



Adultery, Faith and Redemption: A Critical Analysis of Religion and the Perception of Adulterous Love through Sarah Miles in *The End of the Affair*

^{*1}M Comlan Appolinaire ADJAGBO, ²Dr. (MC) IBOURAHIMA BORO Alidou Razakou and ³Dr. (MC) Hergie Alexis SEGUEDEME

^{*1}Littérature Anglaise à l'Ecole Doctorale Pluridisciplinaire Espaces Cultures et Développement de l'Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Bénin.

²Enseignant-Chercheur, Université Parakou, Bénin.

³Enseignant-Chercheur à l'Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Bénin.

Abstract

This article critically examines the complex interrelation between religion, adulterous love, and moral consciousness in Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, with particular emphasis on the character of Sarah Miles. Specifically, it addresses the central problem of how Greene reconciles adultery traditionally condemned within Christian doctrine with the possibility of spiritual growth and redemptive suffering. To this end, drawing on critical perspectives advanced by George Orwell, David Lodge, and John Stratford, the study interrogates Greene's sustained challenge to moral absolutism and his redefinition of sanctity through human failure. Thus, methodologically, the research adopts a Counter-Cross methodology, a critical framework that reads faith and sin, love and renunciation, not as binary oppositions but as intersecting and mutually illuminating forces. Accordingly, the article combines close textual analysis, theological criticism, and comparative literary reading across Greene's Catholic novels. In particular, narrative voice, symbolism, and character psychology are examined in order to situate Sarah Miles within Greene's broader moral and theological vision. The findings indicate that Greene deliberately destabilizes conventional moral judgments. Rather than presenting adultery as mere illicit desire or ethical deviation, *The End of the Affair* portrays it as a crucible through which faith is tested, intensified, and ultimately transformed. Consequently, Sarah Miles emerges as a paradoxical believer whose adulterous love leads not to moral collapse but to a painful and authentic encounter with God. The study therefore concludes that, in Greene's fiction, sin frequently becomes the condition of grace and that religious meaning arises through contradiction, suffering, and moral ambiguity rather than through doctrinal clarity or ethical certainty.

Keywords: Adultery, Faith, Sin, Redemption, Religion.

Introduction

Graham Greene occupies a distinctive position in twentieth-century English literature because of his sustained engagement with religious doubt, moral ambiguity and the intensity human experience. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Greene does not present religion as a source of moral certainty or ethical clarity. Instead, his fiction repeatedly interrogates belief as a condition marked by anxiety, contradiction, and spiritual suffering. Critics have long noted that Greene's Catholicism is less doctrinal than existential, shaped more by inner conflict than by theological resolution. George Orwell famously observed that Greene was drawn to the "tragic sense of life," privileging moral tension and spiritual unease over ethical consolation. This tragic vision finds one of its most concentrated and complex expressions in *The End of the Affair*. Rather than presenting religion as a stable moral framework that regulates human

behavior, Greene dramatizes belief as a disturbing and disruptive force that unsettles desire, destabilizes relationships, and deepens psychological conflict. Faith in *The End of the Affair* does not protect the characters from suffering; instead, it intensifies their emotional and moral turmoil. David Lodge describes Greene's fiction as a narrative space where theology and psychology converge, producing characters who are simultaneously spiritually alert and morally compromised. Sarah Miles exemplifies this collision. Her adulterous relationship with Maurice Bendrix functions not merely as a plot device but as the narrative and theological core of the novel, through which Greene explores the paradoxical coexistence of sin, love, and divine obligation.

This article adopts a Counter-Cross methodology, a critical approach that examines the intersection rather than the opposition of moral and theological categories. Unlike

traditional moral criticism, which often separates sin from grace, transgression from redemption, or human desire from divine command, the Counter-Cross reading foregrounds their mutual entanglement. It assumes that in Graham Greene's fiction, spiritual meaning does not emerge from moral purity or doctrinal coherence, but precisely at the crossing point of contradiction, where faith and failure confront one another.

Drawing on George Orwell's observation that Greene's religious vision is rooted in tragedy rather than orthodoxy, this methodology treats adultery not merely as an ethical failure but as a site of spiritual exposure and existential revelation. In this context, sin becomes a condition through which characters encounter the demands of faith with greater intensity. David Lodge's emphasis on Greene's psychological realism further supports this approach, as the Counter-Cross reading privileges interior conflict, emotional fragmentation, and moral ambiguity over theological closure. Similarly, John Stratford's analyses of Greene's Catholic imagination reinforce the argument that faith in Greene's novels does not resolve suffering but rather sharpens it, transforming belief into a source of profound moral pain.

