

2

Graham Greene, Believing Skeptic

Darren J. N. Middleton

Kreuzer: No, I don't believe. Sometimes I doubt my disbelief."

—Greene 1985, 106

Sometimes an unsettled, inquisitive approach to theology appears far better for the soul than an established, unquestioning method; and, raising religious doubts need not signify a falling away from grace. Graham Greene (1904–1991) upheld both notions, as recent scholars testify, and throughout his life he believed that faith was a pilgrimage, however errant (Bosco 2005; Brennan 2010; Gilvary and Middleton 2011; Hill 2001, 2008). The cultural critic Pico Iyer puts it this way:

He [Greene] knew how to keep alive the demands and intensity of faith, by not really being part of any congregation, yet refusing to stake out the easy ground of a nonbeliever. He saw that he was in part the schoolmaster whose face he surely recognized whenever he caught his blurred features in a train window—and a boy committed to forging his own way in opposition to that schoolmaster, his father. Life would and could be spent in movement, in process, not settling to any fixity or doctrine, but sensing that the human challenge was something much more profound and unassimilable. So much so, in fact, that even saints might despair of figuring out the riddle and the ache. (2012, 74)

This chapter explores Greene's theological convictions, which were always evolving but nonetheless coalesce and show his work to be the art form of his anguished yearning for God. I focus on his understanding of doubt's relationship to faith, his theological anthropology, and his troubling images of God. Allegedly scandalous thoughts attend such beliefs, as we will see, and yet I think Greene's views contribute to Christian efforts at rethinking faith's meaning in the twenty-first century. In the last analysis I view him as a believing skeptic, a member of "the tribe of Thomas,"

because he probed the religious assumptions of his day—sometimes with controversial consequences—and yet still professed faith in the divine. This is no small virtue.

LIFE AND LITERARY ART

Graham Greene was born the fourth of six children in 1904 in the county of Hertfordshire in England (R. Greene 2007; Griffiths 2010; Sherry 1989, 1994, 2004; Sinyard 2003; West 1997). Shortly after his father was appointed headmaster at Berkhamsted School in 1911, Greene grew exceedingly ill and acutely depressed. At only sixteen, he entered an intense period of psychoanalysis and underwent a six-month convalescence in London. In 1922, he went up to Oxford, where he spent three years reading history. There he edited the *Oxford Outlook*, flirted with membership in the Communist Party, published some experimental verse, formed important friendships, and met Vivien Dayrell-Browning, his future wife. After graduation, Greene worked as a journalist in Nottingham. Upon taking catechism classes from Father Trollope, he converted to Catholicism in 1926 and a year later married Dayrell-Browning—two of the most momentous occasions of his life. At this point, he accepted a job working with the staff of the *Times* newspaper in London. His first novel, *The Man Within*, was published in 1929, prompting him to leave journalism to concentrate on travel and writing. Always somewhat restive, Greene satiated his wanderlust, not to mention his desire for copy, by traveling to places such as Burgundy, Cologne, Sweden, and West Africa; later critics have followed in Greene's footsteps, keen to locate the source(s) of his political and theological wisdom (Smith 2000; Butcher 2010). While Greene produced several critically acclaimed novels, travelogues, movie scripts, and somewhat controversial film reviews between 1931 and 1937, the 1938 publication of *Brighton Rock* garnered the attention of numerous Christian readers, clergy and laity alike.

The first of four so-called Catholic novels, *Brighton Rock* chronicles the fallout from gangland warfare in an English coastal town at Whitsuntide, and it plays with the contentious idea that God's limitless mercy reaches down and saves those whom we are tempted to believe irredeemable, beyond salvation, or outside the official range of divine sympathy. Greene's travels through Mexico, which he undertook in 1937–1938, inspired his portrayal of an irreverent priest hunted down by God and the state in *The Power and the Glory* (1940). And his 1942–1943 tour of duty in Sierra Leone for MI6, the British Secret Intelligence Service, shaped *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), which addresses the thorny issue of suicide as a mortal sin. Greene outlined *The End of the Affair* (1951), the last installment in this Catholic tetralogy, on Capri in 1948. Although some critics see this novel as a vocational fulcrum, a text that marks the end of Greene's concern with the Catholic novel, after which he became preoccupied with political novels, there are others who argue that Greene may best be understood as an enduring Catholic novelist with pre- and post-Vatican II impulses (Miller 1990, 90; Bosco 2005). Additional scholars think that we would



Greene died in 1991 in Vevey, Switzerland, and he lies buried in Cimetière des Monts-de-Corsier, which some see as a pilgrimage site, especially for all those who, like Greene, are unable to subscribe to traditional Christian doctrine but who nevertheless remain religious.

