955), Greene inaugurates a new and more secular phase in his work. Thomas Fowler, the narrator of *The Quiet American*, often downplays his own sexual potency—he is acutely aware of his advancing age, and his opium habit reduces desire—but his carnal relationship with his mistress, Phuong, is his primary passion. He writes to his ex-wife that to lose Phuong "would be, for me,

¹⁶ Greene, *It's a Battlefield*, 58.

the beginning of death.”¹⁷ His assertion, coupled with the emphasis on violent death in the political setting of the novel, invokes the battle between Eros and Thanatos. Erotic love becomes the animating force of the book, just as it is the source of Sarah Miles’s spiritual desire in *The End of the Affair*.

Greene’s novels of the 1960s—*A Burnt-Out Case* (1960), *The Comedians* (1966), and *Travels with My Aunt* (1969)—show the trajectory of Greene’s work toward playfulness or comedy. The tragic novel *A Burnt-Out Case* portrays a depressed architect, Query, who retires to a leproserie in the Congo. Query inspires a girlish crush in Marie Rycker. When she becomes pregnant, she claims that the child is Query’s. Marie argues that she thought of Query while making love with her husband, in order to tolerate his advances, and that she thinks of the child as Query’s. Mr. Rycker becomes convinced that Query and his wife have had an affair. Rycker shoots Query, who is then buried in the village, his desire to abandon his old life fulfilled. Although this novel is serious in its tone (possibly too serious for it to be a popular success), the farcical quality of Query’s death and the absurdity of Marie’s accusation foreshadow the direction of Greene’s writerly evolution toward comedy.

Travels with My Aunt has been judged one of Greene’s most entertaining novels. Aunt Augusta, widely accepted as a bawdy, titillating joy, is at the same time a tragic figure; she shows the renewing force as well as the destructive power of sexuality. The novel chronicles the relationship of Henry Pulling, retired bank manager, with his aunt Augusta. The two have not seen each other since Henry’s

¹⁷ *The Quiet American*, New York: Penguin Classics, 2004, 87.

baptism, and when Aunt Augusta turns up at her sister's funeral, she turns her nephew's life upside down. She immediately whisks him off on a series of journeys, tells him that the woman he always thought was his mother was really his stepmother, and scandalizes him by carrying on an affair with a much younger man. She is a wonderful speaker and storyteller, but her speeches are one-sided performances instead of dialogues. She refuses entry to the moral and sexual discussions that figure so largely in Greene's novels.

Monsignor Quixote (1982) and *The Captain and the Enemy* (1988) both marginalize sex. Father Quixote is a celibate priest, traveling with his friend, the Mayor; the focus of the book is the friendship between the two men. In *The Captain and the Enemy*, the love affair between the Captain and Liza seems not to be openly sexual. In each case, however, Greene has written in sexual relationships—minor ones—that serve as contrasts to the nonphysical bonds that control the novels. More significantly, in *Monsignor Quixote*, the characters themselves downplay the role of sexuality. The Mayor's sexual escapade at a brothel and their accidental visit to a pornographic film have little erotic appeal, and Father Quixote himself is untroubled by sexual desire. These novels may serve as a mature correction to Greene's obsessive earlier interest in sexuality by demonstrating a male friendship that does not revolve around a woman.

As an adjunct to Greene's novels, his autobiographies—*A Sort of Life* (1971) and *Ways of Escape* (1980)—provide discussions about sexuality as he experienced it. His letters are rich sources of related information as well. In particular, his letters to Vivien Greene and Catherine Walston give insight into Greene's erotic worldview.

Some of Greene's reviews and critical essays also bear on this discussion. Greene's most famous literary influences are Joseph Conrad, Henry James, and the adventure and melodrama writers that Greene read in his youth (such as H. Rider Haggard, Marjorie Bowen, and John Buchan); however, Greene grew up in the heyday of modernism, and he absorbed its skepticism and its questioning aesthetic. T. S. Eliot, one of Greene's favorite poets, provided a model for Greene. While they are very different writers, Greene's vivid physical description, disenchantment with the modern world, and drive to discover spiritual content in what Eliot termed a "wasteland" all owe a debt to Eliot. Eliot's poetry also reawakened an interest in the metaphysical poets for his contemporary readers; Greene was drawn to these poets, particularly John Donne (and of course John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, about whom Greene wrote the biography *Lord Rochester's Monkey*). Donne's emphasis on the role of the body in religious or metaphysical discovery was important to Greene.

In a review of Frederick Rolfe, Greene quotes a passage from T.S. Eliot's 1930 essay on Baudelaire: "Most people are only a very little alive; and to awaken them to the spiritual is a very great responsibility: it is only when they are so awakened that they are capable of real Good, but that at the same time they become first capable of Evil."¹⁸ Greene's works deploy this belief from the opposite direction, suggesting that only the elements of life that are sinful or dangerous can awaken a corresponding good.

Each of the chapters of this dissertation examines a different aspect of Greene's treatment of sexuality and sexual love. The first chapter, "Analysis, Speech,

¹⁸ Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume I*, 646; original essay in T.S. Eliot's *Collected Essays*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1950, 371-81.

Dream, Confession: The Language of Sex and Sin,” explores the way Greene’s characters talk about sex and the reasons they spend so much time discussing it. The main texts are *The Quiet American*, *Travels with My Aunt*, *Orient Express*, and *The Human Factor*. In this chapter, Greene’s own life experiences illuminate the ways his characters examine sex. Their dialogues—which take a number of forms, including religious confession and conversation between sexual rivals—establish, question, and re-establish the sexual norm. All of these characters, while challenging social mores and rules, crave definition of a sexual standard as the proof of sexuality’s moral importance. This chapter also discusses Greene’s restraint in describing sexual activity and the narrative gaps that imply erotic love.

The second chapter, “Troubled Fertility,” traces the conflicted significance of fertility and sterility in *The Quiet American*, *Doctor Fischer of Geneva*, *Travels with My Aunt*, and *The Captain and the Enemy*. Although Greene attempts to divorce sexuality from the question of fertility or reproduction, his characters consistently conclude that reproductivity is central to the experience of sex. Greene’s novels feature intense anxiety and repulsion over pregnancy, childbirth, and parenthood; at the same time, paradoxically, his characters view these processes as sacred.

Chapter Three, “The Sensuality of Pain: Suffering, Disfigurement, and Eroticism,” examines the role of pain, suffering, and mutilation in *Brighton Rock*, *The End of the Affair*, *Orient Express*, and *Doctor Fischer of Geneva*. Greene considers pain part of the spectrum of erotic sensation. This chapter explores the connection between this erotic view and Catholicism, as well as the allure of disfigurement in Greene’s novels.

The fourth chapter, “A Man May Look: Scopophilia, Risk, and Exposure,” discusses voyeurism, exhibitionism, and visual eroticism in the novels *The Man Within*, *The End of the Affair*, and *Travels with My Aunt* and the short stories “May We Borrow Your Husband?” and “The Blue Film.” The practice of watching, even spying on, other characters is formative in Greene’s novels; contrariwise, the temptation to take risks and court sexual exposure appears in some of his most erotic pieces. This chapter suggests that the practices of hiding, exposure, risk-taking, and voyeurism are all functions of Greene’s interest in the secret landscapes of sexuality.

The final chapter, “Male Companionship: A Different Desire,” turns from sexual relationships to discuss male friendship and its significance in erotic desire. While Greene’s male characters are almost exclusively heterosexual, most of the men in his books have deep relationships with other men. This chapter discusses the nature of those relationships in *The End of the Affair*, *The Quiet American*, *Our Man in Havana*, *The Heart of the Matter*, and *Monsignor Quixote*, suggesting that the ties between men are essential to the formation of sexual pairings; the model of mimetic desire, as advanced by Rene Girard, and that of the homosocial, as described by Eve Sedgwick, provide a useful vocabulary. In many cases, the relationships between male characters are the most enduring relationships, possibly because they are not subject to the vicissitudes of consummated sexuality or aimed at a particular goal. This chapter also discusses the mimetic attachment between Greene’s male characters and their fictional and cultural heroes; the role of James Bond as a model in *The Human Factor* and of the concept of *machismo* in *The Honorary Consul* serve similar purposes to the friendships between men.

Ultimately, Greene's evolving depictions of sexuality assume a central role in his work and become the most important way that his characters make meaning in a postwar, post-Eliot world. Rather than accept the view of modern life as a wasteland, Greene reinvests it with drama, danger, and existential importance through his exploration of sexuality. His interest in pain, scopophilia, adulterous or triangular relationships, and other forms of unusual sexuality simultaneously normalize these forms by suggesting that they are functional parts of erotic life, and present a radical view of what normative life really is. Rather than arguing that there is no such thing as perversion or aberration, Greene suggests that even ordinary erotic life—inasmuch as there is such a thing—places us in touch with our most existential fears, carries the possibility of creation and the prospect of our own replacement and death, and challenges our metaphysical senses of selfhood and religious belief. Greene's works form a dialectical conversation about sexuality.

In his biography of John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, Greene describes Rochester's poetry:

The spirit was always at war with the flesh; his unbelief was quite as religious as the Dean of St Paul's faith. He hated the thing he loved with something of the same dark concentration, the confusion of love and lust and death and hate.¹⁹

This description of a "dark concentration" could as easily be applied to Greene's own writings. His preoccupation with sin is as moral or holy as another person's obvious

¹⁹ Greene, *Lord Rochester's Monkey: being the Life of John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester*, New York: Viking (Studio), 1974, 10.

faith. This study holds that sexuality and desire provide a way into this central drama of Greene's fiction and therefore into a central drama of twentieth-century life.

Analysis, Speech, Dream, Confession: The Language of Sex and Sin

Tell everything, not only consummated acts, but sensual touchings, all impure gazes,
all obscene remarks...all consenting thoughts.

—Marquis de Sade, *120 Days of Sodom*

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault argues that the Western tendency to repress sexuality—that is, to declare it unspeakable, to forbid its practice and discussion—has a social value for the speaker who dares to discuss it:

If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom.²⁰

Graham Greene's passion for defying rules defined his political life: his interest in liberation theology, his support of any oppressed people or community, and his desire to understand and expose injustice all spring from his ambition to defy authority. His sexual life follows the same pattern: by speaking openly about sex, and confessing to his sexual practices—including adultery—Greene asserts his own identity as transgressor against traditional mores.

Foucault argues that religious confession has been replaced, in our society, with the analytic confession—that is, the psychiatric process:

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, New York: Vintage, 1990, 6.

Combining confession with examination, the personal history with the deployment of a set of decipherable signs and symptoms; the interrogation, the exacting questionnaire, and hypnosis, with the recollection of memories and free association: all were ways of reinscribing the procedure of confession in a field of scientifically acceptable observations.²¹

While the distinction between these two kinds of sexual discourse is essential, both religious confession and psychoanalytic confession play a significant role in Greene's treatment of sexuality, and the way he employs them is similar.

Catholicism, of course, shapes Greene's worldview, and it is tempting to consider it the source of Greene's interest in confession. Greene continued to practice the sacrament of reconciliation over most of his life, even when he no longer adhered closely to most of the teachings of the Church. It is likely that Greene's interest in psychoanalysis, which began when he was a teenager, made him more susceptible to the allure of the religious confession when he became interested in Catholicism.

While Greene and his characters may be driven to confess by guilt, it is not the priest's formula that provides them absolution, but the process of talking. The 1938 novel *Brighton Rock* follows the criminal and moral descent of a young mobster, Pinkie, and his marriage to an innocent girl from a tea-shop, Rose. At the end of the novel, Rose confesses her sins, and then tells the priest that she is not seeking absolution but damnation. Greene writes, "She hadn't come to confess, she had come to think."²² She is in a state of high excitement when she arrives at the

²¹Foucault, 65.

²² *Brighton Rock*, Collected Edition. London: William Heinemann and the Bodley Head, 1970, 307.

confessional; she begins her confession by saying, “I wish I’d killed myself. I ought to ‘ave killed myself...I’m not asking for absolution. I don’t want absolution. I want to be like him—damned.”²³ She believes her sexual relationship with Pinkie to have been a mortal sin, because they were not married in a church; by refusing to seek absolution, she sets the terms of their conversation and pushes away the traditional goal of the confession.

The priest insists, in perhaps one of the most famous lines in all of Greene’s fiction, that “You can’t conceive, my child, nor can I or anyone the...appalling... strangeness of the mercy of God.”²⁴ The priest tells her that it is impossible to know whether Pinkie might have found salvation, and argues, “If he loved you, surely...that shows there was some good...”²⁵ She has to think about this—“she brooded on the idea in the little dark box.” Eventually, when the priest tells her that her task is to raise her child to be a saint, she arrives at a new sense of purpose and “a sudden feeling of immense gratitude.” This relief is not the result of any absolution, for the priest tells her he cannot give her that. It is, rather, the product of her own meditation on her own sins and Pinkie’s, on their sexual relationship and her erotic and moral capitulation to him, and on the prospect of carrying his baby.

Greene undermines Rose’s redemption by ending the novel with Rose, walking toward the room that she had shared with Pinkie, preparing to listen to the phonograph record he made for her, which carries his voice speaking a message of hate: “God damn you, you little bitch, why can’t you go back home forever and let

²³ *Brighton Rock*, 207.

²⁴ *Brighton Rock*, 308.

²⁵ *Brighton Rock*, 309.

me be?”²⁶ And yet there is a perverted truth in Pinkie’s assertion that he “put something on it—loving.”²⁷ He cannot shake her off or get rid of her; he’s “got her like you got God in the Eucharist—in the guts.”²⁸ His own speech reveals more than he realizes: anger is itself a kind of testimony to the immutability of their union. The ambiguous, ironic ending to the novel suggests that Rose will, despite Pinkie’s message, go on. She thinks that she can go back to Snow’s, the café where she worked as a waitress, “just as if the Boy had never existed at all. He had existed and always would exist.”²⁹ Her life is permanently changed by the brief interlude with Pinkie, and she has already come to terms with the fact that the rest of the world would not see the change.

The discourse of confession allows the penitent and confessor to modify, define, and reshape the moral code; to challenge a normative view of sexuality; and to share and thereby re-experience one’s past. Rose, who can only codify her own feelings into language in the confessional, demonstrates the role of this discourse. She refuses to repent of the behavior that the church would consider sinful, thereby evading the traditional purpose of the religious confession. Her gratitude for the priest’s guidance, and for the opportunity, as she says, to “think,” demonstrates the immense value that Greene places on that “dark little box” where the penitent can always find some kind of moral engagement and the opportunity for self-examination that is difficult or impossible elsewhere.

²⁶ *Brighton Rock*, 220.

²⁷ *Brighton Rock*, 220.

²⁸ *Brighton Rock*, 220.

²⁹ *Brighton Rock*, 309.

Religious or not, confession in Greene's own life almost always involved sexual behavior; in particular, his adulterous affair with Catherine Walston led to conflict between Greene's need to confess and his unwillingness to change. This emphasis probably had its roots in his childhood. Greene absorbed very early the lesson that sex was an offense. His father, Charles Greene, was a headmaster, and he was adamant that no sexual activity should take place in a boys' school. He frequently hectored his pupils on the subject. In an interview, Zoe Richmond assessed Greene's father's position on sexuality thus: "The fact that his father thought Graham was involved in a homosexual ring when in fact he was being bullied—why, his father was barmy."³⁰ This extreme view of sexuality was, perhaps, bound to produce a rebellious, secretive reaction in Greene, particularly considering his temperamental dislike of authority. When Greene was sixteen, he discovered psychoanalysis, which provided the framework for his defiance of his father's principles about the correct, repressed nature of sexuality.

Greene visited an analyst, Kenneth Richmond, for treatment. Greene was unhappy at school, depressed, even suicidal. Richmond—who was, according to Norman Sherry, "without training or qualifications"³¹—was an avid spiritualist and a Jungian practitioner. Greene went to stay at his home, with Richmond and his wife Zoe. Some of the therapeutic value of Greene's stay was simple: it removed him from school, where he was being bullied mercilessly. In addition, the environment of the Richmonds' home was a rich one, providing plenty of intellectual conversation and

³⁰ Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene, Volume I: 1904-1939*, New York: Penguin, 1989, 103.

³¹ Norman Sherry, *Volume I*, 93.

openness. Sherry enumerates the ways in which the Richmond ménage was both different and beneficial to Greene:

[Richmond] was not on the side of respectability and social correctness....While the Greene household was highly literate there were limitations on what could be discussed. In the Richmond household there were no such limitations and for sound psychological reasons. Inhibition only succeeds, Richmond felt, in driving things underground. How refreshing it must have been for Graham to discover an adult who held the view that faults of character become magnified and ingrained by perpetual ‘don’ts.’ Also, Richmond was utterly opposed to boarding schools, seeing them as artificial orphanages. Finally, he did not equate sex with sin.³²

To be permitted and even encouraged to discuss all of his hidden thoughts and repressed ideas fostered Greene’s belief in the power of speech and analysis. He became quite invested in his own treatment. Describing his own thoughts, urges, and dreams—particularly those focused on what Foucault terms “wayward and unproductive sexualities,” those that were the most taboo for Greene—did more than liberate him from guilt (the expressed goal of much therapy, as well as of religious confession). It also introduced him to the natural pleasure of discussing eroticism.

Sherry asserts that “he taught Graham to sift his own motives fearlessly, encouraging him to make use of intuition and intellect. In this way he reduced his sense of guilt.”³³ This intellectual activity was part of the treatment that the Richmonds provided. In particular, the practice of “sifting his own motives” fostered

³² Norman Sherry, *Volume I*, 98.

³³ Norman Sherry, *Volume I*, 99.

what Foucault terms “the nearly infinite task of telling”: “...telling oneself and another, as often as possible, everything that might concern the interplay of innumerable pleasures, sensations, and thoughts which, through the body and the soul, had some affinity with sex.”³⁴ This “game,” as Foucault terms it, is sport in itself. Whether it is a precursor to sex or not, it has an erotic component. It is also an effective antidote to boredom, Greene’s greatest affliction. Examining himself (and others—he returned home from the Richmonds’ bursting to analyze the dreams his family shared at the breakfast table) provided endless investigative interest. Foucault describes this process as a circle of “power and pleasure”:

The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it. The power that lets itself be invaded by the pleasure it is pursuing; and opposite it, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting. Capture and seduction, confrontation and mutual reinforcement....These attractions, these evasions, these circular incitements have traced around bodies and sexes, not boundaries not to be crossed, but *perpetual spirals of power and pleasure.*³⁵

It is not coincidence that the language of Foucault’s assertion compares this process against spying, evasion, and pursuit. Greene’s interest in all of these phenomena draws on the same basic investigative and interrogative urge: the urge to know, to

³⁴ Foucault, 20.

³⁵ Foucault, 45.

explain, and on the other hand the deep attraction to any process that defies explanation.

One of the effects of psychoanalysis, for Greene, was the development of his interest in dreams. Sherry reports that, as a Jungian,

Richmond placed importance on dreams. He believed, like Jung, that the motivation always derives from the unconscious and that dreams are part of the unconscious making itself manifest in sleep and therefore having meaning, reflecting a hurt, rejection or mental disturbance. But the dream has to be decoded. There are recognisable elements, but the key to understanding is there only if the signs can be read correctly.³⁶

Greene and his cousin Ave, who was also sent to Richmond for therapy, sometimes made light of the dream analysis sessions, but eventually Greene came to take them very seriously indeed. Over the course of his life, he kept a “dream diary” in which he recorded them. Titled *The Night Life of a Sexagenarian*, it was never completed, though a posthumous edition was published in 1992. Norman Sherry says, “If Greene had overseen the publication of the selection of dreams I suspect it would have had the more sexually provocative title above, rather than the tame one eventually chosen. He began his first dream diary on 6 October 1964, and worked unceasingly on it for twenty-six years, training himself to wake up and record his dreams. Sadly, the present published version is heavily abridged, and has the tedious title of *A World of My Own*. The soul of it has been diluted by heavy cutting, the genius of Greene taken

³⁶ Norman Sherry, *Volume I*, 95.

away.”³⁷ The dreams that were cut or changed for *A World of My Own*, are, unsurprisingly, the more erotic ones.

Sherry holds that the therapy Greene received from Richmond was “a form of confession through dreams...releasing him from his inhibitions and habits of suppression.”³⁸ It is certainly true that Greene revealed himself freely to Richmond. Greene developed a sexual interest in Zoe Richmond, his analyst’s wife (which Greene credits to normal transference). Greene relates that one day during their daily session:

I found the only dream I had to communicate was an erotic one of Zoe Richmond. For the first time I dreaded the hour of eleven. I could, of course, say that I remembered nothing, and Richmond would tell me to invent, and I could trot out the habitual pig, but I was caught sufficiently by the passion for analysis to be repelled at the thought of cheating. To cheat was to behave like a detective who deliberately destroys a clue to murder. I steeled myself and left the Gardens and went in.

‘And now,’ Richmond said, after a little talk on general theory, ‘we’ll get down to last night’s dream.’

I cleared my dry throat. ‘I can only remember one.’

‘Let’s have it.’

‘I was in bed,’ I said.

‘Where?’

³⁷ Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene: Vol. III*, New York: Penguin, 2004, 438.

³⁸ Norman Sherry, *Volume I*, 99.

‘Here.’

He made a note on his pad. I took a breath and plunged.

‘There was a knock on the door and Zoe came in. She was naked. She leant over me. One of her breasts nearly touched my mouth. I woke up.’

‘What’s your association to breasts?’ Richmond asked, setting his stopwatch.’

‘Tube train,’ I said after a long pause.

‘Five seconds,’ Richmond said.³⁹

Greene’s self-described “passion for analysis” makes him unable to cheat or lie. His diction, referring to destroying a clue, demonstrates his engagement with this investigative process. Later, when Greene became a Catholic, this passion made him continue to go to reconciliation (that is, confession). Part of the process of Reconciliation is self-examination: the penitent must consider his own sins before going to the confessional. The moral imperative to confess is accompanied by the opportunity to discuss the sins that one confesses: it offers a venue for a similar kind of “sifting” as psychoanalysis. In addition, Greene’s term, “plunged,” emphasizes the active sexuality of this conversation—he is not merely describing a sexual experience, he is recreating it, experiencing it anew as he lets another person hear about it.

This moment, in which one describes a sexual experience, is a powerful one, and Greene revisits such descriptions in his characters’ speech throughout his career. As Foucault develops it, these speeches carry their own defiant pleasure:

³⁹ Greene, *A Sort of Life*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971, 103-4.

...we are conscious of defying established power, our tone of voice shows that we know we are being subversive, and we ardently conjure away the present and appeal to the future, whose day will be hastened by the contribution we believe we are making. Something that smacks of revolt, of promised freedom, of the coming age of a different law, slips easily into this discourse on sexual oppression. Some of the ancient functions of prophecy are reactivated therein. Tomorrow sex will be good again.⁴⁰

In the process of telling, the speaker violates the stated law of silence about sex at the same time as he obeys the less encoded—but equally binding—law of complete sharing: that is, the rule of analysis. Greene’s excitement in this passage comes from the knowledge that he is sharing a forbidden secret; as he speaks, he experiences not only the memory of the erotic dream, but the fracture of a taboo (in this case, his attraction to a married woman).

The “promised freedom” that Foucault discusses is mythic, but Greene—living through the twentieth century—experienced the erasure of one sexual taboo after another. By the time that Greene embarked on an affair with Catherine Walston, even adultery was often acceptable, particularly in Greene’s liberal and artistic circle. The pleasure of infraction disappeared; Greene was forced to pursue it by increasingly flagrant meetings with Catherine. Eventually, however, Greene turned back to the institution that would always forbid sex, and always listen to what he had to say about it: the Catholic Church.

⁴⁰ Foucault, 6-7.

Greene first came to the Church, as chapter three describes, as an adult. Foucault says of psychoanalytic procedure, “This scheme for transforming sex into discourse had been devised long before in an ascetic and monastic setting.”⁴¹ In Greene’s case, the operation worked in reverse: the powerful experience of analysis prepared him for his conversion to Catholicism and participation in the sacrament of Reconciliation (that is, confession). Sherry speculates that Richmond’s Jungian belief in “‘the God within you’ set him on the path to his eventual conversion to Catholicism.”⁴²

Soon after he left Richmond’s treatment, he met Vivien, and in 1926, he converted. In a letter before his first general confession, he wrote, “‘I’m awfully afraid that I may have the ‘mouldy’ one to confess to. It’s a drawback if one can’t feel an instinctive respect for the other man.’”⁴³ This remark, which seems to reflect Greene’s nervousness about the sacrament, also suggests his future practice of seeking out particular confessors. What he sought in a confession was not just the formula of contrition and absolution; nor was he open to dogmatic, authoritarian rulings on his sinful behavior. The practice of the Sacrament is in four parts: sorrow for the sins committed; a resolution or firm purpose of amendment; a sincere confession; and satisfaction or penance. Where Greene found the most difficulty—and where his characters, similarly, face conflict—is in the “purpose of amendment.” He disagreed with the priest’s argument about what that purpose must entail, and felt that the consistent striving for moral improvement was enough.

⁴¹ Foucault, 20.

⁴² Sherry, *Volume I*, 107.

⁴³ Sherry, *Volume I*, 262.

During Greene's affair with Walston, he went to confession and Mass frequently. In a letter to Walston dated 13 April 1950, Greene wrote:

What a trying time to go to Confession. At Farm Street nobody, so I went unwillingly from previous experience to the Cathedral. After 3/4 hour I got a Fr. Pilkington and gave him the whole works to be on the safe side. You've never heard anything so fantastic. I had to start marital relations with my wife again and it was a sin to keep the separation going. Then about 'adultery'—I was agreeable to say I'll try, try, try till the cows come home. But he wouldn't allow that. I must promise from this moment to give up seeing you etc. Finally I said, 'I'm sorry, Father, I'm afraid I must find another confessor' and walked out. I even had to teach him (perhaps that is why I was short) the elementary fact of life, that you couldn't have a woman without desire.⁴⁴

Greene's goal—aside from finding a priest who will hear his confession despite his unwillingness to end his affair with Catherine—is to have a discussion about his own sins. Sex was rapidly becoming an acceptable topic for conversation, just another part of life. Forcing sex back into its position as sin, by framing the conversation about his affair in Catholic moral terms, reinvests sexuality with danger and life, by contrast with the twentieth century's less codified view of sexual morality.

Greene does not accept the idea that his behavior is wrong; his quotation marks around "adultery" demonstrate that. Catherine, by contrast, felt that their relationship had to end. Sherry writes, "As a devout Catholic, Catherine knew that she had sinned and felt that she could not just go to confession and soon afterwards repeat

⁴⁴ Sherry, *Volume I*, 278.

the sin. They both knew what to do, and although they made efforts to end the affair, they didn't succeed. With Greene at his most persistent and obsessive, she knew the solution was not easy to come by."⁴⁵ One of the ramifications of Catherine's uncertainty was a steady stream of letters from Greene to Catherine, detailing all of the reasons that Greene didn't believe their relationship was sinful. He refers Catherine to the wisdom of their mutual friend, the Dominican priest Thomas Gilby:

Again and again he put forward the view that the only way they could continue to stay together for life 'is to go back and back to Confession and Communion after every time or period, but I *don't* believe—even Thomas doesn't believe in the possibility...of suddenly switching a relation into the unphysical level.'⁴⁶

This view of confession—a dialectical part of the moral process, not a static rite but a conversation—appears in Greene's fiction as well. Religious confessions in Greene's fiction, which appear in serious and farcical forms, demonstrate that the confession has a number of roles: it forces the confessing penitent to articulate the sin; it allows the confessor to provide a moral guideline, which can then become the occasion of a discussion about what is sinful and what is not (or what is normal and what is not); and it provides the opportunity to discuss those things which are forbidden. The confession of sexual sin, as Greene renders it, is not a rote performance, but a dynamic ritual that constantly redefines sexuality as acceptable or not acceptable, sanctioned or sinful.

⁴⁵ Sherry, *Volume I*, 302.

⁴⁶ Sherry, *Volume II*, 380.

In Greene's writings, religious confessions share a number of important characteristics: they are inescapable, the duty that a priest cannot refuse; they often appear in incongruous—or even farcical—situations, or under terms that defy the standard form of religious ritual (as when Rose begins hers by refusing absolution); and they demonstrate Greene's interest in the process of judging and describing sexuality. Instances of secular confession or sexual speech share these features. Beyond this role, however, speech can open up a dialogue about sexuality that seeks to define and redefine the norm.