Through a Counter-Cross reading, this article argues that *The End of the Affair* dismantles the binary opposition between adultery and faith. Greene situates Sarah Miles at the intersection of sin and grace, where moral transgression becomes the very condition of religious encounter. Her adulterous love does not negate faith; instead, it exposes faith's tragic depth and emotional cost. In doing so, Greene confirms a vision of Christianity not as moral reassurance or ethical stability, but as a religion of suffering, sacrifice, and unresolved tension one in which redemption is inseparable from loss and belief is inseparable from pain.

To move forward efficiently and better understand this article, we implement this structural plan as follow: introduction to the theoretical framework, problem Statement, significance of the Study, Conceptual clarification, methodology, the topic and the corpus and the exploration of sin, faith, adulterous love, redemption Sarah Miles, perspectives and conclusion

1. Theoretical Framework

This section of the study aims to clarify how the key concepts adultery, faith and redemption are connected to the chosen corpus, Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*. It therefore goes beyond a simple conceptual definition, establishing instead the relationship between these notions and their literary representation in the novel. The theoretical framework how the perception of adulterous love, embodies by Sarah Miles, intersects with the religious and moral dimensions Greene explores.

The analysis draws on critical approaches to religion and literature to reveal the tension between transgression and spirituality, guilt and the search for salvation.

In this way, this section lays the necessary foundation for understanding how Greene transforms a narrative for adultery into a broader reflection on faith, grace and the possibility of redemption.

Next, driven by a sustained desire to broaden and deepen the understanding of the theme of this article, this study adopts theological criticism centered on the interrelated concepts of sin, sacrifice, and grace in order to examine more profoundly the dynamics of moral transgression within a religious setting. Theological criticism is particularly suited to Graham Greene's fiction because his narratives are structured around spiritual conflict rather than moral resolution, presenting religious experience as a field of tension where human

weakness and divine authority collide. Within this framework, sin is not treated as a mere ethical failure but as a condition that provokes divine engagement. Greene's characters frequently encounter God not in moments of moral purity or doctrinal obedience, but in the very midst of their transgression. In *The End of the Affair*, Sarah Miles discovers faith precisely through her adulterous passion, confessing: "I prayed for him to be spared and I promised to give him up if he lived". Her vow transforms adultery into the paradoxical site of grace where divine presence intrudes upon human weakness.

This paradox is central to Greene's Catholic imagination. As Maria Couto observes, Greene's fiction "locates God in the cracks of human failure where sin becomes the very ground of grace". Similarly, A.N. Wilson argues that Greene's protagonists "do not find God in sanctity but in despair, jealousy and betrayal".

Sarah's journey exemplifies this theology of brokenness: her adulterous love, far from excluding her from redemption, becomes the catalyst for divine encounter.

Comparatively, Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter* and Rose in *Brighton Rock* embody the same paradox sin as the threshold of grace. Greene's characters thus dramatize a radical theological claim: that redemption is not achieved by escaping human frailty but by confronting it, allowing divine love to transform even the most compromised desires.

1.1. Problem Statement

The intersection of religion, faith, sin, and redemption occupies a central place in the moral and spiritual construction of human existence, particularly in societies where belief in God continues to shape ethical consciousness and personal responsibility. In literary discourse, this intersection raises complex questions about how religious doctrine negotiates human weakness, especially when confronted with transgressed acts such as adultery. Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* provides a compelling framework for examining these tensions through the character of Sarah Miles, whose adulterous love becomes inseparable from faith, suffering, and the possibility of redemption. Despite religion's traditional condemnation of adultery as sin, Greene complicates this moral absolutism by portraying adulterous love not merely as moral failure but as a paradoxical pathway to divine encounter. Sarah's emotional and spiritual journey exposes the difficulty of reconciling human desire with religious obligation, raising a critical problem: Can sin coexist with genuine faith, and can redemption emerge from moral transgression? This question challenges rigid religious interpretations that reduce sin to condemnation rather than transformation.

Furthermore, religion conventionally presents faith and redemption as mediating forces through which the sinner may reconnect with a holy God. However, *The End of the Affair* destabilizes this theological simplicity by depicting faith as painful, disruptive, and deeply conflicted. Sarah's struggle illustrates how faith may demand sacrifice rather than comfort, and how redemption may involve loss, renunciation, and suffering rather than immediate salvation. This tension problematizes the notion of redemption as a straightforward escape from sin and raises doubts about the moral clarity often associated with religious doctrine. The core concern of this study, therefore, lies in examining sin, faith, and redemption as a trilogy, not as isolated religious concepts, but as interdependent forces shaping human moral experience.