Photo taken by Darren Middleton

do well to set aside all religious and political readings and, instead, learn to see how Greene's illicit romance with Catherine Walston holds the key that unlocks the door to this novel's meaning (Cash 2000). More recent commentators think it is time to abandon Greene's biography, to leave off analyzing his life, and to return to his writing (Bergonzi 2006; Thomson 2009).

Later travels in Indochina, Kenya, Vietnam, Cuba, Haiti, the United States, and Argentina yielded experiences that Greene wove into the fabric of his political novels, such as *The Quiet American* (1955), *Our Man in Havana* (1958), *The Comedians* (1966), and *The Honorary Consul* (1973). Throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s Greene wrote several plays, a number of novels, and two autobiographies, but ill health in the late 1980s forced him to ration his literary output. Greene died in 1991 in Vevey, Switzerland, and he lies buried in Cimetière des Monts-de-Corsier, which some see as a pilgrimage site, especially for all those who, like Greene, are unable to subscribe to traditional Christian doctrine but who nevertheless remain religious (Middleton 2009).

A THEOLOGY OF FURIOUS DOUBTS

Understanding Graham Greene involves considerable struggle. Perhaps this is because his character seems so paradoxical, even ironic. In many of his recorded interviews, for example, Greene comes across as a taciturn man both haunted and fortified by an inner core of faith and doubt, of self-interest and self-effacement, and of loyalty and disloyalty (Allain 1983; Cassis 1994; Donaghy 1992). He looks for evidence of humanity in what most of us would think of as inhuman characters. Moreover, he seems to believe that sin contains within itself the seeds of saintliness and that authentic faith pulses at the heart of the unconventionally pious. Ostensibly able to coagulate numerous contradictions within his own embattled soul, Greene divides his allegiances without any anxiety—except, of course, in his fiction—and he consistently loiters on what the poet Robert Browning famously calls “the dangerous edge of things” (1895, 353).

Under Browning’s influence, Greene cultivated an intoxicating zeal to honor the conflicting emotions that swirl and rage within us, struggling for our unbroken attention—impulses like faith and doubt (1971, 84–85). Faith may best be understood as troubled commitment, according to Greene, and this overlay has a personal history, one that begins with Greene’s conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1926, when he took the spiritual name of the doubting disciple Thomas (1971, 120–21; Allain 1983, 145). Greene the Doubter went on to model a faith marked by skepticism and distrust. He viewed the doctrine of the Trinity as the end product of bad mathematical reasoning, for example, and although he was intrigued by the scholarly quest for the historical Jesus, he abhorred academic attempts to demythologize the Bible, especially the Johannine account of Jesus’s physical resurrection (Allain 1983, 158–59). He disliked the concept of sin, moreover, and he disbelieved in traditional Christian eschatology. Addressing *Brighton Rock*’s controversial ending, Greene explains:

I wanted to make people believe he [Pinkie] was a sufficiently evil person almost to justify the notion of Hell. I wanted to introduce a doubt of Pinkie’s future in the words of the priest, who speaks of the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God, a doubt whether even a man like that could possibly merit eternal punishment. It is appalling, the strangeness. Because the mercy of God obviously is operating in some inexplicable fashion even with the gas ovens of Auschwitz. In fact, I wanted to throw doubt on Hell altogether. (Donaghy 1992, 57; also see Allain 1983, 151)

Casting doubts often inclined Greene to proceed from traditional Christianity’s doctrinal center and toward the so-called permissible edges of theological speculation, what we might call the borderlands of belief and unbelief, where papal censors roam (Godman 2001; Schloesser 2000). Such liminality eventually became normative for Greene, the novelist with a fondness for Mark 9:24 (Cassis 1994, 420). “He habitually regarded doubt and skepticism rather than blind faith as the natural human



Can a seemingly irredeemable murderer go to heaven? Pinkie (Richard Attenborough) plots to seduce, marry, and then kill Rose (Carol Marsh) in John Boulting's *Brighton Rock* (1947). Along with Terrence Rattigan, Graham Greene wrote the screenplay for this cinematic adaptation of his novel; Rowan Joffe remade the film in 2011, electing to set the story in 1964 rather than in 1947.