In *The Quiet American*, for example, both sexual talk and confession takes a secular and companionable form: conversation between equals, between men. Alden Pyle, the young American, and Thomas Fowler, the aging British reporter, converse openly about the role of sexuality and about their own experiences. While Fowler admits to many sexual experiences, and confesses that most of them have been empty, Pyle, by contrast, acknowledges his sexual inexperience. For both men, sharing of their erotic histories—that same “personal history” that Foucault describes as part of psychoanalysis—takes the place of a traditional confession. Fowler, indeed, refuses any involvement with a religious confession: he says to a priest, “Kneeling in one of your boxes. Exposing myself to another man. You must excuse me, Father, but to me it seems morbid—unmanly even.”⁴⁷

Even in the context of man-to-man conversation, rather than a strictly-defined confession, Fowler finds these conversations awkward or peculiar. “All my conversations with Pyle seemed to take grotesque directions,” he muses. “Was it

⁴⁷ Greene, *The Quiet American*, New York: Penguin Classics, 2004, 41.

because of his sincerity that they so ran off the customary rails? His conversation never took the corners.”⁴⁸ Despite this discomfort, or perhaps because of it, Fowler is drawn into these conversations, engaging in both specific descriptions—of his sexual past, of his life with his mistress Phuong—and general observations about sexual life. Their discourse attempts to reinscribe normative sexuality: they discuss Kinsey, draw in and evaluate the sexual behavior of other men, and question the validity and functionality of their own erotic histories. Fowler’s inability to escape these conversations is reminiscent of the priest’s obligation to hear a confession at any time.

Because Pyle is in love with Fowler’s mistress, the two men have a powerful bond of shared sexual taste. Pyle says wistfully, “‘You have such an awful lot of experience, Thomas,’”⁴⁹ and then confesses, “‘I’ve never had a girl,’ he said, ‘not properly. Not what you’d call a real experience....I’ve never told anybody else.’”⁵⁰ This admission, surely a curious thing to share with the lover of one’s beloved, opens up a chain of self-revelations by both men. Pyle, who couches his feelings about Phuong in metaphors—such as “she reminds me of a flower”—instead of explicitly admitting to sexual attraction, frames this confession ambiguously. What is “properly”? What constitutes a “real experience”?

Pyle’s notion of a “proper” sexual experience resonates with his plans for their marriage later in the novel. He hopes to get special leave to take Phuong to Boston for their wedding, and he tells Fowler, “‘Then we could get married at home—

⁴⁸ *The Quiet American*, 95-96.

⁴⁹ *The Quiet American*, 94-95.

⁵⁰ *The Quiet American*, 94-95.

properly.’⁵¹ When Fowler asks him whether it is more proper to marry at home, he replies,

‘Well, I thought—it’s difficult to say these things to you, you are so darned cynical, Thomas, but it’s a mark of respect. My father and mother would be there—she’d kind of enter the family. It’s important in view of the past.’⁵²

Pyle’s assumption that a proper wedding invokes familial and cultural history, that it needs to happen in the presence of his parents and his home, and that Phuong would officially become a part of his family, a family so foreign to her that she cannot possibly envision it, demonstrates that he understands marriage as a set of cultural markers that will mark Phuong, clearly and irrevocably, as his own. Indeed, such a marriage would force Phuong to assume his identity as a substitute for her own, rather than in addition to her own: she would be left behind in Boston when Pyle returned to Vietnam. This rigid and codified view of what makes a marriage proper suggests that Pyle may have an equally specific—and unrealistic—idea of what a proper sexual experience would be.

Just as he worries about whether his sexual experiences are correct and whether they “count,” Pyle worries about whether he is normal. After he admits to sexual inexperience, he asks:

‘You don’t think there’s anything wrong with me, do you, Thomas?’

‘No, Pyle.’

‘It doesn’t mean I don’t *need* it, Thomas, like everybody else. I’m not—odd.’⁵³

⁵¹ *The Quiet American*, 97.

⁵² *The Quiet American*, 93-94.

Pyle's concern about his own normalcy—framed in terms that almost, but not quite, invoke “queerness”—emphasizes the role of private conversation (and indeed of a sort of confession) in setting and defining the standard of acceptable sexual behavior and feeling. Fowler, who reassures Pyle that a lack of experience is “nothing to be ashamed of,” admits to his own sexual history—when Pyle asks whether he has “had a lot of women,” he responds:

'I don't know what a lot means. Not more than four women have had any importance to me—or me to them. The other forty-odd—one wonders why one does it. A notion of hygiene, of one's social obligations, both mistaken.'

54

This description necessarily calls to mind Greene himself, whose many sexual partners included only four of any lasting significance to him. The peculiar word “hygiene” invokes some of the same kinds of sexual discourse as the reference to the Kinsey report: a view of sexuality as just another physiological process. Conversation establishes a social norm for sexual behavior, a set of criteria that Fowler seems to dismiss as unimportant, but Pyle longs to articulate.

Greene's characters find these conversations irresistible. Fowler, because of his larger pool of erotic memories, can dismiss the importance of his own sexual experiences, but for Pyle, sexuality is still a largely untasted quantity, endlessly fascinating. He asks Fowler,

"If somebody asked you what your deepest sexual experience had been, what would you say?"

⁵³ *The Quiet American*, 94-95.

⁵⁴ *The Quiet American*, 94-95.

I knew the answer to that. 'Lying in bed early one morning and watching a woman in a red dressing-gown brush her hair.'

'Joe said it was being in bed with a Chink and a negress at the same time.'

'I'd have thought that one up too when I was twenty.'"⁵⁵

Fowler justifies the differences between his sexual conduct and Pyle's on the basis of age, making a judgment about the normalcy of Pyle's sexuality. Because he is the more experienced man, he becomes, in essence, the confessor: the one who makes a final ruling on what is normal or acceptable and what is not.

Foucault describes the confession as "a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile."⁵⁶ In this instance, it is Fowler who serves as the authority. At the time of this conversation, Phuong is still Fowler's mistress, and in part it is this fact that gives him power over Pyle: he is the possessor of the desired object, the woman they both want.

In the same scene, Pyle throws the admission about "forty-odd women" back at Fowler, who responds, "I'm sure it's below the Kinsey average."⁵⁷ Pyle also invokes Kinsey, when he says of his own desire to be faithful to one woman, "It's not in the Kinsey report."⁵⁸ The Kinsey Report represents all that has been quantified about sexual life. It is science; it is statistics; it is hard data. Both references to the

⁵⁵ *The Quiet American*, 94-95.

⁵⁶ Foucault, 62.

⁵⁷ *The Quiet American*, 95-96.

⁵⁸ *The Quiet American*, 93-94.

Kinsey report are dismissive—indeed, Fowler immediately rejects Pyle’s fears about that he might be abnormal—and yet they both suggest it as a standard of what is normative. The inclusion of the report in their conversation reveals the simultaneous desire to produce a hard science of sex and the relief at the realization that such a science is not possible. Even Fowler’s attempt to quantify his own sexual experience by counting his partners (which he is unable to do accurately) fails: only four have been important. This assertion, which relies on a *qualitative* analysis, escapes the realm of scientific or rational judgment.

These conversations in *The Quiet American* are a hybrid: they are both confession and discussion. Although Pyle seems to confess his sexual inexperience and sense of inadequacy, particularly in admitting that he has never told anyone else these things, the conversation becomes a more general exchange. It is an attempt to describe sexuality. Writing and talking about sex are difficult tasks. Sexuality is indefinable; any definition one produces will necessarily exclude something or fail in some way, for eroticism is individual. The very term “sex” has a plethora of meanings and contexts. Germaine Greer notes in *Sex and Destiny*,

"Everybody imagines that he understands what is meant by the word 'sex,' when in fact he simply responds to it with a feeling of recognition. Sex is actually a magical, suggestive and utterly indefinable idea. It includes gender, eroticism, genitality, mystery, prurience, fertility, virility, titillation,

neurology, psychopathology, hygiene, pornography and sin, all hovering about actual experiences of the most intractable subjectivity.”⁵⁹

For Greene’s characters, that very subjectivity is the great appeal of sexuality—rather than attempting to define it, they *describe* it. Experiences, maxims, opinion: all have their place in sexual discourse. Even when the conversation has no element of confession, in the sense that the listener provides absolution or diagnosis, the discussion of sex is endlessly engaging. One wants to compare one’s own experience against others, to make judgments about what is right or what is valuable. In its own way, conversation about sex is an independent erotic act. The speakers, in a subversion of the confessional form, recreate the questions of acceptable behavior—as with Pyle’s “You don’t there’s anything wrong with me, do you?”—in a situation without clear rules.

Pyle and Fowler, like most of Greene’s characters, engage in conversation about sex as a kind of dance, a mutual incitement to further confidences. Foucault’s description of sexual discourse as a rebellion or a revolt—“showing off, scandalizing, or resisting”—suggests that the sexual declaration is one-sided, a speaker attempting to shock the world. Greene usually depicts sexual conversation also as an invitation: as one character opens the subject of sexuality or erotic desire, he beckons the listener to join in the ever-fascinating process of analysis or evaluation. Aunt Augusta, however, in *Travels with My Aunt*, employs sexual talk in a one-sided attempt to maintain her own conversational (and moral) power.

⁵⁹ Germaine Greer, *Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility*, HarperCollins, 1984, 236.

She employs similarly sexual talk in casual conversation. Henry, the narrator, is prim. He does not discuss sex. Indeed, when Augusta says that his mother was a virgin, Henry responds, “I don't quite see...La Pucelle means—well, to put it bluntly, I am here, Aunt Augusta.”⁶⁰ His “blunt” rejoinder must be compared against Augusta’s bawdy conversation. When she discusses her ex-lover, Wordsworth, she says to Henry, “I can support his absence, though I may regret him for a while tonight. His knackers were superb.”⁶¹

Henry, who is shocked by her language (“knackers” is British slang for “testicles”), and also by the fact that she has a much younger lover, is convention itself: “The wind took my hat and tossed it against a lamppost. I was too surprised by her vulgarity to catch it, and my aunt laughed like a young woman.”⁶² The obvious pleasure she takes in shocking staid Henry supports Foucault’s theory of repression—the pleasure is in violating the rule. Without the rule, there is no pleasure. Her speech has a more important social function, however: it establishes, between Augusta and the near-stranger Henry, the fact of her sexuality.

It is important for Augusta to make her own sexual behavior obvious to Henry for two reasons: she is in her mid-seventies (certainly, Henry considers her past the age of sexual activity); and she made a living as a prostitute in her younger years. Her bold sexual speech and her insistent emphasis on sexual pleasure are defenses against the judgments that might be made against her behavior. In this instance, Augusta’s frequent, strident sexual talk is not an invitation to discuss it. Rather, she renders her

⁶⁰ Greene, *Travels with My Aunt*, Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition, 2004, 6.

⁶¹ *Travels with My Aunt*, 31.

⁶² *Travels with My Aunt*, 31.

own sexual history in a fashion that stifles conversation, virtually daring the hearer to question her promiscuity. When Augusta is forced by her conversational partner to question her own past behavior, or that of her past lovers, she turns the question back as an accusation, saying to Henry, ““But you, I suppose, never cheated in all your little provincial banker’s life because there’s not anything you wanted enough, not even money, not even a woman.””⁶³ This, along with her hope, early in the book, that Henry has “a little bit of the hound in you, too,”⁶⁴ is a direct contrast with the open-ended sexual conversation that many of Greene’s characters seek. By defining the terms herself, and doing so defiantly or angrily, Augusta prevents the more dialogical discussion that might call her own behavior into question.

While most of the criticism of this novel agrees that aunt Augusta is a delight, an unfettered, uninhibited heroine of lusty appetites—and the story is often described as a delayed coming-of-age tale, with Henry awakening to the sexual and emotional richness of the world around him—Augusta herself remains essentially insecure. She dedicates herself completely to the support of the current man in her life, even to the exclusion of caring about any other. Wordsworth, her former lover, is stabbed to death, and Henry tries to tell her the news:

I took a few steps further into the room as they returned towards me, calling to her a second time, ‘Mother, Wordsworth’s dead.’ She only looked over her partner’s shoulder and said, ‘Yes, dear, all in good time, but can’t you see that now I am dancing with Mr. Visconti?’⁶⁵

⁶³ *Travels with My Aunt*. 104.

⁶⁴ *Travels with My Aunt*, 7.

⁶⁵ *Travels with My Aunt*, 253.

Henry calls this exhibition “the deep incurable egotism of passion”; however, Augusta’s drastic self-abandonment in her relationship with Mr. Visconti owes more to desperation than to passion.⁶⁶

Even her attempt to build a maternal relationship with her middle-aged son is marked by her deep need to be accepted—a need that drives her to use humor and brashness to evade the moral judgments that others might make. Augusta prefers the telling of a story to a conversation. Henry’s description of her speaking style demonstrates her mode:

I wish I could reproduce more clearly the tones of her voice. She enjoyed talking, she enjoyed telling a story. She formed her sentences carefully like a slow writer who foresees ahead of him the next sentence and guides his pen towards it. Not for her the broken phrase, the lapse of continuity. There was something classically precise, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say old-world, in her diction. The bizarre phrase, and occasionally, it must be agreed, a shocking one, gleamed all the more brightly from the old setting.⁶⁷

Augusta’s well-formed sentences do more than avoid broken phrases. They also evade questioning, cut off lines of possible conversation, and resist all of the qualities of discussion that, in Greene’s other novels, lead to moral and psychological judgments. She relies on her own wit and eloquence to forestall questions from others. The apparent candor of her storytelling serves as an elaborate smokescreen: she tells the story of her past, even those pieces of it that many of her acquaintances

⁶⁶ *Travels with My Aunt*, 253.

⁶⁷ *Travels with My Aunt*, 51.

might consider worthy of confession, in order to escape the prospect of any real confession that might ask her to consider the import of her past behavior.

The one traditional confession in *Travels with My Aunt* is a farce: the lovable scoundrel Mr. Visconti—aunt Augusta's former lover—disguises himself as a monsignor. As aunt Augusta retells the story, he is pushed into hearing a woman's confession:

He had wanted the whole thing finished as quickly as possible, but...he couldn't help becoming a little interested now she had got started and wanting to know a bit more. After all he was a novice—though not in the ecclesiastical sense.

'How many times, my child?' That was a phrase he remembered very well from his adolescence.

'How can you ask that, Father? I've been at it all the time ever since the occupation. After all they were our allies, Father.'

'Yes, yes, my child.' I can just see him enjoying the chance he had of learning a thing or two, even though his life was in danger. Mr Visconti was a very lecherous man. He said, 'Always the same things, my child?'

She regarded him with astonishment. 'Of course not, Father. Who on earth do you think I am?'

He looked at her kneeling in front of him and I am sure he longed to pinch her. Mr Visconti was always a great pincher. 'Anything unnatural, my child?'

'What do you mean unnatural, Father?'

Mr Visconti explained.

‘Surely that’s not unnatural, Father?’

Then they had quite a discussion about what was natural and what wasn’t, with Mr Visconti almost forgetting his danger in the excitement, until someone knocked on the door and Mr Visconti, vaguely sketching a cross in a lop-sided way, muttered what sounded through the noise of the air-conditioner like an absolution.’’⁶⁸

Visconti’s pleasure (or “excitement,” to use Greene’s sexually charged word) is so intense that he forgets his own mortal danger. Although Augusta says that she is sure Visconti wished to pinch the young penitent, there is no physical aim in this conversation. Rather, the pleasure comes from the permission to discuss the forbidden, the voyeuristic excitement of hearing about the girl’s sexual escapades, the secret joy of disguise.

The characters in this exchange personify two sides of the confessional relationship in Greene’s *oeuvre*: Visconti, as the sham priest, is expected to make a judgment on the penitent, but is unable to do so because he does not believe in sexual sin. The fact that Visconti does not make a moral judgment about her actions also maintains the comic tone of the novel, for if he believed in sexual sin, Visconti’s imposture would be morally insupportable (as he would deprive her of absolution). At least from Visconti’s perspective, she has done nothing that requires absolution and therefore he can provide the benefits of Confession as well as a real priest. The girl, who comes to Visconti to be absolved, receives instead the sort of confession that is most similar to psychoanalytic therapy: a conversational, intellectual exchange that

⁶⁸ *Travels with My Aunt*, 113.

defines anew what sin actually is. While this type of conversation is similar to what occurs in Greene's other novels, in *Travels with My Aunt* the confession lacks any kind of moral judgment. Mr. Visconti, who is merely staying in character and enjoying himself, is a false arbiter. The novel refuses, both through Augusta and through Visconti, to pass any kind of judgment or demonstrate the attempt to develop that judgment.

Mr. Visconti's conversation exemplifies another characteristic of Greene's erotic writing: restraint and narrative gaps. Although Greene's characters talk about sexuality often, and at great length, he seldom provides explicit detail. His narrative restraint preserves the essential mystery of sexuality, while suggesting that the physical details are not very important. In Mr. Visconti's confession scene, Greene puts all of the physical details into the short sentence "Mr. Visconti explained." This reticence is comic; it also suggests that the details of their conversation are less important than the process of talking about sexual standards.

The spiritual importance of desire is one of the reasons that sexuality evades description. Hope Hodgkin Howell argues that "The most famous, the most characteristic, and arguably the most successful elements in [Greene's] fiction stem from his negating approach to language and the world."⁶⁹ What he does not say, she argues, is more important than what he says. Howell lists the elements of Greene's "*rhetorica negativa*": "paradox, aphasia, inconclusiveness, irony, and his trademark world-denying seediness."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Hope Hodgkin Howell, "The Apophatic Heart: Graham Greene's Negative Rhetoric." *Renascence*, 59:1, Fall 2006, pp. 53-75, 53.

⁷⁰ Howell, 53-54.

Aphasia is the loss of speech or words—a psychological term, it refers to the involuntary inability to speak or to find the correct, accurate word. Greene’s characters (and indeed the narrative) exemplify this absence when they talk about sexuality. Howell argues that “Greene’s apophaticism, and all true religious *viae negativae*, part company with Freud, Jakobson, and — I believe — Derrida, in regarding aphasic conditions not as dysfunctional but as appropriate to the situation of a human being confronted with the Divine.”⁷¹ Greene’s evasive, often metaphorical descriptions of sexual intercourse, and the moments when the narrative skips over description altogether, exhibit this aphasia.

Our Man in Havana talks about sexuality even more obliquely than most of Greene’s novels. The hero of this novel, Jim Wormold, sells vacuum cleaners in Havana. He is a single father to a teenage girl, Milly. Her beauty creates problems for Wormold. A local police officer, Captain Segura, pursues her throughout the novel, though Milly is only sixteen. Segura’s sexual desire remains unspoken, even when he tells Wormold that Milly is the ideal age to have children. This reticence, however, does not suggest delicacy. Rather, Segura’s designs on Milly are so obvious that they do not require expression. He is a dangerous man. Havana, in this novel, teems with unspoken sexual threats: Wormold longs to take Milly back to England, where there would be “no Captain Seguras and no wolf whistles.”⁷² Wormold believes that the wolf whistles are harmless, and yet the danger to Milly—from both Segura and the men who whistle at her—is so amorphous that it becomes literally unspeakable.

⁷¹ Howell, 73n1.

⁷² Graham Greene, *Our Man in Havana*, Collected Edition, London: William Heinemann and the Bodley Head, 1970, 17.

Wormold cannot articulate it.

Carter, Wormold's would-be assassin, also suffers a form of aphasia. He thinks that Wormold is taking him to a brothel, and he protests:

'I've never been to a h-h-h-house before. To tell you the truth, Wormold, I don't h-have much need of women...I try to want them, but when it comes to the point...' He hovered on the edge of confession and then plunged. 'It doesn't work, Wormold. I can't do what they want.'⁷³

Carter stammers over the confession. Even when he manages to speak it, he cloaks his admission in oblique language. "It" does not work. The reader must guess whether Carter refers to physical impotence or something more ambiguous. As soon as he makes this confession, Wormold orders him out of the car and tries to shoot him. Even if only murder can avoid the discussion, this narrative will not explore Carter's sexual problems.

Wormold's own growing love for Beatrice, his secretary, is quite chaste. Their relationship culminates, in the final chapter, with a mere kiss. Wormold desires Beatrice because of her intelligence and honesty. When he sees her, the day after they first meet, he thinks, "Her eyes...were the same colour as the night before and so was her hair; it had not after all been the effect of the champagne and the palm-trees. He thought, She looks real."⁷⁴ He compares her against the other women of Havana, thinking, "To live in Havana was to live in a factory that turned out human beauty on a conveyor-belt. He didn't want beauty....He wanted honesty."⁷⁵

⁷³ *Our Man in Havana*, 223.

⁷⁴ *Our Man in Havana*, 100.

⁷⁵ *Our Man in Havana*, 118.

Their relationship grows out of conversation: Beatrice tells Wormold about her husband, although they have only just met, and observes, “It takes two to keep something real. He was acting all the time...Haven’t you got a room where there isn’t a bed? Beds always make one talk.”⁷⁶ She criticizes her husband for failing to talk to her, and confesses that she *is* talking to Wormold—a point she connects explicitly to the bed and therefore implicitly to her attraction to Wormold.

Beatrice is Wormold’s equal. As he becomes more and more overwhelmed by his own fictions and the pressures of being a spy, he longs to unburden himself to her:

Walking away through the smell of the night-flowering plants he had only one wish: to tell Beatrice everything. I am no secret agent, I’m a fraud, none of these people are my agents, and I don’t know what’s happening. I’m lost. I’m scared. Surely somehow she would take control of the situation; after all she was a professional.⁷⁷

He is convinced that Beatrice can fix his problems, partly because he wants to tell her the truth. When he finally confesses to her that he has invented all of his agents and all of his news, they are drawn together: “She began to laugh. She put her head in her hands and laughed. She said, ‘Oh, how I love you.’”⁷⁸ As is usual for Greene’s novels, the act of confession is an immediate uniting force between the two of them. His revelation prompts a revelation from her in return (her declaration of love). Their

⁷⁶ *Our Man in Havana*, 108.

⁷⁷ *Our Man in Havana*, 146.

⁷⁸ *Our Man in Havana*, 208.

relationship, which was largely tacit, becomes open and acknowledged, and the two of them become partners in the escapades that follow.

It may seem that confession about subjects other than sex is unrelated to sexuality; however, as the relationship between Wormold and Beatrice shows, these confessions are often linked to sexual love. The most obvious example of this is *The Human Factor*, one of Greene's lesser-known novels but also one of his best. It is the story of Maurice Castle, a civil servant in the intelligence agency, who is really a double agent for Moscow. Even his wife does not know that he is the mole, but Castle knows that the higher-ups have noticed the leak; they are investigating to find out who it is. As the novel progresses and they get closer and closer to discovering Castle, suspense builds—but the focus of the novel is on the marriage between Castle and his wife, Sarah, a black woman he met in Africa. They have a child, Sam, who is not Castle's biological son; Sarah was pregnant at the beginning of their relationship.

Compared against most of the couples in Greene's fiction, the two of them are quite happy together. Castle loves Sarah deeply and they have developed a comforting, yet surprisingly passionate, routine. However, she does not know that he is a double agent. Eventually, he is forced to tell her, and she becomes his ally. Their relationship becomes more equal and complete even as the endgame of the novel's plot separates them physically. It is clear that the novel's main focus is not on the intrigue but on the effects of that intrigue on Castle's home life and relationships; the secrecy between Castle and Sarah causes distance between them, impeding the passion of their relationship even though Castle feels that their married life is happy.

A main motif of the novel is speech—the need to speak, the need to confess, and the power of those confessions. Castle wants desperately to talk to someone about his situation, but he cannot; he cannot reach his contact in the Russian government, Boris, and there is no one else he can speak to. Before he decides to tell Sarah, he is completely alone, and Greene describes the urge to talk in terms often used to describe sexual desire—it is inexorable, inescapable. It must be satisfied or it will break free. The presence of this need interferes with his happiness and his marriage. He longs to talk to Boris and compares the role of the control to that of a priest:

He thought, with a sense of revulsion: the situation's impossible, there's no one in the world with whom I can talk of everything, except this man Boris whose real name even is unknown to me. He couldn't talk to Davis—half his life was hidden from Davis, nor to Sarah, who didn't even know that Boris existed. One day he had even told Boris about the night in the Hotel Polana when he had learned about Sam. A control was a bit like a priest must be to a Catholic—a man who received one's confession whatever it might be without emotion.⁷⁹

Because Boris has an official role, Castle is able to confess to him—whether the confession is related to his work as a spy or not. At the beginning of the novel, and throughout most of the book, Castle considers it an absolute truth that he cannot tell Sarah his secret. At one point, he considers visiting a priest, and thinks,

I want to talk; why don't I talk? A priest like that has to keep my secret. Boris had said to him, 'Come to me whenever you feel that you have to talk: it's a

⁷⁹ Greene, *The Human Factor*, New York: Avon Books, 1979, 129.

smaller risk,' but he was convinced Boris had gone forever. To talk was a therapeutic act—he moved slowly toward the box like a patient who is visiting a psychiatrist for the first time with trepidation.⁸⁰

Castle is afraid to tell anyone his secret, even under the seal of the confessional. He has wanted to tell Sarah for years, as he reflects early in the novel: "...however much he tried to harden himself he was tempted to tell her everything. Sometimes he compared her cynically with a clever interrogator who uses sympathy and a timely cigarette."⁸¹ His desire to protect her prevents him, despite his love for her. She senses that he is keeping something secret and remembers, wistfully, the earlier days of their relationship, when she was one of his agents:

'I sometimes wish I was still your agent. You tell me so much less now than you did then.'

'I never told you much—perhaps you thought I did, but I told you as little as I could, for your own safety, and then it was often lies.'⁸²

This admission—which Greene slips in with little comment—is really an astonishing one. He tells her that he has lied to her, and she accepts it as part of her memory of their more relevatory early relationship. She then adds:

'I thought things would be different,' Sarah said, 'in England. I thought there would be no more secrets.' She drew in her breath and was immediately asleep, but Castle lay awake a long time. He had at such moments an enormous temptation to trust her, to tell her everything, much as a man who

⁸⁰ *The Human Factor*, 206.

⁸¹ *The Human Factor*, 124.

⁸² *The Human Factor*, 170.

has had an passing affair with a woman, an affair which is finished, wants to suddenly trust his wife with the whole sad history, to explain once and for all the unexplained silences, the small deceptions, the worries they haven't been able to share, and in the same way as the other man he came to the conclusion, 'Why worry her when it's all over?' for he really believed, if only for a while, that it was over."⁸³

Castle has, after a fashion, had an affair: he has substituted another spying relationship for the one that they shared. His decision to keep this secret from Sarah denies her the parity that would make her a true partner. His desire to tell her everything is not only the natural desire of a man with a heavy burden of secrecy and fear: it is also the next natural step of self-disclosure in a dance of courtship that is still, after years of marriage, incomplete.

The investigation into the leak keeps circling closer, and eventually he has to tell Sarah the truth. He says, ““So there it is—I became what they call a double agent, Sarah. I rate a lifetime in jail.””⁸⁴ She absorbs this for a moment, and while she is thinking, Castle muses that “He had always known that someday this scene would have to be played out between them, but he had never been able to imagine the kind of words they would say to each other.”⁸⁵ Castle, unable to imagine (or control) this scene of revelation, has refused to engage in it. When he finally reveals the truth, he allows Sarah to have some control over the outcome of the conversation—and of their

⁸³ *The Human Factor*, 170.

⁸⁴ *The Human Factor*, 209.

⁸⁵ *The Human Factor*, 210.

marriage—and in doing so, completes the romantic narrative that began when she worked for him. They go almost immediately to bed:

...when they were in bed, they made love at once without thinking, without speaking, as though it had been something they had agreed together an hour ago and all their discussion had only been a postponement of it. It had been months since they had come together in this way. Now that his secret was spoken love was released, and he fell asleep almost as soon as he withdrew.⁸⁶

This coupling is inevitable because they are consummating their real and sincere union—a union that has been lacking something. Their marriage, despite mutual love, has been marked by anxiety. Only with this disclosure do they reach marital fulfillment. When the anxiety dissipates, Castle sleeps: "...after making love he had fallen into the deepest nullity he had known for months, simply because because they had talked frankly, because they had ceased to have secrets."⁸⁷ The confession is not easy, but its outcome is simple, as he observes: they are now partners.

The narrative includes one other explicit mention of lovemaking between Sarah and Castle: Sarah remembers the night she told Castle she was pregnant with another man's child. She says,

'When I don't feel secure I remember what it felt like when I knew I had to tell you about him. That first night across the border in Lourenço Marques.

The Hotel Polana. I thought, 'He'll put on his clothes again and go away

⁸⁶ *The Human Factor*, 211-12.

⁸⁷ *The Human Factor*, 224.

forever. But you didn't. You stayed. And we made love in spite of Sam inside.’⁸⁸

Sarah remembers and clings to this episode when she needs to feel secure or safe. As with Castle’s confession to her, this moment is more than the removal of a secret. It is an intimate scene, for he is not dressed, and once more the scene includes no description of any decision to make love, nor even of a traditional seduction. It shares with the scene above the sense that the erotic outcome is predetermined.