Through Sarah Miles's adulterous relationship and spiritual

awakening, Greene interrogates whether religion truly saves the sinner from despair and “hell,” or whether it intensifies inner conflict by imposing absolute demands on fragile human emotions. This research thus addresses the critical gap between religious idealism and lived human experience, questioning how religion negotiates moral failure, emotional love, and divine grace. By analyzing Sarah Miles’s character, the study seeks to reassess the perception of adulterous love within Christian theology and to explore whether redemption in Greene’s vision is an act of divine mercy, human sacrifice, or both. The problem statement effectively foregrounds the tension between religious doctrine and human desire in *The End of the Affair*, using Sarah Miles’s adulterous love as a focal point. It highlights how Graham Greene problematizes traditional Christian notions of sin, faith, and redemption by presenting adultery not merely as moral transgression but as a catalyst for spiritual awakening and inner conflict. The statement is relevant and focused, as it raises critical questions about whether religious faith condemns, transforms, or redeems human passion, thereby justifying a nuanced critical inquiry into Greene’s complex representation of religion and moral responsibility.

Critical readings of *The End of the Affair* have frequently emphasized its psychological realism, romantic intensity or autobiographical dimensions. While these approaches are valuable, they often marginalize the novel’s theological radicalism, particularly Greene’s reworking of sin as a vehicle for grace. Sarah Miles’ adultery is commonly interpreted as mortal failure or emotional extremism, yet such reading fail to account for the way embeds her transgression within a broader economy of sacrifice, divine jealousy and redemptive suffering. This study therefore addresses the following problem: How does Greene transform adultery from a moral violation into a site of religious interrogation, and what ways does this transformation challenge orthodox Christian conceptions of sin and redemption.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it examines the moral and spiritual organization of the world through the lens of religion, with the aim of fostering a society grounded in peace, love, and ethical responsibility. By interrogating the interrelationship between sin, faith, and redemption, the paper acknowledges these elements as inherent aspects of the human condition rather than as abstract theological ideals detached from lived experience.

Through a critical analysis of Sarah Miles in *The End of the Affair*, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how adulterous love, often rigidly condemned within religious discourse, can become a complex site of spiritual struggle, moral growth, and divine encounter. In doing so, the study challenges reductive moral judgments and invites a more compassionate and nuanced perception of human failure within religious frameworks.

The significance of this inquiry lies in its ability to reframe Greene’s Catholic imagination as a resource for contemporary discussions of morality and faith. By situating sin not as a barrier to belief but as a condition through which faith is intensified, the study highlights Greene’s vision of Christianity as a religion of suffering, sacrifice and unresolved tension. This perspective enriches literary and theological scholarship by demonstrating how Greene’s fiction dismantles simplistic binaries and instead foregrounds the paradoxical coexistence of transgression and grace. Ultimately, the study underscores the relevance of Greene’s

work for modern readers seeking to understand the complexities of faith, morality and human desire in a fractured world.

1.3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretative research design grounded in literary criticism, with the aim of analyzing the complex relationship between adultery, faith, and redemption in Graham Greene’s *The End of the Affair*. Rather than approaching the novel from a purely moralistic or doctrinal standpoint, the research foregrounds the interdependence of religious belief and moral transgression as embodied in the character of Sarah Miles.

To deepen its methodology the study incorporates theological criticism, focusing on Catholic concepts such as sin, grace, sacrifice, suffering, and redemption. These concepts are examined not as fixed doctrines but as lived experiences dramatized through character psychology. In parallel, psychological criticism is employed to explore Sarah Miles’s inner conflict, guilt, fear, desire, and renunciation, emphasizing the existential dimension of her faith. This combined approach highlights Greene’s tendency to portray belief as psychologically disruptive rather than morally reassuring.

In addition to this argument, theologically, Sarah’s vow to God during Bendrix’s near-death experience exemplifies the Catholic paradox in which sin leading to salvation: “*I prayed for him to be spared, and I promised to give him up if he lived*”. This moment transforms adultery into a site of grace. Scholars argue that Sarah’s relationship is not a simple triangle but a “*love triangle*” involving Bendrix, Henry, Sarah and God where God becomes her ultimate lover.

In psychologically way, Sarah’s guilt and repression reflect Greene’s interest in the unconscious dimensions of faith. Her oscillation between desire and renunciation mirrors the psychoanalytic tension between eros superego, making her character a vessel for exploring the intersection of human passion and divine intervention.