Photo courtesy of Charter Films

perspective upon matters of religious devotion,” Michael Brennan observes (2010, 8). Yvonne Cloetta, Greene’s longtime companion, agrees:

No he [Greene] didn’t really have that [calm assurance]. It was rather more like the state of mind of the poet [Miguel de] Unamuno, whom he admired and whom he felt close to in his paradoxical search for God. He quoted him, notably in *Ways of Escape* [Greene’s second autobiography], and I often heard him say, “Those who believe that they believe in God, but without passion in their hearts, without anguish of mind, without uncertainty, without doubt, without an element of despair in them, in their consolation, believe only in the ‘God’ idea, not in God Himself.” I sometimes used to discuss this, after Graham’s death, with my friend the priest Alberto Huerta. It was something Graham himself felt. It could equally well apply to him, too. (2005, 195)

This said, Greene always appeared grateful when something or someone, like the Italian stigmatic Padre Pio, stimulated one or more doubts in his disbelief (Allain

1983, 147; Thomson 2006, 121–45; Durán 1994). In short, Greene was a “Catholic agnostic” (Cassis 1994, 435–58). And this paradoxical label denotes a way of experiencing life that is both loyal and disloyal to the official teachings of the Church—an unsettled, quizzical approach to any and all authorized patterns of Christian faith and practice. Greene was particularly impatient with theologians such as Anselm and Aquinas, for example, who spent their time intellectualizing not only God’s existence but also God’s nature and activity. Any attempt to conceptualize the divine, especially divine providence, yields little or no positive result, because life is replete with those inexplicable moments that reason appears powerless to explain, Greene holds (1971, 120–21).

Quiet, placid faith seldom appears in Greene’s fiction; rather, rivulets of religiosity become a raging torrent that sweeps away the secular hopes and fears of his fallible, ambivalent characters, like Querry in *A Burnt-Out Case* or Bendrix in *The End of the Affair*. Also consider Father Quixote, the monsignor errant, whose playful yet still unorthodox attempt to explain divine Trinitarianism using three wine bottles leaves him religiously and emotionally spent, feeling like a sinner or a heretic, someone unworthy to serve as a priest (Greene 1982, 49–50). His faith is born of anguish. And his uncertainties are nimble:

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. It’s odd, he thought, as he steered Rocinante with undue caution round a curve, how sharing a sense of doubt can bring men together perhaps even more than sharing a faith. The believer will fight another believer over a shade of difference; the doubter fights only with himself. (1982, 55)

Even Greene’s nonfiction—his reportage, book reviews, and essays—shows someone fighting with himself, unable to let sleeping dogmas lie. Writing in his introduction to *Articles of Faith: The Collected Tablet Journalism of Graham Greene*, Ian Thomson describes such unblinking spiritual scrutiny: “John Cornwell’s celebrated interview with the novelist for the *Tablet* in 1989 (‘Why I Am Still a Catholic’) suggests an eighty-five-year-old who was troubled by theological doubts but still dogged by the possibility of God” (2006, ix). To his dying day Greene sensed the Hound of Heaven on his trail, yet he never stopped preaching fallibility—a theology of furious doubts, not unlike at least two other writers of the last century, Nikos Kazantzakis and R. S. Thomas, with whom Greene may be favorably compared (Donaghy 1992, 171; Middleton 2010).

GRANDEUR AND MISERY

Evidence suggests Graham Greene upheld humankind’s grandeur and misery, or, the way divine mercy and human folly commingle within our lives. Not black and white, Greene insists, human nature is black and gray, which entails that both good

and evil can always find a place in our hearts. We are suspended between wretchedness and holiness, he says, and thus we are marked by an intricate duality that stains and pains us and from which we desperately seek some way of escape. Greene's life displays such traits, and his fiction bristles with examples of this tortured, existential struggle (Allain 1983, 15-43). Consider Scobie, Greene's symbol of fragmented consciousness in *The Heart of the Matter*, who feels torn between the competing values of pity and pride, or else Alden Pyle, Greene's symbol of innocence and experience in *The Quiet American*, who feels caught on the borderland between naïve intrusiveness and informed engagement, never sure exactly which way to turn. Pyle and Scobie are anxious characters, and for Greene, anxiety—the precondition of sin—occurs when we realize the almost numberless moral and spiritual dilemmas in any day's course. Such dilemmas appear to transcend us, exerting some hold on the way we live; they seem to chase us down, to nip at our heels. Many of us feel pursued, Greene avers, by conscience, by others, and especially by God. We possess an awareness that something or someone hunts us, like a bloodhound chasing after prized quarry. One thinks here of Frances Andrews, the smuggler in Greene's *The Man Within*, who spends most of his beleaguered life running from fellow smugglers as well as from himself, particularly his past. And then Pinkie, the embodiment of wanton malevolence in *Brighton Rock*, who feels cornered both by Ida Arnold, his avenging angel, and God, whose strange and appalling mercy refuses to let him go.

