

Joyce Green

*Spark and Greene:
The Faith in their Fiction.*

Edge Hill University College

BA(Hons.) English

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Joyce green

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Index

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Chapter One</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Chapter Two</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Chapter Three</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Chapter Four</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>References</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>32</i>

Introduction

Those who may have read both Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*, and Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori*, might seem justified in assuming that here are two writers who have nothing whatsoever in common. However, although each writes in a distinctive style, they do share a common faith, Roman Catholicism, to which they both came as converts, and this faith is very much a part of their fiction.

It is the intention of this essay to examine several books from each writer, which have an underlying religious motif. The essay will address four issues of faith on which both authors have written and will endeavour to determine whether these two diverse voices are, in fact, addressing the same issues, albeit in widely differing styles.

The following abbreviations have been used for the novels

TC *The Comforters*
MM *Memento Mori*
BPR *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*
F/B *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie.*
MG *The Mandelbaum Gate.*
BR *Brighton Rock*
PG *The Power and the Glory*
HM *The Heart of the Matter*
EA *The End of the Affair.*

All Biblical references are taken from the New International Version.

I

Catholicism: Interpreted and misinterpreted.

Bless those who persecute you. Rom. 12:14

As converts to the Roman Catholic faith, both Muriel Spark and Graham Greene, write from a double perspective, and both place emphasis on the ‘truth’ of their faith. They are however, frequently irreverent in their treatment of Catholicism, and of some of its manifestations. Spark has said that her conversion gave her writing impetus, giving her “something to work on as a satirist,” and views the Catholic belief as “a norm from which one can depart.” She adds that she was “put off” by religious people, and didn’t like the way Catholics “drummed things in.”

In *The Comforters*, examined below, Georgina Hogg’s version of Catholicism is seen as a perversion of the truth, and in *Robinson*, the heroine’s brother-in-law is condemned as a “carping exponent” of the Roman Catholic faith. As set forth in her fiction, the attitude Spark displays towards her faith is one which is described by Ruth Whittaker as “frustration at complying with its rules, and intense irritation with fellow Catholics.”² It is not all Catholics however, who irritate her, it is those whose Pharisaic self-righteousness would have been condemned by Christ himself. This attitude is also seen in Greene’s fiction, in his portrayal of characters such as the pious mother in *The Power and the Glory*. However,

despite its more unsavoury adherents, Catholicism is for both authors, the only true faith, and both are scathingly dismissive of those on the outside, particularly when they question its precepts.

Both writers are also dismissive of the excessive trappings of the Catholic church, but where Spark differs from Greene, particularly in her earlier novels, is the manner in which she toes the party line. The tenets of her faith are never questioned: she is aligned with Caroline who points out: "...the true church is awful, though unfortunately, one couldn't deny, true." (TC.p88-9) Greene's faith is more bound up with love of his neighbour than with a set of rules. It was during a visit to Mexico in 1938 that he first began to realise that his faith was "bound up with ...loyalty to the underdog,"³ and he is not shy of pointing out the shortcomings of the Church, or of some of its priests - such as Father Clay, in *The Heart of the Matter*.

The kind of Catholicism abhorred by Spark is epitomised in her depiction of Georgina Hogg. Georgina suffers from "chronic righteousness, (and) exerts a sort of moral blackmail." (TC.p23) She is a monstrously grotesque character whose shallow faith is characterised by her disappearances. She has no depth, and Helena unknowingly speaks the truth when she says, "I am beginning to think that Georgina is not all there." (p.175) No one has anything good to say about Georgina. She is seen by the narrator as a "gargoyle": by Lawrence as a "psychological thug": by Eleanor as a "witch": and by Caroline as a "Catholic atrocity like the tin medals and bleeding hearts."

Complacency is attacked by Spark as the enemy of true faith. Georgina is convinced of her own Catholicity, and her election to grace. "Our Lady speaks to me," she declares. "I ask a question and she answers." When Caroline presumes to question this, Georgina smugly replies: "You haven't really got the hang of the Catholic faith," and advises her to see a priest. (p.32-3) Caroline sees Georgina as the incarnation of evil, and in her presence, has the sense of "...being with something abominable, not to be tolerated," and experiences "...(an) intense desire to clean her teeth." (p.31)

At the retreat house, Caroline meets two converts who smugly deride their discarded Anglo-Catholic faith. Being Catholic, they feel, "...makes life so easy. Everything easy for salvation and you can have a happy life." (p.39) Such sentiments are deplored by both Spark and Greene. For them, adherence to the "true" faith involves hardship, pain, and self-denial. Spark's portrayal of Caroline bears this out. As Caroline returns from church, Lawrence observes, "You are always bad-tempered after Mass," and Caroline replies:

I know...It's one of the proofs of the faith as far as I'm concerned. It's evidence of the truth of the Mass, don't you see? The flesh despairs.(p.112)

Spark's frustrations with the demands of her faith often find expression in her novels. Another example is the scene in the retreat house where Caroline is listening to a nun reading St. Paul's great hymn of love (1Cor.13). As she watches Georgina with great disgust, she observes:

The demands of the Christian faith are exorbitant, they are outrageous. Christians who don't realise that from the start are...dishonest...Love one another...love, love, love.(p.38).