The novel again reaffirms the significance of shared information between sexual partners through the fantasies of Arthur Davis, Castle’s assistant. Davis has a passionate yearning for the secretary, Cynthia. Part of his attraction to her is that she works for the intelligence service, and therefore it is safe to talk to her about his job. Davis longs for an “adventure”—a word that refers to a sexual relationship or passion, which he imagines himself sharing with Cynthia in an exotic locale. He explicitly ties the success of a sexual relationship to the openness with which he can share his work with his partner:

‘I’m tired of one-night stands. Home from the King’s Road after a party at four with a bloody hangover. Next morning—I think oh, that was fine, the girl was wonderful, I wish I’d done better though, if only I hadn’t mixed the drinks...and then I think how it would have been with Cynthia in Lourenço Marques. I could really talk to Cynthia. It helps John Thomas when you can

⁸⁸ *The Human Factor*, 20-21.

talk a bit about your work. Those Chelsea birds, directly the fun's over, they want to find out things. What do I do? Where's my office?'⁸⁹

Davis pinpoints one of the most difficult aspects of intelligence service and the most significant barrier between Castle and Sarah: inability to share one's work means a necessary obstacle to intimacy that must be broken down in order to achieve a full and successful union. This intimacy is necessary not only for love, but even for successful sexual performance.

For Greene, whose sins were usually sexual, confession is touched by eroticism, and eroticism often by the act of confession, as in *The Human Factor*. These novels take up confession as a yoking of moral and social imperatives, a process marked by the penitent's self-evaluation as well as evaluation by the confessor or confidant. As early in his career as *Brighton Rock*, Greene suggests that even the religious confession can take different forms and fulfill different roles.

Greene dismisses many of the guidelines that shape sexual morality, including those set forth by Catholicism. As these confessions and sexual conversations show, however, the moral and philosophical implications of sex are essential in his fiction. Rather than accepting any imparted rule, his characters turn to self-examination as well as the comparison with other men to delineate moral rules. The ideal Catholic confession shares many of these features; a perfect ritual confession begins not with the admission of sins, but with self-reflection and prayer that prepares the penitent to receive wisdom or personal growth as well as the formula of absolution.

⁸⁹ *The Human Factor*, 75-76.

Greene adapts this ritual discourse into situations that range from the analytical session to intimate conversation between friends or lovers. In these guises, sexual talk becomes not the route to absolution, but the method of judging what behavior is normative or of defining (and perpetually redefining) the sexual relationship between lovers. Characters define themselves against one another, whether they are confessing erotic sins, sexual inadequacy, or abstinence. Couples, in sharing hidden secrets, exhibit self-disclosure as a method of seduction or courtship.

Troubled Fertility

Nothing that was not ordered in terms of generation or transfigured by it could expect sanction or protection.

—Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*⁹⁰

Greene's characters are ambivalent about the reproductive function of sex. They ignore and suppress the possibility of creating a child, even as they draw intensity and excitement from it. Particularly in a Catholic world, reproduction and sex cannot be successfully divorced from one another. The possibility of pregnancy is one of the reasons that sex is sometimes described as spiritual: something might be created. Greene, who did not want to have children, feared this power, and many of his characters do the same. Fear of inadequacy as a parent, of sharing the sexual partner, and of the danger to the sexual partner all contribute to Greene's fear of childbearing. As with other dangerous elements of sexuality, however, fertility and reproduction are nonetheless tempting to Greene.

The view that sex should be procreative—a historically important and common view—pushes aside all other kinds of sexual contact in favor of intercourse. As Michel Foucault describes it, Western culture, by placing primary importance on reproductive sex, categorizes non-reproductive sex as perverse or abnormal:

⁹⁰ Foucault, 4.

The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom. The rest had only to remain vague; proper demeanor avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one's speech. And sterile behavior carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible, it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty.⁹¹

This belief that sex is rightfully reproductive marks Greene's own experiences around the time of his marriage. As Greene attempted to convince Vivien Dayrell-Browning to marry him, he came into conflict with the Catholic Church (to which he was a new convert). Catholicism dictated that contraception was a sin. Greene's own natural disinclination for children and his fear that he might have epilepsy aligned him against the church on this point, and he struggled to decide what to do. He visited a priest he called only "Father Christie" at Brompton Oratory, seeking advice. One of his letters to Vivien, from February 1926, relates their conversation:

My next thought was of an elderly priest...of the Oratory...He was a man of very liberal views, and surely, I thought despairingly, he would have some answer to my greatest problem: that if I were epileptic, I must avoid having

⁹¹ Foucault, 3-4.

children. Surely there must be some cranny of canon law or moral theology that would contain a ruling for just such a case as mine.

He asked me to go out with him, and for the next hour we drove in a taxi, crossing and recrossing the same rectangle between the Brompton Road and Bayswater, just as we crossed and recrossed the same lines of argument.

Under no circumstances at all was contraception permissible. ‘The church forbids me to marry then?’

‘Of course we don’t forbid marriage.’

‘Do you expect married people to live together without making love?’

‘The Church expects you to trust God, that’s all.’

Up and down, over and over, a useless embroidery—which made no pattern.”⁹²

Greene cannot resist this “useless embroidery,” the discussion of sexual rules and regulations. As the last chapter discussed, this kind of conversation is an attempt to identify normative sexuality and isolate it from other, “perverse” forms. In this case, Vivien took her definition of what was acceptable from Catholicism, and Greene knew that she would not agree to disobey the edict of the Church. They married despite the priest’s firmness on this point, and eventually Vivien became pregnant, although neither of them wished it.

⁹² Letter to Vivien, 9 Feb 1926; cited in Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume I*, New York: Penguin, 2004, 333.

When Greene and Vivien began to suspect that Vivien was pregnant, Greene's anxiety grew greater. As Norman Sherry reports, on April 17, 1933, Greene wrote in his diary, "'V. still late. I've got to prepare myself now, just as we've got straight with hope of a prosperous year, for a baby. I feel hopeless.'" The following day, he added, "'V. has obviously dropped her month and next month will decide if there's to be a baby. I can't bear the idea of her suffering, and any child will be an intrusion.'"⁹³ It was difficult for Greene to brook any interference in the extremely tight unit composed of himself and his wife. Indeed, shortly before this, Greene gave Vivien a kitten, and then wrote in his diary, "Funny how I feel even a minute kitten as an intrusion and a responsibility until I get used to her."⁹⁴

Behind all these anxieties—whether she was pregnant at all, how a child would alter the intense connection of their relationship, how the responsibility of parenthood would destroy the life he had planned—loomed a more visceral fear for Vivien, for her wellbeing and for her very life, through the course of the pregnancy. His diary blames "an orgiastic night" for the pregnancy, explicitly connecting the intensity of their experience to conception. Vivien's labor was more grueling even than Greene had foreseen—a long and difficult labor, culminating in a Caesarian section—and Lucy Caroline was born on December 28, 1933. Greene was not allowed to see Vivien until the following day. Greene's response to fatherhood, or perhaps to the change in his marriage that arose from parenting, was flight: by the time his daughter was a year old, Greene was en route to Liberia, the first of many

⁹³ Sherry, *Volume I*, 474.

⁹⁴ Sherry, *Volume I*, 473-74.

trips that would take him out of reach of his family for months at a time.⁹⁵ When he returned from Liberia, the war loomed. Before long, he sent his family to the country. He remained in London. He and Vivien never lived together again; from then on, their marriage consisted of visits.

As Greene's own children grew into adults, he found them more engaging and less frightening. Still, even in their maturity, their presence bothered him. Norman Sherry reprints a postcard from Greene to Catherine Walston, when Greene's son Francis was twenty-four: "I had to sit up till 2 a.m. for Francis. How I dislike children."⁹⁶ Only in moments when he can see one of his children as an equal can Greene appreciate fatherhood, as evidenced by an earlier letter, this one to Francis himself: "[L]et's see also—if you feel like it—whether we can plan a small trip together somewhere queer or interesting on the Continent in the summer holidays. I mean two males together!"⁹⁷ Greene can relate to his son only by disclaiming the parental role and recasting the two of them as equals, relieving himself of the burden of responsibility for Francis.

Greene's fear of pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting was much greater than any attraction to it. In his fiction, however, he transfigures some of this fear into awe: his characters recognize that, through the reproductive functions of sex, they experience sexual intercourse with greater solemnity and significance. In *Brighton*

⁹⁵ Sherry, *Volume I*, 504.

⁹⁶ Postcard to Catherine Walston, 10 January 1960; quoted in Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume III*. New York: Penguin, 2005.²⁴⁶

⁹⁷ Undated letter, probably from 1951, to Francis Greene, in *Graham Greene: A Life in Letters*, ed. Richard Greene, 195.

Rock, Rose and Pinkie both overdetermine the spiritual weight of sexuality. After Ida points out to Rose that she may be pregnant, she thinks, “There was no end to what the two of them had done last night upon the bed: it was an eternal act.”⁹⁸ Already, sex in *Brighton Rock* has sacred importance because Pinkie and Rose believe that it is a mortal sin. The prospect of a child invokes timelessness: reproduction can stretch into the future, beyond the parent’s lifetime. Rose’s use of the word “eternal,” paired with the belief that they’re committing a mortal sin, suggests not the comfort or peace of heaven, but the specter of Hell. Her visit to the confessional at the end of the novel reinforces the image, when she tells the priest that she wishes to be damned like Pinkie.

Greene’s men reflect his unwillingness to share the sexual partner with a child. Sexual relationships in Greene tend to be intense and insular. Women in Greene’s fiction often fulfill the role of daughter for their sexual partners—a dynamic that allows no room for children. While Greene's novels do include some sexual relationships based on parity, Greene more often describes couples, ill-matched in age, for whom sex is intertwined with fatherhood or motherhood. While normative sexuality encompasses compassion and ordinary reciprocity of partners caring for one another, Greene depicts relationships in which one partner is clearly serving as a parent to the other. In some cases, such as between Henry and his fiancée in *Travels with My Aunt*, the woman is explicitly described as a child.

Thomas Fowler and his lover, Phuong, in *The Quiet American*, provide a

⁹⁸ *Brighton Rock*, 249.

typical example of this kind of couple. They are not, in any sense, equals. Fowler protects Phuong. He wants to provide for her. She fixes his opium pipes, his tea, and his drinks with the subordinate grace of a dutiful daughter. She is much younger than he is: when they meet, she is eighteen and he is in his fifties. Because she is Vietnamese and Fowler is English, their conversations are limited by a language barrier: although both of them speak French, it is not their native language. As a result, Phuong makes simple statements, without the nuance that one might expect from an adult. When Fowler tells Phuong that Pyle, the American, has been killed, she looks up at him “like a child.” Her only response is to ask “Tu dis?” (“What did you say?”)—emphasizing her imperfect understanding of his speech and her inability to immediately grasp the significance of what he has said. Although she has lost her fiancé, she has nothing to say, and when Fowler tells her, ““You had better stay here tonight,”” she agrees, falling back easily into the habit of letting him direct her actions.⁹⁹

In describing Phuong’s love for him, Fowler says,

‘[Passionate love] isn’t in their nature. It’s a cliché to call them children—but there’s one thing which is childish. They love you in return for kindness, security, the presents you give them—they hate you for a blow or an injustice. They don’t know what it’s like—just walking into a room and loving a stranger.’¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *The Quiet American*, 13.

¹⁰⁰ *The Quiet American*, 95.

Despite his disclaimer that it is a cliché to call Vietnamese childlike, Fowler does just that. At dinner with Pyle and Phuong, Fowler listens to the conversation about marriage and families between Pyle and Miss Hei, Phuong's sister:

While I was ordering dinner (though Phuong had told me she was not hungry, I knew she could manage a good steak tartare with two raw eggs and et ceteras), I listened to him seriously discussing the question of children. 'I've always thought I'd like a lot of children,' he said. 'A big family's a wonderful interest. It makes for the stability of marriage. And it's good for the children too. I was an only child. It's a great disadvantage being an only child.'"¹⁰¹

Pyle has already developed a sexual interest in Phuong, and he responds to Miss Hei's conversation about marriage because he already imagines Phuong as a possible wife. Fowler, however—her sexual partner—sees her as a child. He decides what she will eat, and does not trust her own assessment of her appetite; like a parent, he orders for her. Later, when his wife refuses him a divorce, he lies to Phuong to hide it, hoping that he can retain her as his lover. This decision again undermines her adult agency, as he assumes that she will wait indefinitely if she is promised the reward she awaits.

Much of the conflict that Fowler feels about Phuong springs from the fact that he tries, and fails, to assimilate the truth about Phuong: she is an adult. He rebukes Pyle for the same belief that he himself has held about Phuong:

¹⁰¹ *The Quiet American*, 34-35.

‘She’s no child. She’s tougher than you’ll ever be. Do you know the kind of polish that doesn’t take scratches? That’s Phuong. She can survive a dozen of us. She’ll get old, that’s all. She’ll suffer from childbirth and hunger and cold and rheumatism, but she’ll never suffer like we do from thoughts, obsessions—she won’t scratch, she’ll only decay.’ But even while I made my speech and watched her turn the page (a family group with Princess Anne), I knew I was inventing a character just as much as Pyle was. One never knows another human being; for all I could tell, she was as scared as the rest of us: she didn’t have the gift of expression, that’s all.¹⁰²

For Fowler, the confusion between Phuong as his lover, his equal; his mother and caretaker; and his child are all intertwined. This set of expectations and roles leaves no room to add a child. His needs fill all of her time. Fowler’s constant insistence on knowing where Phuong is and what she is doing demonstrates his possessiveness of her. A baby would replace Fowler and consume Phuong’s time and love. Children also raise the more encompassing fear of replacement: in having children, parents acknowledge that a new generation will replace their own. Fowler’s perception of his own old age is ever-present (he speaks of having a partner to “last until he is through”). His fear of his own age and mortality renders fatherhood even less possible for him.

The novel makes no mention of any possibility of Fowler and Phuong having a baby, including any mention of contraception; this absence is characteristic of

¹⁰² *The Quiet American*, 125.

Greene's novels from the 1950s. Rather, the novel assumes that they will not, without elaborating. This premise forms a counterpoint to Pyle's assumption that when he and Phuong marry, they will have children. When Pyle proposes to Phuong, he tells her that he knows his blood-group, as a qualification for producing children; when he talks to Fowler about Phuong, he refuses to believe that she can be happy without children.¹⁰³ Both of these premises are implicit, as though reproduction necessarily results from a coupling between young people, whereas an older man cannot sire babies. This belief is typical of Greene's *oeuvre*, in which age (even middle-age, such as Fowler's) connotes sterility.

The Comedians provides a more extreme description of a child as an intrusion. Brown, the narrator, has an affair with a married woman, Martha Pineda (wife of an ambassador). She has a son, Angel. Brown resents Angel, and considers him a spoiled and unpleasant child. The basis of his dislike, however, is not only the child's personality, but the attention that Angel demands of Martha. Angel is not Brown's son, which increases his sense that Angel is an intruder in his relationship:

Angel was her son, the unbearable child who helped to keep us apart. He was too fat for his age, he had his father's eyes like brown buttons, he sucked bonbons, he noticed things, and he made claims—claims all the time on his mother's exclusive attention. He seemed to draw the tenderness out of our

¹⁰³ *The Quiet American*, 51.

relationship as he drew the liquid centre from a sweet, with a long sucking breath.”¹⁰⁴

Brown’s perceives the child as a constant series of demands. These demands are more offensive because Angel is Louis Pineda’s son. Angel is too young, Brown thinks, to understand the relationship between Brown and Martha; however, he describes the child as a “detective” and fears Angel’s apparent suspicions. He pits himself against Angel as a rival, even as he describes the methods by which he and Martha attempt to conceal their affair:

A year passed, and we found ways of outwitting him, but his claims on her remained. I discovered she was indispensable to me, but when I pressed her to leave her husband, the child blocked her escape. She could do nothing to endanger his happiness. She would leave her husband tomorrow, but how could she survive if he took Angel from her?¹⁰⁵

Angel stands in the way of Brown’s happiness with Martha, both actively (by requiring her attention when Brown wants it) and passively (by tying her to her marriage). The impediment of a child cripples his happiness with Martha, or so Brown believes. He thinks that, absent Angel, Martha would leave her husband and create a *ménage* for the two of them.

¹⁰⁴ Greene, *The Comedians*. London: William Heinemann and the Bodley Head, 2004, 56.

¹⁰⁵ *The Comedians*, 89.

In *Dr. Fischer of Geneva*, Anna-Luise (who hates her father) falls in love with the much older Jones. Jones himself realizes that she desires a father figure and may have fallen for Jones because he fits that bill:

But Anna-Luise—what could have attracted her to a man in his fifties?

Perhaps she was seeking a father more sympathetic than Doctor Fischer, just as I may have been unconsciously engaged in a parallel pursuit, of a daughter rather than a wife. My wife had died in childbirth twenty years before, taking with her the child who doctors told me would have been a girl.¹⁰⁶

He sits in the chalet as she skis, like an indulgent father watching his child's recreation. He has only one hand, which makes it impossible for him to ski, and the novel implies that he is too old for skiing in any case.

The relationship between Jones and Anna-Luise is one of the happiest in Greene's *oeuvre*, despite the mismatch of age. They have a satisfying physical relationship. Anna-Luise is surprisingly interested in sex. She does not seem conflicted or neurotic about sex, as one might expect from a character whose sexual education came from an abused, neglected mother for whom sex was a punishment instead of a joy. The sacramental, communicative nature of their sexual relationship allows Anna-Luise to meet Jones on an adult footing, instead of as a daughter figure. As Jones describes their first sexual encounter, she is the aggressor or at least an equal partner. After bestowing her body, she gives over the rest of herself: ““Why

¹⁰⁶ Graham Greene, *Doctor Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980, 18-19.

not? You're my lover and my father, my child and my mother, you're the whole family—the only family I want.”¹⁰⁷ This affirmation makes explicit the number of roles that the lover plays in Greene's fiction. It also suggests why a child is often viewed as an intrusion on the hermetic relationship between sexual partners.

Anna-Luise, despite her assertion, does plan to have children. She tells Jones that she plans to stop taking birth control pills when the skiing season ends, lest she should have an accident skiing and be “pregnant in plaster.” She believes that she can control their reproductive destiny. When she dies in a freak skiing accident, Jones sees her white sweater, stained red with blood: a symbol traditionally associated with both death and birth. Anna-Luise's decision to wait to have children means that she will never have any, and that Jones again loses his daughter figure along with his own reproductive future.

As Anna-Luise's death demonstrates, reproduction is uncontrollable, and any attempt to constrain it is prone to failure. Indeed, sexual desire and erotic pleasure are irrepressible and inescapable partly because of the generative power of sex. Some of the women in Greene's fiction believe that they control their own family planning, and yet Greene consistently undermines their ability to choose whether to have children. They become pregnant accidentally (aunt Augusta in *Travels with My Aunt*, for example, or Clara in *The Honorary Consul*), or they decide to have children, only to have that option taken away. This preoccupation may reflect Greene's own feeling of helplessness in the face of childbearing choices.

¹⁰⁷ *Doctor Fischer of Geneva*, 24.

Tooley, in *Travels with My Aunt*—a teenage girl Henry befriends on a train—is terrified that she is pregnant, and when she finds out that she is not, her great relief only emphasizes her lack of agency in the decision: she escapes this danger by sheer chance. She uses birth control pills, but she blames herself for not remembering to use them correctly. Tooley laments, “The trouble is men are so ignorant now. In the old days a girl never knew what to do, and now it’s the men who don’t know.”¹⁰⁸ Shared responsibility is not an option: either it is the man’s job or the girl’s job. Later, she explains, “I really did forget...I don’t remember all the dull things—like the pill and washing the dishes.”¹⁰⁹ Tooley’s description illustrates birth control’s power to reduce sexuality to entertainment. The pill is mere housekeeping, something one does in order to enjoy sex, just as one washes the dishes in order to enjoy food.

Greene’s fiction reveals his ambivalence about birth control pills. At the time of his marriage, of course, they were not available. The Greenes may have used them if they had been. Discussing her marriage with Norman Sherry in 1979, Vivien Greene said, “There was no pill then. I always think how different things would have been with the pill.”¹¹⁰ Though Greene disagreed with the Church’s view on birth control, his worldview is shaped by the fact that it was not available when he became sexually mature and first wished to control his reproductive future. The difficult-to-harness power of sexual generativity instilled in him a deep respect, even awe, for the consequences of intercourse—an awe that did not diminish as he grew older. When

¹⁰⁸ Greene, *Travels with My Aunt*. New York: Penguin Centennial Edition, 2004, 101-2.

¹⁰⁹ *Travels with My Aunt*, 116.

¹¹⁰ Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume II*. New York: Penguin, 2004, 208.

birth control pills became available, the obvious advantages of greater control over reproductivity came into conflict with Greene's belief that reproduction and fertility are inherent to meaningful sex, whether one wants to reproduce or not.

The development and distribution of birth control pills allowed for greater sexual freedom, of course, but Greene's characters demonstrate the drawbacks as well. This freedom produces a jaded sophistication of the sort that Querry, protagonist of *A Burnt-Out Case*, describes when he says that the best mistress is a married woman:

“Married women are the easiest....The young girl too often has her weather-eye open on security, but a married woman has already found it. The husband at the office, the children in the nursery, a condom in the bag.”¹¹¹

Querry's description of married certainty is the product of his intense cynicism and weariness. Here, as in *Travels with My Aunt*, the use of birth control both liberates and disappoints, reducing sex to a diversion. While Greene unquestionably supported the distribution of birth control, especially in countries where sexually transmitted diseases are rampant, his work demonstrates ambivalence about it: removing the danger of pregnancy removes, also, much of the significance of the sexual act, especially between committed partners. In a brothel, or during an adulterous affair, the illicit thrill of the situation might be heightened by the transgression of using birth control and acting purely for the physical pleasure of the occasion, but in a marriage or a long-term affair, these devices connote emptiness.

¹¹¹ Greene, *A Burnt-Out Case*, New York: Penguin, 1977, 114.

Greene discusses birth control pills in these novels in practical, serious terms. Condoms, however, play a different role in his fiction: they appear in several of his novels, almost exclusively as jokes. In *The Comedians*, as the protagonist Brown sails toward Haiti, the purser decorates for their ship's concert with condom "balloons":

He was blowing up a French letter till it was the size of a policeman's truncheon. He tied the end up with ribbon and removed it from his mouth. His desk was littered with great swollen phalluses. It was like a massacre of pigs.

'Tomorrow is the ship's concert,' he explained, 'and we have no balloons. It was Mr Jones's idea that we should use these.' I saw that he had decorated some of the sheaths with comic faces in coloured ink. 'We have only one lady on board,' he said, 'and I do not think she will realize the nature...'

'You forget she is a progressive.'

'In that case she will not mind. These are surely the symbols of progress.'"¹¹²

This exchange illustrates both sides of Greene's view on birth control. Contraceptives stand for progress, certainly, providing liberation from the anxiety and fear that mars sexual relationships when none are available. And yet, they are also ridiculous, lending themselves to farce. Greene employed them in a number of practical jokes. In his youth, Greene traveled with his brother Hugh to Burgundy. Hugh recalls, "there was somebody with his elbow and his hand laid out on the partition fast asleep in the next carriage, and just before we got out at the station,

¹¹² *The Comedians*, 30.

Graham very quietly fitted a French-letter on one of his fingers.”¹¹³ At a different time, he sent the editor Wilson Harris—his boss at *The Spectator*—a condom stuffed with Smarties.¹¹⁴ Greene never tired of this schoolboy humor, as his fiction attests. Aside from the fact that Greene enjoyed a dirty joke, his affection for this kind of humor reveals the world-weary sophistication that accompanies contraception. Condoms are funny because they reveal how ridiculous sex can be when it becomes a matter of mechanics.

Perhaps the best example of this view occurs in *Monsignor Quixote*. Father Quixote absent-mindedly blows up a “a sausage-shaped balloon” that Sancho has left on his table.¹¹⁵ He pops it, and says, “Oh dear, I am so sorry, Sancho, I didn’t mean to break your balloon. Was it a gift for a child?”¹¹⁶

Sancho asks him, “with a kind of anger,”

‘Have you never seen a contraceptive before? No, I suppose you haven’t.’

‘I don’t understand. A contraceptive? But what can you do with a thing that size?’

‘It wouldn’t be that size if you hadn’t blown it up.’”¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Sherry, *Volume I*, 487.

¹¹⁴ Sherry, *Volume I*, 449.

¹¹⁵ *Monsignor Quixote*, 85.

¹¹⁶ *Monsignor Quixote*, 86.

¹¹⁷ *Monsignor Quixote*, 86.

Sancho's anger comes from discomfort. Father Quixote, who is not troubled by sexual desire, is sexually ignorant enough to fail to recognize a condom, even though he is compassionate and liberal enough to condone love and to be tolerant of sexual misbehavior. Although he believes that sexual activity outside of marriage is a sin, Quixote refrains from chastising or judging the Mayor's sexual behavior. The mistake with the condom, however, shows Sancho that Quixote's tolerant attitude comes from the sense that sexuality accompanies love; the cheap details are outside of Quixote's understanding of sex.

Their visit to a pornographic film develops this theme. Father Quixote chooses the film, based on its title, *A Maiden's Prayer*. He does not recognize it as pornography, and even when he watches it, he is not sure what he's seeing until Sancho identifies it as "making love." Father Quixote is uncertain because the film does not seem to be showing anything enjoyable, much less romantic or passionate. He is unaware of the sordid and the ridiculous parts of sex, which are symbolized by the condom.

Sancho, on the other hand, finds those sordid aspects compelling—he visits a girl in the brothel, for example. To say that Greene finds sex with contraceptives hollow does not exclude its attraction. Rather, it suggests that it has a different kind of appeal than reproductive or committed sex, the kind of seedy appeal that Greene's fiction documents. Hence his ambivalence about birth control. It divides sexual experience into qualitatively different categories: the reproductive, which tends toward the spiritual and carries risk and possibility; and the purposefully non-

reproductive, which is more strictly pleasure-oriented, sometimes less significant, and always transgressive of the societal (and particularly Catholic) rule that sex should be reproductive. For Greene, reproductive sex trespasses against the couple as an erotic and romantic unit, just as nonreproductive sex trespasses against something more codified.

The burden of unwanted feeds the conflict that Greene's characters feel toward reproduction. In *The Honorary Consul*, the protagonist, Dr. Plarr, has an affair with a married woman, Clara. Charlie Fortnum, her husband, cannot father a child. Clara conceives a baby through her affair with Dr. Plarr. When Plarr finds out that she is pregnant, he imagines the baby as an illness, "a part of Clara like her appendix, perhaps a diseased appendix which ought to be removed."¹¹⁸ Eventually, however, he begins to see the baby as a person with a genetic and familial heritage. He reflects on "the tangle of its ancestry" and thinks that he "would have liked the little bastard to believe in something, but he was not the kind of father who could transmit belief in a god or a cause."¹¹⁹ As Mark Bosco points out, Plarr's musings connect the child to generations past and future, giving the sexual contact between Clara and Plarr more importance. Plarr considers his affair with Clara minor; he does not believe that they are in love, nor that their sexual liaison will be long-term. Rather, he feels that their sexual relationship is based on physical satisfaction, and that—on some level—he has sexual access to Clara because she is a former prostitute.

¹¹⁸ *The Honorary Consul*, 224.

¹¹⁹ *The Honorary Consul*, 224.

When she becomes pregnant, his view of their affair changes. Over time he begins to desire a certain type of future for the child (a type of future that he, Plarr, would be able to provide). Through this desire, he begins to see Clara, the baby, and himself as a family unit, even if only in a fantasy that he has no serious desire to make real. Only through carrying his baby does Clara become a real person for him. Reproductive sex brings Plarr to acknowledge what Bosco terms “the transcendent power of love.”¹²⁰

Plarr resembles a number of Greene’s other male characters: Fowler in *The Quiet American* or Querry, in *A Burnt-Out Case*, who is an extreme example. Bosco summarizes this character type as “the jaded rationalist who casts an ironic glance at the wasteland of modern life.”¹²¹ The term “wasteland” is particularly apt. Greene—who was heavily influenced by T.S. Eliot—suggests that this modern “wasteland” is characterized by sterility, and in Plarr’s case Clara’s baby draws him out of that wasteland.

Part of the reason that Plarr finds meaning in Clara’s pregnancy may be as simple as masculine pride. Clara’s husband believes that he has fathered the child. His solicitude for Clara during her pregnancy and his excitement over the baby make him almost a caricature of the happy father, to Plarr’s annoyance: “He talked with pride rather than anxiety of his wife’s troubles in her early pregnancy as though they were a kind of compliment to his prowess until Doctor Plarr was almost ready to

¹²⁰ Mark Bosco, *Graham Greene’s Catholic Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 109.

¹²¹ Bosco, 108.

exclaim, ‘But who do you suppose is the father?’”¹²² Despite Plarr’s disparaging reflections on *machismo* throughout the book, he does take a sort of perverse male pride in Clara’s pregnancy.