A few of Greene's reviewers treat this overlay as a piece of controversial theology, because it appears to disbelieve the will's autonomy, to question our capacity to withstand divine grace, and because it seems to uphold the possibility of transhistorical malevolence; in other words, some critics think Greene peddles either neo-Jansenism or neo-Manichaeism (Brennan 2010, 88-99; Cassis 1994, 356-57; Sharrock 1984, 91). Inspired by Cornelius Otto Jansen, onetime Bishop of Ypres, and often viewed as analogous to Calvinism (because both support the doctrine of limited atonement), Jansenism was a radical Augustinian impulse within the Roman Catholic Church during the seventeenth century. Jansenists deny human freedom, an orthodox Catholic tenet, and they think we are unable to choose at any time between good and evil, which, in their view, necessitates the impossibility of resisting God. Although some famous Christian thinkers, like Blaise Pascal, favored Jansenism with their faith, the Jesuits eventually attacked and helped to condemn it in 1653 (Abercrombie 1936; Doyle 2000). Also connected with Augustine, albeit the youthful side of this fourth-century wandering catechumen, Manichaeism sees life as an arena in which two eternal principles are eternally opposed—God and light versus Satan and darkness. This controversial theology also argues that matter corrupts the soul, which is not free and does not sin; and, Manichaeism rejects the Incarnation, because the flesh is soiled, even if it teaches Christ's divinity (Baker-Brian 2011; Coyle 2009).

Greene dissociates himself from both theologies. "He evidently disapproves of being so classified," remarks Marie-Françoise Allain, and he "merely concedes that his books may perhaps have helped sharpen the focus on certain principles which govern

belief" (1983, 143; also see Donaghy 1992, 40). It is the "human factor" that interests him, moreover, and not apologetics (Allain 1983, 150). In Greene's own words:

People who think they are getting at Jansenism in my novels usually do not know what Jansenism really means. They probably mean Manichaeism. This is because in the Catholic novels I seem to believe in a supernatural evil. One gets so tired of people saying that my novels are about the opposition of Good and Evil. They are not about Good and Evil, but about human beings. After Hitler and Vietnam, one would have thought good and evil in people was more understandable. (Donaghy 1992, 80–81)

First spoken in 1969, Greene's last line invites theological speculation, because it is a small but not insignificant part of his general sense that we are errant souls operating within a graced horizon of meaning, and because it seems to harmonize with the theological anthropology expressed in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* ("Joy and Hope"), which appeared in 1965 under the auspices of the Second Vatican Council; although Greene did not warm to everything associated with the council, some of its ideas resonated, as Mark Bosco notes (2005, 71–96). The constitution states:

Although he was made by God in a state of holiness, from the very onset of his history man abused his liberty, at the urging of the Evil One. Man set himself against God and sought to attain his goal apart from God. Although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, but their senseless minds were darkened and they served the creature rather than the Creator. What divine revelation makes known to us agrees with experience. Examining his heart, man finds that he has inclinations toward evil too, and is engulfed by manifold ills which cannot come from his good Creator. Often refusing to acknowledge God as his beginning, man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal as well as his whole relationship toward himself and others and all created things.

Therefore man is split within himself. As a result, all of human life, whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Indeed, man finds that by himself he is incapable of battling the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though he is bound by chains. But the Lord Himself came to free and strengthen man, renewing him inwardly and casting out that "prince of this world" (John 12:31) who held him in the bondage of sin. For sin has diminished man, blocking his path to fulfillment.

The call to grandeur and the depths of misery, both of which are a part of the human experience, find their ultimate and simultaneous explanation in light of this revelation. (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965; cited in McGrath 2011, 399).

Although we should follow Greene in recognizing that he is not a theologian or an apologist for the faith, I think Greene's literary art takes "the call to grandeur and the depths of misery" seriously (Donaghy 1992, 26–32; Bosco 2005, 81–84), and his insights into our perils and possibilities reflect as well as contribute to the ever-in-process Christian tradition.

Greene was a novelist of human sin. “Over the sixty years of his writing career he created characters who try to hide their weaknesses from the world and themselves. Few novelists have fathomed with such intensity the suffering of this earth. In Catholic terms, Greene was a moralist excited by human turpitude and evil in our times,” Ian Thomson claims (2006, vii). Saying this tells just one side of the story, though, for Greene also was a novelist of divine mercy. He believed that we are never more ourselves than when we feel struck by the existential fissure between facticity and opportunity, between what we are and what we might be: mired in the midst of life’s fragility and mortality, yet in the presence of a God who faithfully touches us—even, or especially, the worst of us—with impulses toward our good.