Spark sees the Catholic faith as an immutable truth which penetrates one's whole mode of existence, involving both body and soul. Her ironic depiction of Edwin Manders, a "contemplative creature," shows her antipathy for those whose idea of religion is confined to the spiritual realm. Edwin is deeply devout, displaying all the accoutrements of an Eastern mystic, whilst totally ignoring his family and the day-to-day happenings of their lives. He is pithily described as "...a testimony to the truth that human nature is apt to fail in spite of regular prayer and deep breathing." (TC.p.126)

Greene appears to share Spark's contempt for such false piety. It is implicit in his depiction of the mother who tells her children a story about a martyred priest (PG). The story provides a counter theme to the story of the whisky priest, and the unreal plaster saint of the story is contrasted with the all too human real priest. The gullibility of the mother and her

daughters is not shared by her son, Luis, who eventually comes to see the whisky priest as the real martyr.

One of the differences between Spark and Greene is that she stays aloof from her characters, whilst his portrayals are more sympathetic. This is particularly evident in the prison scene in *The Power and the Glory* (Part 2.Ch3) Here amongst the poor, the outcast, and the criminals, the priest is overwhelmed by feelings of solidarity and companionship, such as he had never before experienced. It is here he meets the archetypal self-righteous Catholic female so abhorred by both Spark and Greene. The woman complains about the couple making love in a dark corner of the cell, but despite the priest's annoyance at her lack of charity, he worries about her, and about all such pious women, knowing that they feed on illusion, and often die in a state of "invincible complacency, full of uncharity." He feels it incumbent upon himself to make her face the truth and so he strips away her illusions by telling her of his illegitimate daughter.

Both writers are united in the search for the truth of their faith, and in their denunciation of those who tailor it to their own needs. They are also like-minded in their attitudes towards those 'outside' the faith, although they differ in their approaches. While Spark frequently uses the witty asides of minor characters to comment indirectly on the ignorance of the outsider who thinks himself acquainted with the nuances of the Catholic faith, Greene tackles the subject more directly in the shape of such characters as Ida (BR), Helen (HM), and the Lieutenant (PG).

The Lieutenant, however, despite having renounced Catholicism, is shown to be not beyond redemption, for he performs several acts of charity which include giving - albeit unknowingly - the "price of a mass" to the whisky priest. (PG.p.140). He has, nevertheless, helped to wipe out the religion which is for him, "an unhappy memory," hoping to replace it with something better. He is altruistic in his motives, wanting the best for his people, but fails to take into account their spiritual needs. In adherence to his own atheistic creed, he is as dedicated as the priest he pursues, and there is even "something of a priest" in him; he is

a “mystic,” but has experienced only “vacancy.” The word invites pity, for this man has lost something valuable .the “pearl of great price.”

Many Catholics find themselves at the receiving end of religious bigotry, and the stance taken by Mr Lehr .who shelters the priest, is a prime example. Anti-Catholic clichés permeate his conversation. In the eyes of this austere Lutheran, the Catholic church has “too much luxury...while the people starve,” and he tells the priest, “You people make a lot of fuss about inessentials...Fasting, fish on Fridays.” This to a man who has subsisted for several days on nothing but faith, and a lump of sugar: the irony is not lost on the reader. In the priest’s room he finds a Gideon Bible, which has at the front a list of texts purporting to have the answer to all of life’s problems. The priest’s astonishment carries the implication that this simplistic reduction of Scripture cannot begin to compare with the ‘true’ faith.

Similarly, Ida (BR) may know “what’s right,” but she is outside the faith and is depicted as inferior to Pinkie. Pinkie may be evil, but he is a baptised Catholic and therefore carries within him the possibility of redemption. Ida’s ignorance of the Catholic faith is seen as a cause for scorn by Rose, who regards her as a being “from a strange country...as far from (Pinkie and Rose) as she was from Hell .or Heaven.” (BR.p.126-7) Ida may know the difference between right and wrong, but this means nothing to Rose, for the “taste” of these two words “is extinguished by stronger foods . Good and Evil.” (p.199) Concepts such as Good and Evil, Heaven and Hell, are viewed by Greene as essential components of the faith. Liberal attitudes are scathingly dismissed, as for example in the description of Fred’s funeral where the minister denounces the idea of a “mediaeval hell” declaring that Fred is now “at one with the one...absorbed in the universal spirit.” (BR.p.35) The man’s speech is patently meaningless drivel.

In Spark’s novels, those outside the faith see Roman Catholics as a breed apart, separated, different. Louisa Jepp, learning of Caroline’s conversion to Catholicism, observes: “I *thought* she was looking thin.” (TC..p21) Non-Catholic characters frequently profess to be the fount of all knowledge on things Catholic and the authority of the Church is frequently

mocked. In her portrayal of such characters, Spark aligns herself with Greene against bigotry.

