CATHOLIC THEMES:
THE DIVERS MOVEMENTS
OF NATURE AND GRACE

At the height of their careers both Mauriac and Greene turned to an overt treatment of Catholic themes in their fiction. Mauriac recognizes three of the novels which immediately follow Lines of Life—That Which Was Lost (1930), The Knot of Vipers (1932), and The Dark Angels (1936)—as "the only novels of mine that unreservedly merit the title of 'Catholic novels.'"13 Greene's Catholic fiction includes the four major novels from 1938 to 1951—Brighton Rock, The Power and the Glory, The Heart of the Matter, and The End of the Affair.

The decision to experiment with religious themes was prompted in each case by a complex combination of circumstances. The change in Mauriac's fiction was associated with what he calls "a religious crisis" which built up "between 1925 and 1930 and reached its peak in Souffrances et Bonheur du chrétien."14 In its original form, this essay, which was published the same year as Lines of Life, was part of a series in which a number of contemporary writers had been asked to comment on texts from the classics. It was a commissioned work, the author who had been as-
signed to Mauriac was Bossuet, and the essay was at first called Supplément au traité de la concupiscence de Bos-
suet. It also appeared in October, 1928 in La Nouvelle Revue
Française under the short title Souffrances du chrétien.

It dealt in general terms with themes already enunciated in
Mauriac’s fiction: with man’s solitude, his servitude to
the passions, and with the inevitable failure of his inevi-
table pursuit of pleasure. Mauriac opposed to his diagnosis
of the ills of modern man the harsh strictures of Catholic
morality as set out by Bossuet, and closed his essay with
the bitter observation: “The least sin is a crime against God
and that is why Christianity condemns all men to become
saints.”

Abstracted from the concrete context of the novel, the
note of habitual anguish was pitched even higher than
usual, and it reflected a keenly felt personal debate. “Once
the work was finished,” writes Mauriac, “it remained un-
resolved, a solemn question planted in the middle of my
life. Around a work of circumstance, a commissioned task,
a whole destiny crystallized out.”

Most of the essays during the next two years (there were
no novels), echo the apparent incompatibility between the
claims of the flesh and the spirit, between nature and Grace,
which tormented Mauriac at this time. Writing a biogra-
phy of Racine (1928), he reviewed the whole problem in literary
terms, opposing to the writer’s obligation to paint a con-
vincing picture of the passions, the Christian’s obligation
to avoid provoking scandal and to beware of endangering
the souls of his readers. He concluded that it was not given
to every writer to follow Racine’s example and burn his
books. “Racine did not know the meaning of religious an-
siety,” he wrote, “and found his faith again when he needed
it.” And for his own part he contrasted to the demands of
his faith the exigence of the literary vocation which com-
pelled the writer to write. “We have yet to see the miracle
of a writer whom God has reduced to silence,” he com-
mented wryly.

Gide seized on the ambiguity in Mauriac’s attitude and

write him an open letter to congratulate him on having
struck “a reassuring compromise” which permitted him
to love God without losing sight of Mammon.”

This malicious challenge provoked a book-length reply from
Mauriac, Dieu et Mammon (1929), in which he reviewed his
religious education and the present state of his faith and
traced its relationship to his work as a novelist. In this
apologia he took up many points he had made in an earlier
critical study, Le Roman (1928), in which he had dealt with
the theory of the novel and the responsibility of the Catho-
lic novelist.

Finally the crisis passed when Mauriac experienced what
has been called “a conversion within the faith.” He pub-
lished an essay Bonheur du chrétien in the N.R.F. in
April, 1929, in which he spoke of having known “the joy of
a soul who has found peace in a single night.” He de-
nounced his “parti pris of equivocation,” his “determina-
tion not to make a choice” between God and Mammon.
He wrote that he now believed the law of the spirit to be
identical with the law of the flesh sanctified in the Eucha-
rist, and claimed that the whole debate of the Catholic
novelist now resolved itself for him in one decision: to
purify the source of his inspiration. He reworked a novel
begun in 1928, which had tentatively been called Pygmalion
and which was to have treated the theme of incest, and
published it in 1930 as That Which Was Lost, his first
“Catholic” novel. In 1931 he published Souffrances and
Bonheur du chrétien together in one volume, making some
important omissions which partly drew the sting of the for-
er, dropping, for example, the closing passage on the
Christian’s being condemned to sanctity and substituting
Don Lloyds: “There is only one sadness, not to be a saint.”
The sense had not changed, but the attitude was quite dif-
ferent.