Brighton Rock’s Pinkie personifies Greene’s theological anthropology, perhaps more than any other character Greene created, because, at the novel’s end, after we have witnessed Pinkie’s calculated evil (“the depths of human misery”), we find ourselves invited to pause and ponder that God has been present to Pinkie all along, in every nook and cranny of his abject existence, continuously wooing him toward his transformation (“the call to grandeur”); and that heaven, not hell, is peopled by the Pinkies of this world (Greene 1977, 246). This said, picturing God’s agency in a way that invites comparisons to Aeschylus’s “awful grace” causes some to wonder about Greene’s troubling image(s) of the divine, to which I now turn (Hamilton 1937, 170; Baldrige 2000, 49–89).

DIVINE DISCONTENT

Painted by Titian in the sixteenth century, *The Pentecost* depicts the descent of God’s spirit as a tranquil bird, bathed in shimmering light, about to arrive upon the apostles in Jerusalem; here, as in Luke 3:21–22, God is a pacific, comforting presence. Graham Greene recognizes this customary way of picturing sacred power within our world, even as he uses a novel like *Brighton Rock* to trouble it. Set in the English coastal town of Brighton, this novel’s action occurs during Whitsun; and Whitsun is an old English word for Pentecost. In a scene toward the novel’s close, Pinkie gets into his car and speeds off and away from the police, who appear to know about his involvement in a recent murder. Any respite Pinkie feels is entirely temporary, though, because he soon senses that his soul is prey for a remorseless kestrel visited upon him by God:

The car lurched back on to the main road; he turned the bonnet to Brighton. An enormous emotion beat on him; it was something trying to get in; the presence of gigantic wings against the glass. *Dona nobis pacem*. He withstood it, with all the bitter force of the school bench, the cement playground, the St. Pancras waiting room, Dallow’s and Judy’s secret lust, and the cold unhappy moment on the pier [all events in the past that tested Pinkie’s limits]. If the glass broke, if the beast—whatever it was—got in, God knows what it would do. He had a sense of huge havoc—the confession, the penance and the sacrament—and awful distraction, and he drove blind into the rain. (1977, 239–40)

God's spirit is often viewed as a dove of peace, as I note, but here Pinkie is not at peace, despite the fact that he is in a place called "Peacehaven" when he gets in his car and turns it back toward Brighton.

The winged beast heralds the chance of repentance, or so it seems, and yet Pinkie eschews this opportunity. Or does he? On the one hand, Greene's narrator seduces us into supposing that Pinkie's suicide, coupled with his evil life, secures his eternal damnation. On the other hand, the words of the nameless Catholic priest at the novel's end suggest it might be otherwise. God's spirit is appallingly strange, he declares, and there is a wideness to God's mercy that ensures the redemption of the worst kind of sin-sick soul. The winged beast is a sign, then, or a *potential* sign, that no soul is cut off from mercy, that no individual is outside the so-called parameters of providence, and that God gets God's prized quarry in the end.

Greene sustains such provocative pneumatology in *The End of the Affair*, which he released thirteen years after *Brighton Rock*. When, two years after the end of Sarah Miles and Maurice Bendrix's affair, a private detective's son breaks into the Miles' house and retrieves something that resembles a love letter, Bendrix suspects that he has a new rival. But little does he realize that his contender is none other than God, arguably the supreme example of the jealous lover (Ex. 20:5; 34:14). For her part, Sarah's florid prose hints at an intimacy that both repels and compels Bendrix. He wastes no time in asking the detective and his boy to track down his new adversary, to root him out, and to bring him to the attention of Henry, Sarah's husband. A lover's extreme jealousy motivates Bendrix, and his self-protectiveness appears nakedly disagreeable. However, perhaps God's jealousy is the cause for concern at this point. After all, it appears that God adores Sarah enough to chase after her and intervene in her world, saving Bendrix to win her devotion (1962, 42, 52–59). And yet, if this is how God acts, it prompts us to question the *character* of divine providence: Is God's desire for Sarah so strong, so obsessive even, that the best way to view the miracle of Bendrix's survival (from the V1 bomb blast) is to treat it as the dastardly tactic of a green(e)-eyed rival-in-love? Bendrix thinks so. Looking back over his affair with Sarah, he rails against God's peculiar providence: "He was as underhand as a lover, taking advantage of a passing mood, like a hero seducing us with his probabilities and his legends" (1962, 173). Come what may, God grips Bendrix at the end, just as God grips Pinkie at his story's close; taken together, *Brighton Rock* and *The End of the Affair* uphold Greene's troubling images of the divine, his "shadow-side" theology of an irresistible God (Bleicher 2002).