Godfrey Colston (MM) sees himself as an expert on Catholic matters, and charges to the attack when Mrs Anthony says she does not “fancy” the idea of cremation:

Fancy the idea? It’s not a question of what you fancy. You have no choice in the matter...It’s a point of discipline in your Church...that you mustn’t be cremated. You women don’t know your own system.” (p.33)

Later, as he berates Charmian for her failing memory, he advises her to review the day’s events when she retires to bed. Charmian answers that she already does since it is a Catholic practice to do so. This observation is rudely dismissed by Godfrey, who declares, “That kind of examination of conscience is designed to enslave the individual and inhibit his freedom of action.” (p.105-6)

This view that the Catholic church enslaves the individual conscience is also considered in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. We read: “the Lloyds were Catholics and so were made to have a lot of children by force.”(p102) Jean Brodie disapproves of the Roman faith, seeing it as “a Church of superstition,” and observing that “only people who did not want to think for themselves were Roman Catholics.” When she finds out about Sandy’s affair with Teddy Lloyd, she cannot understand it, for as she tells Sandy, “You are a girl with a mind....He is a Roman Catholic and I don’t see how you can have to do with a man who can’t think for himself.” (p.123) All of these comments are heavily laced with irony, and the irony is compounded when Sandy, whom she had seen as her own disciple, betrays Miss Brodie and adopts Teddy Lloyd’s religion.

In *The Comforters*, the Catholic church is also mocked by Eleanor, who automatically assumes that Caroline and Lawrence are sleeping together because they are living in the same flat. Caroline tells her she is mistaken, that it is just a “temporary arrangement.” Eleanor retorts: “You Roman Catholics can get away with anything. You just nip into the

confessional in between temporary arrangements so to speak.” (p.10 1) Her scathing reply typifies the attitude of the outsider, who understands confession to be a passport to moral freedom.

This contention that the Catholic faith provides instant grace is refuted by Spark who sees grace as hard won.. However, she also aligns herself with Proust, whose writings she admired. His power she feels, came from “an acceptance of that deep irony in which we are presented with the most unlikely people, places and things as repositories of inward grace...”⁴ The struggle to overcome the lower nature and achieve a state of grace is a leitmotif in the fiction of both authors.

2

Good and Evil

Saint and Sinner.

This man receives sinners and eats with them. Luke. 15:2

Both the confirmed atheist and the zealous Catholic can find much to fuel their respective fires in Greene's novels. The response of Catholic officialdom to some of his books has been at best, critical, and in the case of *The Power and the Glory*, extremely censorious . the novel was condemned by the church as blasphemous.⁵ Yet this novel is in fact, a tribute to the sacramental ministry of the priesthood, albeit as exemplified by its all too human priest.

The whisky priest, like Scobie and Pinkie, appears to have in some way lost sight of God, yet all three are sympathetically drawn characters who evoke our compassion and pity. In an interview recorded in *The Other Man*, Greene revealed that the "human factor" was more important to him than apologetics and he cites an incident concerning his family, who had been on holiday to Spain. He records that they had been shocked to find a priest, "living with his house-keeper." Greene, however, was not shocked; he found no reason why the man should not be different from his function: he could be "an excellent priest whilst remaining a sinner." (p.160) It is a fact that the church exists for sinners, and against the opprobrious attitudes of unforgiving Catholicism, Greene opposes the example of the one who came into the world to save them.

Greene engages the reader's sympathy for his characters by disclosing motivating factors, but Spark's attitude towards her characters, certainly in her earlier novels, is

uncompromisingly severe. Whittaker feels that the “state of the soul” is more important for Spark than the invitation to sympathise with “the foibles and nuances of personality.”⁶ However, I am not sure that this contention is entirely true. Greene believes that God’s justice derives from “total knowledge,”⁷ and in her introduction to *Realisations* .a collection of Cardinal Newman’s sermons, Spark seems to agree with Greene. She quotes Newman as saying that “...those who are genuinely pleasing in God’s sight, only God knows. The disposition of every soul is a secret matter, not easily discernible.”⁸

The disposition of every soul might not be immediately apparent in respect of her characters, nevertheless, the reader is given implicit hints as to the way in which their minds work. Like Greene, she creates “good” characters .such as Caroline and Barbara Vaughan .who are aware, or are made aware of their imperfections, and she creates ambiguously “bad” characters such as Georgina Hogg and Jean Brodie. Both writers are aware of the paradoxical nature of sin, and the discrepancy between the divine will and our own.. Spark has written that “people of high moral principle may be on the side of evil.. .they may be Satan’s instruments in seducing and enfeebling the people of God.”⁹ But she is also aware that such people may also used by God for his own purposes: their very sinfulness may become a vehicle for his grace. Thus Georgina may be seen as being necessary to Caroline’s growth as a Christian, and Sandy’s affair with Teddy Lloyd as an essential precursor to her conversion to Catholicism.

Georgina is undoubtedly the most evil of Spark’s creations. Georgina exudes evil, despite her ostentatious Catholicism. In her presence, Caroline is overwhelmed by “a sense of being with something abominable, not to be trusted.” Georgina’s ex-husband, Mervyn Hogarth, sees in her something almost Satanic:

‘(Her) lust for converts to the Faith was terrible, for by the Faith she meant herself.’

He felt himself shrink to a sizeable item of prey, hovering on the shores of her monstrous mouth to be masticated to a pulp and to slither unrecognisably down that abominable gully.(TC..p166)

rue words are reminiscent of the words of the Apostle, Peter: “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour...” (1 *Pet.5:8*)

Spark’s delineation of such “bad” characters is not always so explicit; criticism of their behaviour is deduced from the skilful use of satire such as that directed against Jean Brodie. Jean Brodie is guilty of astonishing egotism: her opinions are given as dogma from which there is to be no dissent:

Who is the greatest Italian painter?