Although the “conversion” may have had great personal
significance, when Mauriac turned to fiction again the
change was not recorded in his novels as much as one
might expect. They did not vary greatly in theme or in tone from those that went before and, again, the unity of Mauriac's vision was the striking thing, not the development. His general subject was still the world, the flesh and the devil, and there were, as usual, more vipers than doves among his characters. To be sure, certain Catholic themes were now purposely made explicit, but to overemphasize the importance of the crisis of conscience and its resolution in 1928-1930 is to put Mauriac's work into a false perspective. Although I will deal with the Catholic novels in due course, then, one of my main concerns in this chapter will be to deal with the continuing religious qualities in Mauriac's fiction, in the roman noirs and Catholic novels alike.

The same caution is necessary when studying Greene's Catholic novels. Suddenly, in 1938, with little warning, Brighton Rock appeared, a novel which was almost brazenly religious in theme. One is at first tempted to look for a crisis to explain the new emphasis, but on close examination one finds a number of mixed elements contributing to it, and reading carefully back one discovers in the earlier novels many indications of a movement in this direction.

We have already examined some of the factors which forecast this development: Greene's interest in the metaphysical background of the Jacobean dramatists, for instance, supported by Eliot's critical injunctions. Indeed, Eliot's statement,

Most people are only a very little alive; and to awaken them in the spiritual is a very great responsibility; it is only when they are so awakened that they are capable of real Good, but at the same time they become first capable of Evil,

which Greene had quoted in an early review, might have been the direct inspiration for the theme of Brighton Rock.

But there were other non-literary influences. One was the trip that Greene made to the interior of Liberia in the first months of 1935. Writing of this experience later, he defined the fascination of Africa as "a religious fascination: the country offers the European an opportunity of living continuously in the presence of the supernatural. The secret societies, as it were, sacramentalize the whole of life..." and his avowed purpose in exploring the interior was to get below the "cerebral" level of modern civilization to the more primitive religious roots of human experience.

By the time of a second voyage of exploration to Mexico three years later, his open engagement in Catholic matters was firmly established. He had undertaken the expedition to report on religious persecution in the southern Mexican states for Longmans Green. It was, therefore, a commissioned venture, but the experience moved him deeply, and he has admitted that he first began to "feel" his faith at about this time. What he learned in Mexico did not influence Brighton Rock, for he was correcting proof for that novel at the time, but it did give him the material and the Catholic attitude for two of his best books, The Lawless Roads, a travel book account of the voyage, and The Power and the Glory, the novel that grew out of it.

Between the two trips a gradual confirmation of purpose took place. Greene (who is a convert) explains that in a practical sense growing familiarity with Catholics and Catholicism gave him the necessary confidence to treat religious themes in his fiction. In late 1936, as if following Eliot's dictum, "Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint," he began expressly to give his literary reviews in The Tablet and The Spectator a religious orientation. Finally, there is the question of Mauriac's influence.

As stated in the introduction, I do not wish to press the case for direct influence because the evidence is not convincing. But one can say that Greene's first reading of Mauriac just preceded the first open application of Catholicism in his criticism and fiction.

Also, as we have already seen, Greene was in the habit
of reading with an eye to finding support for his current creative interests, and it may be said that in the mid-thirties Mauriac's novels were better suited to match these than the work of any contemporary English novelist.