The play of darkness and light fascinated Greene. Twenty-two years after *The End of the Affair*, when most of his critics assumed he had given up writing about God, Greene published *The Honorary Consul*, an early, novelistic account of Latin American Catholic liberation theology. Here, Greene's dissident priest, Father Léon Rivas, rationalizes the poverty and suffering he sees in the *barrio* by preaching his own outlandish version of Christian process theology, which maintains that God is evil (1973, 284); that God is the divided original in whose divided image we remain

(1973, 284); and that God will one day evolve to the point where it is no longer necessary for God to embody *both* good *and* evil qualities. In Rivas's words:

The God I believe in must be responsible for all the evil as well as for all the saints. He has to be a God made in our image with a night-side as well as a day-side. When you speak of the horror, Eduardo [the *barrio*'s physician], you are speaking of the night-side of God. I believe the time will come when the night side will wither away . . . and we shall see only the simple daylight of the good God. You believe in evolution, Eduardo, even though sometimes whole generations of men slip backwards to the beasts. It is a long struggle and a long suffering, evolution, and I believe God is suffering the same evolution that we are, but perhaps with more pain. (Greene 1973, 285)

For his part, Eduardo questions this belief that God proceeds toward perfection, and he ruminates that history itself provides the strongest support for his own supposition that the night-side of God has engulfed the day-side. In response, Father Rivas grounds his scandal-tinged theistic evolutionism in a poetic vision of the Cosmic Christ evolving throughout history. With each valiant act of women and men to mount a step higher in the evolutionary growth of the spirit, history inches toward the Omega Point, which is the Christic consummation of life's creative advance, Father Rivas declares (1973, 286). Put differently, Greene's liberation theologian does not accept entropy's final triumph. We have a part to play in God's character development, a contribution to make to the enrichment and enhancement of the divine as well as temporal life. On this view, evil actions—war, inequality, torture—thwart the forward movement of God and the world; by contrast, good actions—working for a higher standard of living, for a humane, free and equal society—accelerate the creative process. Genuine Christian spirituality leads to the salvation of God as well as the transformation of humankind (1973, 286–87).

In her 1978 *Rolling Stone* interview with Greene, journalist Gloria Emerson tells us that at one time Greene worried about Father Rivas's controversial way of picturing God, though his friend, the Spanish priest Father Leopoldo Durán, eventually reassured him, offering the observation that Father Rivas's troubling theology was, from one important angle, nothing more and nothing less than an ingenious, literary re-presentation of the traditional Catholic doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. Utilizing Pauline and Deutero-Pauline texts, Catholics teach the cosmic ubiquitousness of the Resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 8:6; Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10, 22–23; Col. 2:9–10; Heb. 1:2, 10), and they proclaim Christ as the beginning, the middle, and the end of God's desire for our evolving, multidimensional, and dissonant world. In Durán's view, we hear an echo of this teaching in *The Honorary Consul* (1994, 111), and his attempt to connect Father Rivas to a wider, Catholic ecclesial imagination makes sense, because Catholic doctrine teaches that it is in and through the Church that Christ manifests his own mystery as God's desire to reconcile all things back to Godself. Jesus the Christ, the resurrected Son of God, mysteriously and mystically forms his body, his ecclesial field of force, out of those women and men who freely come to him in response to the gospel. Additionally, women and men participate

in the paschal mystery of Christ when the love made manifest in Christ's cross and resurrection finds its way into their lives, into the lives of those whom they serve, and into the development of natural creation. In short, the aim of all things is to serve the becoming of God-in-Christ.

Although Greene often took great pains to inform his readers that he was not a theologian and that some of his more uncharitable critics confuse the vocation of the novelist with the job of the apologist, *The Honorary Consul* may be viewed as a fictional meditation on Christ *kata pneuma*, the Christ of Spirit, who instantiates the new humanity, the convocation of God, and who enacts *le milieu divin*, to use a phrase that belongs to Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit theologian and paleontologist whom Greene read and admired (Greene 1971, 120–21; Middleton 2001, 523–47). Far from being controversial, then, *The Honorary Consul* works as a narrativized rendering of this mystery of humanity's union with God through the crucified and resurrected Christ—an overlay that many contemporary Catholic theologians, also inspired by Teilhard, find both theologically progressive and spiritually enriching (Bracken 2006; Delio 2008, 2011; Duffy 1992; Kinast 1999; King 1997).