Leonardo da Vinci, Miss Brodie.

That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite. (2.pl 1)

It is Sandy, with her “small eyes,” and her “insight,” who really sees Miss Brodie for what she is. Sandy recognises Miss Brodie’s presumption, her arrogation of a god-like role in the lives of her girls. Just as Christ is seen by believers as the head of his church, with its members as the body, so Sandy sees the Brodie set as being “...a body with Miss Brodie for the head.” She sees them too, as all being in “...unified compliance to the destiny of Miss Brodie as if God had willed them for that purpose.” (PJB.p.30)

Jean Brodie’s indoctrination of her “set” is an attempt to efface their individuality. She tells them: “You are of my stamp and cut.” (p.97) That they are made in her image is evident in the portraits which Teddy Lloyd paints of them . all resemble Miss Brodie. As Sandy absorbs Teddy Lloyd’s Catholic faith, she finds herself unable to tolerate Miss Brodie’s attitude any longer, and her teacher’s declaration that Sandy is “the leaven in the lump” (p.50) is ironic, for we learn that it is Sandy who eventually betrays Miss Brodie. While Sandy’s uncompromising attitude seems to reflect that of Spark herself, there are hints that such an attitude sits uncomfortably, since at the end of the novel, Sandy, now a nun, is glimpsed desperately clutching the bars of her cell, and seems not to have found peace.

Greene is more generous towards his characters . even his bad characters have some redeeming features. In his capacity for evil, it is perhaps Pinkie (BR) who comes closest to

Georgina Hogg, yet whilst Greene does not completely exonerate him, he suggests that there may be explanations for his behaviour, particularly the deprivations of his childhood. Greene himself seems open to the possibility of Pinkie's redemption:

I tried. ..to present the reader with a creature he could accept as worthy of hell. But in the end, I introduced the possibility that he might have been saved "between the stirrup and the ground."

Some critics would disagree with this premise. Atkins calls Pinkie "an obnoxious youth (who) never rises above his squalor," and Sherry feels that Pinkie's character derives not so much from his social background as from his defiance, in the way that he seeks, "with a religious passion, his own damnation."² Yet for many readers, Pinkie appears to have about him, something which makes him redeemable. He is capable of love: the pity of it is, that he rejects it, failing to recognise its redemptive power. He sees love only in terms of the "frightening weekly exercise" of his parents.(BR.p.90) His childhood experiences have left him incapable of expressing or accepting love, and he approaches his impending marriage with a sense of doom:

...to be touched, to give oneself away; to lay oneself open .he had held back intimacy as long as he could at the end of a razor blade. (p.133)

There lies within the heart of Pinkie, a deep longing for peace, but in his short life, he has never encountered it. Peace is just a word, "...a country of which he hadn't seen as much as a picture postcard." (p.150) Heaven too, is beyond his powers of imagination. Only hell is recognised, because, "...a brain is only capable of what it can conceive, and it couldn't conceive what it had never experienced." (p.228)

Although baptised into the Catholic faith, Pinkie's deprivations have cast him into a spiritual vacuum and the potential for good, endowed at baptism, has not been nurtured. However the divine spark can never be extinguished: it lies patiently dormant, awaiting the rekindling of faith. There are, at times, signs that this could happen, not only in the stirrings of love he begins to feel for Rose, but also in his love of music. When Rose tells him that she is a Catholic, he replies, "I'm one too...I was in the choir once," and sings a phrase from the well-remembered Mass. Music still has the power to move him, speaking to him of "things

he didn't understand." (p.52) Our awareness of this thwarted potential in Pinkie evokes sympathy. He is a child/man; deprived of love; hiding his vulnerability under a cloak of hate and bitterness. His painful awareness of his youth, and the consequent incongruity of his position as leader of the gang, only make him more determined to prove himself, and so he struts his stage, "trail(ing) the clouds of his own glory after him: hell lay about him in his infancy." (p.68) The words are a sad paraphrase of Wordsworth's, taken from *Intimations of Immortality*: "But trailing clouds of glory do we come! From God who is our home:! Heaven lies about us in our infancy." Pinkie has not been so lucky.

Pinkie does have a faith, of sorts, but it is based upon the fear of eternal damnation, rather than upon the love of God. This fear leaves him weak and defenceless, unable to trust anyone, not even Rose whose unconditional love is so freely offered. Yet once he has married her, he does experience the first faint stirrings of hope, feeling that at last he might:

..begin to think of making peace, of going home, and his heart (weakens) with a faint nostalgia for the tiny confessional box, the priest's voice...to be made safe from eternal pain.

Sadly, Pinkie is conditioned not to expect anything for nothing, and feels that even God will expect some sort of repayment and so he vows that after he has made his confession, when he is "safe," he will "give a statue." (p.109)

God's love is such, that he is constantly seeking out those who are lost in order to bring them home. Its action upon Pinkie is seen in his unconscious recalling of religious phrases as he moves towards acts of increasing evil. Later, these promptings become stronger, almost physical manifestations of goodness striving for a foothold in his soul. As he drives Rose towards the place he has chosen for her "suicide," Pinkie is assailed by "an enormous emotion," which seems to him "like something trying to get in." There are intimations that Pinkie might yet "betwixt the stirrup and the ground" be saved.