Greene’s 1969 novel, *Travels with My Aunt*, also describes an unwanted pregnancy; however, in this case, the pregnancy is a well-hidden part of the past. Henry Pulling, the narrator, discovers after his mother’s funeral that she was not his mother at all. His aunt Augusta, who has come to the funeral, refers to his mother as a virgin, and explains to Henry how the fiction of his parentage came to be. She tells Henry, “You were your father’s child, not your mother’s,” and adds:

‘I have said that your official mother was a saint. The girl, you see, refused to marry your father, who was anxious—if you can use such an energetic term in his case—to do the right thing. So my sister covered up for her by marrying him. (He was not very strong-willed.) Afterwards, she padded herself for months with progressive cushions. No one ever suspected. She even wore the cushions in bed, and she was so deeply shocked when your father once tried to make love to her—after the marriage but before your birth—that, even when you had been safely delivered, she refused him what the Church calls his rights.’¹²³

The reader pieces together, over the course of the novel, that Augusta is Henry’s mother. It’s not clear exactly when Henry himself figures it out, for he seems to

¹²² Greene, *The Honorary Consul*, London: The Bodley Head, 1973, 13-14.

¹²³ *Travels with My Aunt*, 7.

become aware of it slowly, over time. He finds a photograph of Augusta in her youth, tucked inside his father's copy of *Rob Roy*, in which she looks "ready for anything."

¹²⁴ He guesses that she is no more than eighteen years old in the photo, kept for all of these years in a little-read novel. When he returns to the book later, he sees the photograph again:

When I opened the book now the pages naturally divided at the photograph, and I found myself thinking not for the first time that the happy smile, the young breasts, the curve of her body in the old-fashioned bathing costume were like the suggestion of a budding maternity. The memory of Visconti's son as he took her in his arms on the Milan platform hurt me a little.¹²⁵

Mr. Visconti, Augusta's great love, has a son who has gotten more of her maternal care than Henry has—"He always thought of me as his real mother," she asserts. Henry's jealousy in this scene suggests that he realizes Augusta is his mother, and yet that he cannot embrace her. Augusta, whose love for Mr. Visconti's son is no less because they are not linked by blood, is nonetheless driven to attempt a relationship of sorts with Henry that has no other basis than blood. Even as Greene argues that love is not created by biological parenthood, he suggests that the ties of maternal or filial love can never completely be cut.

Augusta's attempt to control reproduction through the elaborate charade around the adoption fails. She cannot keep the secret in the end, but she also cannot

¹²⁴ *Travels with My Aunt*, 135.

¹²⁵ *Travels with My Aunt*, 180.

offer Henry the care that he deserves. He has grown up emotionally and sexually stunted (possibly, the book suggests, by growing up in the home of a puritanical virgin). Augusta, who has subverted the rules of sex and reproduction, ultimately loses, for it is too late—despite her efforts—for her to be Henry’s mother. The conclusion of the book is particularly unsatisfying for the reader who awaits a tender acknowledgement of the filial relationship, followed by a renaissance in Henry’s emotional life. Instead, Greene provides an understated affirmation of their biological relationship, and Henry becomes a worker in Mr. Visconti’s import-export business. He becomes engaged to the daughter of the Chief of Customs and plans to marry her when she turns sixteen. Henry states, “There is, of course, a considerable difference in our ages, but she is a gentle and obedient child.”¹²⁶ As in *The Quiet American*, the protagonist’s choice of sexual object subverts the taboo against sexual feelings toward children, bringing those drives barely into the realm of the possible. Neither Phuong nor Henry’s fiancée are quite children; they are almost, but not quite, forbidden fruit. As in his brief friendship with Tooley, Henry steps into the role of father rather than lover. He has no model for a functional sexual relationship; his life has been as sexless as his stepmother’s.

The reverse of the unwanted pregnancy, of course, is sterility. Greene's novels often refer to sterility, either obliquely or explicitly. There are few children in his works, and even fewer who are not adopted (or, in *The Captain and the Enemy*, kidnapped). Although Greene was not particularly interested in children, their explicit absence in these novels signifies a modernist emptiness as well as a lack of personal

¹²⁶ *Travels with My Aunt*, 254.

interest. Greene is drawn to the figure of sterility—just as Eliot was drawn to the mythical Fisher King—as a symbol of moral and spiritual decay.

Maurice Castle, in *The Human Factor*, has a single son, who was fathered by another man. Castle himself is explicitly sterile. The presence of Sam, the son, emphasizes Castle's sterility. Castle's mother refers to his first wife (killed in the Blitz), and says, "I was very fond of Mary. I wish you had had a child with her." Maurice, who dismisses this with "I try to forget the dead," thinks to himself:

He had learned early in his marriage that he was sterile, so there was no child, but they were happy. It was as much an only child as a wife who was blown to pieces by a buzz bomb in Oxford Street while he was safe in Lisbon, making a contact. He had failed to protect her, and he hadn't even died with her. That was why he never spoke of her even to Sarah.¹²⁷

This reflection conveys a great deal about the relationship between Sarah and Maurice, although he thinks of his first wife. In his first marriage, Maurice viewed himself as a father figure; his own expectation included protection of his wife. His second marriage, to Sarah, has greater parity, and even before he tells her that he is a double agent, they are more nearly equals. In part, their partnership revolves around Sam: she and Maurice interact as parents, although Maurice always remembers that he is not Sam's biological father.

Infertility, with its attendant feelings of sexual inadequacy, troubles women as

¹²⁷ Greene, *The Human Factor*, New York: Avon Books, 1979, 121.

well as men. Liza, in *The Captain and the Enemy*, cannot have a child; indeed, her desire for one precipitates the plot. Her lover, the Captain (if “lover” is the correct term for their ill-defined relationship) kidnaps the narrator, Jim, to please her. Jim’s mother is dead, and after a brief grapple with his father and his aunt, Liza is able to keep him as her son. Their relationship, however, fails to satisfy, and eventually it becomes a mere façade to keep the often-absent Captain from worrying about Liza.

Liza’s barrenness results from an earlier abortion—for which Liza blames Jim’s biological father, who was also the father of the aborted child. She remembers, in a conversation with Jim, that she and the Captain met then, at the time of the abortion:

“...I was [sick] once. That was the first time he saw me—he came with your father to the hospital. Sometimes when he looks at me—he looks at me in a scared sort of way. As though I were still lying sick in that bed.”¹²⁸

This memory—full of Liza’s vulnerability, which drew the Captain to her, and of sexuality, fertility and sadness—is far beyond Jim’s understanding when he hears it. Later, when Jim’s father turns up at Liza’s flat, she blames him for her childlessness, and he disagrees:

“You know well enough you didn’t want the one you lost, Liza. Blame that clumsy doctor, not me.”

¹²⁸ Graham Greene, *The Captain and the Enemy*, New York: Penguin Classics, 2004, 38.

“I didn’t want any child *you* had fathered—that’s true enough.”¹²⁹

Again, Jim does not understand this conversation, though he can recognize Liza’s obvious pain. The conversation articulates part of the reason his relationship with Liza is troubled: she does not want any child that Jim’s father has sired. The connection between her former lover and her adopted son is too close for her to be comfortable stepping into the role of his mother. No child can replace the one she lost—the one that would have been hers—and Jim’s parentage only adds to her pain.

Jim’s father remembers the first meeting between the Captain and Liza—he tells Jim, “She was four months’ gone and I never knew he was getting all that interested in her. She didn’t exactly look her best.”¹³⁰ Jim’s father—the Devil, as Liza calls him—refused utterly to face the prospect of fatherhood. He tells Jim:

She had cheated me, trying to have a child. Perhaps she had marriage in mind, but I wanted none of that nonsense. I told her I’d treat her to an abortion, but I wouldn’t pay for a child. One child was quite enough—you. That abortion of Liza’s cost me a lot in those days when it wasn’t strictly legal, and it was no fault of mine when things went wrong and she knew she could never have another.¹³¹

When the Captain meets Liza, she is grief-stricken and ill, and her lover refuses to address her problems. The Captain—like many of Greene’s other

¹²⁹ *The Captain and the Enemy*, 43.

¹³⁰ *The Captain and the Enemy*, 79.

¹³¹ *The Captain and the Enemy*, 80.

characters—cannot resist this vulnerability, and their relationship begins almost immediately, as soon as “she got back on her feet again.” Jim’s father admits that he was relieved by this, as Liza “wasn’t fit for much when she came out of hospital”¹³²—a callous description that nonetheless encapsulates the appeal she had for the Captain, who considers it his job to take care of her.

The circumstances of their meeting have shaped the Captain’s treatment of Liza: gentle, solicitous, courtly. Liza observes that the Captain sometimes seems to imagine that she is still ill. His concern emphasizes the vulnerability that drew him to her in the first place. Jim—and the reader—never find out whether Liza and the Captain have a sexual relationship or not. The interactions that Jim does see are mostly examples of Liza and the Captain taking care of one another, from Liza making tea to the Captain bringing Liza money. Their love is undemonstrative, if constant.

Adoptive or proxy parenting appears in other novels as well. *Travels with My Aunt*, *The Honorary Consul*, and *The Human Factor*—Greene’s entire novelistic output between 1969 and 1978—all feature these relationships. This preoccupation, even obsession, demonstrates Greene’s desire to separate the sexual element of reproduction from the practical element. These novels all insist, however, that blood tells: the adoptive parent cannot be equivalent to the parent who created the child, nor can an adopted child serve in the place of a biological child. The importance of the biological tie reaffirms the importance of reproduction in the sex lives of Greene’s

¹³² *The Captain and the Enemy*, 79.

characters, for nothing else replaces childbearing.

Although Greene's memoirs and diaries all reflect his fear of having children, his insistence on the role of generativity demonstrates how this fear also produces awe. Seeing reproduction as the central impetus for sexuality (the Church's view, though not Greene's) allows Greene to see sex through two lenses. The first is that of reproductive sex, which carries risk, fear, and the excitement of chance—compelling particularly for Greene, who saw most aspects of life as a gamble. The other, nonreproductive sex, has the allure of transgression against the social order. In both cases, the decisions that characters make in their attempts to control their own reproduction are signs of their general views—birth control and sterility standing for the emptiness of the modern moral and spiritual landscape, and the acceptance of the risk of having a baby for the acceptance of some kind of external force in the world, whether God or mere chance.

The Sensuality of Pain: Suffering, Disfigurement, and Eroticism

In *A Sort of Life*, Greene recalls one of the masters from his school days, whose predilection for beating his pupils had a sadistic, sexual edge:

A popular master in charge of one of the junior houses was called Simpson. He was never properly shaved, the five o'clock shadow was there at morning prayers, and he had four chins, although he was not otherwise a fat man. He rubbed his hands together in a gloating manner when in form he caught one who belonged to his house in a punishable offense. He would refer jocularly to beatings and he very obviously enjoyed them. In a strange way this made him popular. It seemed to me even then that his boys were collaborators in a pleasure.¹³³

Greene's assessment of the situation, crediting the boys with complicity in this violent relationship, prefigures his later writings on sexuality and pain. The carefully-observed description of the master, recalled after more than fifty years, suggests that Greene was deeply affected by these exchanges. Greene's novels expand from the notion of enjoyment—which suggests a sexual charge or satisfaction that the schoolmaster gets from administering the beatings—to a deeper understanding of pain as an integral and natural adjunct to eroticism and spirituality.

Criticism of Greene has frequently characterized the sex scenes in his novels as unhappy, troubled, or even, as Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan argues, "grotesque." Erdinast-Vulcan claims that a "typically Catholic derogation of the flesh underlies

¹³³ Greene, Graham. *A Sort of Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971, 64-65.

Greene's love scenes." ¹³⁴ The qualities that Erdinast-Vulcan considers grotesque may not in fact result in joyless or unsatisfying sex; rather, Greene uses pain to give life and significance to the sexual liaisons in his fiction. For Greene, sexuality is serious business, even in its most playful forms—his characters are not seeking fun, but a type of fulfillment that cannot be quantified or even adequately described.

Greene invokes the traditional triad of sexuality, spirituality, and pain. His works, however, place the emphasis not only on the spiritual significance of sexuality and suffering, but also on the value of pain and spiritual engagement as a component of healthy sexuality. Rather than seeing sex or pain as means to a spiritual end, Greene sees these three elements as equal players in human experience.

Over the course of Greene's career, he links pain to the erotic drive. The pain takes many forms — from outright sadism, as between Pinkie and Rose in *Brighton Rock*, to the mellower pain of old age, with its attendant losses of strength and sexual potency, explored in several of his late books. The loss of virginity, which figures in *Stamboul Train*, *Brighton Rock*, and *Dr Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party*, connects sexual intercourse and pain to increased knowledge and deepened relationships. Finally, disfigurement, a central theme in Greene's novels, bears sexual and erotic significance. The common factor in these disparate plots is the use of pain—or, to use Freud's term, "unpleasure"—as part of the function and process of sex. ¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, *Graham Greene's Childless Fathers*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1988, 2.

¹³⁵ See Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, *Volume XIX: The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975, 159.

The End of the Affair examines the virtue of pain and abstinence, as well as the role of sexual love in religious experience. Bendrix, the novel's main narrator, has an affair with a married woman, Sarah; she refuses to leave her husband, and she ends the affair. Bendrix assumes that there is another man, but when he hires a private investigator, it becomes clear that God is the only other man. Sarah ends the affair because she has made a vow: when Bendrix is struck by a V1 bomb during the Blitz, she promises God that if he is alive, she will give him up. She believes him dead, lying unconscious under a door, and she prays for a miracle.

Despite the shakiness of her faith, she obeys her vow, and she ends their liaison. Bendrix does not understand why until the middle of the book, when he reads Sarah's diary, which constitutes the center of the novel. In his introduction to the new Penguin Classics edition of *The End of the Affair*, Michael Gorra writes that the diary provides "the core of the novel's critical interest," as well as its most "memorable" voice. Her narrative stands alone in a number of ways. In *The End of the Affair*, Greene takes up for the first and essentially only time the task of writing in a female voice. Her impassioned, wide-ranging meditation encompasses religion, sexuality, and the pain of loss. As she adheres to her vow, she asks herself whether she could love or understand God without first having loved Bendrix. Sarah's narrative describes the *via negativa* of her religious faith: she comes to God only by her own suffering and abstinence. She writes at length about the experiences of her body as they relate to the suffering of Christ, and she argues that her union with Bendrix opened her up for the development of faith.

As Mark Bosco argues,

Greene proposes to place the doctrine of the Incarnation at the center of his realistic novel, thereby pushing the ramifications of the doctrine to extreme moments of sexual ecstasy and of intense suffering because of the loss of the beloved's body. If God has become human flesh, the logic goes, then every finite body is a possible conduit of God's grace.¹³⁶

Sarah grows to believe this, and her narrative—which is openly religious, deeply personal, and, as Bosco phrases it, “sometimes hysterical”—makes explicit the connection between sexual experience and religious love. She wishes for the total annihilation of the body after death, writing, “If I were to invent a doctrine it would be that the body was never born again, that it rotted with last year's vermin.”¹³⁷ Only after thinking about her sexual relationship with Bendrix does she change her mind about this. Instead of thinking of her own body, she thinks of Bendrix's body:

I thought of certain lines life had put on his face as personal as a line of his writing: I thought of a new scar on his shoulder that wouldn't have been there if once he hadn't tried to protect another man's body from a falling wall. He didn't tell me why he was in hospital those three days: Henry told me. That scar was part of his character as much as his jealousy. And so I thought, do I want that body to be vapour (mine yes, but his?), and I knew I wanted that scar to exist through all eternity. But could my vapour love that scar? Then I

¹³⁶ Mark Bosco, *Graham Greene's Catholic Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 61-62.

¹³⁷ *The End of the Affair*, 87.

began to want my body that I hated, but only because it could love that scar.

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His body, which she knows intimately, is synecdochically represented by this scar, which she views as a physical reminder of Bendrix's essential self. Rather than see his scar as one small element of his body, it becomes the central figure of her physical passion. Like Rose in *Brighton Rock*, Sarah focuses on the scar—visible representation of the pain that Bendrix suffered.

This mark is significant because of the heroism Bendrix displayed in receiving it; however, Sarah is drawn to pain and scarring regardless of the origin of the scars. Any body in pain will serve to deepen and reaffirm her empathy and connection with God. What Freud calls "moral masochism" fits this mold; he argues that "All other masochistic sufferings carry with them the condition that they shall emanate from the loved person and shall be endured at his command. This restriction has been dropped in moral masochism. The suffering itself is what matters; whether it is decreed by someone who is loved or by someone who is indifferent is of no importance."¹³⁹

This is true for Sarah. She is attracted, almost impersonally, to physical flaws and pain. She feels it for all who suffer, for anyone she encounters. As she carries out her vow, she meets Richard Smythe, a man with a repulsive birthmark on his cheek. This disfigurement becomes, for Sarah, a site of religious import, for she associates physical flaws with God. She kisses Smythe's cheek, site of his disfiguring blotches, and her diary records the moment as a religious one:

¹³⁸ *The End of the Affair*, 87-89.

¹³⁹ Freud, *The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, 165.

I shut my eyes and put my mouth against the cheek. I felt sick for a moment because I fear deformity, and he sat quiet and let me kiss him, and I thought I am kissing pain and pain belongs to You as happiness never does. I love You in Your pain. I could almost taste metal and salt in the skin, and I thought, How good You are.”¹⁴⁰

As Sarah’s record shows, she equates Smythe’s suffering—and her own proximal experience of it—with a spiritual brush with God. Through his pain, Smythe becomes a conduit for religious meaning. After Bendrix reads a scrap of her diary—which he mistakes for a love letter to Smythe—he meets Smythe and considers the nature of Sarah’s attraction to him. Bendrix sees that Sarah is drawn to Smythe’s affliction: “I stared up at the raw spots on his cheek and thought, there is no safety anywhere: a humpback, a cripple—they all have the trigger that sets love off.”¹⁴¹ She cannot resist the pull of Smythe’s pain; it is as powerful a somatic experience as her sexual encounters with Bendrix. Bendrix understands Sarah well enough to recognize that she is drawn to these flawed bodies.

The sensuality of her kiss of Smythe’s cheek is integral to Sarah’s religious passion, and the sexuality of the situation (encompassing Smythe’s powerful attraction to—indeed, love for—Sarah) becomes a form of contact with the divine. Even as Sarah acknowledges her revulsion—“I fear deformity”—she channels that energy, commingled with a thrill of disgust and fear, into her religious pursuit.

While this scene is less openly erotic than many other points in the book, the sense of taste in Sarah’s experience ties that moment to more explicitly sexual scenes

¹⁴⁰ *The End of the Affair*, 98.

¹⁴¹ *The End of the Affair*, 64.

in which Bendrix relates the taste he associates with Sarah, which he describes as “thin and elusive as water...”¹⁴² While Greene's work as a whole has surprisingly little to say about food, he repeatedly returns to taste and eating in *The End of the Affair*, always tying it to the intimacy of relationships. The novel features one of Greene's rare food-focused scenes: Bendrix and Sarah go to a film made from one of Bendrix's novels before they begin their affair. The movie is poor, but one scene conveys the contents of the book: one lover refuses to eat onions, because her husband dislikes the taste of them when he kisses her. Bendrix desires Sarah because she identifies this scene, and because she eats her onions with relish even though Henry dislikes them. They order steak at Rules, and Sarah calls it “the best I've ever eaten.” They abandon it, however, together in their sexual attraction and purpose:

There was no pursuit and no seduction. We left half the good steak on our plates and a third of the bottle of claret and came out into Maiden Lane with the same intention in both our minds. At exactly the same spot as before, by the doorway and the grill, we kissed. I said, ‘I'm in love.’

‘Me too.’¹⁴³

This description of Sarah shows her as an equal partner in the pursuit of their sexual relationship, as a woman with intense appetites of all kinds. Corporeal experience—more even than her intense faith—is an essential part of her character, part of what Bendrix loves.

The imagined unpleasant metal-and-salt flavor of Smythe (and, perhaps, God) serve to contrast that relationship with that of Bendrix and Sarah, which is evoked in

¹⁴² *The End of the Affair*, 55.

¹⁴³ *The End of the Affair*, 33-34.

the simplicity of water and the enjoyment of a well-cooked meal. When Sarah turns to God, praying to be able to kiss Smythe's birthmark, the scene changes focus, and the physical details drop away—just as the physical details of her sexual relationship with Bendrix drop away after Sarah's vow, leaving the abstract elements of love and jealousy.

Sarah, who describes herself as “a bitch and a fake,” tries a number of techniques for getting outside of her own ego. Chief among these is love or pity for another—she begs, in her diary, “Let me think of those awful spots on Richard's cheek. Let me see Henry's face with the tears falling. Let me forget me.”¹⁴⁴ As in sexual abandonment, her pity allows her to set aside the constant awareness of self, inspiring an empathy that she finds hard to achieve otherwise. Her diary also records a desperate plea to God, asking to “come alive again”:

If I don't come alive again, I'm going to be a slut, just a slut. I'm going to destroy myself quite deliberately. Every year I'll be more used. Will you like that any better than if I break my promise? I'll be like those women in bars who laugh too much and have three men with them, touching them without intimacy.¹⁴⁵

Her inability to enjoy life without Bendrix drives her to this threat, which exposes her belief in sexuality as a sort of drug. She is desperate to feel, and willing to take any step to assure it. In this threat, there is perhaps an etiology for Ida Arnold in *Brighton Rock* and aunt Augusta in *Travels with My Aunt*, whose sexuality Greene

¹⁴⁴ *The End of the Affair*, 96.

¹⁴⁵ *The End of the Affair*, 79.

seems to celebrate and censure at the same time. Even as Sarah resists this outcome, she understands the addictive power of desire and sexuality.

All of Sarah's relationships feature this focus on bodily vulnerability, even her relationship with Henry, which has cooled to a sisterly regard. Sarah comes home in one scene of the novel, prepared to leave Henry for Bendrix. Henry claims to have a headache. Sarah writes,

“I came behind him and put my hand on his forehead. It was an odd thing to be doing just before leaving him for ever. He used to do that to me when we were first married and I had terrible nervous headaches because nothing was going right. I forgot for a moment that I would only *pretend* to be cured that way.”¹⁴⁶

When she says that “nothing was going right,” she may be discussing the fact that she and Henry have never been sexually compatible, for she tells Bendrix that she never had an orgasm with Henry.

This scene, complete with the ‘laying on of hands,’ demonstrates Sarah's inability to disregard suffering. She does not leave Henry. He asks her—begs her—never to leave him, although he does not know of her intention to leave, and she agrees, cornered by his need. After this scene, Sarah reflects, “God made man. He was Henry with his astigmatism, Richard with his spots, only not Maurice. If I could love a leper's sores, couldn't I love the boringness of Henry? But I'd turn from the

¹⁴⁶ *The End of the Affair*, 94.

leper if he were here, I suppose, as I shut myself away from Henry.”¹⁴⁷ Human flaws and inadequacies both attract and repel her.

Sarah’s own pain and weakness come into play when she becomes ill. Greene describes a scene on the sidewalk from Maurice’s perspective and again from Sarah’s. As she records it, “Only for a little I was unhappy, saying good-bye above the grating I thought he was going to kiss me again, and I longed for it, and then a fit of coughing took me and the moment passed.”¹⁴⁸ Maurice is drawn to her by pity for her illness. He remembers, “Suddenly she began to cough with her hand pressed to her side. I knew she was in pain and I couldn’t leave her alone in pain. I came and sat beside her and put my hand on her knee while she coughed.”¹⁴⁹ Maurice is attracted to her vulnerability, and when she falls asleep against his shoulder in the same scene, he reflects, “The slowly growing pain in my upper arm where her weight lay was the greatest pleasure I had ever known.”¹⁵⁰ This physical connection between Bendrix and Sarah (the first they have had since Sarah’s vow) transfigures pain into pleasure; the experience echoes Sarah’s own attraction to Bendrix’s scar.

Sarah’s death shocks and devastates Bendrix. He describes his suffering from this loss of a shared history as though it is an injury:

She had lost all our memories for ever, and it was as though by dying she had robbed me of part of myself. I was losing my individuality. It was the first stage of my own death, the memories dropping off like gangrened limbs.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ *The End of the Affair*, 96.

¹⁴⁸ *The End of the Affair*, 91.

¹⁴⁹ *The End of the Affair*, 104.

¹⁵⁰ *The End of the Affair*, 105.

¹⁵¹ *The End of the Affair*, 113.

Bendrix, who scarcely mentions his permanent physical lameness, finds this loss unsupportable. Sarah's death brings him into contact with his own mortality, even as it causes him suffering.

Greene's preoccupation with pain takes a different form in *Brighton Rock*. From their first meeting, Rose's relationship with Pinkie hinges on pain and violence—Pinkie, who has frequently “carved up” his enemies with a razor blade, and who has killed a man, sees violence as a replacement for sex. He considers violence clean, while sex is dirty (marriage, he thinks, is “like ordure on the hands”).¹⁵² Their relationship begins with Pinkie's violence toward Rose—the thrill, perhaps, of being important enough to Pinkie to deserve punishment or threats.

Pinkie uses a bottle of vitriol to frighten Rose. He tells her about another woman who was maimed by vitriol:

“‘What happened to her?’ Rose said.

‘They spoilt her looks. She lost one eye. They splashed vitriol on her face.’

Rose whispered, ‘Vitriol? What’s vitriol?’ and the lightning showed a strut of tarred wood, a wave breaking and her pale, bony, terrified face.

‘You’ve never seen vitriol?’ the Boy said, grinning through the dark. He showed her the little bottle. ‘That’s vitriol.’ He took the cork out and spilled a little on the wooden plank of the pier: it hissed like steam. ‘It burns,’ the Boy said. ‘Smell it,’ and he thrust the bottle under her nose.

She gasped at him ‘Pinkie, *you* wouldn’t—’ and ‘I was pulling your leg,’ he smoothly lied to her. ‘That’s not vitriol, that’s just spirit. I wanted to warn

¹⁵² *Brighton Rock*, 122.

you, that's all. You and me's going to be friends. I don't want a friend with her skin burned off.”¹⁵³

He carries the bottle of vitriol in his pocket, feeling it often: “a faint secret sensual pleasure he felt, touching the bottle of vitriol with his fingers, was his nearest approach to passion.”¹⁵⁴ When he and Rose go out to a dance hall, he links his opinion of her to the thrill of possibility in the bottle of vitriol: “[O]ne hand caressed the vitriol bottle in his pocket, the other touched Rose's wrist.”¹⁵⁵ Pinkie fears both Rose and his own emotional responses to the sentimental music, and he responds with cruelty:

His fingers pinched her wrist. ‘You're green,’ he said again. He was working himself into a little sensual rage, as he had done with the soft kids at the council school. ‘You don't know anything,’ he said, with contempt in his nails.

‘Oh no,’ she protested. ‘I know a lot.’

The Boy grinned at her, ‘Not a thing,’ pinching the skin of her wrist until his nails nearly met. ‘You'd like me for your boy, eh? We'll keep company?’

‘Oh,’ she said, ‘I'd love it.’ Tears of pride and pain pricked behind her lids. ‘If you like doing that,’ she said, ‘go on.’¹⁵⁶

Rose's complicity in this physical relationship, which borders on the sadomasochistic, draws on the combination of “pride and pain” described here.

Pinkie's abusive form of attention still constitutes love, to Rose. For Pinkie, however,

¹⁵³ *Brighton Rock*, 55-56.

¹⁵⁴ *Brighton Rock*, 54.

¹⁵⁵ *Brighton Rock*, 59.

¹⁵⁶ *Brighton Rock*, 60.

the fact that she accepts it takes some of the savor out of his actions—if she accepts it, he does not overpower her. Her lack of resistance disappoints him, and he responds with anger:

He sat there, anger like a live coal in his belly, as the music came on again: 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: what would be the fun if people didn't squeal?¹⁵⁷

Pinkie usually bestows pain and violence, rather than suffering it. When he is attacked by Colleoni's men, the experience appalls him. He recognizes, for the first time, his own vulnerability:

The surprise at first was far worse than the pain (a nettle could sting as badly). 'You fools,' he said, 'it's not me, it's him you want,' and turned and saw the faces ringing him all round. They grinned back at him: every man had his razor out: and he remembered for the first time Colleoni laughing up the telephone wire.¹⁵⁸

He tries, at first, to defend himself, but is slashed across the knuckles, and "pain happened to him, and he was filled with horror and astonishment as if one of the bullied brats at school had stabbed first with the dividers."¹⁵⁹

Pinkie, even in the terror of the moment, registers the pleasure of the scene for the other men. He observes that "the men were enjoying themselves, just as he had always enjoyed himself. One of them leant forward to cut his cheek, and when he put

¹⁵⁷ *Brighton Rock*, 60.

¹⁵⁸ *Brighton Rock*, 129.

¹⁵⁹ *Brighton Rock*, 129.

up his hand to shield himself they slashed his knuckles again. He began to weep, as the four-thirty went by in a drumbeat of hooves beyond the rail.”¹⁶⁰ His own response—tears, fear, and flight—is worse than the punishment itself, and Pinkie’s suffering grows because he knows that his attackers are enjoying the pursuit.