Furthermore, the research also adopts a comparative literary approach, situating *The End of the Affair* within the broader context of Graham Greene’s Catholic novels. Select references to works such as *Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory*, and *The Heart of the Matter* are used to demonstrate recurring patterns in Greene’s treatment of sin, suffering, and redemption. This contextualization reinforces the argument that Sarah Miles’s experience is emblematic of Greene’s wider religious vision. Additionally, the study engages with critical commentaries by George Orwell, David Lodge, and John Stratford to contextualize Greene’s moral and theological concerns within twentieth-century literary criticism.

The study employs a qualitative interpretative methodology, combining close textual analysis with theological and existential criticism. Primary emphasis is Greene’s other novels to illuminate recurring moral and spiritual patterns. The analysis draws on:

Theological criticism, particularly concepts of sin, grace, sacrifice and divine jealousy;
Existential thought, focusing on freedom, suffering, obsession and the burden of belief.

1.4. Conceptual Clarification

First, this article refers to conceptual clarification as an analytical tool that aligns with and reinforces the central theme of the study. Conceptual clarification is employed to

determine what the key terms refer to and signify within the specific context of adultery, faith, and redemption, rather than relying on their conventional or moralistic interpretations. In this study, conceptual clarification designates to the precise analytical definition of key terms as they function within a literary-theological framework. Such clarification is essential when engaging with concepts that carry ethical and religious complexity, as it establishes the interpretive boundaries and methodological coherence of the analysis.

The topic of this study is Graham Greene's sustained exploration of the paradoxical relationship between sin and faith with particular attention to *The End of the Affair*. Greene's fiction dramatizes the entanglement of moral transgression and spiritual obligation, situating characters at the intersection of desire, guilt and divine encounter.

The corpus of this study is *The End of the Affair* (1951), a novel that exemplifies Greene's catholic imagination and distinctive treatment of belief as a condition of suffering rather than consolidation. By focusing on this text, the analysis highlights how Greene dismantles binary oppositions such as adultery versus faith or sin versus grace and instead presents them as mutually constitutive.

Through conceptual clarification, the study demonstrates how Graham Greene's narrative transforms adultery into a site of theological revelation where redemption emerges not from purity but from the lived experience of contraction, loss and spiritual exposure.

2. The Topic and the Corpus and the Exploration of Sin, Faith, Adulterous Love, Redemption, Sarah Miles

2.1. The Topic and the Corpus

Adultery is conceptualized not merely as marital infidelity but as a theological and existential transgression that exposes the tension between human desire and divine law. In Graham Greene's fiction, adulterous love operates as a narrative catalyst through which guilt, obsession, and spiritual awareness are intensified, transforming sin into a site of religious interrogation rather than simple immorality (Lodge). Faith is understood as unstable and agonistic, marked by doubt, fear, and suffering rather than doctrinal certainty. As Orwell observes, Greene's religious vision presents belief as psychologically painful, sustained less by love of God than by fear and inner compulsion. Redemption, finally, is conceived not as moral reward or emotional resolution but as a process of sacrificial loss, achieved through suffering and submission to divine will. Stratford emphasizes that Greene's redemptive logic privileges brokenness as the condition of grace, suggesting that salvation is inseparable from pain. Taken together, these clarified concepts reveal a coherent structure in which adultery generates spiritual crisis, faith sustains inner contradiction, and redemption emerges through sacrifice, thereby supporting a Counter-Cross reading of Greene's religious imagination.

Driven by the need to clarify and align the analysis with the central theme of this article, this study adopts close textual analysis focusing on narrative voice, symbolism, and character psychology. These analytical categories are not arbitrary; they are essential tools for uncovering how the themes of adultery, faith, and redemption are articulated, contested, and transformed within the narrative structure of Graham Greene's fiction. Narrative voice is crucial because it mediates the reader's access to moral judgment and spiritual conflict. In *The End of the Affair*, the confessional, unreliable first-person narration exposes the tension between subjective desire and objective moral law. The narrator's voice reveals

how jealousy, resentment, and guilt shape the perception of faith and adultery, allowing the text to dramatize inner spiritual struggle rather than impose doctrinal conclusions.