The only modern English Catholic who seems to have intrigued Greene is Frederick Rolfe. In 1934 and 1935, when Rolfe's work enjoyed a brief posthumous vogue, he wrote three reviews on this eccentric novelist, self-styled Baron Corvo, who, incongruously in the middle of the solid Edwardian age, had been obsessed in his life and work with a kind of medieval spirituality. Discovering Rolfe, Greene wrote, made one aware of "eternal issues, of the struggle between good and evil, between vice that really demands to be called satanic and virtue of a kind that can only be called heavenly."20 Here was an example of a man who was really "alive" in Eliot's sense because his realities were less material than spiritual, and Greene wrote that his life illustrated the paradox that "the greatest saints have been men with more than a normal capacity for evil, and the most vicious men have sometimes narrowly evaded sanctity."21 But it was Rolfe's life that interested Greene more than his art, and to find a novelist who could treat these themes with a technical skill equal to the intensity of his religious vision he had to look outside England. He had to look beyond Rolfe, and even beyond James, for although he had done his best to accentuate James's sense of evil in the end he had to admit that "neither a philosophy nor a creed ever emerged from his religious sense."22 In contrast, Greene wrote that "the French novelist continues an uninterrupted tradition of Christian state of mind, thought and style,"23 and singling out in Mauriac's novels the presence of forces of good and evil that penetrated them and gave an extra dimension to character, he deplored the fact that "in general this sense of the supernatural is banished from the English novel."24 Undoubtedly, his reading of Mauriac in the early thirties helped to encourage him to change the plan of Brighton Rock (which he had begun in 1937 as a

simple thriller) and to recast it as a spiritual drama dealing with the metaphysical implications of crime.

Greene's decision to give a Catholic emphasis to his point of view cannot be attributed, however, to a single influence. In fact, his religious sensibility was active long before the appearance of his first "Catholic" novel, and it is necessary now to trace this sensibility back to its origins, comparing it when appropriate, with Mauriac's religious outlook.

One should immediately note an important difference between the two writers' experience of Catholicism. Greene is a convert; Mauriac was born a Catholic. "That is the drama of my life," Mauriac writes in Dieu et Mammon, comparing his religious education to that of two famous French converts, Psichari and Maritain, "I was born in it; I did not choose it; this religion was imposed on me from the day of my birth. Many others have been born in it and have swiftly escaped from it because the inoculation of faith did not 'take' on them. But I belong to that race of people who, born in Catholicism, realise in earliest manhood that they will never be able to escape from it."25 To be, as Mauriac puts it later, "a prisoner"26 of his faith may at first seem to imply a static quality in belief as opposed to the idea of dramatic change usually associated with conversion. But despite the encircling stability, religious questions within the faith always presented themselves to Mauriac's imagination in dramatic terms; and in the chapter in Dieu et Mammon where he traces his own spiritual autobiography he describes various stages of infatuation and rebellion, of "sensual devotion"27 and nagging scruples, of surface doubts and periods of missionary fervor.

These personal conflicts provided themes for several early novels; the state of internal tension they represent found its way into the conscience of all his major heroes; and his saturation in Catholic thought, symbolism and precept gave him a fixed standard for judging the destinies of his characters whether religious concerns entered openly into their stories or not.
Graham Greene’s introduction to Catholicism was quite different. Officially, his conversion in 1926 was occasioned by his marriage to a Catholic. He has implied that it was little short of a convenient arrangement,29 has written that he is “a Catholic with an intellectual if not an emotional belief in Catholic dogma,”29 and has constantly played down all references to his entry into the Church. His religious background prior to conversion was that of a public school Anglicanism which left no impression on him greater than one of mild scorn. It is also true that none of the novels before Brighton Rock (possible exception made for Rumour at Nightfall) clearly foreshadows the religious preoccupations of his major novels, and Greene enjoys quoting a letter he received from a Dutch priest who wrote to him about The Power and the Glory: “I suppose that even if you are not a Catholic, you are not too hostile to us.”30 But discounting such humorous reticence and tuning to the right wave-length, one can pick up some interesting rumors of religious preoccupations even as early as his juvenilia.

Although no Catholics figure in Greene’s first novel, The Man Within, Elizabeth is a Christian and Andrews is fascinated by her faith which gives her a courage, calm, and what he is pleased to call “a sanity” which he is lacking. One can see in Greene’s rather too reverent portrait of his first heroine an oblique tribute to his newly adopted faith. Andrews’ deferential attitude towards Elizabeth is briefly echoed in Oliver Chant’s admiration for Frau Weber, a minor character in The Name of Action who is praised for the “calm, tender, unassuming” love she bears her husband and the faith she puts in him and in Providence which makes her “a good wife and a good Catholic.” And in the person of Eulalia Monti in Rumour at Nightfall Greene again equates a heroine’s realistic grasp of the subtleties of love to her familiarity with the mysteries of religion.

In these early novels the Christian heroine always plays opposite a skeptical young hero which permits Greene in
This time two agnostic heroes are plunged into the element of a Catholic country. Through the mind of Francis Chase, the more materialistic of the twin heroes, Greene often compares Anglicanism with Spanish Catholicism.