In this scene, Pinkie finally understands the nature of pain, after inflicting it countless times, and he fails to fight back, which he sees as a failure of masculinity. He lies about his part in the fight, telling others that the attackers had the worst of the combat. Rose accepts this valorization of violence. When he goes to her to be bandaged and doctored, she says, “Your dear face,” and Pinkie recoils: “He remembered with disgust that they were always said to like a scar, that they took it as a mark of manhood, of potency.”¹⁶¹ This mention of potency is important in Greene’s *oeuvre*, both because scars and disfigurements are so common in his characters and because a scar—or, even more, a missing limb—can be associated with a *loss* of physical attractiveness or manhood.

Throughout their courtship, Pinkie’s disgust of sex and physical touch rises over and over. Any arousal registers as illness: “She got up and he saw the skin of her thigh for a moment above the artificial silk, and a prick of sexual desire disturbed him like a sickness. That was what happened to a man in the end: the stuffy room, the wakeful children, the Saturday night movements from the other bed.”¹⁶² Desire—the vulnerability that Pinkie equates with sickness—is often described in this text as a “prick,” with all of the genital focus that implies. Pinkie finds sexual contact

¹⁶⁰ *Brighton Rock*, 130.

¹⁶¹ *Brighton Rock*, 134-35.

¹⁶² *Brighton Rock*, 112.

repulsive, but he obsesses over sexuality, seeing it everywhere, feeling it constantly. His resistance to his own sexual drives is represented in sexual language—he thinks, of the prospect of marrying Rose, “He didn’t want *that* relationship with anyone: the double bed, the intimacy, it sickened him like the idea of age. He crouched in the corner away from where the ticking pierced the seat, vibrating up and down in bitter virginity.”¹⁶³ The description (“vibrating up and down” in particular) emphasizes the power of his sexual desire, even as he quashes it and transmutes it into hate. Both his anger and his lust are described as feelings in his “belly,” further connecting violence and sexuality—for example, when he gets angry: “A passion of cruelty stirred in his belly.”¹⁶⁴

Their wedding night, the occasion of almost unbearable anxiety for Pinkie, is also attended by pain:

Shaken by a kind of rage, he took her by the shoulders. He had escaped from Nelson Place to this: he pushed her against the bed. ‘It’s a mortal sin,’ he said, getting what savour there was out of innocence, trying to taste God in the mouth: a brass bedball, her dumb, frightened and acquiescent eyes—he blotted everything out in a sad brutal now-or-never embrace: a cry of pain and then the jangling of the bell beginning all over again. ‘Christ,’ he said, ‘can’t they let a man alone?’ He opened his eyes on the grey room to see what he had done: it seemed to him more like death than when Hale and Spicer had died.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ *Brighton Rock*, 122.

¹⁶⁴ *Brighton Rock*, 129.

¹⁶⁵ *Brighton Rock*, 225-26.

The equation of sex with death emphasizes the solemnity of the act. For Rose and Pinkie, it is the point of no return: for her, the moment when she has committed a sin that she believes to be grounds for damnation, and for him, the point at which he opens himself to Rose and allows her to see his vulnerability. Earlier in the novel, Pinkie nearly has sex with another woman, Sylvie, but backs out at the last moment, unable to allow another person such intimate access: “His own [nerves] were frozen with repulsion: to be touched, to give oneself away, to lay oneself open—he had held intimacy back as long as he could at the end of a razor blade.”¹⁶⁶

The next day, Rose ponders the effects of the consummation. She thinks, “It was a lie when people said that sleeping with a man made no difference: you emerged from pain to this—freedom, liberty, strangeness. A stifled exhilaration moved in her breast, a kind of pride.”¹⁶⁷ She is changed by their sexual encounter, and can reach those more mature attributes only by going through pain. Rather like Sarah’s “cry of abandonment” that attends her orgasm during sex with Bendrix, Rose’s “cry of pain” marks a transformation, a transcendence, perhaps, that is inherent to the sexuality of these novels.

Paul O’Prey believes that *Brighton Rock* is the first of Greene’s novels to explore the connection between sexuality and spirituality. He points to Pinkie’s reflection near the end of the novel as evidence, when Pinkie thinks, “He hadn’t hated her; he hadn’t even hated the act. There had been a kind of pleasure, a kind of pride, a kind of—something else.”¹⁶⁸ According to O’Prey, that unnameable “something” is

¹⁶⁶ *Brighton Rock*, 164-65.

¹⁶⁷ *Brighton Rock*, 238-39.

¹⁶⁸ *Brighton Rock*, 299.

“a suggestion of a connection between profane and sacred forms of love, a suggestion that Pinkie could find redemption through human love, even through sex itself. This idea was to become a central theme of *The End of the Affair*, though Greene does not develop it further here.”¹⁶⁹

The End of the Affair draws a more explicit connection between sex and spiritual growth—even, perhaps, between romantic and religious ecstasy—but Greene does expand on the idea even in *Brighton Rock*. He offers, as a possible gleam of hope in an otherwise bleak narrative, the prospect that Rose may be carrying Pinkie’s child. Pinkie is horrified at this prospect—he “watched her with terror and disgust as if he were watching the ugly birth itself, the rivet of another life already pinning him down.”¹⁷⁰ Rose, however, imagines children who would support Pinkie and join her in her love for him. Ultimately, this prospect—which neither of them has considered until Ida points it out to Rose—connects sexual experience to eternity, when Rose realizes that they have committed “an eternal act.” Pinkie also makes the sacred nature of their union explicit, though he expresses hate for Rose and God: “he’d got her like you got God in the Eucharist—in the guts.”¹⁷¹

Brighton Rock does not suggest that Pinkie and Rose are a perverse, isolated case. Rather, the novel depicts the sharing of pain as a normal part of sexuality. Rose, on the first morning after her wedding, sees Pinkie’s housemate Dallow kissing his mistress:

¹⁶⁹ Paul O’Prey. *A Reader’s Guide to Graham Greene*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988, 69.

¹⁷⁰ *Brighton Rock*, 267.

¹⁷¹ *Brighton Rock*, 220.

She opened the kitchen door boldly and there at the head of the basement stairs was Dallow and the red-haired bitch, the woman he'd called Judy. They stood with lips glued together in an attitude of angry passion: they might have been inflicting on each other the greatest injury of which there were either of them capable...As they fought mouth to mouth the sweet-toned clock sounded the half-hour.¹⁷²

Rose, who thinks of Judy as “the red-haired bitch” because that’s how Dallow describes her, feels a deep understanding of the scene (“She knew all about this now”¹⁷³). The struggle in their kiss makes it explicable to Rose, for once she can connect their sexual relationship to the erotic link between herself and Pinkie, she feels belonging and understanding. She feels that she has been inducted into a sisterhood of women through the loss of her virginity.

Pinkie grants sexuality the same importance, although his feeling about it is different. Though he has a form of sexuality that most readers might think twisted, he finds both sin (mortal sin, in fact) and redemption in the same sexual act. His relationship with Rose has no linear trajectory, but instead a circling and doubling back that goes around and around the central problem of sexuality. His alternating acceptance of her (even, at some moments, desire) and revulsion are a dialectical representation of his ambivalence about sex. He feels trapped into marrying her, and the text suggests the question: why does he marry her? He is already a cold-blooded killer, and certainly he considers the alternative, murder. Her love is difficult for him to accept, but through their marriage he does accept it.

¹⁷² *Brighton Rock*, 238-39.

¹⁷³ *Brighton Rock*, 238-39.

Rose's love for Pinkie, passionate and apparently indestructible, is the engine driving the events of this book. She demonstrates as much unquestioning kindness and loyalty as any character Greene ever created, and Pinkie the most pure malice. The Manichean opposition of the two, however, is a false dichotomy: the real opposition in this novel is between the solemnity that both Pinkie and Rose see in their sexual and marital union, and the lighter, more dismissive suggestion that sex can be simple, just for fun—set forth by Ida Arnold, whose simple view of the world the novel condemns. She is a "good sort"—and Greene has little patience for "good sorts." Ida muses that sex is "Fun...human nature...does no one any harm..."¹⁷⁴ This view, reducing sex to entertainment, opposes the seriousness with which Pinkie and Rose both regard sexuality.

Ida's worldview—superficially a sophisticated one—is actually a simplistic schema, in which fair play and justice always win. Her sexual freedom and sensuality accompany her sense that life is a game; she is unabashedly sexual in part because she does not believe that there is any significance to sexuality beyond the practical. Rose and Pinkie, by contrast, consider life serious—and sex, as the root of life, must be serious too. Ida reveals her own lack of understanding when she advises Rose to take "precautions" against pregnancy. While Ida is streetwise enough to know how to avoid pregnancy, she doesn't grasp the significance that sexuality has for Rose and Pinkie—a significance that cannot be pushed away by contraception.

¹⁷⁴ *Brighton Rock*, 185.

In *Orient Express* (1932), as well as in *Brighton Rock*, Greene signifies the loss of virginity by "a cry of pain." Coral Musker loses her virginity to Myatt, who only realizes during the act that she is a virgin:

[L]ying in the berth she proved awkward in a mysterious innocent fashion which astonished him...She said suddenly and urgently, 'Be patient. I don't know much,' and then she cried out with pain. He could not have been more startled if a ghost had passed through the compartment dressed in an antique wear which antedated steam.¹⁷⁵

The realization that he has misjudged her, however, inspires tenderness in him:

'I never knew. I never guessed.' There was such warmth in the carriage now between them that, without closing the window, he knelt beside the berth and put his hand on her face, touching her features with curious fingers. Again he was overwhelmed with the novel thought, 'How sweet, how dear.' She lay quiet, shaken a little by quick breaths of pain or excitement.¹⁷⁶

Myatt's gentle touch on Coral's face is his most tender moment in the book. Her pain gives him a new and unexpected thrill of compassion and solicitousness. He finds his feelings "novel." His loyalty to Coral does not last long, however; he abandons her, after some lukewarm efforts to find her, when customs officers remove her from the train. The attraction he feels to Janet Pardoe—a different type of woman, one he could marry—overpowers his sense of obligation to Coral. He takes Janet to the theatre, to Dunn's Babies: the chorus Coral was traveling to join.

¹⁷⁵ Graham Greene, *Orient Express*, Centennial edition, New York: Penguin, 2004, 109.

¹⁷⁶ *Orient Express*, 110.

For Coral, their sexual encounter changes everything, not only because she is no longer a virgin, but because she will be disappointed in her hopes of support as Myatt's mistress. When she describes their sexual encounter, she says, "It wasn't a picnic."¹⁷⁷—a statement that is truer than she knows, as the reward she expected is not going to be forthcoming. Myatt, despite his unease about her safety, speaks of her as a woman who cost ten pounds, thereby denying the quite real emotional charge of their union.

The sexual appeal of vulnerability and pain sparks the relationship between Coral and Myatt on the train in the first place. Myatt, the currant vendor, sees Coral faint. He is drawn to her instantly, despite the fact that, as the purser notes near the beginning of the novel, there was nothing special about her:

It seemed to him suddenly of vital necessity that he should aid her. Watching her dance upon the stage, or stand in a lit street outside a stage-door, he would have regarded her only as game for the senses, but helpless and sick under the dim unsteady lamp of the corridor, her body shaken by the speed of the train, she woke a painful pity. She had not complained of the cold; she had commented on it as a kind of necessary evil, and in a flash of insight he became aware of the innumerable necessary evils of which life for her was made up.¹⁷⁸

Myatt describes his own pity as "painful," as though he himself suffers. He understands her deprivations "in a flash of insight"—which is temporary, as his

¹⁷⁷ *Orient Express*, 110.

¹⁷⁸ Graham Greene, *Orient Express*. New York: Penguin Centennial edition, 2004, 18.

attraction to Coral is not strong enough to sustain over the course of the novel. When his pursuit of her becomes inconvenient, he lets her go and transfers his attentions to the more beautiful, more available Janet Pardoe. The language of this passage—“helpless,” “dim,” “unsteady,” “shaken”—emphasizes the solidity and superiority that Myatt feels over Coral, which drives him to feel compassion and responsibility for her.

By contrast, in an intensely rendered scene in *Dr Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party* (1980), loss of virginity constitutes a bonding ceremony. Jones, the hero, falls in love with Anna-Luise, a much younger woman. He cannot believe that she could love him; he has only one hand, has modest means, and is old enough to be her parent. He desires her powerfully, however, and they fall in love. Greene describes the loss of blood during their first sexual encounter. He invests this coupling with sacred significance—Jones recounts the occasion as a kind of marriage beyond the social forms:

She said, ‘Why not? You’ve my lover and my father, my child and my mother, you’re the whole family—the only family I want,’ and she put her mouth on mine so that I couldn’t reply and she pressed me down onto the bed, so that her blood was smeared on my legs and my stomach, and thus it was we married for better or worse without the consent of Dr Fischer or a priest if it comes to that. There was no legality in our kind of marriage and therefore there could be no divorce. We took each other for good and all.¹⁷⁹

As Anna-Luise makes this statement—a vow of sorts, in this unofficial but

¹⁷⁹ Graham Greene, *Dr Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980, 24.

binding marriage—she smears Jones with her blood, thereby tying them together.

Greene uses this scene to prefigure her death: Jones sees her being carried down the ski slope on a stretcher, but thinks that it is someone else, because her white skiing sweater has been turned red by blood.

Jones sees their physical relationship as a measure of their love, remarking, on the night that they argue about Dr Fischer's party, that Anna-Luise fell asleep without making love. He further argues the sacred importance of sex by arguing that happiness is something else entirely: "Is there happiness in a sexual embrace? Surely not. That is an excitement, a kind of delirium, and sometimes it is close to pain."¹⁸⁰ Sex between Jones and Anna-Luise is not the pursuit of happiness; it is a renewal of their pledge to one another, something far more than mere happiness or pleasure. While their relationship picks up the threads that Greene began to weave in his earliest work, their sexual encounters are more explicitly sacred.

From its inception, Jones credits their relationship to his missing hand. Because Anna-Luise sees his missing hand and does not want to offend him, she does not seek another table when she discovers that Jones is using the table she chooses in a café. Instead, she sits and talks to him, and he is immediately attracted to her. As with Sarah Miles in *The End of the Affair*, the physical flaw increases Anna-Luise's interest in Jones.

Greene himself felt this same kind of attraction to flawed bodies, as Norman Sherry reports in his biography of Greene. When Greene met John Hayward, an editor who became a good friend, he was drawn to him immediately. Sherry reports,

¹⁸⁰ *Dr Fischer*, 53.

“Hayward was physically ugly and badly crippled, but his condition only brought out a deep sympathy in Greene and a desire to defend him: ‘That powerful head ugly? that twist of the half paralysed arm, as the agile hand seized a cup or procured itself a cigarette? the wicked intelligence of the eyes? a cripple, yes, but there are few men I can remember with greater vitality.’”¹⁸¹ Greene responded to this “vitality” by sending him “‘dirty postcards’ from every part of the world, recognising that there were ‘few men with a greater appreciation of physical love.’”¹⁸²

Dr Fischer presents two very different paradigms of sexuality. While Anna-Luise and Jones enjoy an equitable, fulfilling sexual relationship, Anna-Luise tells Jones about her mother’s sex life in her marriage to Dr Fischer. Mrs Fischer, who loves music, especially that of the violinist Heifitz, cannot share this passion with Dr Fischer, who is tone-deaf. He refers to it as “caterwauling.” She eventually begins meeting with another man to listen to music together, and when Dr Fischer finds out, he lashes out in fury and jealousy. Jones imagines their brutal sexual relationship, piecing it together from what Anna-Luise has told him. Jones envisions Mrs Fischer’s situation:

...ever after it seemed to her that he made love with hatred. She couldn’t explain that to her daughter, but I could imagine the way it went—how he thrust his way in, as though he were stabbing an enemy. But he couldn’t be satisfied with one final blow. It had to be the death of a thousand cuts. He told her he forgave her, which only increased her sense of guilt, for surely there

¹⁸¹ Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume I (1904-1939)*. New York: Penguin, 1989, 394.

¹⁸² Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume I (1904-1939)*. New York: Penguin, 1989, 394.

had to be something to forgive, but he told her also that he could never forget her betrayal—what betrayal? So he would wake her in the night to stab her with his goad again.¹⁸³

The penis as weapon appears in *The Quiet American* as well, between Fowler and Phuong. In their case, Fowler is desperate to reach Phuong, to make her talk to him:

...I remembered that first tormenting year when I had tried so passionately to understand her, when I had begged her to tell me what she thought and had scared her with my unreasoning anger at her silences. Even my desire had been a weapon, as though when one plunged one's sword towards the victim's womb, she would lose control and speak.¹⁸⁴

In both of these cases, the man employs sex in an attempt to force the utterly unforceable: Dr Fischer cannot possibly achieve aesthetic equality with his wife or with Steiner by the violence of sex, nor can Fowler provoke Phuong into speaking. The language barrier between Fowler and Phuong is only one part of the communicative problem; their communication problems also come from the cultural differences that Fowler will never understand. Even as he attributes motives to Phuong's actions, he acknowledges that he is guessing: he doesn't know what causes her to make the decisions she makes. Only when he accepts the gulf between them can Fowler redefine their sexual relationship.

While the frailties of the body take many forms, Greene consistently sexualizes them. Greene's characters do not seem to desire perfection; instead, they

¹⁸³ *Dr Fischer*, 48-49.

¹⁸⁴ *The Quiet American*, 125.

actively desire the flaws and weaknesses of their sexual partners, sometimes driven by what seems to be pity. Experiencing pain—delivering it, receiving it, embracing it—enriches the sexual life, particularly in the books of Greene's middle period (*Brighton Rock*, *The End of the Affair*). Greene, who emphasizes this connection over the course of his career, depicts a sexual landscape in which pain, deformity, and failure have erotic significance. Sarah Miles, the character who most explicitly connects sex, pain, and spirituality, is a mouthpiece for some of the theological ideas about the body that influenced Greene—but those ideas are present in less explicitly Catholic forms in many of Greene's novels.

Perversity and darkness, as they figure into Greene's sexual descriptions, are not just odd sidenotes in the main stream of "normal" sexuality. Rather, Greene's whole concept of sexuality includes pain, darkness, and sin. Emptiness and need all play into Greene's sexual universe. While it is possible for Greene's characters to embrace a "wholesome" or normal sexuality (Wormold in *Our Man in Havana*, for example), these characters are not the standard or the goal. They are, instead, usually people with less ability to feel—a middle-class sort of comfort and complacency.

While Greene suggests that these elements are a part of normal sexuality—not perverse pleasures for a deviant few—his characters nonetheless find sexuality a route into their own dark places. From Pinkie, whose very definition of sexuality is pain, to the more 'normal' characters such as Maurice Bendrix, Greene's characters demonstrate a confluence of pain and eroticism. While it is tempting, as a result, to equate sex and sin in some of these texts—for, after all, the presence of pain in erotic ecstasy is surely suspect—this equation is flawed. It reduces sexuality to another

element of a simplified landscape in which absolute answers exist, a landscape that Greene resisted. The myriad ways that Greene's characters experience sex, and the frequency with which they find stimulation and excitement in pain and disfigurement, echo Greene's messages about faith and spirituality: they are different for everyone, and there is no standard, any more than there is such a thing as a normative sexual practice.

“A Man May Look”: Scopophilia, Risk, and Exposure

At the opening of *A Gun for Sale* (1936), Greene describes Raven, the sociopathic, twisted antihero. As Raven surveys a room, Greene writes, “His eyes, like little concealed cameras, photographed the room instantaneously.”¹⁸⁵ The idea of the eye as a camera—while hardly unique to Greene—is more than a description of careful observation. The equation of the eye with a camera also suggests a division between the observer and the observed. The imaginary camera lens creates an imagined barrier that allows the observer to watch without being observed in return: the position of the voyeur.

Scopophilia, or “pleasure of looking,” encompasses two related sexual practices: watching the sexual object (whether openly, or from hiding as a voyeur), and exhibitionism (public or private). Voyeurism and visual eroticism play a large role in Greene’s description of sexual life, but Greene’s writings also describe the sexual excitement of taking risks that might result in exposure. His characters keep secrets, have sex in public places, or engage in adulterous relationships in places that might be discovered by a lover’s spouse. Where characters watch one another, Greene sees a complicated set of relationships, in which secrecy, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and sexual risk-taking are interwoven into the very fabric of sexual desire. Exposure and concealment structure sexuality in texts as chronologically disparate as *The Man Within* (1929) and *Travels with My Aunt* (1969) and as stylistically different as the atmospheric, erotic novel *The End of the Affair* (1951) and the short stories “May We Borrow Your Husband?” (1967) and “The Blue Film” (1954).

¹⁸⁵ Graham Greene, *A Gun for Sale*. Heinemann, 1973, 2.

Greene's interest in scopophilia grows from his love of cinema. Raven's eyes, "little concealed cameras," draw on Greene's years of watching through the camera at films. In his youth, particularly while he was courting his wife, Vivien, Greene went to the cinema almost daily; his biographer, Norman Sherry, points out that going to films "was the means of escaping from his isolation. It was also cheap entertainment, for matinee seats in the stalls cost only fourpence."¹⁸⁶ As Greene became a film critic and eventually a screenwriter, the influence of what psychoanalytic theorists call "the gaze" became increasingly prominent in his fiction. The gaze separates subject from sexual object; in the context of voyeurism, the subject is hidden, and the object is not aware of being observed.

As feminist critic Laura Mulvey argues in her influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), the experience of the cinema duplicates, in several important respects, the experience of voyeurism. Mulvey asserts that the comparison—which seems extreme, considering that the actors are aware of a future audience during filming—is nonetheless a fair one because of the emphasis that films place on the separation between viewer and image. Seeing a film mimics the experience of "looking through the keyhole," as it were—an experience that is powerful partly because it is secret. Mulvey describes a film as

...a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy. Moreover, the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one

¹⁸⁶ Norman Sherry, *Graham Greene: A Life (Volume I: 1904-1939)*, 243.

another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world.¹⁸⁷

The private world of the cinema is a socially acceptable setting in which to indulge one's predilection for watching.

Normative sexuality includes a certain amount of watching. In Greene's fiction, however, watching the sexual object becomes more important than the more central forms of erotic drive. In *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud describes voyeurism and exhibitionism, the two variations of scopophilia, as non-genital instincts which are independent of erotogenic zones. Freud considers them "perverse" only if they crowd out the desire for sexual consummation.¹⁸⁸ In Freud's view, scopophilia makes up part of infantile sexuality, which may contribute to the adult's sexual pleasure as well. The distinction is not merely of degree: a voyeur does not seek exchange or relationship, but instead obtains, for the purpose of sexual pleasure, the image of another, usually without the object's knowledge.

In *A Sort of Life* (1971), Greene recalls his siblings' governess, in whom he had an intense sexual interest, which began with a secret glimpse of her:

The first time I looked at her with any interest was at the same instant the *coup de foudre*. She was lying on the beach and her skirt had worked up high

¹⁸⁷ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, 16.3, Autumn 1975, 6-18.

¹⁸⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. James Strachey. 24 vols. London: Hogarth, 1953-74, Vol. 7.

and showed a long length of naked thigh. Suddenly at that moment I fell in love, body and mind. There was no romantic haze around this love, no make-believe: I couldn't share it like calf love with a waitress at the George. It is strange how vivid the memory has remained, so that I can see the stretch of beach, my mother reading, the angle from which I examined her body, and yet I cannot even remember the first time I kissed her or the hesitations and timidities which surely must have preceded the kiss.¹⁸⁹

Although Greene does not remember the relationship's progress, he recalls his surreptitious look perfectly. The private revelation of usually-concealed skin prefigures the visual snapshots that his characters sometimes preserve in their memories. Thomas Fowler, for example, in *The Quiet American* (1955), identifies as his deepest sexual experience ““lying in bed early one morning and watching a woman in a red dressing-gown brush her hair.””¹⁹⁰ This experience calls to mind Freud's assertion that scopophilia is a part of infantile sexuality, enjoyed even as one watches from the bed. According to Greene's wife, Vivien, this memory comes from Greene's own experience: he described to Vivien ““the most terrific sort of sexual thrill” he felt, watching his mistress Dorothy Glover ““sitting in a red dressing gown in front of a dressing table.””¹⁹¹

The distinction between ordinary sexual behavior and the sort of gaze that Greene describes is emphasis: the gaze itself, the view of the woman in the red dressing gown, creates the sexual thrill, rather than being preparatory to the sex act.

¹⁸⁹ Greene, Graham. *A Sort of Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971, 125.

¹⁹⁰ *The Quiet American*, 94.

¹⁹¹ Norman Sherry, *Graham Greene: A Life, Volume II (1939-1955)*, New York: Penguin, 2004, 25.

Many of Greene's characters display an interest in watching exclusive of physical sex. In *Brighton Rock*, Mr. Prewitt tells Pinkie that he watches the women passing by his window:

He leant forward and said in a whisper—"I watch the little typists go by carrying their cases. I'm quite harmless. A man may watch. My God, how neat and trim."¹⁹²

Prewitt calls himself "harmless," but then he admits, "Sometimes...I have an urge to expose myself—shamefully—in a park."¹⁹³ Prewitt's longing to display himself sexually to these women reveals the power relationship inherent in his spying. The typists, who have no control over his surveillance—nor, indeed, any awareness of it—become his property, albeit property of a temporary kind. His observation dehumanizes them, reduces them to bodies, and refuses them any participation or relationship. Prewitt wants to expose himself to make this power structure explicit and to show the typists themselves that he has control over them. At the same time, Prewitt's timidity makes it impossible for him to carry out this wish.

This same language of permission—"a man may look"—appears also in *The Power and the Glory*. In the opening pages of the novel, Mr. Tench watches a young woman on the boat the *General Obregon*:

He said aloud in English, 'My God, a pretty one' --...he spat, staring with vague interest at a girl in the bows of the *General Obregon*—a fine thin

¹⁹² Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 261.

¹⁹³ Greene, *Brighton Rock*, 263.

figure, they were generally so thick, brown eyes, of course, and the inevitable gleam of the gold tooth, but something fresh and young....¹⁹⁴

When a visiting stranger says that the girl is very young—voicing disapproval of Tench's interest in her—he responds: ““Oh, I don't have intentions....A man may look. I've lived alone for fifteen years.””¹⁹⁵

In this case, watching the girl is a poor stand-in for a more physical, consistent sexual life. The repetition of the sentence from *Brighton Rock*, however, emphasizes an aspect of scopophilia: watching can be performed, often, when sexual intercourse is unavailable, or when sexual intercourse is forbidden by taboo or by fear.

Even *The Man Within*, Greene's first novel, describes voyeurism. As Andrews, the hero, hides in an attached shed, his hostess Elizabeth tries to convince the gangster Carlyon that she has not seen Andrews. In reality, the two of them have been drinking tea together, and Andrews's cup is still on the table. Elizabeth says that one cup belongs to her brother, who has gone out, and Carlyon—Andrews's mentor and father figure, the man Andrews has betrayed—says, ““He must have been here very lately...The tea is hot. And he left in a hurry with his tea unfinished. Curious that we did not meet.””¹⁹⁶

In response, Elizabeth says, ““That is my cup you have,”” and drinks the rest of Andrews's tea. Andrews watches this exchange from the closet:

Andrews kneeling by the keyhole put up his hand to ease his collar as

Elizabeth's lips touched the cup and drained what he had left. A strange

¹⁹⁴ Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 9.

¹⁹⁵ Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 9.

¹⁹⁶ Greene, *The Man Within*, 60.

loving cup, he thought bitterly, but his bitterness vanished before a wave of humility which for one moment even cleared his mind of its consciousness of fear. He had been kneeling to gain a view of the room beyond, but now in heart he knelt to her. She is a saint, he thought. The charity and courage with which she hid him from his enemy he had taken for granted; but to his muddled unstraight mind the act of drinking from the same cup came with a surprising nobility...he imagined that with unhesitating intimacy she had touched his lips and defiled her own.

Andrews's arousal, suggested by the easing of his collar, is only partly a response to Elizabeth's lips touching the cup that his own lips have just touched. It also springs from the fact that Carlyon is watching, as well, that this unexpectedly intimate gesture is visible to another. Particularly because that other is Carlyon—Andrews's father figure—a triangle forms. Both men watch Elizabeth. She is aware of their observation. Indeed, she performs her part consciously, a carefully calculated move that protects Andrews by demonstrating her loyalty to him and making it impossible for Carlyon to question her statement openly. He does not try the door that leads to the shed—"that embarrassing streak of chivalry which would not allow him to show openly his doubt of a woman's word" prevents him.¹⁹⁷ Elizabeth tells Carlyon that Andrews stayed the previous night and then left in the morning, headed north. Carlyon, charmed by her, tells her a bit about Andrews, and about his pursuit, and Andrews listens and watches through the keyhole. The discussion allows Andrews to see himself, after a fashion.

¹⁹⁷ *The Man Within*, 62.

At the beginning of the scene, the narration includes descriptions of what Andrews is doing and thinking—kneeling, taking out his knife, fearing discovery. As the conversation progresses, however, those descriptions fall away and only the conversation between Elizabeth and Carlyon remains. Andrews is caught up in their discussion, drawn in just as he might be drawn into a play or a film. Carlyon shows his attraction to Elizabeth, and Andrews finds her attractive as well; he also has a physical, visceral attraction to Carlyon. He fixates on the two figures, and his own consciousness of himself disappears until Carlyon leaves the cottage and breaks the spell. By that time, Andrews has fallen in love with Elizabeth.