Symbolism functions as a theological language through which abstract religious ideas are rendered experientially. Objects, events, and recurring images such as wounds, miracles, silence, and absence encode the conflict between human love and divine intervention. Symbolism thus transforms adultery from a private sin into a metaphysical contest and renders redemption visible through signs of suffering and sacrifice rather than moral resolution. Character psychology is central to understanding Greene's religious vision because faith and redemption are experienced internally as emotional and psychological crises. Characters such as Sarah Miles embody divided consciousness, where desire, fear of God, and obedience coexist in painful contradiction. Psychological analysis reveals how redemption in Greene's fiction is achieved not through ethical reform but through inner torment, renunciation, and submission to divine will. Together, narrative voice, symbolism, and character psychology matter because they illuminate how the thematic triad of adultery, faith, and redemption operates at the intersection of text, belief, and human consciousness. These elements enable a Counter-Cross reading in which sin initiates spiritual crisis, faith sustains inner conflict, and redemption emerges through suffering moments of virtue but at the height of their transgression, suggesting that sin functions as a catalyst for spiritual awakening. This perspective challenges conventional moral binaries by revealing how transgression intensifies consciousness of God's presence and authority. Sin, therefore, becomes a paradoxical entry point into religious experience rather than its negation.

Sacrifice emerges as the central mechanism through which this encounter is resolved. In Greene's religious imagination, sacrifice is neither voluntary nor redemptive in a sentimental sense; it is imposed, painful, and often emotionally destructive. Characters are compelled to relinquish what they love most human affection, personal happiness, or autonomy in submission to a jealous and demanding God. Theological criticism allows this pattern to be read not as narrative cruelty but as an expression of Greene's belief that spiritual authenticity requires absolute surrender.

Grace, finally, operates in a manner that defies human logic and moral expectation. Rather than restoring harmony or rewarding virtue, grace in Greene's fiction manifests through suffering, loss, and inner desolation. It is precisely through brokenness that divine favor is disclosed, reinforcing a theology in which redemption is inseparable from pain. This conception of grace destabilizes secular and optimistic readings of redemption by insisting on its tragic and costly nature. By foregrounding sin, sacrifice, and grace, theological criticism enables a nuanced examination of how moral transgression functions as a site of religious meaning rather than moral collapse. This approach illuminates the intersection of adultery, faith, and redemption as a Counter-Cross structure, where horizontal human desire confronts vertical divine command, producing spiritual significance through conflict. In doing so, the study situates Greene's fiction within a broader theological discourse that redefines redemption as an outcome of suffering rather than moral coherence.

Following this analytical foundation, a deeper intertextuality reading is employed to justify and demonstrate the relevance of the selected literary theories to the central theme of the article. This approach allows the study to show how the

theoretical frameworks, including conceptual clarification, close textual analysis, and theological criticism, interact with the text to illuminate the intersections of adultery, faith, and redemption. By situating the narrative within a broader literary and critical context, intertextuality reading strengthens the methodological rigor and supports the article's interpretive claims.

2.2. Exploration of Sin, Faith, Adulterous Love, Redemption, Sarah Miles

i). Faith and Sin in Graham Greene's Moral Conceptions

Greene's moral universe is profoundly shaped by Catholic theology, yet it consistently resists doctrinal clarity. Sin, in his fiction, is never abstract; it is experiential, psychological, and relational. John Stratford argues that Greene's characters live in a state of permanent moral tension, where belief intensifies rather than resolves ethical conflict.

In *The End of the Affair*, adultery becomes the privileged site where faith and sin intersect. The illicit affair between Sarah and Maurice unfolds in a wartime context marked by destruction and uncertainty, reinforcing Orwell's claim that Greene's religious vision is inseparable from human suffering. Moral absolutes lose their rigidity, and sin becomes entwined with the search for meaning. George Orwell famously described Greene as a novelist preoccupied with "the tragic sense of life," arguing that his Catholicism expresses itself more through moral anxiety than doctrinal assurance. This insight is crucial to understanding *The End of the Affair*, where religious belief does not resolve ethical dilemmas but deepens them. Sarah Miles's faith intensifies her suffering, confirming Orwell's claim that Greene's religious vision is inseparable from human pain and contradiction.

Through a Counter-Cross reading, Sarah's growing awareness of God emerges not despite her sin but through it. Guilt sharpens her spiritual consciousness, confirming Greene's recurrent idea that grace often operates through moral failure rather than moral achievement.

ii). Adulterous Love and Emotional Absolutism

The love between Sarah and Maurice is characterized by emotional excess and possessiveness. Maurice's devotion borders on idolatry, as he demands total loyalty and unconditional presence. This absolutist love, paradoxically, mirrors religious commitment while remaining fundamentally secular. Sarah's dilemma arises from her inability to reconcile human love with divine obligation. Adultery offers her intense emotional fulfillment, yet it also exposes the limitations of purely human attachment. Greene uses this tension to question whether any human love can remain morally sufficient when it excludes transcendence.