Pinkie's sudden death appears to have snatched away any hopes of salvation. The recorded message which Rose has yet to hear, a message of hate, seems to support the view that

Pinkie deserves what is coming to him. We do not know whether Pinkie had time to repent in those split seconds between life and death, or indeed, whether he might not yet be saved by Rose's goodness, by her love and her prayers, even though she may be hurt by his message. Greene intends us to be unsure, and his ending is ambiguous. Like the priest who comforts Rose, Greene's contention is that we "cannot conceive, ...the appalling...strangeness of the mercy of God." (p.246)

While Pinkie, Georgina Hogg, and to some extent Jean Brodie, may be rather extreme examples of the evil inherent in fallen humanity, most people despite their acknowledgement of their own imperfections do not exhibit such excessive tendencies towards evil. We are all constantly at war with our lower natures, a fact recognised even by Saint Paul, who declared: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do...It is sin living in me." (Rom. 7:15-17). Both Greene and Spark generally acknowledge this duality in the portrayal of their major characters and even their "good" characters undergo trials of faith.

Surrounded as she is by false comforters, Caroline (TC), is a modern counterpart of Job. Spark had written a book on Job, and says that she saw Job's comforters not as "distinct characters," but as "very much of one type." She compares them to "modern interrogators, who come to interview and mock the victim in shifts."³ Caroline's persecution takes the form of voices, which she comes to understand as the manipulations of an author in another dimension, who is writing her into a novel. Like Job, Caroline will admit of no such interference in her life, seeing only God as being in control. Resolutely deciding that she is having nothing to do with such nonsense she declares: "I intend to stand aside ...from this artificial plot. I happen to be a Christian." (p.103) Caroline is far from perfect, but she struggles to abide by the rules of her faith. She is however, constrained within the moral boundaries set by Spark, and has not as much freedom as Spark's later heroine, Barbara Vaughan.

Barbara Vaughan possesses “the beautiful and dangerous gift of faith.” (MG p.23) It is “dangerous” for Barbara in that it threatens to prevent her from marrying the man she loves. Harry Clegg has been married before, and is, for the sake of Barbara’s religious scruples, trying to obtain an annulment. Barbara still has much to learn about her faith, and its integration into the whole of her life, and the novel’s setting in a Jerusalem divided not only by its different faiths, but also geographically, parallels Barbara’s background as a “Jewish Gentile who has converted to Catholicism.” As such, Barbara is, at first, “in a state of conflict,” but her experiences teach her that faith cannot be compartmentalised, it has to embrace all things.

The theme of the novel is a change of stance for Spark, for in her previous novels, the theme is failure to achieve unity. Here, she preaches that duality has to be accepted and embraced: it cannot be otherwise. Barbara declares, “Either the whole of life is unified under God, or everything falls apart.” (p.283) The novel exposes the falsity of religious ideologies. Barbara, like Spark, has been used to seeing things only from “a Catholic point of view,” but begins to understand that her faith consists not in a religion, but in a being who transcends religion. She acknowledges that one of the first attractions of the Catholic religion had been:

...its recognition of the helpless complexity of motives that prompted an action...there was seldom one motive only in the grown person; the main thing was that motives should harmonise. (p.161)

Barbara’s increasing awareness of the need for tolerance reveals a softening of Spark’s position.

This tension between good and bad motives, between faith in theory and faith in practice, is explored by Greene in the characters of Rose (BR), and Scobie (HM). Rose, like Pinkie, is a cradle Catholic, and shares with him, a common background of childhood deprivation. Yet the past has not corrupted her, neither is she corrupted by Pinkie. Her essential goodness remains intact. Aware that her civil marriage will be a sin in the eyes of the Church, she had nevertheless wanted to make her confession before the ceremony, telling Pinkie: “I wanted to be in a state of grace when I married you.” (p.166)

Her views on what is right are constantly contrasted with Pinkie's. She confides to him her fear that they will not be "properly" married, but Pinkie derides her fears: "Ideas change, the world moves on," he airily declares. Rose, however knows differently: "ideas never changed, the world never moved: it lay there always, the ravaged and disputed territory between the two eternities."(p.139) Rose is constantly torn between her faith, and her love for Pinkie, yet her love - like God's - is unconditional, and she is willing to follow him not only unto death but also to damnation. The morning after her wedding, Rose tries to pray, but remembers that it is now useless: "She'd finished with all that: she had chosen her side. If they damned him, they'd got to damn her too." (p.139) The battle going on for Rose's soul is highlighted by the sense Rose has of a "guardian angel," who "tempt(s) her to virtue like a sin," implanting in her the idea that if she escapes the planned "suicide," then she will live to intercede for Pinkie, and perhaps save his soul.(p.241)

Suicide has been preached as the unforgivable sin, for it admits of despair. The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out that "By despair, man ceases to hope for his personal salvation from God, for help in attaining it or for the forgiveness of his sins."⁴ (p.455) This definition is particularly apt in respect of Scobie. He is filled with despair, torn as he is in three directions: between the two women he loves, and the God whom he worships. Like Rose, Scobie is inherently good: if he has a fault it is his overwhelming pity and concern. Greene has said that readers misunderstood his depiction of Scobie: he had intended to show that Scobie's pity makes him guilty of the sin of pride.'⁵ Whatever Greene's intentions, most readers are sympathetic towards Scobie, and see him as deserving of compassion. All that he does, he does for love's sake. Faust-like, he prays over the dying child, "Take away my peace forever, but give her peace." (HM,p.82) His peace is taken away, but what follows could perhaps be interpreted as his period of atonement or purgation, for he is undoubtedly a man in torment.