Andrews does not attempt to touch Elizabeth. He confines himself to aesthetic and visual appreciation, rather than bodily contact. Andrews holds an internal dialogue between himself and his “internal critic,” who falls silent when Andrews argues that “there is something holy” in his relationship with Elizabeth.¹⁹⁸ Lynette Kohn, in her 1961 study, argues that “Elizabeth, the heroine, who represents peace and divine love, is scarcely developed as a real character. Young Greene seems to have been so engrossed by his wish to write about ideal love that he sees Elizabeth only as an instrument of Andrews’ salvation and not as a woman. She is removed from earthly passion and draws her loved one away from it.”¹⁹⁹ Certainly, he describes her, over and over, as “saintly”—and the teacup conjures images of the chalice in a Catholic Mass—but the taboo against touching her amplifies his sexual

¹⁹⁸ *The Man Within*, 82.

¹⁹⁹ Lynette Kohn, *Graham Greene: The Major Novels*. Stanford, CA: Stanford, 1961, 24.

pleasure in watching her. For Andrews, looking is the only allowed sexual enjoyment he can share with Elizabeth, whose body he touches only after her death.

In Greene's short story, "May We Borrow Your Husband?", the protagonist attempts to create a similar barrier by posing as an objective observer. "May We Borrow Your Husband?" is often described as a story about sexual predation; it depicts a newly-married couple and the attempts of a pair of homosexual men to seduce the newlywed husband. It is equally a story about scopophilia, however; both the narrator, William, and the two homosexual characters, Tony and Stephen, focus obsessively on watching the married pair and speculating about their new sexual relationship. The story ironizes William's stereotyped, even bigoted, view of Tony and Stephen, by demonstrating that William himself is as much a vulture as they are; when Tony and Stephen spirit away the young man for an afternoon and evening outing, William takes the wife, Poopy, out to dinner, and the two of them drink a great deal and exchange confidences. William entertains fantasies of proposing marriage to the young woman. He knows that the marriage has not yet been successfully consummated, which allows him to imagine that she might have it annulled. He even composes a desperate proposal, but never voices it. The names of the newlyweds—Poopy and Peter—invoke a sort of grade-school coarse humor, which is off-putting to William, and from which he wants to rescue Poopy.

From the opening of the story, William shows an intense, almost prurient interest in the other guests at the hotel. When the two interior decorators arrive, he observes them carefully, and says, "I soon knew a great deal about them. They had rooms side by side in my passage, though I doubt if both rooms were often occupied,

for I used to hear voices from one room or the other most evenings when I went to bed.”²⁰⁰ William’s interest in their domestic arrangements springs from the sort of exotic *frisson* he gets from observing them.

He is a novelist, and defends his interest as a constant professional habit; however, he is himself a bit uncomfortable with it, and insists, “Do I seem too curious about other people’s affairs? But in my own defence I have to say that the events of this sad little comedy were forced by all the participants on my attention.”²⁰¹ This is, of course, rather absurd; William places himself where he will not only see all that passes between the other characters, but will necessarily be part of the social intercourse. Greene emphasizes William’s interest in Poopy, whose unfortunate name confirms his conception of her as a doomed, tragic figure.

William observes Poopy and Peter closely. Their marriage has problems, as he concludes; he observes the dark circles under Poopy’s eyes and decides that she suffers insomnia.²⁰² William assumes that Peter, who cares deeply about his appearance, must be homosexual. Because William finds Poopy extremely beautiful, he can imagine no other reason that their sexual relationship might fail. When Poopy confesses that she and Peter are having sexual difficulties, she blames the problems on her own lack of attractiveness. William listens to her while assessing her attractiveness himself:

²⁰⁰ *Collected Stories*, 5.

²⁰¹ *Collected Stories*, 5.

²⁰² *Collected Stories*, 13.

She looked down at her long black legs; I followed the course of her eyes because I was finding now that I really wanted her and she said with sincere conviction, ‘I’m just not pretty enough when I’m undressed.’

‘You are talking real nonsense. You don’t know what nonsense you are talking.’

‘Oh no, I’m not. You see—it started all right, but then he touched me—“ she put her hands on her breasts—and it went all wrong. I always knew they weren’t much good. At school we used to have dormitory inspection—it was awful. Everybody could grown them big except me. I’m no Jayne Mansfield, I can tell you.’”²⁰³

Her hands on her breasts, which she intends as illustration, feed William’s desire. His reassurances that she *is* attractive mean, of course, that he finds her so. They are drinking heavily, in the absence of the others, and William entertains a series of fantasies in which he removes her from her sexless, unsuccessful marriage, despite his observation earlier in the story that she does love Peter. Poopy shares her problems because she views William as an older man who might serve as counselor; she does not sense his sexual interest. His predatory interest in her—the counterpart to the homosexual couple’s interest in Peter—is less active than theirs only because he is aware that their age difference makes him an unacceptable sexual partner for her. He is wounded when she calls him “Mr Harris,” because he knows that it means she sees him as an older man.

²⁰³ *Collected Stories*, 32-33.

This story creates layers of observation: Poopy herself watches Peter, looking for signs of what has gone wrong: "...she stole her quick glances when she was quite certain that his attention was absorbed elsewhere—they were tender, anxious perhaps, quite undemanding."²⁰⁴ She sees only Peter, with no interest in analyzing any of the others. William observes that Tony and Stephen are "seducing Peter before her eyes"²⁰⁵—a telling phrase, in a story so focused on watching. Tony and Stephen, for their part, have obviously been observing William's interest in Poopy, for they neatly engage William to spend the day with her when they arrange to take Peter on a day trip.

The decorators, in turn, watch the young couple, and William watches them; when the newlyweds first arrive, William notes, "They were not, of course, looking at the girl but at the boy."²⁰⁶ William, who imagines himself as different from the participants in the drama (the "sad little comedy," as he calls it), considers this set of relationships to be a performance of sorts, something that he can watch without joining. Of course, this is a delusion—he participates in the situation by observing all four of the others (and watching the ways that Tony and Stephen watch the newlyweds). When the other men ask him to take Poopy to dinner and entertain her during their absence, it is the inevitable result of his constant spectatorship: he has, whether he acknowledges it or not, been part of the group. The heavy-handed irony of this story springs from William's censure of Tony and Stephen for the same kind of

²⁰⁴ *Collected Stories*, 13-14.

²⁰⁵ *Collected Stories*, 21.

²⁰⁶ *Collected Stories*, 9.

voyeuristic engagement in Peter's marriage that he performs himself. Indeed, his own distance as observer breaks down as surely as theirs does, if more passively.

William's role as spectator parallels that of Thomas Fowler, narrator of *The Quiet American* (1955), whose status as a British reporter covering Vietnam allows him to maintain a similar fantasy of detachment. While William clings to his assertion that, as a novelist, observing the human character is his job, and that all he has been doing in this drama is observing, Fowler must admit that his objectivity is a fiction. Fowler, who likes watching other people as much as William does, must eventually acknowledge that he derives active pleasure from watching them, and that (like it or not) he plays a role in the drama.

Fowler establishes early in the narrative that he enjoys watching other people. His love for Vietnam comes from the visual beauty of the country, particularly of its women. As he sits with Alden Pyle at their first meeting, he notices a group of women:

Up the street came the lovely flat figures--the white silk trousers, the long tight jackets in pink and mauve patterns slit up the thigh. I watched them with the nostalgia I knew I would feel when I had left these regions for ever. 'They are lovely, aren't they?' I said over my beer and Pyle cast them a cursory glance as they went up the rue Catinat.²⁰⁷

Fowler's aesthetic appreciation of Vietnamese women in general is similar to his appreciation for his own mistress, Phuong. The two of them go out to dinner with Pyle, and Fowler watches Pyle and Phuong dancing: "Suddenly watching her feet, so

²⁰⁷ *The Quiet American*, 10.

light and precise and mistress of his shuffle, I was in love again.”²⁰⁸ He takes greater pleasure in watching her dance than he would have in dancing with her—when Pyle apologizes for monopolizing her time, Fowler replies, ““Oh, I’m no dancer, but I like watching her dance,”” and then reflects, “One always spoke of her like that in the third person as though she were not there. Sometimes she seemed invisible like peace.”²⁰⁹

Fowler does often speak and think of Phuong as though she were not there, or, perhaps more accurately, as though she were a portrait instead of a real person. Fowler’s tendency to look at her instead of speaking to her is partly due to their language barrier: they converse in French, although it is the native language of neither. It is also due to his belief, only half-articulated, that Phuong’s stoic, quiet demeanor accurately represents her emotional state. Fowler realizes—and explicitly says—that Phuong may have any sort of feelings, underneath the illusion of calm, but this realization never lasts. He always returns to his view of Phuong as an unchanging, perhaps even unfeeling, statue.

Phuong has exotic allure. She is a metonymic representation of Vietnam—a place where Fowler does not understand the language, where he spends most of his time attempting to preserve an objective, reportorial distance. His pleasure in the country and his pleasure in Phuong are similar: they are both grounded on aesthetic, visual appreciation. Finally, however, Phuong leaves him for Alden Pyle, and Pyle participates in a bombing that kills innocent civilians. Fowler confronts his own agency and accepts Mr. Heng’s argument that eventually “one has to take sides—if

²⁰⁸ *The Quiet American*, 36.

²⁰⁹ *The Quiet American*, 36.

one is to remain human.” Although Fowler has always defined himself as an observer and reporter, he discovers that it is not possible to watch without changing the course of events.

Greene does not allow the spectator to maintain the comfortable illusion of being uninvolved, even when the spectator cannot engage with an actor. Films, which play an important role in Greene’s fiction, do not allow the viewer to be involved with the actors; instead, Greene emphasizes the shared audience experience. In *The End of the Affair*, Sarah and Bendrix fall in love while discussing a film; in *The Captain and the Enemy* (1988), Jim and the Captain have one of their only intimate talks while discussing *King Kong*.²¹⁰ Indeed, the Captain, in the safety of the film audience, allows himself his most open emotional display of the entire novel.

In *Monsignor Quixote* (1982), one of Greene’s least overtly sexual novels, a pornographic film provides not just one of the novel’s few small glimpses of sex but also occasion for a deepening—and also darkening—of the relationship between Father Quixote and Sancho, even though neither finds the film arousing. Father Quixote chooses the film, misled by its title (*A Maiden’s Prayer*):

In fact the maiden’s prayer turned out to be a very handsome young man whose adventures with a series of young girls ended always, with the monotony of repetition, in bed. The photography at that point became soft and confusing, and it was a little bit difficult to discern whose legs belonged to whom since the private parts, which distinguish a man from a woman, were skillfully avoided by the camera. Was it the man or the girl who was on top?

²¹⁰ *End of the Affair*, 32-33.

Whose parts were being kissed by whom? On these occasions there was no dialogue to help the viewer: only the sound of hard breathing and sometimes a grunt or a squeal, which could be either masculine or feminine. To make things even more difficult the scenes had obviously been shot for a small screen (perhaps for a home movie) and the images became still more abstract when enlarged for a cinema. Even Sancho's enjoyment waned: he would have much preferred more overt pornography, and it was difficult to identify with the principal actor who had very shiny black hair and side whiskers.²¹¹

As this passage clearly suggests, this film fails to arouse because it does not replicate the elements of lovemaking that would contribute to realism or invoke the viewer's own experiences. Sancho's observation that he cannot identify with the principal actor is apropos: this comically bad film provides no sense of inclusion, allows for no fantasy of participation on the part of the viewer. Because the film does not allow the viewer to distinguish actor from actress, one body from another, it frustrates the gaze—the viewer cannot objectify the actors if they are indistinguishable, unspecific, androgynous. As Mulvey argues, “the cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect. The conventions of mainstream film focus attention on the human form. Scale, space, stories are all anthropomorphic. Here, curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human

²¹¹ *Monsignor Quixote*, 121-22.

form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world.”²¹² In these respects, the film in *Monsignor Quixote* is a demonstration of all that is least effective in pornography.

Greene includes this description partly as the occasion for Father Quixote and Sancho to discuss sexual desire, and partly as one of a series of grimly comic sexual escapades (the two travelers spending the night in a brothel, Father Quixote mistaking a condom for a balloon and inflating it) that emphasize the priest’s sexual innocence. It serves, however, as a useful counterpart to the scopophilic pleasures that are more common in Greene’s work.

An unappealing pornographic film appears in *Travels with My Aunt*, as well; aunt Augusta, discussing her past in Havana, describes the Shanghai Theatre, and adds, “I am told that to compete with television they put in a large screen. The films, of course, had all been shot on sixteen millimetre, and when they were enlarged practically to Cinerama size, it really needed an act of faith to distinguish any feature of the human body.”²¹³ As with the film in *Monsignor Quixote*, the low quality of the film causes fragmentation of the body and the inability to detect which part is which.

In Greene’s novels, one of the reasons that blue films are so often a disappointment is that there is no element of competition or conflict. Even a skillfully made pornographic film is destined to lead to one conclusion; there is no suspense. As chapter five will show, relationships between men are an essential component of sexual relationships between men and women. Without the presence of another man

²¹² Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen*, 16.3, Autumn 1975, 6-18.

²¹³ *Travels with My Aunt*, 63-64.

to invite conflict, suggest the value of the object, and provide an interlocutor, the sexual experience is flat and without interest.

By contrast, “The Blue Film,” Greene’s 1954 short story, depicts another erotic film that is arousing to the one of the two viewers precisely because this element of competition is present. The story describes a married couple, the Carters, who go to a “French film” to satisfy Mrs. Carter’s desire to see “Spots” on their travels. The erotic film turns out, by chance, to be one in which Mr. Carter starred, in his much younger days. As they watch, he slowly realizes what the film is. He tries to convince his wife to leave, but she refuses. Eventually the actor makes eye contact with the camera and she recognizes him.

She is horrified when she realizes that it’s her husband in the picture—“I’d never have married you if I’d known,” she says, ““Never””²¹⁴—yet she keeps watching. She presses for details about the woman in the picture, about how much her husband was paid, about why he was asked to do it. Then she pauses in her questioning and watches the film: “She stopped. He knew she was watching, caught up herself in the heat of that climax more than a quarter of a century old.”²¹⁵

Although Mrs Carter continues to express her horror—and it is horror and revulsion, not just surprise or anger—on the way home, when Mr Carter returns from the bathroom to go to bed, he finds Mrs Carter waiting:

But when he returned Mrs Carter was standing by the mirror. She had partly undressed. Her thin bare legs reminded him of a heron waiting for fish. She

²¹⁴ *Collected Stories*, 357-58.

²¹⁵ *Collected Stories*, 359.

came and put her arms round him: a slave bangle joggled against his shoulder.

She said, 'I'd forgotten how nice you looked.'

'I'm sorry. One changes.'

"I didn't mean like that. I like you as you are.'

She was dry and hot and implacable in her desire. 'Go on,' she said, 'go on,' and then she screamed like an angry and hurt bird. Afterwards she said, 'It's years since that happened' and continued to talk for what seemed a long half hour excitedly at his side. Carter lay in the dark silent, with a feeling of loneliness and guilt. It seemed to him that he had betrayed that night the only woman he loved."²¹⁶

Mrs. Carter, excited by the film, sees her husband as if for the first time, remembering how she viewed him when they met. She is able to see him as the female lead would have seen him; the triangle that is formed among the three of them suggests that Mrs. Carter feels a certain triumph over the nameless girl from the past. Carter himself, in this unsatisfying lovemaking, must also remember what he used to be like—he compares himself, in the mirror, to the young self he saw on the screen, and finds his older self wanting.

Carter does not feel guilt over his part in the film. He does, however, feel guilty about making love with his wife with the girl from the film fresh in his memory. Mrs. Carter's excitement drives his loneliness and guilt: they are both reenacting the scene from the film, and while she finds it exciting, he feels disloyal. For both of them, their lovemaking is a reflection of the scenes in the movie. This

²¹⁶ *Collected Stories*, 360.

pornographic movie is as specific as the ones in *Monsignor Quixote* and *Travels with My Aunt* are vague, showing identifiable people with personalities as well as bodies.

“The Blue Film,” more explicitly than most texts, reveals what Jacques Lacan claims about voyeurism: the fiction that the subject is present in the scene—sometimes even that the subject can replace an character in the scene, as, for example, when Carter watches the film of himself and easily projects his current self into the scene in the place of his younger self. The ambiguous relationship between viewer and viewed can eliminate the distinction between the two entirely.²¹⁷ By replacing the usual distance between viewer and actor with the distance of time, Greene dramatizes the identification between Carter and the man in the film.

Voyeurism also shapes the most important description of scopophilia in *Travels with My Aunt*: Henry’s fixation on the snapshot of aunt Augusta in her younger days. When he first finds the photograph, Henry examines it in detail:

I opened *Roy Roy* again and found a snapshot lying between the leaves: the square yellowing snapshot of a pretty girl in an old-fashioned bathing-dress taken with an old-fashioned Brownie. The girl was bending a little towards the camera; she had just slipped one shoulder out of its strap, and she was laughing, as though she had been surprised at the moment of changing. It was some moments before I recognized Aunt Augusta and my first thought was how attractive she had been in those days.... This then was how she had looked--she could have hardly been more than eighteen--in the long ago days

²¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI)*, trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1998, 182.

before she knew Curran or Monsieur D'Ambreuse or Mr Visconti. She had an air of being ready for anything.²¹⁸

The slightly scandalous content of the photograph—Augusta's shoulder out of the strap, the intimacy of a laugh—fascinates Henry. Part of its appeal, however, comes from her youth: Henry is able to rewrite Augusta as an innocent, erase the affairs with Curran, D'Ambreuse, and Mr Visconti. She has no volition, but has been immobilized in the photograph, which makes her much less threatening to Henry than the real-life Augusta. Unlike the Augusta of the present, the girl in the photo cannot challenge his moral opinions, disappoint him, or confound his expectations.

Henry examines the photo closely, and when he revisits it later, the snapshot has the allure of familiarity: "When I opened the book now the pages naturally divided at the photograph, and I found myself thinking not for the first time that the happy smile, the young breasts, the curve of her body in the old-fashioned bathing costume were like the suggestion of a budding maternity."²¹⁹ Henry sees aunt Augusta's sexuality, an element of her personality that he tries strenuously to ignore in the present day of the narrative. He believes that she is too old for lovers; her sexuality is far more acceptable to him if it can be contained in a photograph. At the same time, he also begins to accept the fact that she is his mother, focusing on the maternal aspects of the portrait. Only by confining her to paper can Henry accept her significance and her power. Because she cannot respond to his examination, and because he is not expected to make any kind of formal judgment or statement or conversational response, he is drawn to the snapshot. In addition, the photograph

²¹⁸ *Travels with My Aunt*, 135.

²¹⁹ *Travels with My Aunt*, 180.

necessarily implies a photographer. Henry decides that his father must have taken the picture; examining the photo allows Henry access to the relationship between his father and Augusta. This shadowy and mysterious relationship assumes greater importance over the course of the novel as Henry realizes that Augusta is his mother. As he gradually accepts this fact, the photograph gives him insight into a romantic or sexual tie between his parents. He also receives an illicit thrill from discovering the secret photograph, which has been hidden away for years.

The pleasures of secrecy, aunt Augusta suggests in *Travels with My Aunt*, are sometimes coexistent with those of sex, but are not the same. Augusta reminisces about her affair with Monsieur D'Ambreuse, who kept a wife and two mistresses within a ten-minute walk of one another. He balanced all three of them and kept his activities secret, and when it was discovered, he lost all interest in the affairs. Augusta reassures her nephew, Henry, that Monsieur D'Ambreuse did not maintain three relationships at once for the sake of more sex, but for the intrigue: "He was not a promiscuous man. He had loved his little secret. He felt naked, poor man, and exposed to ridicule."²²⁰ She understands why the affair ended soon after it was revealed, and she explains to Henry, "I said... 'It doesn't make any difference.' But of course it did to him, because he had no secret any more. His fun had been in the secret, and he left us both only so that somewhere he could find a new secret. Not love. Just a secret."²²¹

The stimulation of secrecy plays a role in Greene's 1948 novel *The Heart of the Matter*. The protagonist, Scobie, embarks on an affair with a shipwreck survivor,

²²⁰ *Travels with My Aunt*, 79.

²²¹ *Travels with My Aunt*, 80.

Helen Rolt. When they meet, he views her as a child, and he feels responsible for her. His sense of responsibility springs from the loss of his own daughter, who died in childhood. At their first meeting, Scobie is reading a book to another of the shipwreck survivors, a young boy. Helen cannot resist the story. Her interest emphasizes her childlike qualities. Eventually, however, when Scobie visits to check on her, he realizes that she is not a child but a woman.

Freddie Bagster, an abrasive young man with sexual designs on Helen, knocks on her door.

“‘Don’t answer,’ she whispered, ‘don’t answer.’ She put her arm in [Scobie’s] and watched the door with her mouth a little open as though she were out of breath. He had the sense of an animal which had been chased to its hole.

‘Let Freddie in,’ the voice wheedled. ‘Be a sport, Helen. Only Freddie Bagster.’ The man was a little drunk.

She stood pressed against him with her hand on his side. When the sound of Bagster’s feet receded, she raised her mouth and they kissed. What they had both thought was safety proved to have been the camouflage of an enemy who works in terms of friendship, trust and pity.”²²²

Their shared concealment makes them partners in deception. The minor danger of discovery awakens passion in them both. Scobie’s pity for Helen overshadows his lust for her, even in the first moments of their affair, and he cannot help but consider himself her protector. Scobie has a similar sense of obligation and responsibility toward his wife; he is unable to separate the role of protector from the

²²² *The Heart of the Matter*, 140-41.

role of lover. Even the relatively harmless Bagster provides enough dangerous impetus to trigger Scobie's sexual interest in Helen.

Exhibitionism is the opposite side of the pleasure of looking; indeed, Freud describes voyeurism and exhibitionism as two elements of the same instinct. It is well-established that Greene, in his personal life, sought risks and danger; critics and biographers agree that his travels—one of the ways he fended off boredom—were most interesting to him if they were dangerous. His sex life, as well, had a dangerous side, and in his long-standing relationship with Catherine Walston, he was most aroused by the sexual experiences that included the possibility of exposure or discovery. His behavior, a form of exhibitionism, suggests that the piquancy of the relationships was proportional to their riskiness.

According to Norman Sherry, Greene's affair with Walston was an open secret, and neither of them was afraid to reveal it. The excitement that Greene found in flaunting their affair grew as they became bolder, and Greene took pleasure in the exhibitionist element of carrying an adulterous affair in the plain view of others. As Sherry notes in his biography, "Everyone was aware of their liaison. Even with Harry in the house, Catherine would say things like, 'You know, Graham and I were in bed all day and all night—that's why I'm feeling a bit jaded.' When Greene spent Christmas 1947 with the Walstons at Thriplow, he and Catherine managed to make love while her husband was in the house."²²³ This last escapade made its way into Greene's fiction in *The End of the Affair*.

²²³ Sherry, *Graham Greene: A Life (Volume II: 1939-1955)*, 260.

The End of the Affair draws together these threads—voyeurism, risk, and self-exposure—into a narrative that is perhaps Greene’s most erotic. The relationship between Bendrix and Sarah is, of course, adulterous, for Sarah is married. They risk exposure several times, both in public and in Sarah’s own house with her husband at home. As Bendrix remembers, thinking back to the days of their sexual relationship, Henry had his tray, sitting up against two pillows in his green woolen dressing gown, and in the room below, on the hardwood floor, with a single cushion for support and the door ajar, we made love. When the moment came, I had to put my hand gently over her mouth to deaden that strange sad angry cry of abandonment, for fear Henry should hear it overhead.”²²⁴

Their sexual risk-taking is the most important element of what Bendrix recalls about their physical relationship. He reflects, lying awake one night, on

...one memory after another pricking me with hatred and desire: her hair fanning out on the parquet floor and the stair squeaking, a day in the country when we had lain down in a ditch out of view of the road and I could see the sparkle of frost between the fronds of hair on the hard ground and a tractor came pushing by at the moment of crisis and the man never turned his head.²²⁵

Both of these memories are alive for Bendrix because of the intense arousal that he and Sarah found in the danger of exposure.

Having sex in Henry’s house arouses Bendrix, but perhaps as important is the information he gets about Henry and about Sarah’s marriage. The voyeuristic pleasure he takes in this knowledge also makes him feel that he has a relationship

²²⁴ Greene, *The End of the Affair*, 38.

²²⁵ Greene, *End of the Affair*, 40.

with Henry himself. When Henry addresses Bendrix as a close friend, although the two of them have spent little time together, Bendrix believes that Henry has realized how much Bendrix already knows about him:

I knew he had a mole on the left of his navel because a birthmark of my own had once reminded Sarah of it: I knew he suffered from short sight, but wouldn't wear glasses with strangers (and I was still enough of a stranger never to have seen him in them): I knew his liking for tea at ten: I even knew his sleeping habits. Was he conscious that I knew so much already, that one more fact would not alter our relation?²²⁶

Without being themselves close friends, the two men have achieved intimacy. After Sarah's death, the two men feel quite close to one another. After the occasion for jealousy disappears, the intimacy that they have built through her remains. After the two men share a bottle and a half of whiskey, Henry says, "It's strange, Bendrix, how one can't be jealous about the dead. She's only been dead a few hours, and yet I wanted you with me."²²⁷ His feeling is natural enough, for each of the men knows intimate facts about the other through the means of their shared love for Sarah.

After Sarah ends their relationship, Bendrix suspects that she has a new lover. He hires Parkis, a private investigator, to follow Sarah and report on her activities. Parkis provides the sometimes-bleak narrative with bit of grim comedy, but his role is more than comic relief. Bendrix is intensely interested in the investigator's results, and receives daily reports on what he has found. The summaries give him a new and somewhat exciting perspective on Sarah. Parkis's reports are stilted and self-

²²⁶ *The End of the Affair*, 6.

²²⁷ *The End of the Affair*, 10.

consciously formal, calling Sarah “the party in question.” They translate Sarah’s familiar actions and movements into an eerie, abstract series of facts. When Bendrix goes to lunch with Sarah at Rules—the restaurant they frequented when they were a couple—Parkis submits a report, describing the event.

Parkis’s account adheres to facts, and its only speculation is clearly identified as speculation: “The party and the gentleman were obviously very close, treating each other with affectionate lack of ceremony, and I think on one occasion holding hands below the table. I could not be certain of this, but the party’s left hand was out of sight and the gentleman’s right hand too which generally indicates a squeeze of that nature.”²²⁸

When Parkis has finished his report, Bendrix says, “But you are wrong about the hands, Mr Parkis... We never so much as touched hands.”²²⁹ The private investigator, whose careful accumulation of details has allowed him to fail to recognize his own client, bemoans his own mistake, and Bendrix feels guilty for having joked about it. The opportunity to read about his own tête-à-tête with Sarah also gives him information about where she went afterward, including Parkis’s assessment that she went into a church to have “a good cry.”²³⁰ His experience of the afternoon is reflected back as though through a camera. Parkis provides minute detail, if not insight, and Bendrix is able to fill in the absent information as though it is a story—that is, as though watching himself.

²²⁸ *The End of the Affair*, 28.

²²⁹ *The End of the Affair*, 30.

²³⁰ *The End of the Affair*, 30.

When Bendrix describes his torment after his relationship with Sarah ends, he complains that the novelist, in particular, suffers jealousy because of his ability to envision.

It is my profession to imagine, to think in images: fifty times through the day, and immediately I woke during the night, a curtain would rise and the play would begin: always the same play, Sarah making love, Sarah with X, doing the same things that we had done together, Sarah kissing in her own particular way, arching herself in the act of sex and uttering that cry like pain, Sarah in abandonment.²³¹

These fantasies objectify Sarah, making her into a phantasm that exists for Bendrix's emotional and erotic consideration. He replays his memories of her constantly, as one might replay a film. His comparison of his thoughts to a play points to the fact that these memories are performances; the imaginary Sarah acts only for the purpose of being observed by Bendrix.

As *The End of the Affair* epitomizes, Greene's writings show voyeurism, secrecy, risk, and exhibitionism to be primary ways of experiencing sexuality. Like pain, scopophilia is sometimes described as a perverse source of sexual pleasure, but Greene reveals it to be part of normative sexual desire. The viscosity of Greene's writing is not only a trademark of his style (the impetus for the critical coinage "Greeneland"), but a signal of Greene's own "pleasure of looking." Exposed and hidden, the objects of his characters' gazes are erotic; even in the absence of sexual

²³¹ *The End of the Affair*, 59.

activity, as between Andrews and Elizabeth, the trajectory of the look is essentially sexual.