David Lodge emphasizes Greene's fusion of theology and psychology, noting that belief in his novels often manifests as emotional disturbance rather than spiritual consolation. Sarah Miles exemplifies this pattern. Her faith does not elevate her above human desire but fractures her interior life. Through Lodge's lens, Sarah's adultery becomes a psychological gateway to religious awareness, reinforcing Greene's refusal of simplified moral judgments.

3. Sarah Miles as a Paradoxical Believer and the Narrative Voice and the Limits of Secular Judgment

3.1. Sarah Miles as a Paradoxical Believer

Sarah Miles is neither a conventional saint nor a simple

sinner. Her faith is hesitant, fearful, and deeply personal. Her vow to God, made in desperation during the bombing, binds her to a moral path she neither fully understands nor desires. What distinguishes Sarah is her acceptance of suffering as a form of obedience. She does not renounce adultery out of moral superiority but out of submission to a God she experiences as demanding and jealous.

In this sense, her faith is marked by loss rather than consolation. In this sense, her faith marked more by loss than by consolation. It is a faith that strips away comfort, leaving her exposed to anguish and sacrifice. Yet it precisely this paradox her willingness to endure pain as a sign of fidelity that defines the uniqueness of her spiritual journey. Sarah's devotion is not radiant or triumphant; it is shadowed, conflicted and costly. And in that tension lies the depth of her character: a woman whose belief is inseparable from suffering and whose obedience to God is both her burden and her truth.

3.2. Narrative Voice and the Limits of Secular Judgment

The novel's first-person narration through Maurice Bendrix reinforces the tension between secular skepticism and religious experience. Maurice's hostility toward God reflects his wounded pride and his sense of emotional exclusion. His narrative attempts to reduce Sarah's faith to neurosis, weakness or betrayal ultimately fail. Greene deliberately uses Maurice's perspective to expose the inadequacy of purely rational explanations for spiritual experience.

The structure of the narrative mirrors the novel's central thematic struggle between disbelief and faith. By filtering Sarah's devotion through Maurice's skeptical voice, Greene dramatizes the limits of secular judgment: the inability of reason alone to grasp the mystery of religious commitment. Maurice's account, shaped by jealousy and resentment, cannot contain the depth of Sarah's encounter with God. Instead, his narration becomes a testimony to the very insufficiency of secular categories when confronted with the reality of faith.

In this way, Greene transforms the act of narrative itself into a battleground. The tension between Maurice's rationalizing voice and Sarah's lived spirituality underscores the novel's larger concern: that faith, however unsettling or paradoxical, resists reduction to the language of psychology or skepticism. The narrative voice thus embodies the novel's struggle, revealing that the limits of secular judgment are precisely what open the possibility of transcendence.

The narrative structure thus mirrors the novel's thematic struggle between disbelief and faith.

4. Adultery as Redemption: A Counter-Cross Reading and Suffering, Sacrifice and the Jealous God

4.1. Adultery as Redemption: A Counter-Cross Reading

A counter-cross reading reveals adultery not as the negation of faith but as its paradoxical precondition. Sarah's love affair becomes her cross, a site of suffering that leads to spiritual awakening. The renunciation of Maurice functions as a form of sacrifice rather than moral correction. Greene reconfigures redemption as emotional and spiritual endurance rather than ethical purity. In this framework, adultery acquires redemptive potential without being morally justified, preserving the tension between sin and grace.

John Stratford argues that Greene's Catholic novels consistently undermine moral idealism by presenting sanctity as inseparable from guilt. Sarah Miles aligns with Stratford's conception of Greene's "flawed saints," characters whose moral failures paradoxically disclose their spiritual

seriousness. In this sense, adultery functions not as narrative scandal but as theological provocation, forcing a confrontation between divine demand and human limitation.

4.2. Suffering, Sacrifice, and the Jealous God

In *The End of the Affair*, God is not represented as a distant or consoling presence but as a jealous and demanding force that interrupts human happiness. Greene deliberately challenges sentimental or benevolent images of God by presenting divinity as one who competes with human love for absolute allegiance. Sarah's experience of God is therefore marked by fear, obligation, and loss rather than joy. Suffering becomes the primary medium through which Sarah relates to God. Her sacrifice is not only the renunciation of Maurice but also the acceptance of emotional isolation and misunderstanding. Greene aligns suffering with spiritual authenticity, suggesting that faith, when genuine, necessarily wounds human desire. This theology echoes the Christian paradox of the Cross, where redemption is achieved through pain rather than fulfillment.