Scobie, unlike his wife Louise, is not a cradle Catholic, but a convert. His faith, however, appears deeper than hers. She petty and selfish: almost as guilty of Scobie's fall from grace

as he is himself. Aware of his affair with Helen, Louise forces Scobie to go to Mass, knowing that his reception of the Host will be an act of sacrilege. She cares nothing for his soul, seeking only revenge. Conversely, Scobie, even as he receives the sacrament, prays for her and for Helen. (p.241-2) His guilt at betraying the two women is compounded by the sorrow he feels at betraying the God who loves him. Scobie may have fallen from grace in the eyes of his wife, he may be seen by Greene and others as displaying insufferable pride, but the impression which remains is of a man who embodies all of the weaknesses of our dual nature, and is therefore deserving of our pity.

In the novels discussed above, both authors address the fundamental issues of faith and salvation, and the paradoxes of good and evil omnipresent in fallen humanity. Their novels also testify to the fact that nothing and no-one is beyond the reach of the God whose love passes understanding.

Love:***Human and Divine.***

If I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 1 Cor. 13:2

When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, he replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart...and love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matt.23:37-39) In these words, he summed up and re-evaluated the ten commandments. Love was to be the yardstick by which all Christians would be measured. But there are many kinds of love .the Greeks had several words for it, and Christian love for one’s fellow man, Agape, is not to be confused with human, sexual love, Eros. Whilst the Church has always been insistent upon the former, it has been somewhat ambivalent and repressive, in its approach to the latter, resulting for many in the equation of human sexuality with guilt and shame.

Writing in 1961, Spark declared: “It’s a bit of a nuisance not being able to have a sex life if you are not married, but it also has its advantages if you have a vocation...or a job to do in life.” (HH,p61) Her first heroine, Caroline (TC), having converted to Catholicism, renounces the sexual relationship she had enjoyed with Lawrence, and takes a flat so that she may be on her own. Though eventually he stays in her flat while she is ill, even sharing her bed, she remains stubbornly chaste.

By the time she came to write *The Mandelbaum Gate*, Spark had become more tolerant, and its heroine, Barbara, does not have the same problems with her sexuality as Caroline.

Barbara is seen by others as “a definite spinster, one who had embraced the Catholic Church instead of a husband. “The inference is ironic, since Barbara is in fact, in the habit of embracing her lover Harry Clegg. By virtue of her Jewish blood, Barbara sees herself as “more blessed by sex” than her Gentile relations. She has a relaxed attitude towards sex, seeing it as “child’s play, even observing that “Jesus Christ was very sophisticated on the subject...and didn’t harp on it.” (MG.p.262)

Barbara may see sex as fun but in Greene’s characterisation of Pinkie we are shown a point of view in which the repressive views of the church find expression, for Pinkie sees sex as a threat, a thing of disgust and dread. He tells Dallow that he had once thought of becoming a priest, they had to be celibate, they know “what’s what...They...keep away ...from this.” (BR.p.164) Priestly celibacy is to be preferred to the nauseating “bouncing and ploughing” of his parents which he remembers from his childhood. Pinkie fears Rose’s love because of its inevitable outcome in the sexual act. However, her love for him is such, that despite himself, he begins to feel “a sort of tenderness...and a companionship in her goodness.” He is aware that he is somehow “completed” by her. (p.220) The implication for the Christian is that love has its own healing power, and the ability to transform broken lives.

Both Greene and, in her later novels, Spark, challenge the rigidity of their adopted Church on sexual matters. They see love as a matter which involves both the flesh and the spirit, the whole person. Sarah writes in her diary: “We can love with our minds, but can we love only with our minds?...we can love even with our clothes, so that a sleeve can feel a sleeve.” (EA.p. 110) Anyone who has been deeply in love will know this phenomenon, when even an inert piece of clothing belonging to the beloved can prove strangely emotive. There is a Biblical echo here of the woman who reached out to touch the hem of Jesus, and was the recipient of his healing love. As Sarah struggles with her emerging faith, she begins to realise that her theories may also apply to the figure upon the cross; he may after all, be not just “a vapour,” but flesh and blood, for, she reasons, “Could anybody love or hate him if he hadn’t got a body?” (p.112) In *The Mandelbaum Gate*, Spark appears to align herself with Greene, for Barbara’s thoughts run on the same lines:

...either religious faith penetrates everything in life it doesn't ...Either the whole of life is unified under God or everything falls apart. Sex is child's play in the argument. (3.p283)

A priest, by the very nature of his profession, is one who is constantly reminded of this duality in mankind, as the sins of the flesh are reiterated in the privacy of the confessional. The whisky priest (PAG), finds it easy to empathise, for in his illegitimate daughter he has a visible reminder of his own transgressions. Nevertheless, he loves her dearly, and this very love gives rise to that "helpless complexity of emotions" to which reference has been made. Knowing that the act was sinful, he cannot help loving the result of his sin. Hearing the villagers' confessions, the recounting of the old familiar sins of carnality, he longs to tell them: "Love is not wrong, but love should be happy and open." Perhaps to absolve himself, he adds, "Lust is not the worst thing. It is because any day, any time, lust may turn into love that we have to avoid it. And when we love our sin, then we are damned indeed." (p.172) He despairs of ever confessing his sin, for he knows he will be unable to repent, loving as he does the result of his "crime." (p.176)