[There] a gentle, sentimentally sad ringing across the fields, the respectable slow footsteps in the porch, the gossip across the tombstones, and inside the drone of undisturbing prayer. Here men and women would be kneeling on the flags, their faces lifted in adoration of the raised Host, containing what they believed to be the living flesh and blood of God . . .

Chase's certainties are contrasted to Eulelia's. What he wants from life is success, money, friends; "I am certain of what death is—the end." He suspected that her certainties were very different, made up of crosses and crucifixes, beads and prayers, tortures, flames, fear . . . She would not be satisfied with the world as it is."

Michael Crane, it will be remembered, represents "heart" to Chase's "mind," and he is more sympathetic to Eulelia's Catholicism. He contrasts Chase's educated uncertainty to the vulgar belief of a Spanish informer: "His friend was, in some sort, the modern world. He was a sceptic who was not even easy about his materialism. But this pimp had a faith, even if it was a wrong faith, and a believer of any kind is a worthy opponent." Gradually, through his exposure to Spanish faith and through his love for Eulelia, Crane becomes a believer. His conversion is staged during another lovers' tryst in a church. I will quote several passages from this scene because of the interesting foretaste they give of some of the themes that Greene develops in the later "Catholic" novels.

It was easy there in the dark, where time did not enter, and the only human voice seemed burdened already with the horror of eternal life, to believe in a living God that men might eat the bread and a soul that could be condemned to consciousness forever . . .

If there is a God, he thought, if that wafer is flesh and blood, enduring at every communion the actual pain of Calvary, the torture of the nails and the torment of the thief's mockery, a thousand years foreshortened into this moment, may one be allowed to pity God? . . . He felt the inclination to pray, to beseech God on his knees to put an end to His eternal torment, to cease to overwhelm man with such an enormous debt.

A little later Crane thinks of God "risking sacriilege . . . for the sake of humanity," and in the church he sees "a priest brooding on the death of a sinner, the Virgin disclosing to the innocent dark her pierced heart, the Son of God hanging in torture from the cross, paying in agony for His mother's grief, who paid in turn with hers, a circle of endless torment. For whose sake? For mine?" Crane wonders. And after confessing himself to Eulelia, he has a vision of the two of them united in love and faith and joined in "the endless circle of God and the mother of God." This kind of personal exposition of Catholicism, undertaken as much, one feels, for Greene's own benefit as for that of his non-Catholic readers, is the early and rather clumsy expression of a lasting fascination with religious questions.

Mauriac's early novels also contained a good deal of documentary evidence in favor of Catholicism, and in two novels, Flesh and Blood and The Enemy, he used Protestants or agnostics as foils for his Catholic heroes. In Mauriac's case this fictional testimony was prompted by the missionary zeal of the prewar years rather than by the curiosity of the convert, but the net result was the same. There was the same vein of Catholic snobbery and the same theoretical approach to certain aspects of dogma not yet very well assimilated to plot or character. There was the same failure to amplify and dramatize the religious implications of the story beyond the use of a few striking ideas and a few melodramatic but superficial effects.

To mark the similarities while at the same time respecting the differences between the two, one might compare
their first novels, each of which deals with a conversion spurred on by a woman's love. Both The Man Within and Young Man in Chains are introspective and overwritten, their subject a drama of conscience. Both heroes succumb to the temptations of the flesh and afterwards are won over to a more enduring kind of love sanctioned by religious faith. In each case this love remains chaste and is not put to the test of experience, but both young authors obviously feel bound to plump for the superior merits of a Christian romance.

But here the differences begin to demand recognition. Jean-Paul's conversion is a conversion within the faith, and he discovers after his false liberty of revolt that he is "a prisoner of his Catholic childhood." His whole drama is cast within the compass of Catholicism and Mauriac's description of Amour et Foi is documentation of an internal rift. By contrast, in Greene's novel, Elizabeth's faith is an island in the middle of an essentially irreligious society. Although there is little to choose between the heroes as far as hesitations and scruples are concerned, The Man Within is marked throughout by the heightening of theme and exaggeration of conflict typical of historical romance, while Mauriac stays within the limits of his other stricter tradition. Thus Young Man in Chains ends in a realistic fade-out with the sense that Marthe's mute and long-suffering love has finally saved and will go on saving Jean-Paul from himself. With exactly the same message (Elizabeth is Andrews' salvation), Greene closes The Man Within in a blustering melodramatic manner. Marthe's patient suffering becomes Elizabeth's self-sacrifice through suicide, and Jean-Paul's slow recognition of her love is carried violently into action in Greene's novel by Andrews' self-surrender and self-accusation as Elizabeth's murderer and the suggestion of his death by his own hand.