God's jealousy in the novel underscores the incompatibility between total human possession and divine sovereignty. Maurice's demand for exclusive love mirrors, in distorted form, God's own claim over Sarah's life. Greene thus stages a confrontation between two absolutes: human passion and divine authority where the triumph of God is neither triumphant nor reassuring, but tragic and costly.

4.3. Greene's Other Adulterous Saints: Comparative Glimpses

Sarah Miles belongs to a broader gallery of Greene's characters whose moral failures coexist with spiritual depth. Figures such as the whiskey priest in *The Power and the Glory* or Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter* similarly embody the tension between sin and sanctity. Like Sarah, these characters are neither redeemed by moral rectitude nor condemned by their transgressions. In these narratives, Greene consistently presents adultery or sexual failure as a site of moral exposure rather than simple corruption. The adulterous or fallen believer becomes a privileged figure through whom divine grace operates unpredictably. Sarah's silent suffering aligns her with these characters, reinforcing Greene's conviction that holiness often emerges from weakness rather than virtue.

5. Perspectives

The thematic complexity of *The End of the Affair* allows for multiple critical perspectives through which the relationship between adultery, faith, and redemption can be examined. Rather than privileging a single interpretative lens, this study integrates complementary perspectives that illuminate Graham Greene's paradoxical treatment of religion and moral transgression through the character of Sarah Miles.

5.1. Theological Perspective: Sin and Grace in Tension

From a theological standpoint, adultery in *The End of the Affair* appears as a grave sin within Christian doctrine. However, Greene resists a conventional moral reading by presenting sin as a site of divine encounter rather than spiritual exclusion. Sarah Miles's adulterous relationship becomes the context in which she experiences God most intensely, suggesting that grace operates within, rather than outside, human failure. This perspective highlights Greene's reconfiguration of Christianity as a faith grounded in suffering, sacrifice, and moral tension rather than moral purity.

5.2. Existential Perspective: Faith as Inner Conflict

Viewed through an existential lens, faith in the novel is not a source of certainty but a burden that intensifies anxiety and emotional pain. Sarah's belief forces her to renounce personal happiness in obedience to a divine command she neither fully understands nor desires. Adultery, in this context, exposes the fragility of human freedom and the tragic cost of religious commitment. This perspective aligns with George Orwell's assertion that Greene's religious vision is rooted in tragedy rather than orthodoxy.

5.3. Psychological Perspective: Guilt, Desire and Renunciation

Psychologically, Sarah Miles embodies a divided self-torn between erotic desire and spiritual obligation. Her adulterous love is marked by intense passion, while her faith generates overwhelming guilt and fear. From this perspective, redemption is not achieved through moral correction but through psychological suffering and self-denial. Greene's emphasis on interior monologue and emotional fragmentation allows the reader to witness faith as a deeply disruptive force within the human psyche.

Sarah diary entries reveal the depth of this inner conflict: "*I want Maurice, I want him too*". This confession illustrates the paradox of her divided identity where desire and belief coexist in painful tension. Her vow to God: "*I prayed for him to be spared and I promised to give him up if he lived*" further dramatizes the psychological cost of faith, transforming love into sacrifice.

5.4. Feminist Perspective: Female Agency and Religious Constraint

A feminist reading raises questions about female autonomy and the moral expectations imposed on women within religious frameworks. Sarah's renunciation of love can be interpreted either as an act of spiritual agency or as a submission to a patriarchal religious system that demands female self-sacrifice. This perspective interrogates whether Sarah's faith empowers her moral choice or silences her desire, thereby complicating traditional representations of female virtue and sin.

From this standpoint, Sarah's vow to God "*I prayed for him to be spared to give him up if he lived*" may be read as an assertion of agency, a conscious decision to prioritize spiritual obligation over personal passion. Yet it can also be seen as a form of coercion where religious structures dictate the suppression of female desire in the name of sanctity. Feminist critics argue that Greene's portrayal of Sarah reflects the broader tension between women's autonomy and the patriarchal demands of Catholic morality, situating her sacrifice within that often valorizes female suffering as redemptive.

Thus, Sarah Miles embodies a paradox: her faith both empowers her with a sense of spiritual purpose and constraints her by demanding the renunciation of love. This duality complicates simplistic readings of her character, positioning her at the intersection of agency and submission, desire and denial, sin and sanctity. Greene's narrative thereby opens space for feminist critique, questioning whether redemption for women in religious contexts is achieved through genuine autonomy or through conformity to patriarchal ideals of virtue.