Though his nickname testifies to another of the priest's sins of the flesh, there is more to this man than his weaknesses. He is a man all too aware of the awesome responsibility which has been laid upon him to minister to his people, to bring them Christ in the form of bread and wine, and to pronounce God's forgiveness. Despite his protestations of unworthiness, he is a man who exemplifies Christ's law of love. The money he earns from the baptisms is returned to the villagers to provide food and blankets. He shares his sandwiches with his betrayer, in a scene reminiscent of that other meal, shared with another Judas. He gives this man the shirt from his own back when the man is suffering a fever, giving up his mule for him whilst he walks alongside barefoot, bleeding. He knows that "Christ died for this man too," and he hopes that perhaps the reward money the man will receive, which will give him "a year without anxiety," may be the means of saving the man's soul. (p.100) Finally, knowing the implications of his actions, the priest gives up his life by turning his back on safety and returning to minister to a dying criminal. To the Lieutenant who captures him, he confesses that he is "not a saint.. .not even a brave man," yet after the priest's death,

Luis' mother tells her son: "He was one of the martyrs of the Church...He may be one of the saints."
(p.219)

In *The Heart of the Matter*, we discover that Scobie too, is a man painfully aware of his sinfulness, yet paradoxically displaying Christ-like qualities. His "sin" arises from his propensity for pity, from loving too much, not too little. Scobie loves nearly all with whom he comes into contact, even the town's petty criminals. He loves too, the town where he lives, feeling that here, "you could love human beings nearly as God loved them, knowing the worst." (HM,p.30) He takes upon his own shoulders, the burdens of others: Louise, the ship's captain, the dying child, Helen. For Scobie, love overrides the strictures of the church. He tells Helen, "...one has the conviction that love . any kind of love . does deserve a bit of mercy. One will pay of course...but I don't believe one will pay for ever." (p.224) When called to investigate the suicide of Pemberton, he is more pitying than the priest. Looking at the boy-like body he feels that it is unquestionable that "there must be mercy for someone so unformed." (p.87)

Greene's attitude to sinners is always one of compassion, even when this seems to fly in the face of the Church's teaching. That suicide is the "unforgivable sin" is questioned. Scobie himself asks whether it is "more impossible for (Christ) to put out a hand of forgiveness into the suicidal darkness and chaos than to have woken himself in the tomb...?" (p.202-3) It is implied that the love of God transcends the sinful nature of his people, it surpasses all the laws of the church, and is beyond human comprehension. His unfathomable love reaches out as both a reassurance, and as a call to repent, to come home. This still, small voice of God calls in many different ways, and Scobie senses it at the beginning of his affair with Helen, as he looks out at the sea:

Somewhere on the face of those obscure waters moved the sense of yet another wrong and another victim, not Louise, not Helen. Away in the town the cocks began to crow for the false dawn. (p.170)

These Biblical allusions to the creation story, and to the betrayal of Christ by Peter, carry the implication that God is present in all things, that nothing is beyond his redemptive power.

Reflecting upon the love of God, Scobie thinks, "How desperately he must love," (p.228). The desperate nature of this love, which will not let us go, is shown in the eleventh hour attempts to win Scobie's soul. It comes to him as a voice which pleads: "I made you with love, I've wept your tears...And now you push me away...Can't you trust me?" (p.281-2) Then again, as Scobie is dying, he has the feeling that he hears the sounds of pain, and someone "seeking him, calling him...someone appealing for help, someone in need of him." (p.289-90)

Christians worship the God whose name is Love, but his love is so vast, so all-embracing that it is incomprehensible by human standards. Speaking of God's love, the whisky priest declares,

we wouldn't recognise *that* love...it would be enough to scare us . God's love. It set fire to a bush in the desert didn't it...A man like me would run a mile to get away if he felt that love around.
(PAG.p200)

Yet he did not run away. Albeit unknowingly, he ran towards God, living and dying in and through the faith which sustains when all else fails, and in the care of the loving and forgiving God who comes out to meet him and brings him home.

4

The Nature of Faith

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Heb. 11:1

As every Christian knows from experience, faith walks hand in hand with doubts and questioning. Those who look for certainties will not find them, as the priest tells the pilgrims in the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem:

If you are looking for physical exactitude in Jerusalem it is a good quest, but it belongs to archaeology, not faith...It is better to know what is doubtful than to place faith in uncertainties.

Doubt is the prerogative of the believer; the unbeliever cannot know doubt.(MG.p. 198-9)

Barbara is amongst those who hear these words, and as she begins her pilgrimage, she too is looking for exactitude and certainties. Her faith journey is to involve her in much inner searching, and it is in coming to know herself, to reconcile the conflicts within, that Barbara's faith sits more comfortably upon her.