In *Brighton Rock*, Pinkie and Rose both consider sex a sin, unequivocally, until the experience of it makes Pinkie feel more ambivalent about its role and purpose. This range of views on sexuality suggests that Greene is playing with differing ideas about the role of sex in human life. The more secular novels and stories, however, describe forms of sexuality that are dangerous or hidden: in the absence of sin, secrecy and risk invest the sex act with interest and significance.

T.S. Eliot wrote that Baudelaire "...has perceived that what distinguishes the relations of man and woman from the copulation of beasts is the knowledge of Good and Evil (of *moral* Good and Evil which are not natural Good and Bad or puritan Right and Wrong). Having an imperfect, vague romantic conception of Good, he was at least able to understand that the sexual act as evil is more dignified, less boring, than as the natural, 'life-giving,' cheery automatism of the modern world. For Baudelaire, sexual operation is at least something not analogous to Kruschen Salts."²³² Greene, like Baudelaire, resists the reduction of sexuality to an act of hygiene—or, perhaps worse, fun. In Greene's case, sexual practices that are non-normative, secret, or forbidden assure that erotic life has significance beyond the moment.

²³² T.S. Eliot, "Baudelaire," in *Selected Essays of T.S. Eliot*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1950, 380.

Male Companionship: A Different Desire

In almost all of Greene's work, the major characters are heterosexual. They display constant and often passionate sexual desire. Nonetheless, the companionship between men is more variable and dynamic than the sexual relationships themselves, even though companionship ties into the erotic relationships. In Greene's *oeuvre*, male friendship structures erotic desire. Greene's fictional characters exhibit an irresistible drive toward friendship. The competition and modeling between men shape the characters' desire for the sexual object, even as the characters themselves experience these male-male friendships as powerful, emotional ties in their own right. No matter how intense the sexual relationships are, friendship between men is key for his protagonists (all of them, with the possible exception of Aunt Augusta in *Travels with My Aunt*, male).

In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Rene Girard uses the term "mimetic desire" to describe the process of identification, jealousy, and modeling that takes place between male characters. Greene's relationships and those of his characters often adhere to Girard's paradigm of triangular desire: a single woman serves as the common object of two men, as one of the men models himself on, and identifies with, the other. As one man observes the other, he internalizes that standard of behavior as the yardstick of what is masculine.

These structures are similar to the homosocial model described by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*; however, Girard clearly distinguishes between homoerotic desire and the desire to take the place of another, while Sedgwick sees these two elements as parts

of a spectrum, two sides of the same libidinal process. In Girard's model, the imitator, or *vaniteux*, experiences desire as an attempt to be like another—a mediator who provides a masculine model. As Girard points out, "A vaniteux will desire any object so long as he is convinced that it is already desired by another person whom he admires. The mediator here is a rival, brought into existence as a rival by vanity, and that same vanity demands his defeat."²³³ This particular element of Girard's paradigm structures Greene's plots in *The Quiet American*, *The End of the Affair*, *The Honorary Consul*, and "May We Borrow Your Husband?"

This desire to be *like* another differs from a desire to possess or submit to another; as Girard argues, these relationships are essentially formative, guiding both the behavior and the character of the man in question. Girard describes mimetic desire as a natural and fundamental process of mimicry. Girard is quick to point out, however, that mimicry is neither shallow nor simple; the process of mimetic desire can create innumerable forms of erotic drive, in myriad different types of triangular relationships.

When we think of those phenomena in which mimicry is likely to play a role, we enumerate such things as dress, mannerisms, facial expressions, speech, stage acting, artistic creation, and so forth, but we never think of desire.

Consequently, we see imitation in social life as a force for gregariousness and bland conformity through the mass reproduction of a few social models.²³⁴

It is easy, perhaps, to consider social imitation as it applies to boys, first

²³³ Rene Girard. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, 7.

²³⁴ Rene Girard, *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare*. South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2004, 3.

learning about how men and women relate to one another. In Greene's fiction, however, mimetic desire remains vital into old age. The ties between men are, indeed, more enduring than those between men and women; they survive the aging of the body and the pressures of exclusivity that trouble sexual relationships. The enigma of masculinity—on which much of Greene's work focuses—revolves not around women, but around these connections with other men. These relationships form the basis of a complete and mature masculinity. In Greene's *oeuvre*, these relationships tend to take the specific forms of mentor and pupil or cuckold and lover.

This triangular model of desire structures the relationship of cuckold and illicit lover so common in Greene's fiction. *The End of the Affair*, *The Quiet American*, and *The Comedians*, in particular, emphasize the tie between two men who love the same woman. Greene, his biographers agree, maintained a similar relationship with Harry Walston, wife of Greene's lover Catherine Walston: after Catherine's death, Greene's friendship with Harry became more friendly, and at the end of Greene's life, they were quite close. In Greene's fiction, these male/male relationships, mediated by a single woman, are the founding ties that produce masculine sexual identity. As Sedgwick argues about Wycherly's *The Country Wife*, "...heterosexual relationships in the play have as their *raison d'être* an ultimate bonding between men; and that this bonding, if successfully achieved, is not detrimental to 'masculinity' but definitive of it."²³⁵

²³⁵ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 50.

Alden Pyle, Fowler's young rival in *The Quiet American*, makes this relationship explicit: "I can call you Tom, can't I?" he asks. "I feel in a way this has brought us together. Loving the same woman, I mean."²³⁶

Indeed, the relationship between Pyle and Fowler directly illustrates the conflicts and difficulties of male friendship in Greene's universe. When they first meet, Pyle introduces himself to Fowler, who is reminded of his own youth—Pyle embodies not only vitality, but innocence and idealism, qualities that Fowler has lost.²³⁷ Fowler feels an immediate connection to Pyle: the first time they meet, Pyle credits many of his statements to the political writer York Harding. In the face of Fowler's dismissive attitude toward Harding, Pyle is deferential but remains respectful of Harding. Fowler thinks, "I liked him for that—to consider it was boasting to claim acquaintance with...York Harding," and "I liked his loyalty to Harding."²³⁸ Fowler's instant liking for Pyle grows not only from a personal sense of flattery (for Pyle wants to know all about Vietnam and get all of the information that Fowler can share), but from approval of the way that Pyle treats his mentor figures. Pyle very seriously questions Fowler about the political scene in Vietnam. They arrange to dine together, and Pyle meets Phuong (Fowler's mistress) for the first time.

During this meeting, Pyle and Phuong dance. Fowler's vicarious appreciation of Phuong's dancing skill takes him back to his own first meetings with Phuong. As he watches them dance, he thinks, "Suddenly watching her feet, so light and precise and mistress of his shuffle, I was in love again. I could hardly believe that in an hour,

²³⁶ *The Quiet American*, 50.

²³⁷ *The Quiet American*, 9.

²³⁸ *The Quiet American*, 16.

two hours, she would be coming back to me to that dingy room with the communal closet and the old women squatting on the landing.”²³⁹ Fowler’s love rekindles as he remembers his own first encounters with Phuong—by identifying himself with Pyle. As Girard points out, another man’s desire for the loved object heightens its desirability; Phuong becomes more valuable, more precious to Fowler because Pyle desires her.

When Pyle apologizes for monopolizing Phuong, Fowler replies, “Oh, I’m no dancer, but I like watching her dance.” He reflects, “One always spoke of her like that in the third person as though she were not there. Sometimes she seemed invisible like peace.”²⁴⁰ She is indeed, in this text, largely invisible: her role is to mediate between Pyle and Fowler, seldom to be the focus of a scene or to demonstrate character development. She is compared to things that cannot be seen: “the clink of a cup,” “the hiss of steam,” “the promise of rest.”²⁴¹ Her speeches are notable for their absences—she does not speak when she is told that Pyle has been killed, nor does she speak to Fowler when she discovers his lie. She is silent, invisible—an absent center to the novel, serving as the pivot for the relationship between Pyle and Fowler.

Because Phuong is difficult to visualize as a character, her presence allows for a number of different rearrangements of the triangle. She can as easily be imagined as Pyle’s partner as Fowler’s, though the two men are very different. The possible orientations of the triangle—Pyle as the wooing lover, or Pyle as Phuong’s partner with Fowler as jilted ex-lover—operate freely in the absence of a concrete personality

²³⁹ *The Quiet American*, 36.

²⁴⁰ *The Quiet American*, 36.

²⁴¹ *The Quiet American*, 4.

for Phuong. In part, Greene achieves this through the device of a language barrier between Phuong and the men: her first language is Vietnamese and she speaks fluent French. Fowler speaks little Vietnamese but is also fluent in French, so he and Phuong can communicate well, but in a non-native language for them both. Pyle speaks little French or Vietnamese (or at least will admit to none—in a later scene it becomes clear that he speaks and understands more than he will admit), and so he cannot communicate directly with Phuong beyond pleasantries.

As a result, Pyle must declare his love for Phuong through Fowler, who translates into French for Phuong's benefit. In this way, Pyle speaks his words of courtship to Fowler, rather than to Phuong. Fowler, who imagines responses for the remarks he translates, identifies with Phuong's position. Later in the novel, Pyle actually replaces Phuong:

When I reached the landing I saw that the door was open, and I became breathless with an unreasonable hope. I walked very slowly towards the door. Until I reached the door hope would remain alive. I heard a chair creak, and when I came to the door I could see a pair of shoes, but they were not a woman's shoes. I went quickly in, and it was Pyle who lifted his awkward weight from the chair Phuong used to use.²⁴²

Pyle's invasion of Phuong's space--not just her former home, but her very chair—shows the precedence that Pyle takes in Fowler's mind. While Fowler does not have active sexual desire for Pyle, Pyle becomes a larger focus of his thoughts even than Phuong, because Pyle embodies all of the things that Fowler wishes he could be:

²⁴² *The Quiet American*, 146.

young, unmarried, available, with enough money to support Phuong.

Because Pyle so quickly makes friends with Fowler when he arrives in Vietnam, seizing him as a role model, a figure of sophistication, and a counterpoint to the theories of York Harding, it is inevitable that Pyle will desire Phuong. Pyle says, at several points, that he wishes it were not Phuong he desired—"Don't be bitter, Thomas. These things happen. I wish it had happened to anybody else but you."—but it is impossible that it could have been anyone else.²⁴³ Their instant rapport determines that Pyle will fall in love with Phuong, who is a representative of all of the women of Vietnam--and indeed of the country as a whole--for both Fowler and Pyle.

Pyle, who seems to be the idealist of the two, is actually a pragmatic utilitarian, weighing the possibility of saving more lives against the certainty of ending others. Fowler, who philosophically opposes the terrorist-style attacks that Pyle's "Third Force" launches, considers himself objective and practical—and yet his own horror in the face of Pyle's violent political activities leads him to betray Pyle, despite his reluctance. Through all of this, remarkably, Fowler's essential liking for Pyle remains. Their affinity persists despite the fact that Pyle steals Fowler's mistress and Fowler helps the Communists assassinate Pyle. His basic, gut-level sense of affinity cannot be abolished or destroyed, even by these catastrophic events.

Fowler identifies with Pyle in some essential ways; their mediation is not one-sided. At their first dinner together, when Pyle meets Phuong, Fowler sees himself through Pyle's eyes:

Suddenly I saw myself as he saw me, a man of middle age, with eyes a little

²⁴³ *The Quiet American*, 52.

bloodshot, beginning to put on weight, ungraceful in love, less noisy than Granger perhaps but more cynical, less innocent, and I saw Phuong for a moment as I had seen her first, dancing past my table at the Grand Monde, watched by an elder sister who had been determined on a good European marriage.

While this moment produces jealousy in Fowler, it also demonstrates a rising force in the text: Fowler's own sense of inadequacy, which grows throughout the novel. Without Pyle's presence, Fowler would have no occasion to consider his own worth to Phuong or his adequacy as a lover.

Pyle and Fowler have plenty of leisure to discuss Phuong and women in general while they are caught in a guard tower together overnight. Pyle thinks that Fowler has much experience with women, and they discuss the nature of desire, sexuality, and love. In their conversation, Fowler's role as mentor becomes clearer than ever, as he delivers descriptions of what it is like to grow older, and what sexual desire should be like. He tells Pyle, "One starts promiscuous and ends like one's grandfather, faithful to one woman."²⁴⁴ He tells Pyle details of his sexual history, including the story of the mistress who preceded Phuong, and Pyle, the passive recipient of these confidences and generalizations, is at his most vulnerable, both emotionally and physically.

An attack on the guard tower disrupts this dynamic. They jump down, and Fowler injures his leg. Pyle rescues him, saving his life, and demonstrates that he is

²⁴⁴ *Quiet American*, 94.

far more competent than Fowler had known or believed. This moment in the text overturns the power structure. Suddenly, Fowler relies on Pyle.

When Fowler becomes angry about the rescue—in particular, about the fact that Pyle performed this feat for the sake of Phuong—Pyle again shows his idealism, and Fowler his cynicism. Fowler tells Pyle that he should have left him there instead of rescuing him, and Pyle says,

‘When you are in love you want to play the game, that’s all.’ That’s true, I thought, but not as he innocently means it. To be in love is to see yourself as someone else sees you, it is to be in love with the falsified and exalted image of yourself. In love we are incapable of honour--the courageous act is no more than playing a part to an audience of two. Perhaps I was no longer in love but I remembered.²⁴⁵

This passage, which emphasizes the role of fantasy in sexual and romantic interaction, also illuminates the relationship between Fowler and Pyle. It may be the nature of love to require and allow this sort of performance; however, friendship fosters it as well, asking each member of the pair to measure himself against the other and to guide his behavior accordingly.

Although Fowler seems to think more about Pyle than he does about Phuong, he nonetheless betrays Pyle in the most serious way possible: he agrees to help Mr. Heng lure Pyle to the bridge to Dakow, where Heng’s people will be able to assassinate him. This decision follows a bombing, orchestrated by Pyle and his cohorts, that kills innocent Vietnamese citizens. While Fowler is still emotionally

²⁴⁵ *The Quiet American*, 103.

vulnerable from the bombing—during which he sees a woman with a dead baby and people with limbs blown off by the explosion—he is susceptible to Mr. Heng’s arguments about how dangerous Pyle is. When Pyle comes to his flat, Fowler makes the appointment that Heng suggested, gives Heng the signal that he has done so, and immediately begins to question his own action.

Separating Fowler’s political motives from his personal ones, of course, is impossible. He and Pyle, joined by their common desire for Phuong, personify one of the traits of mimetic desire that Rene Girard describes:

Imitation does not merely draw people together, it pulls them apart.

Paradoxically, it can do these two things simultaneously. Individuals who desire the same thing are united by something so powerful that, as long as they can share whatever they desire, they remain the best of friends; as soon as they cannot, they become the worst of enemies.²⁴⁶

Fowler’s anger at Pyle, over the bombing and over Phuong, goads him into an action that he ordinarily would never perform. His remorse begins almost immediately, and by the time he has arranged to meet Pyle for dinner—an appointment he knows Pyle will not be able to keep—he imagines any possible way that Pyle might escape. He also considers—for the first time consciously—how his betrayal of Pyle will affect Phuong:

...I thought, for the first time since I had known that she was safe, of Phuong. I remembered how Pyle, sitting on the floor, waiting for the Viets, had said, ‘She seems fresh, like a flower,’ and I had flippantly replied, ‘Poor flower.’”

²⁴⁶ Rene Girard, *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare*. South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2004, 3.

She would never see New England now or learn the secrets of Canasta.

Perhaps she would never know security; what right had I to value her less than the dead bodies in the square? Suffering is not increased by numbers; one body can contain all the suffering the world can feel.²⁴⁷

Although Fowler's anger at Pyle must have a sexual component—surely, he cannot consider Pyle rationally or objectively—he has avoided considering what will happen to Phuong if Pyle dies. She is, once again, an absent center: the point at which Pyle and Fowler meet, less a person than a symbol. Fowler does not believe that he has considered her, or considered his own jealousy, in making his decision.

He thinks,

I had judged like a journalist, in terms of quantity, and I had betrayed my own principles; I had become as engagé as Pyle, and it seemed to me that no decision would ever be simple again. I looked at my watch and it was nearly a quarter to ten. Perhaps after all he had been caught; perhaps that 'someone' in whom he believed had acted on his behalf and he sat now in Legation room fretting at a telegram to decode, and soon he would come stamping up the stairs to my room in the rue Catinat. I thought, If he does I shall tell him everything.²⁴⁸

While this novel might be described as the emotional awakening of a man who has hardened himself to political sadness, only through Pyle does Fowler become emotionally engaged enough to act. When he discovers Pyle's ruthless violence against the Vietnamese, the sense of kinship that he feels for Pyle heightens

²⁴⁷ Greene, *The Quiet American*, 199.

²⁴⁸ Greene, *The Quiet American*, 199.

his sense of betrayal. They are so alike in some facets, and so different in others, that Fowler does not know how to “read” Pyle or how to assimilate the truth about Pyle’s career, his actions in Vietnam, or even the way he views Phuong, whose future Fowler cannot begin to imagine. He wants what Pyle has in Phuong, of course, but his betrayal is much more complex than that; his horror at the carnage he sees after the bombing causes him to respond with violence himself. When he realizes that he has “betrayed his own principles,” he reframes his thoughts in rational terms instead of the emotional ones that Pyle forced him to adopt. Fowler’s desire to confess, to tell Pyle “everything,” emphasizes his still-extant sense of connection to Pyle—he wishes, at this moment, to reverse their habitual roles and make Pyle into his confessor.

This novel is unusual in its constant insistence that Fowler likes Pyle, even through the bombing and Pyle’s murder. Greene uses similar language to describe the instant rapport that Bendrix, the protagonist of *The End of the Affair*, feels for his lover’s husband, Henry. Although of course Bendrix’s betrayal of Henry does not involve life or death, their friendship—through Bendrix’s sexual affair with Sarah—reinforces Greene’s idea that friendship relies on a form of chemistry, rather than on loyalty. Greene discusses Bendrix’s relationship with Henry in considerable depth. When the three first meet, Bendrix views Henry as a source of inspiration or material for his book-in-progress about a civil servant. He pumps Sarah for information about Henry’s habits, and then he and Sarah embark on an affair.

Bendrix speculates that his interest in Henry sparks Sarah’s romantic interest: “I had the cold-blooded intention of picking the brain of a civil servant’s wife. She

didn't know what I was at; she thought, I am sure, I was genuinely interested in her family life, and perhaps that first awakened her liking for me."²⁴⁹ Greene sets the stage for the three-cornered play that ensues by emphasizing Henry's presence in the triangle. Bendrix also observes that he feels "an enormous liking" for Henry at their first meeting—language reminiscent of the way Greene describes Fowler's friendship with Pyle.²⁵⁰

While their affair continues, Bendrix begins to use his book as a weapon against Sarah in their arguments. He continues to ask her about Henry, interjecting a petty condescension toward Henry into his own private moments with Sarah. When she wakes with Bendrix after an argument, Bendrix immediately reopens the quarrel by saying, "I've lain awake thinking of Chapter Five. Does Henry ever eat coffee beans to clear his breath before an important conference?"²⁵¹ He attempts to reduce Henry's importance by insisting that he views Henry exclusively as the material for his book; only later does Bendrix admit that Henry has the advantage in their relationship to Sarah. He begins to feel pity for Henry and tries to correct himself: "...why should I say poor Henry? Didn't he possess in the end the winning cards—the cards of gentleness, humility and trust?"²⁵² Because Sarah refuses to leave Henry, no amount of love or lust will undermine Henry's advantage.

Michael Shelden describes the trajectory of this book as evidence for Greene's focus on homosexuality: "Although [*The End of the Affair*] is ostensibly about Maurice's love for Henry's wife, she ends up dead, and Maurice moves in with

²⁴⁹ Greene, *The End of the Affair*. New York: Penguin, centennial edition, 2004, 4.

²⁵⁰ *The End of the Affair*, 18.

²⁵¹ *The End of the Affair*, 5.

²⁵² *The End of the Affair*, 18.

Henry. By the end of the book he is wearing Henry's pajamas to bed, and they are spending their evenings quietly sipping drinks together."²⁵³ The very details that Sheldon uses as evidence for his claim point to a more complex set of male/male assumptions. Maurice stays in Henry's house, wears his pajamas--that is, he *assumes* Henry's role. Maurice makes his jealousy of Henry explicit through his desire to share the domesticity with Sarah that Henry already has.

As Bendrix suspects, Henry does, indeed, hold the winning cards. After her vow, Sarah ends the affair, and Bendrix loses her physical presence. The Miles's marriage still has its problems, however, and Henry turns to Bendrix for advice about the possibility that Sarah is being unfaithful. When Henry asks him for advice—or, more accurately, for reassurance—Bendrix thinks:

I expect it was the rum that made him speak, or was he partly aware of how much I knew about him? Sarah was loyal, but in a relationship such as ours had been you can't help picking up a thing or two...I knew he had a mole on the left of his navel because a birthmark of my own had once reminded Sarah of it: I knew he suffered from short sight, but wouldn't wear glasses with strangers (and I was still enough of a stranger never to have seen him in them): I knew his liking for tea at ten: I even knew his sleeping habits. Was he conscious that I knew so much already, that one more fact would not alter our relation?"²⁵⁴

This passage demonstrates a fact of male/male relationships in Greene's fiction: knowledge of the other man is power. Bendrix has the advantage over Henry

²⁵³ Sheldon, 62.

²⁵⁴ *The End of the Affair*, 6.

because he has intimate knowledge of him. Fowler feels that he has a superior knowledge of Pyle, because Pyle reminds him of himself. He is unsettled and disturbed when he discovers that Pyle's persona hides a different identity.

In both of these novels, the connection between the male characters has an essential role in the romantic relationship. The competitive element makes the sexual relationships interesting to the men. Sexuality is embattled. Beyond the Girardian notion of triangulation—that is, the production or increase of desire as a result of a rival's high regard for the object—the conflict itself creates and deepens desire. In *The Quiet American*, Fowler's attraction to Phuong reawakens with Pyle's admiration of her, as he reflects that he was "in love again"; in *The End of the Affair*, Bendrix's sexual interest in Sarah begins as he feels a sense of liking for Henry. In his most vicious moments in the volatile relationship he shares with Sarah, he attacks Henry by asking Sarah questions about him, theoretically to use for his novel.

Our Man in Havana shows a different form of mediation. Wormold has a strong friendship with Dr. Hasselbacher, but Wormold and Captain Segura share the chief rivalry in this text—not over a shared lover, but over Wormold's daughter, whom Segura wishes to marry. Captain Segura's nickname is "The Red Vulture." Milly asserts that he has a cigarette case made from human skin. His version of sexuality is dangerous, even as he maintains a light tone in his interactions with Milly—at the Floridita nightclub, he sings "The Rose I Plucked from the Garden,"²⁵⁵ suggesting that he plans to "pluck" Milly and acquire her for himself.

²⁵⁵ *Our Man in Havana*, 90.

Wormold wishes to deny his daughter's growing sexuality, and he tries to pretend that she is still a child, although at sixteen she is highly desirable and beautiful. He fears the attention she receives, but eventually reconciles himself to it by telling himself that the wolf whistles that follow her as she walks down the street constitute an aesthetic appreciation, not an actively sexual one:

They were not dangerous wolves, he had reluctantly to admit that. The salute had begun about her thirteenth birthday, for even by the high Havana standard Milly was beautiful. She had hair the color of pale honey, dark eyebrows, and her pony-trim was shaped by the best barber in town. She paid no open attention to the whistles, they only made her step the higher—seeing her walk, you could almost believe in levitation. Silence would have seemed like an insult to her now.²⁵⁶

Hasselbacher, who is Wormold's closest friend, attempts to discuss it with him, but Wormold refuses to accept the fact that Milly is sexually mature. She is, of course, far from adult in other ways, and Wormold seems to believe that ignoring her sexuality will allow her to continue to be a child. This pretense endangers her, for her unacknowledged sexuality creates the competitive friction between Wormold and Segura.

While Wormold does not like Segura, the Captain becomes his direct rival for control of Milly. The two of them are well-matched, it turns out; their competition ends in a game of checkers, in which the pieces are miniature bottles of whisky and Scotch. Wormold, despite his comparative innocence, manages to trick Segura into

²⁵⁶ *Our Man in Havana*, 9-10.

winning the game. When Segura drinks the whisky in the bottles, he falls unconscious, fulfilling Wormold's plan. While Segura seems to suspect Wormold of this subterfuge, Greene describes him as a man whose competitive nature will not let him lose the game:

Then Wormold made his careful slip and exposed his king. For a moment he thought that Segura had not noticed and then he thought that deliberately to avoid drinking Segura was going to let his chance go by. But the temptation to take the king was great and what lay beyond the move was a shattering victory. His own piece would be made a king and a massacre would follow.²⁵⁷

The language of this passage—"a shattering victory," a "massacre"—reinforces the very real and violent nature of Segura's desire to defeat Wormold. They are essentially dueling over Milly. Segura wins the game, thereby losing his ability to overpower Wormold's objections, because his bellicose pride will not let him sacrifice a win. Segura's sexuality, like his personality, is militaristic and forceful; he woos Milly by hinting at how dangerous he is. This competitive view of masculinity allows Wormold to trick him.

As the first chapter suggested, Wormold has a gentle and undemonstrative approach to romance and sexuality. Unlike most of Greene's characters, he is drawn to a "pretty" woman, Beatrice. In most of Greene's works, the term "pretty" is an epithet, carrying the implication of a boring, uncomplicated attraction: in *Stamboul Train*, Greene describes a beautiful woman and asserts that "one could never use the

²⁵⁷ *Our Man in Havana*, 219.

insignificant measure of prettiness.”²⁵⁸ In *Our Man in Havana*, however, Greene describes Beatrice as wholesome, intelligent, and pretty. Contrasted with Wormold's innocent-seeming love that grows for Beatrice, Segura's regard for Milly becomes even more threatening. He wants to possess her, and he employs dangerous methods of taking the things he wants. He attempts to threaten Wormold into allowing Milly to marry him:

“It would really be a most suitable marriage, Mr Wormold.’

‘Milly is only seventeen.’

‘It is the best and easiest age to bear a child, Mr Wormold. Have I your permission to speak to her?’

‘Do you need it?’

‘It is more correct.’

‘And if I said no...’

‘I would of course try to persuade you.’

‘You said once that I am not of the torturable class.’²⁵⁹

Segura attempts to keep things light, not threatening Wormold outright, but makes it clear that he is quite serious, adding “but seriously, there is always your residence-permit to consider.”²⁶⁰ This understated threat emphasizes what Wormold already knows very well: Segura has far more power than Wormold himself has, and he is not afraid to wield it in pursuit of Milly. By raising the issue of child-bearing, Segura

²⁵⁸ Greene, *Stamboul Train*, 88.

²⁵⁹ *Our Man in Havana*, 199.

²⁶⁰ *Our Man in Havana*, 199.

acknowledges—albeit obliquely—that this conversation involves sexuality. He forces Wormold to consider Milly as a sexual creature.

The danger of Segura's courtship drives Wormold to acts he would not ordinarily commit, in defense of his daughter's purity. In traditional fashion, he attacks Segura instead of approaching Milly, under the assumption that Milly herself cannot control her own sexual value. He cannot forbid Milly to see Segura, both because Milly would not accept the ban and because of the force of Segura's pursuit. Therefore, he must challenge Segura directly.

Wormold is an ineffectual man. He loses control over his faux career as a spy; Milly maintains the upper hand in their relationship; he will always be mediocre in his job as a salesman. A scene in his vacuum-cleaner shop illustrates this lack of potency:

'Oh yes, your daughter. Now where's she?'

'At school. Now let me show you this snap-action coupling,' but of course, when he tried to demonstrate, it wouldn't couple. He pushed and screwed, 'Faulty part,' he said desperately.

'Let me try,' the stranger said, and in the coupling went as smooth as you could wish.²⁶¹

Wormold's lack of ability to "couple" the part mirrors his lack of sexual knowledge and ability. In his relationship with Beatrice, he is not threatened, for her own regard is as wholesome and chaste as his: their first kiss comes late in the relationship, after they have already declared their love for each other. In other

²⁶¹ *Our Man in Havana*, 9.

situations, however, he remains an innocent of sorts, unable—or, more accurately, unwilling—to understand why Segura wants to spend his time with Milly, or that Segura is serious in his attempts to win Milly's hand. Hasselbacher tries to push him toward acknowledging this, but his essential lack of sexual power and confidence makes it impossible.

Milly, by contrast, has perfect confidence in her own ability to manage the advances of her dangerous love. She believes she controls the situation. The narrative bears out this belief in a limited way: Milly remains safe throughout the story. The looming threat of Segura nonetheless causes a tension that belies the farcical nature of the novel. And this, at its heart, is how *Our Man in Havana* operates: it is at once a comic novel and a deeply serious novel, both laugh-out-loud funny and desperately suspenseful. As Wormold realizes that his imaginary agents have spiraled out of his control, Milly's storyline becomes more tense. Whether they escape the country or not, Wormold must put paid to this terrifying (from his perspective) romance, the source of Wormold's deepest fears.