For Greene, faith in God's existence involves struggle, and it is God's ironic nature and activity that poses the most problems, as we see with Father Rivas and as we witness, returning to *Brighton Rock* and *The End of the Affair*, with Pinkie and Bendrix. The concept of violent grace disturbs traditional Christians, and many of us would find Greene's theology troubling, although perhaps we struggle to find sympathy for Greene's God because Greene himself—the believing skeptic—struggled to feel any such sympathy. Yet this struggle to feel sympathy for—or what could be considered as faith in—God is part of a long tradition, one beginning with the biblical authors, who seldom shy away from their version of believing skepticism and from thinking of God as terror. Scholars from David Penchansky to Jack Miles to Eric Seibert have addressed those scriptural passages where God appears to act in ways that are less than tender. Greene is in good company. When seen not simply in the context of Catholic doctrine but also against this background of troubling Hebrew Bible images of God, Greene's stories do not appear to be theologically scandalous after all. Rather, they seem to be part of a legitimate, if unsettling, biblical faith still in the making (Miles 1995; Penchansky 1999; Seibert 2009). For too long theologians have, somewhat ironically, turned a blind eye to this tradition of believing skepticism, to pestering God with questions about how the divine works with us, and yet the fact that so many of us leave Greene's literary art unsettled and disturbed indicates that this religious agnostic has uncovered a truth we ignore at our peril—that the troubled theism lurking within our souls finds an echo not simply in the biblical and Christian theological tradition but also in life's ambiguity.

CONCLUSION

“‘The Hound of Heaven,’ a poem written by Frances Thompson in 1922, a few years previous to Greene's conversion to Catholicism, with the dominant image of

the soul fleeing a relentless hound, aptly figures Greene and his spiritual journey,” Mary Warner proclaims (2001, 294); moving forward, perhaps we can say that Graham Greene’s perspectives on faith are expandable to all those Christians who, like Greene, could not subscribe to traditional doctrine but who nevertheless remain(ed) deeply religious. Like Nikos Kazantzakis, Greene intoned broken hallelujahs throughout his life and literary art—litanies of agonized spirituality that many today find moving (Middleton 2007). “All his novels are unreliable gospels for those who can’t be sure of a thing,” Pico Iyer concludes (2012, 139); I suspect Greene’s life and literary art is of special importance to each of us who struggle with religious doubt.

WORKS CITED

- Abercrombie, Nigel. 1936. *The Origins of Jansenism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Allain, Marie-Françoise. 1983. *The Other Man: Conversations with Graham Greene*. Trans. Guido Waldman. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Baker-Brian, Nicholas. 2011. *Manichaeism: An Ancient Faith Rediscovered*. London: T & T Clark.
- Baldrige, Cates. 2000. *Graham Greene’s Fictions: The Virtues of Extremity*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Bergonzi, Bernard. 2006. *A Study in Greene: Graham Greene and the Art of the Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bleicher, Patricia A. 2002. “Missing the Good News: Graham Greene’s Shadow-Side Theology.” *Perceptions of Religious Faith in the Work of Graham Greene*. Ed. William Thomas Hill, 109–37. Berlin: Peter Lang.
- Bosco, Mark. 2005. *Graham Greene’s Catholic Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bracken, Joseph A. 2006. *Christianity and Process Thought: Spirituality for a Changing World*. Philadelphia: Temple Foundation Press.
- Brennan, Michael G. 2010. *Graham Greene: Fictions, Faith and Authorship*. London: Continuum.
- Browning, Robert. 1895. *The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Browning*. Ed. Horace E. Scudder. Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin.
- Butcher, Tim. 2010. *Chasing the Devil: A Journey through Sub-Saharan Africa in the Footsteps of Graham Greene*. New York: Atlas.
- Cash, William. 2000. *The Third Woman: The Secret Passion That Inspired Graham Greene’s The End of the Affair*. New York: Carroll & Graf.
- Cassis, A. F., ed. 1994. *Graham Greene: Man of Paradox*. Chicago: Loyola University Press.
- Cloetta, Yvonne. 2005. *In Search of a Beginning: My Life with Graham Greene*. Trans. Euan Cameron. London: Bloomsbury.
- Coyle, John Kevin. 2009. *Manichaeism and its Legacy*. Leiden: Brill.
- Delio, Ilia. 2008. *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
- . 2011. *Christ in Evolution*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
- Donaghy, Henry J., ed. 1992. *Conversations with Graham Greene*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Doyle, William. 2000. *Jansenism: Catholic Resistance to Authority from the Reformation to the French Revolution*. Houndmills, England: Macmillan Press.