Such self-knowledge can be achieved only by deep reflection and self-examination, an exercise which many find helpful. Litvack relates that Newman was an advocate of the practice, quoting Newman as saying; "those who profess to believe, but do not engage in inward reflection, cannot hope to find...the love of God, which distinguishes mere assent...from 'real' belief."⁶ Their fiction reveals the agreement of both authors on this matter: it is by such inner reflection that Sarah (EA) and Barbara come to terms with their faith and with themselves. Barbara is thus enabled to unify the "Golders Green Jewishness" and the "rural Anglicanism" of her childhood background: to see Christianity as simply "a

new order of an old firm,” (MG.p 38) and to view the Old and New Testaments as being “bound by love into one volume.” (p.26)

Doubt, questioning, and uncertainties also play a part in Sarah’s faith journey. Her struggle with God is on a par with the wrestling match by the river in which Jacob participated.(Gen.32:26-30)). God wins, as it were by default, for she would much prefer to give up the struggle and return to Bendrix, declaring at one point: “Believe me God, I don’t believe in you yet.” (EA.p.. 102) Greene knew from his own experiences, the difficulties which beset those who endeavour to obey God’s rules, and sympathises with those who find the task too difficult, if God wins, life can never be the same, for the suffering of the world must be entered into and shared. Greene has written that it was events such as the religious persecution in Mexico which drove him to examine more closely the effect of faith on action, and resulted in a change of perception:

Catholicism was no longer primarily symbolic, a ceremony at an altar with the correct canonical number of candles...It was closer now to death in the afternoon.’⁷

It is through deprivation and suffering, not through Church ceremonial, that the faith of the whisky priest has been distilled. His banishment means that all such encumbrances have been cast off, leaving only “the simple ideas of hell and heaven (to move) in his brain.” All that remains of his theological training is “the outline of the mystery.” (PAG.p.65) He moves amongst a people who been nurtured in the faith since birth, and whose faith has been honed by hardship into its bare essentials. The stubborn nature of their faith is evidenced in their refusal to betray the priest, despite the threat to the lives of their men-folk.

It is this faith which is personified in the Indian mother who indicates that the priest should accompany her as she treks to the hidden graveyard with her dead child. The graveyard is the work of the Indians, and is different from anything ever encountered before by the priest. He sees it as “a short cut to the dark and magical heart of the faith,” and he watches as the mother presses the dead child to a cross, perhaps expecting a miracle. He is amazed

at the simplicity of her faith, faith in “the spittle that healed the blind man, and the voice that raised the dead.” (p.154-5)

The priest enters into the sufferings of his people: frightened, ashamed, deprived of the essential tools of his trade, he refuses to abandon them. He is patently unaware of the example of faith which he gives to others and as he faces death, he is conscious only of his imperfections.

That faith must be proved in action, is assented to by both Spark and Greene, but both writers are also aware of another dimension to faith, and their novels are permeated by an awareness of the supernatural. Life on earth is seen as being bound up with the eternal; death is seen through the eyes of faith, as the passage to heaven or to hell, as a staging post. Spark has indicated that she, like Newman, believes in angels, in “another world than this,” and her fiction depicts the interplay between the material world and the supernatural. There is Dougal, with his constantly changing shape; the unseen typewriter; the mysterious phone-calls; the disappearances of Georgina. The priest in *The Mandelbaum Gate* observes that “there is a supernatural process going on under the surface and within the substance of all things.” (p.199) Greene too, believes that some things defy explanation though people try to dismiss them, and this belief is implicit in his fiction: “It isn’t a case of miracles not happening . it’s just a case of people calling them something else.” (PAG.p.201)

The fact that Bendrix is alive is, for Sarah, proof that miracles happen, for she had been convinced of his death (EA). Her miracle is bought at a price however, for it brings suffering both for her and for Bendrix. It is her deepening faith which resolves her to offer up her suffering for others, such as Smythe, whose disfigured cheek she kisses, little knowing that this act of compassion is in itself to result in a miracle. Greene has referred to the fact that some people did not like the “magic” element in this book, but felt that” if we are to believe in some power infinitely above us in capacity and knowledge, magic does inevitably form part of our belief . or rather magic is the term we use for the mysterious and the inexplicable”¹⁹.

Jean Taylor (MM) is another Christian who uses her suffering constructively, and refuses, to see death as a threat. The committed Christian sees death as an intrinsic part of life, something which should inform every aspect of our existence. We should all remember we must die, and it is the refusal to acknowledge this which Spark attacks. Life is to be seen as a time of preparation, death and life are entwined, inextricable. This fact is movingly illustrated in Miss Valvona's observations as the priest anoints the body of Granny Barnacle:

(He) would be committing Granny Barnacle to the sweet Lord, he would be anointing (her) eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands and feet, asking pardon for the sins she had committed...

Immediately following these words, we are briskly returned to the secular world of the ward: "The priest left. A few of the patients finished their supper. Those who did not were coaxed with Ovaltine." (MM,p.115) Death is not only one of the "four last things to be remembered," it is shown to be a matter of fact, a fact of faith.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the above discussion will have shown that, despite the diversity of their writing styles, Muriel Spark and Graham Greene are, in fact, addressing the same issues of faith. They share an interest in issues which affect every Christian, and write from the moral rather than the religious perspective, emphasising the need for tolerance.

As has been shown, both exhibit a reluctance to comply with all of the demands of the Catholic church, and are not averse to pointing out its shortcomings. It is nevertheless the faith which both of them have deliberately chosen and adhere to: it informs their writing and proves the adage that there can be unity in diversity.

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