The companionship between men is not always so clearly tied to sexuality, although the dynamic persists in subtler ways. In *The Heart of the Matter*, the protagonist, Scobie, has tormented relationships with both his wife and his mistress. Scobie has a satisfying relationship only with his “boy,” Ali, who can more nearly be described as his traveling companion than as a servant. Traveling in the African landscape with Ali, leaving his wife behind, relieves Scobie's tension and unhappiness. Ali is cook, houseboy, and maid in one. He speaks minimal English, but it suffices for the practical type of conversations that Scobie and Ali conduct; indeed,

Scobie prefers the simplicity of their conversation, which neither allows nor requires social nuance. When Scobie must leave to examine a suicide, Ali travels with him. When Scobie falls ill with fever, Ali nurses him. As they drive to another part of the country to deal with another officer's suicide, Scobie feels complete contentment with Ali:

He could see in the driver's mirror Ali nodding and beaming. It seemed to him that this was all he needed of love or friendship. He could be happy with no more in the world than this—the grinding van, the hot tea against his lips, the heavy damp weight of the forest, even the aching lead, the loneliness.²⁶²

Later, Scobie dreams of walking through a meadow with Ali, a dream “of perfect happiness and freedom”:

There was nobody else anywhere in his dream, and Ali never spoke. Birds went by far overhead, and once when he sat down the grass was parted by a small green snake which passed on to his hand and up his arm without fear, and before it slid down into the grass again touched his cheek with a cold, friendly, remote tongue.²⁶³

It is both Ali's silence and the fact that he does not engender pity that makes him such a relief to Scobie. The snake, which appeals to Scobie, is “cold” and “remote”—it demands nothing. Freudian imagery aside, the snake remains a wild animal, not a pet; by contrast, when Scobie comes home to Louise, he thinks that “she reminded him of a dog or cat”²⁶⁴...both eminently needy animals, a reflection of

²⁶² *Heart of the Matter*, 93.

²⁶³ Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 91.

²⁶⁴ *The Heart of the Matter*, 14.

Scobie's feeling of obligation to Louise. Scobie considers his friendship with Ali simpler and purer than his relationships with his sexual objects. Both Louise and Helen are needy, even childlike, particularly Helen, who collects stamps and listens avidly as Scobie reads children's stories for a boy in the hospital. For Scobie, sexual desire thrives on pity—and only in his dealings with men does he escape that doomed pairing.

Scobie also grapples with a difficult, conflicted friendship with Yusef, a shady local businessman. He knows that Yusef has his hand in illegal dealings—smuggling, at the least—and he resists Yusef's overtures of friendship. When Scobie asks Yusef why he wishes to be friends, Yusef replies, “friendship is something in the soul. It is a thing one feels. It is not a return for something.”²⁶⁵ Over time, Scobie feels a reluctant connection with Yusef, and when he borrows money from Yusef to allow Louise to leave Africa, he becomes indebted to him emotionally as well as financially.

Scobie's debt to Yusef cements their friendship, partly because Scobie's sense of obligation makes it impossible to deny that he has relied on Yusef. At one point, however, Scobie refuses to acknowledge Yusef's friendship. Yusef threatens to go to the commissioner and tell him that Scobie has borrowed the money. Scobie replies,

“Do what you like, Yusef.’ But he couldn't believe in any of this scene however hard he played it. It was like a lovers' quarrel. He couldn't believe in Yusef's threats and he had no belief in his own calmness: he did not even believe in this goodbye. What had happened in the mauve and orange room

²⁶⁵ *The Heart of the Matter*, 101.

had been too important to become part of the enormous past. He was not surprised when Yusef, lifting his head, said, 'Of course I shall not go. One day you will come back and want my friendship. And I shall welcome you.'"²⁶⁶

As Scobie and Yusef forge their mutual history, they create a bond that Scobie considers indelible. Scobie's relationships with women center on his pity for them and his sense of responsibility for their happiness. His sense of responsibility betrays his enormous arrogance. It both relieves and worries Scobie to allow Yusef the advantage in their relationship, for he never allows the women in his life to have an advantage over him. His habitual egoism slips for a moment when he agrees to Yusef's loan: as a general rule, Scobie believes that he can keep Louise and Helen happy on his own, and feels obligated to do so. When he accepts the other man's help, despite his reluctance, he accepts his own inability to provide for both women. It is not coincidence that he compares their argument to a lovers' quarrel, for it shares the characteristic of inevitable reconciliation that defines an argument between committed lovers.

Yusef and Scobie do not share a common sexual object, which distinguishes this novel from *The End of the Affair* and *The Quiet American*. In *The Heart of the Matter*, the more traditional triangulated bond between men over a woman appears in the form of Scobie's casual friendship with Wilson, who falls in love with Scobie's wife. The Scobies' marriage is largely platonic, and Scobie has little desire for Louise's company; as a result, his competitive instinct is not aroused by Wilson's advances, even when Louise tells him that Wilson kissed her. Much like Louise,

²⁶⁶ *The Heart of the Matter*, 133.

Wilson has too much emotional need for Scobie to feel comfortable with him. Scobie compares him to a pet, thinking, “He was like a dog. Nobody had yet drawn on his face the lines that make a human being.”²⁶⁷ Wilson requires pity. Scobie, who feels sorry for him, does not feel a true friendship.

Greene’s books illustrate that one can identify not only with real, flesh-and-blood men, but with those of the imagination. Girard’s term *external mediation* describes a man’s identification with a cultural icon, stereotype, or figure. In Greene’s fiction, this phenomenon plays an important role—in particular, because Greene (and his characters) rely so heavily on books to teach cultural lessons. One of Greene’s most oft-quoted essays makes the argument that the books of our childhood influence us more than anything else—more than our parents, and certainly more than things we read later:

What do we ever get nowadays from reading to equal the excitement and the revelation in those first fourteen years? Of course I should be interested to hear that a new novel by Mr E.M. Forster was going to appear this spring, but I could never compare that mild expectation of civilized pleasure with the missed heartbeat, the appalled glee I felt when I found on a library shelf a novel by Rider Haggard, Percy Westerman, Captain Brereton or Stanley Weyman which I had not read before. It is in those early years that I would look for the crisis, the moment when life took a new slant in its journey towards death.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ *The Heart of the Matter*, 24.

²⁶⁸ Greene, *Collected Essays*, 13.

Among the “excitement and the revelation,” of course, are the first hints--or more than hints--about sex. In *The Honorary Consul*, for example, “Perry Mason’s secretary Della was the first woman to arouse Plarr’s sexual appetite.”²⁶⁹ Greene’s parents avoided discussing sex, aside from his father’s prohibitions on masturbation. The first open discussions of sexuality in Greene’s life were with Kenneth Richmond, when Greene was already sixteen. Long before that, books served as sexual education.

The characters in these novels are role models for the young reader whose images will never be completely effaced, no matter how many live models are set against them over time. Ian Fleming’s ruthless James Bond or H. Rider Haggard’s strong, upright Allan Quatermain—unrealistically dashing, successful, strong, and clever—cannot be removed from the child’s consciousness. These adjunct role models complicate the landscape of masculinity; they display unrealistic, idealized versions of the male self, which conflict with the real-life models that are available to men. As a result, external mediation can be as powerful as internal mediation, and just as problematic and flawed.

For many young men, and certainly for Greene, the influence of these fictional models shapes the development of masculine identity. Long before a boy gains access to adult male friendships, he draws on the cultural image of what makes a man. In essence, these idealized males are a path toward adult male relationships—a type of initiation into the process of modeling oneself on another. The other primary male model is the father, a figure that Greene’s works often shroud in mystery or leave

²⁶⁹ Greene, *The Honorary Consul*, London: The Bodley Head, 1973, 32.

entirely absent. For most of Greene's young characters, masculinity comes from books and films, and establishes an early sense of sexual inadequacy that lasts long into life.

Greene's novel *The Human Factor* describes this phenomenon in particular detail. In this novel, the protagonist, Castle, has one colleague, Davis, with whom he spends most of his days. Their friendship consists of a mild intimacy, enforced by proximity, rather than the close bond that Greene describes elsewhere. *The Human Factor* does not feature a close male relationship such as that in *The Quiet American* or *Monsignor Quixote*; rather, Davis grounds his sexual identity in observations of other men, fictional or real. He pines for his secretary, Cynthia, but he is torn between the masculine ideal set forth by James Bond and the mundane reality of a happy marriage demonstrated by Castle.

Fleming's James Bond is a hardened, sometimes world-weary secret agent—at once less glamorous, more physical, and less romantic than the screen icon. Bond goes into mortal danger in every novel and emerges intact (though not always unscathed) and manages to have sexual escapades every time. He is cynical, even weary, but indomitable and endlessly sexual. Davis, who has little romantic success with Cynthia, reflects that “James Bond would have had Cynthia a long while ago. On a sandy beach under a hot sun.”²⁷⁰ He wishes for an “adventure,” rather than a relationship, and contemplates asking for a transfer to a different station, in the hope that an exotic setting might open up the possibility of a more exotic life.

²⁷⁰ *The Human Factor*. New York: Avon Books, 1979, 46-47.

Davis fears an open conversation with Cynthia about his job, although she also works for his agency, because "...she's so damn loyal, she might report me as a security risk. To Colonel Daintry. Like James Bond killing the girl he slept with. Only she hasn't slept with me."²⁷¹ This confusion over which of them fulfills the James Bond role illustrates Davis's awareness that no relationship with Cynthia could ever take the form of a James Bond interlude. Nonetheless, Davis has little knowledge of any other kind of love.

The limitations of a Bond-esque encounter are clear to Davis, though, who wishes, at other moments, for a more serious, marital commitment, which he views through the lens of Castle's marriage to Sarah. When he asks after Castle's son, Sam, he then adds, "I wish I could have a little bastard too--but only with Cynthia. What a hope!"²⁷² While this vision draws on reality more than the depictions of Bond, it shows that Davis can only see the most basic outline of Castle's marriage. He does not know that Sam is biologically unrelated to Castle; nor does Castle ever speak of his passion for Sarah, saying simply, "I like my wife." Indeed, Davis's view of Castle's marriage is nearly as fictitious as the stories of James Bond. When Davis points out that "Bond never had to marry,"²⁷³ it is less an assertion that he doesn't want marriage than an admission that he doesn't understand or feel equipped for it.

Idealized views of masculinity, always beneath the surface in Greene's fiction, are explicit in *The Honorary Consul* (1973). Doctor Plarr, an Englishman in Paraguay, observes the phenomenon of *machismo*:

²⁷¹ *The Human Factor*, 47.

²⁷² *The Human Factor*, 143.

²⁷³ *The Human Factor*, 49.

Machismo--the sense of masculine pride--was the Spanish equivalent of *virtus*. It had little to do with English courage or a stiff upper lip. Perhaps his father in his foreign way was trying to imitate *machismo* when he chose to face alone the daily increasing dangers on the other side of the Paraguayan border, but it was only the stiff lip which showed upon the quay.²⁷⁴

Throughout the novel, Plarr reflects on *machismo*, concluding that he himself is “not a man with *machismo*.”²⁷⁵ This meditation, which effectively compares English masculinity to Latin masculinity, contrasts with the comparison between Dr Plarr and Charley Fortnum—the titular Consul, and the husband of Plarr’s lover, Clara. Plarr, who believes that his relationship with Clara is casual and purely physical, still sees Clara’s pregnancy as confirmation of his own virility. He does not believe that he has no *machismo* because he considers himself unmanly; rather, he draws a distinction between *machismo* and masculinity as the English understand it.

His interpretation of the cultural standard of masculinity reveals a mature and self-possessed man with an established self-concept; he does not feel an obligation to meet the Latin standard of what is male. He does not mind being foreign, and he considers with equanimity the traits that make him foreign:

People when they first saw him sitting on a bench with an open book had looked at him with keen curiosity. Perhaps they thought it was a custom peculiar to foreign doctors. It was not exactly unmanly, but it was certainly foreign. The men here preferred to stand at street corners and talk, or sit drinking cups of coffee and talk, or lean out of a window and talk. And all the

²⁷⁴ Greene, *The Honorary Consul*, London: The Bodley Head, 1973, 11.

²⁷⁵ Greene, *The Honorary Consul*, London: The Bodley Head, 1973, 19.

time, while they talked, they touched each other to emphasize a point or just from friendship. In public Doctor Plarr touched nobody, only his book. It was a sign, like his English passport, that he would always remain a stranger: he would never be properly assimilated.²⁷⁶

The distinction between Plarr's behavior and that of the Paraguayan men emphasizes that his formative experiences—in England—control his masculine identity.

In the context of characters so overwhelmingly heterosexual, the role of same-sex friendship is sometimes dismissed or overlooked. For Greene, however, male friendship is key to how desire works. Friendship contains chemistry, as surely as does erotic love, and these novels set forth that chemistry as a propelling force behind the development of a sexual self. Men in Greene's highly-gendered universe look to other men, real or iconic, as primary sources of masculinity. These friendships endure when erotic love does not because they have no defined sexual aim and no guarantee of exclusivity. That does not, however, make them simple. The ties between men are more subtly drawn than the sexual relationships. In Greene's writings, same-sex friendship and eroticism are not divorced from one another; rather, the sexual love informs the male friendship and vice versa. Greene uses each to illuminate and complicate the other.

Greene's own life provides a pattern for some of these male-male phenomena. One of his own most powerful and enduring friendships—and probably his best-known—was with Kim Philby. Greene and Philby met as colleagues in MI6; Philby,

²⁷⁶ Greene, *The Honorary Consul*, London: The Bodley Head, 1973, 15-16.

a double agent for the Soviet Union, later defected to Moscow. Yvonne Cloetta, Greene's romantic companion for the last thirty years of his life, said of Greene and Philby, "just as one cannot explain love, one cannot explain friendship either."²⁷⁷ Greene's relationship with Philby typifies Greene's friendships with other men: they became friends almost instantly when they met, and they remained friends despite the upheaval and tumult of Philby's life, even after Philby went to Moscow.

Greene and Cloetta visited Philby after his defection. In her memoir, *In Search of a Beginning*, Cloetta reports that she asked Greene why he wished to see Philby and that Greene responded, "Firstly because he is a friend, and it is always pleasant to meet a friend you haven't seen for a very long time; and then, out of curiosity, too."²⁷⁸ Even faced with Philby's treason, Greene would not dissolve a friendship. In his foreword to Philby's memoir, *My Silent War*, Greene says, "He betrayed his country"—yes, perhaps he did, but who among us has not committed treason to something or someone more important than a country? In Philby's own eyes he was working for a shape of things to come from which his country would benefit."²⁷⁹ Because Greene cared so deeply for Philby, he attributes the double agent's behavior to good motives.

According to Cloetta, "...what marked Graham out from other people was that the equivalent of 'love at first sight' existed for him in friendships: it was a gift which was close to love. What is more, when he was talking about one or other of his

²⁷⁷ Cloetta, Yvonne, with Marie-Françoise Allain. *In Search of a Beginning: My Life with Graham Greene*. London: Bloomsbury, 2005, 129.

²⁷⁸ Cloetta, 131.

²⁷⁹ Greene, foreword to Kim Philby's *My Silent War*, New York: Modern Library, 2002, xvii.

friends, he used to say, ‘I love him.’²⁸⁰ Cloetta argues that Greene’s fidelity as a friend stands in contrast to the transience of most of his romantic relationships; his most meaningful and long-lasting friends included Philby, for whom he felt an immediate affinity, and A.S. Frere, one of his publishers. She reports, “If Graham was not constant in love, there can be no doubt at all that he was a loyal and faithful friend: some of his traveling companions were with him for the greater part of his life. By and large, they all remained his friends.”²⁸¹ Cloetta’s comparison of friendship with “love”—by which she seems to mean sexual relationships—suggests not only that friendship was equally significant for Greene but that the same notion of chemistry applies. Greene’s own use of the word “love” is less clearly defined: perhaps he chose it for its complicated set of meanings and connotations.

Greene’s description of Philby, in the foreword to Philby’s memoir, details Greene’s one reservation about his friend’s character. Philby managed to eliminate another employee from the secret service in order to gain his own position, an action that Greene says makes one feel “the sharp touch of the icicle in the heart.” He adds:

I attributed it then to a personal drive for power, the only characteristic in Philby which I thought disagreeable. I am glad now that I was wrong; he was serving a cause and not himself, and so my old liking for him comes back...²⁸²

Greene’s admission that he has misread Philby, and that he is relieved to find himself wrong, holds the seed of the relationship he describes between Fowler and Pyle in

²⁸⁰ Cloetta, 149.

²⁸¹ Cloetta, 149.

²⁸² Graham Greene, foreword to Kim Philby’s *My Silent War*, xviii-xix.

The Quiet American: one in which the immediate attraction between the two men remains constant through enormous differences of ideals and even through Fowler's ultimate betrayal of Pyle.

Eve Sedgwick, in *Between Men*, argues that the terms “homosocial” and “homosexual,” while different in quality, occupy ends of a spectrum, on which most male friendships fall: “To draw the ‘homosocial’ back into the orbit of ‘desire,’ of the possibly erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual--a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted.”²⁸³ This “radical disruption” springs from the unwillingness to voice the desire that attracts two men to one another. Greene, although he writes almost exclusively about heterosexual characters, still conveys that form of desire or libido. His male characters feel an element of physical desire or physical appreciation, along with the mental identification.

On the other side of the “radical” divide, one of Greene's better-known short stories, “May We Borrow Your Husband?”, presents an unflattering—even disturbing—depiction of a gay couple, who are stereotypically homosexual. Greene describes them as “that hungry pair of hunters,” on the prowl for sexual satisfaction (not only homosexual but also polyamorous, transgressive on several points), with no scruple about seducing a man who has not yet consummated his new marriage.

As this dissertation has argued, the narrator of the story, William Harris, watches the interchanges between the two couples just as avidly as the gay couple watches their object. Harris describes their behavior as a military assault: “...you

²⁸³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York: Columbia UP, 1985, 1-2.

must imagine how all the time these other two were closing in. It was like a medieval siege: they dug their trenches and threw up their earthworks...I believe the two of them would have changed their floor if that would have helped to bring them closer to the fortress; they probably discussed the move together and decided against it as too overt.”²⁸⁴ Greene depicts Tony and Stephen as predators or soldiers, an ironic contrast to their effeminacy.

This story complicates the view of masculinity and sexuality in Greene’s works—because Greene wrote so few homosexual characters, the unattractiveness of these ones raises questions about his view of homosexuality. Greene’s discomfort with Tony and Stephen, and perhaps with homosexuality as a whole, may reflect his uncertainty about how homosexual relationships work. Yvonne Cloetta reports that Greene accepted homosexuality, and that he did not consider it a factor in his friendships with homosexual men. She says, “...each friendship was special in its own way. It depended on individuals. They couldn’t be divided according to sex, or even sexuality. Graham couldn’t care less about that.”²⁸⁵ Writing about a gay couple, however, only fit into Greene’s career in the form of a farce, in which the characters can be caricatures. Writing a longer and more in-depth story with a major gay character, however, would require a complete reconfiguration of the male-male friendship as Greene understands it. Because Tony and Stephen have a sexual relationship, jealousy creeps in; even though they both desire Peter and they approach him as a couple, it is not possible for them to get equal satisfaction from the pursuit. When Tony and Peter hit it off, Stephen becomes jealous.

²⁸⁴ *Collected Short Stories*, 266.

²⁸⁵ Cloetta, 166.

He sulks, and in his anger begins to show his greater age. “Can people ever hunt quite equally in couples or is there always a loser?”, Harris wonders.²⁸⁶ Because sexual relationships trend toward exclusiveness, even in such couples as Tony and Stephen, they suffer the strains of jealousy and boredom that friendships do not.

As a counterpoint to “May We Borrow Your Husband?”, the central friendship in *Monsignor Quixote* gives a clear view of a non-sexual male relationship, unmediated by a woman. Father Quixote describes himself as completely untroubled by sexual desire of any kind. As a result, the device of a common love interest is absent in this book, and the friendship between Father Quixote and Sancho is the basis of the plot. The Mayor (“Sancho” is the nickname that Father Quixote gives him) is Quixote’s traveling companion. They spend a great deal of their time discussing religion and politics, for Quixote is a Catholic and Sancho is a Communist. The details of their agreement and disagreement, however, are swept aside in favor of the sharing of their general belief in humanity. They agree that “it’s human to doubt,” and yet they try not to doubt; as Quixote thinks to himself, “It’s odd...how sharing a sense of doubt can bring men together perhaps even more than sharing a faith.”²⁸⁷

In this same paragraph, when Quixote and Sancho are revealing their doubts to one another, that the “Mayor put his hand for a moment on Father Quixote’s shoulder, and Father Quixote could feel the electricity of affection in the touch.”²⁸⁸ That “electricity”—especially for Monsignor Quixote, who is celibate—is the warmest physical expression of union. The physical touches between the two in this

²⁸⁶ *Collected Short Stories*, 282.

²⁸⁷ Greene, *Monsignor Quixote*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982, 55.

²⁸⁸ *Monsignor Quixote*, 55.

novel, though they are rare and fleeting, are moments that reflect the closest communion of mind as well as body.

Greene's male characters share a desire to conceal themselves, to avoid display (with the exception of the homosexual couple in "May We Borrow Your Husband?"). In *Orient Express*, for example, Myatt hates the idea of sharing a compartment because he has "a hatred of undressing before another man."²⁸⁹ Similarly, in *Monsignor Quixote*, in the shared hotel room that Sancho and Father Quixote visit, Father Quixote is "much relieved when the Mayor lay down on his bed fully clothed (he feared that his throat would be cut more easily if he undressed), for Father Quixote was not used to taking off his clothes in front of another, and anything, anything, he thought, might happen before nightfall to save him from embarrassment."²⁹⁰

Father Quixote, of course, is particularly opposed to any sort of revelation of his body because he is not accustomed to it; having never had a sexual partner, he has never had occasion as an adult to share a room with another, and the intimacies that necessarily accompany that sharing are part of the gradual growth of Father Quixote's deepening friendship with Sancho. By becoming physically much more close, the two of them leave behind the awkward consciousness of their bodies and become, instead, more completely united in emotion and intellect.

Near the end of the novel, Monsignor Quixote falls ill. He has a dream and sleepwalks to the altar; the Mayor, along with their host, the professor, follows. He stays very close to Father Quixote: "The Mayor moved a few steps nearer to the altar.

²⁸⁹ *Orient Express*, 6.

²⁹⁰ *Monsignor Quixote*, 61.

He was afraid that, when the moment of waking came, Father Quixote might fall, and he wanted to be near enough to catch him in his arms.”²⁹¹ Father Quixote then proceeds to celebrate a Mass, with his empty hands, consecrating “the non-existent wine in the non-existent chalice.”²⁹² As the Mass progresses, the Mayor and the professor confer, believing that Father Quixote will wake when he realizes that there is no bread and no wine. Instead, Father Quixote takes Communion: “...with no hesitation at all he took from the invisible paten the invisible Host and his fingers laid the nothing on his tongue. Then he raised the invisible chalice and seemed to drink from it. The Mayor could see the movement of his throat as he swallowed.”²⁹³ As the Mayor watches, Father Quixote turns to look for the communicants, who are not there:

He remarked the Mayor standing a few feet from him and took the non-existent Host between his finger; he frowned as though something mystified him and then he smiled. “*Compañero*...you must kneel, *compañero*.” He came forward three steps with two fingers extended, and the Mayor knelt. Anything which will give him peace, he thought, anything at all. The fingers came closer. The Mayor opened his mouth and felt the fingers, like a Host, on his tongue.”²⁹⁴

This fictive Eucharist, after which Father Quixote collapses, dead, causes the Mayor some uncertainty after the fact. He catches Father Quixote afterward, as the priest falls, and lowers him gently to the altar; when it becomes clear that the priest is

²⁹¹ *Monsignor Quixote*, 215

²⁹² *Monsignor Quixote*, 215.

²⁹³ *Monsignor Quixote*, 217.

²⁹⁴ *Monsignor Quixote*, 217.

dead, his minds turns to the possible ramifications of the “ceremony.” The professor points out that the bread and wine, while not visible, could have as easily existed out of air as the body and blood of Christ from bread and wine. As Brannon Hancock says in his article, “Pluralism and Sacrament: Eucharistic Possibility in a Post-Ecclesial World,” there is a difference between an “imaginative” Mass and an “imaginary” one.²⁹⁵

For the Mayor, the strangely intimate physical touch of Father Quixote’s fingers on his tongue is a capstone to their close friendship. It combines the spiritual freight of the Mass with an echo of the sexual act of penetration. It also demonstrates, in a concretely physical way, the interplay of different roles between men: mentor and pupil, or priest and worshipper, as well as that of intellectual equals, evidenced by Father Quixote’s use of the term *compañero*. In his introduction to *Monsignor Quixote*, John Auchard argues, “Fiction, of course, can invent any kind of proof it wants. *Monsignor Quixote* makes no such mistake. At the end of the novel nothing is certain, nothing is clear, nothing proves anything, nothing shows.”²⁹⁶ Whether the Mass is a delusion, brought on by Quixote’s illness or madness, or whether Sancho has just experienced a real Mass, the novel provides the clearest, gentlest friendship in Greene’s *oeuvre*.

Although Father Quixote and Sancho have a relationship that is substantially different from most of the friendships between men in Greene’s fiction, it is the conclusion of this novel that most clearly expresses the value of companionship. The

²⁹⁵ Brannon Hancock, “Pluralism and Sacrament: Eucharistic Possibility in a Post-Ecclesial World,” *Literature and Theology*, 19: 3, September 2005, 266.

²⁹⁶ John Auchard, introduction to *Monsignor Quixote*, New York: Penguin, xxiv.

Mayor, grieving for Father Quixote, thinks about their friendship, as he rides in a car with Professor Pilbeam:

The Mayor didn't speak again before they reached Orense; an idea quite strange to him had lodged in his brain. Why is it that the hate of a man—even of a man like Franco—dies with his death, and yet love, the love which he had begun to feel for Father Quixote, seemed now to live and grow in spite of the final separation and the final silence—for how long, he wondered with a kind of fear, was it possible for that love of his to continue? And to what end?²⁹⁷

This question—and it is a true question, not a merely rhetorical one—is a curious ending to a novel. Surely, it would seem, the answer to it is in the pages of the book. The relationship between Father Quixote and Sancho has its own obvious merit. Companionship, conviviality, loyalty: all of these things have their own clear value. The closing paragraph of the novel, however, suggests that there is something more, something less obvious, in this close, dynamic friendship. Sancho's "kind of fear," in part, may stem from his lack of religious belief, as the love he feels for Father Quixote continues and even grows, in a negation of "the final silence." He asks how long it will continue because the growth of this love calls into question the finality of death, which is an established part of the Mayor's worldview. The more important of the questions, however, is the second: "And to what end?" Greene's fiction, read as a body, suggests that it is impossible to identify *any* logical end to the experience of friendship, and that—even less than erotic love, which has a reproductive purpose as well as its more diffuse functions—friendship is nothing less

²⁹⁷ Greene, *Monsignor Quixote*, 194.

than a constant, ever-shifting method of experiencing the world and oneself.

It may, as Cloetta claims, be impossible to understand friendship or love, but Greene establishes clearly that the desire of the body and the working of the libido draw on these male-male friendships—that, in fact, the connection between men is an essential part of *being* a man. Far from the picture of isolated romantic love as it's described in the story of Eden, Greene's idea of erotic love multiplies as it is discussed, shared, fought over, and imitated. This is not to say that male companionship is simply a means to an end, designed to further erotic desire. Rather, Greene argues that the variety of love that springs up between heterosexual men has its own significance and role in the development of the *self*, and that the development of that self, in turn, can modify and complicate erotic desire.

Conclusion

Greene's novels revolve around discussion and confession, whether secular or religious. The value of the confession, for Greene, goes beyond absolution. When Rose, in *Brighton Rock*, goes to the confessional in order to think—with no intention of being shrived—the confession changes its emphasis. She makes her own ethical judgments, but she needs the presence—and the discussion—of the priest in order to make them.

The perverse sexual outlets that appear in Greene's fiction provide development for this ethical process. Pain and suffering place emphasis on the physical body, but Greene complicates this emphasis. He transfigures the most somatic moments in the text into religious or spiritual reflections, as when Sarah Miles kisses Richard Smythe's disfigured cheek and envisions physical contact with God.

Relationships between men anchor Greene's plots and provide necessary tension and competition. The sexual relationships have no savor or interest without another male perspective. In *The End of the Affair* and *The Quiet American*, in particular, Greene explores the connections between male-male friendship and sexual relationships. The male characters imitate and internalize models of masculinity, such as what Pyle sees in Fowler in *The Quiet American*. Those models determine their sexual objects as well as their sexual behavior.

Part of the ambition of this study has been to establish that moral structures of an earlier century are no longer of use. In their place, Greene employs one of fiction's

most commonly developed centers of energy—the erotic—as the site of moral complexity. His use of sexuality brings vigor back to moral consideration. This reading of Greene makes his novels relevant for today's reader; while the specific political problems or religious settings of the novels may grow dated, Greene's engagement with sexuality remains ultimately modern.

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