5.5. Moral Perspective: Redefining Ethical Judgment

From a moral-critical perspective, Greene dismantles

simplistic ethical binaries. Adultery in *The End of the Affair* is neither fully condemned nor morally justified; instead, it occupies a space of ethical ambiguity. The novel invites readers to suspend judgment and to recognize the complexity of moral decision-making within lived experience.

Sarah Miles' relationship with Maurice Bendrix exemplifies this ambiguity. Her passion reveals the depth of human desire while her vow to God exposes the cost of faith. Greene resists presenting adultery as a straightforward moral failure, instead situating it within a framework where love, guilt and sacrifice coexist. As Bendrix reflects on Sarah's choices, the reader is compelled to confront the inadequacy of rigid moral categories in capturing the nuances of human experience.

Redemption, in this sense, does not restore moral order but reveals the insufficiency of inflexible ethical systems. Greene's Catholic imagination insists that grace operates most powerfully in the midst of contradiction where sin, and sanctity overlap. Thus, this novel redefines ethical judgment by showing that moral truth cannot be reduced to binary categories of right and wrong but must be understood as a dynamic process shaped by suffering, desire and faith.

5.6. Literary Perspective: Symbolism and Narrative Structure

Literarily, Greene's use of diary entries, retrospective narration, and religious symbolism contributes to the thematic entanglement of adultery and faith. Miracles, vows, and acts of renunciation function as symbolic crossings between human love and divine command. This perspective emphasizes how narrative form reinforces theological meaning.

5.7. Counter-Cross Perspective: Intersection Rather Than Opposition

Finally, the Counter-Cross perspective synthesizes these approaches by focusing on the intersection of adultery and faith rather than their opposition. It argues that redemption in *The End of the Affair* emerges precisely where sin and belief converge. Sarah Miles stands at this crossing point, embodying Greene's conviction that spiritual truth arises through contradiction, suffering, and moral ambiguity.

5.8. Concluding Perspective

Taken together, these perspectives reveal that *The End of the Affair* resists any singular interpretation. Greene's portrayal of Sarah Miles challenges moral absolutism and reimagines adultery as a space of spiritual exposure rather than ethical failure alone. Through these intersecting perspectives, the novel affirms a tragic vision of Christianity in which redemption is inseparable from suffering and faith is inseparable from loss.

6. Conclusion

This article has examined the intricate and paradoxical relationship between religion, adulterous love, and moral consciousness in Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, with particular attention to the character of Sarah Miles as a complex and conflicted figure of faith. Through the application of a Counter-Cross methodology, the study has demonstrated that Greene neither condones nor trivializes adultery. Instead, he reconfigures its moral significance by situating it within a theological framework where suffering, contradiction, and spiritual struggle become central to religious experience. By reading adultery and faith as intersecting rather than opposing forces, this study has shown

that Sarah's adulterous love functions simultaneously as sin and sacrifice. Her relationship with Maurice Bendrix exposes the depth of her emotional commitment, while her vow to God reveals the cost of belief in Greene's fictional universe. Faith, in this context, is not a source of consolation or moral clarity but a disruptive force that intensifies emotional pain and ethical uncertainty. This paradox reflects Greene's broader Catholic imagination, in which divine grace operates most powerfully within human weakness.

In Greene's vision, redemption is not achieved through the confrontation of human frailty where sin itself becomes the ground for divine engagement.

Moreover, the figure of the jealous God in *The End of the Affair* plays a crucial role in destabilizing romantic idealism. God's demand for Sarah's exclusive loyalty challenges the primacy of secular love and exposes its limitations when confronted with transcendence. Through this tension, Greene suggests that human love, however passionate, remains incomplete and vulnerable when measured against the absolute claims of faith. Redemption, therefore, is not achieved through moral purity or ethical perfection but through endurance, loss, renunciation, and painful obedience. Psychologically, Sarah's inner conflict illustrates the existential cost of belief. Her guilt, fear, and longing underscore Greene's insistence that faith deepens suffering rather than alleviates it. Theologically, her experience affirms a vision of Christianity rooted in sacrifice and tragedy rather than reassurance. Literarily, Greene's narrative structure marked by retrospection, confession, and symbolic imagery reinforces the inseparability of love and loss, sin and grace.

Ultimately, *The End of the Affair* affirms Graham Greene's enduring vision of religion as an experience that unfolds at the margins of moral certainty. God is most present where human beings are most broken, and spiritual meaning arises not from obedience alone but from the painful confrontation between desire and renunciation. The path to faith, Greene suggests, often passes through the very experiences that religious morality appears to forbid. In this sense, the novel challenges readers to reconsider simplistic moral judgments and to recognize the tragic depth at the heart of religious belief.

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