- Duffy, Stephen J. 1992. *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press.
- Durán, Leopoldo. 1994. *Graham Greene: An Intimate Portrait by His Closest Friend and Confidant*. Trans. Euan Cameron. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Gilvary, Dermot, and Darren J. N. Middleton, eds. 2011. *Dangerous Edges of Graham Greene: Journeys with Saints and Sinners*. London: Continuum.
- Godman, Peter. 2001. "Graham Greene's Vatican Dossier." *Atlantic* 288, no. 1:84–86, 88.
- Greene, Graham. 1962. *The End of the Affair*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- . 1971. *A Sort of Life*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- . 1973. *The Honorary Consul*. Beccles: Book Club Associates.
- . 1977. *Brighton Rock*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- . 1982. *Monsignor Quixote*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.
- . 1985. *The Collected Plays of Graham Greene*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Greene, Richard, ed. 2007. *Graham Greene: A Life in Letters*. London: Little, Brown.
- Griffiths, Richard. 2010. *The Pen and the Cross: Catholicism and English Literature, 1850–2000*. London: Continuum.
- Hamilton, Edith. 1937. *Three Greek Plays: Prometheus Bound, Agamemnon, The Trojan Women*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Hill, William Thomas, ed. 2001. *Perceptions of Religious Faith in the Work of Graham Greene*. Berlin: Peter Lang.
- . 2008. *Lonely without God: Graham Greene's Quixotic Journey of Faith*. Bethesda, Md.: Academica Press.
- Iyer, Pico. 2012. *The Man within My Head*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Kinast, Robert L. 1999. *Process Catholicism: An Exercise in Ecclesial Imagination*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America.
- King, Ursula. 1997. *Christ in All Things: Exploring Spirituality with Teilhard de Chardin*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
- McGrath, Alister E., ed. 2011. *The Christian Theology Reader*. 4th ed. Malden, Mass.: Wiley Blackwell.
- Middleton, Darren J. N. 2001. "Redeeming God: Traces of Catholic Process Theism in Graham Greene's *The Honorary Consul*." In *Perceptions of Religious Faith in the Work of Graham Greene*. Ed. William Thomas Hill, 523–47. Berlin: Peter Lang.
- . 2007. *Broken Hallelujah: Nikos Kazantzakis and Christian Theology*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
- . 2009. "Dead Serious: A Theology of Literary Pilgrimage." *CrossCurrents* 59, no. 3:300–318.
- . 2010. "God-Haunted Writers: Nikos Kazantzakis and R. S. Thomas." *Epworth Review* 37, no. 1:28–46.
- Miles, Jack. 1995. *God: A Biography*. New York: Vintage.
- Miller, R. H. 1990. *Understanding Graham Greene*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Penchansky, David. 1999. *What Rough Beast? Images of God in the Hebrew Bible*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Schloesser, Stephen. 2000. "Altogether Adverse: The Story of Graham Greene and the Holy Office." *America* 183, no. 15:8–13.

- Seibert, Eric A. 2009. *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press.
- Sharrock, Roger. 1984. *Saints, Sinners and Comedians: The Novels of Graham Greene*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Sherry, Norman. 1989. *The Life of Graham Greene*: Vol. 1: 1904–1939. London: Jonathan Cape.
- . 1994. *The Life of Graham Greene*: Vol. 2: 1939–1955. London: Jonathan Cape.
- . 2004. *The Life of Graham Greene*: Vol. 3: 1955–1991. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Sinyard, Neil. 2003. *Graham Greene: A Literary Life*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Smith, Julia Llewellyn. 2000. *Traveling on the Edge: Journeys in the Footsteps of Graham Greene*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Thomson, Brian Lindsay. 2009. *Graham Greene and the Politics of Popular Fiction and Film*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Thomson, Ian, ed. 2006. *Articles of Faith: The Collected Tablet Journalism of Graham Greene*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Warner, Mary. 2001. "Faith Born of Anguish: Sarah Miles as Profligate and Apostle." In *Perceptions of Religious Faith in the Work of Graham Greene*. Ed. William Thomas Hill, 289–313. Berlin: Peter Lang.
- West, W. J. 1997. *The Quest for Graham Greene: A Biography*. New York: St. Martin's Press.