But these similarities in the realm of Catholic themes consciously chosen with a documentary or propaganda purpose lie on a relatively shallow level. It is more interesting and significant to trace, in these and later novels, those aspects of Catholicism which are not dictated by a sense of curiosity or obligation but which are closely accorded to very basic creative instincts. And here one must re-examine the distinction made between Greene as a convert and Mauriac as a "cradle" Catholic, and seriously question Greene's assertion that he adheres to the faith by intelligence alone.

In several autobiographical pieces, Greene hints, on the contrary, at a very early stirring of religious sensibility. The "Prologue" to his Mexican travel book contains one such revelation. The Lawless Roads begins with a montage of two border scenes, one set on the frontier between "the empty, sinless, graceless world"31 of the United States and violent, shabby, primitive Catholic Mexico; the other, taken from one of Greene's most urgent childhood memories, set on the border between home and school. The first border scene prompts these thoughts:

The world is all of a piece, of course; it is engaged everywhere in the same subterranean struggle, lying like a tiny neutral state, with whom no one ever observes his treaties, between two entities of pain and—God knows the opposite of pain, not we. . . . There is no peace anywhere where there is human life but there are, I told myself, quiet and active sectors of the line. Russia, Spain, Mexico—there's no glorification on Christmas morning in those parts. . . . But where the eagles are gathered together, it is not unnatural to find the Son of Man as well. So many years have passed in England since the war began between faith and anarchy: we live in an ugly indifference.32

This meditation is closely linked in the essay to Greene's account of his own first awareness of the conflict in the intimate symbols of his childhood. As a boy of thirteen he has escaped from a compulsory school concert to the family
croquet lawn which lies on the frontier between the two countries of home and school. "It was an hour of release," he writes,
and also an hour of prayer. One became aware of God with an intensity—music lay on the air; anything might happen before it became necessary to join the crowd across the border. There was no inevitability anywhere.... And so faith came to one—shapelessly, without dogma, a presence above a croquet lawn, something associated with violence, cruelty, evil across the way. One began to believe in heaven because one believed in hell.34

This primitive religious sense was to remain shapeless, "without dogma" for a long time. Anglicanism, as Greene knew it, failed to provide symbols vigorous enough to match the intensity of his own private vision. "The Anglican Church had almost relinquished Hell," Greene has written, "it smoked and burned on Sundays only in obscure provincial pulpits."34 And having suffered what he thought of as hellish torments every weekday as a schoolboy, he must have found the Sunday sermons in the Berkhamsted chapel extremely unrealistic.

As we know, it was literature, not religion, that first gave Greene some support for his innate religious sense. He writes that The Viper of Milan "had given me my pattern—religion might later explain it to me in other terms, but the pattern was already there—perfect evil walking the world where perfect good can never walk again.... We have seen how Marjorie Bowen's gothic pessimism far more than the kindly practical morality of home or chapel (or the blandishments of traditional melodrama) helped to explain the terrible living world of the stone stairs and the never quiet dormitory."36 And now we can make the interesting connection between those first stirrings of religious sensitivity, however vague and tentative, and his first desire to write: "It was as if I had been supplied once and for all with a subject."37

The imitative pattern and the shaping dogma that could at the same time realistically accommodate his intuitive sense of evil and effectively counterbalance it with powerful symbols for the good. "One began slowly, painfully, reluctantly to populate Heaven. The Mother of God took the place of the brass eagle; one began to have a dim conception of the appalling mysteries of love moving through a ravaged world—the Curé d'Ars admitting to his mind all the impurity of a province. Péguy challenging God in the cause of the damned. It remained," Greene writes, "something one associated with misery, violence, evil."38

In the light of these revelations Greene's assertion that he is "a Catholic with an intellectual if not an emotional belief in Catholic dogma" deserves some reinterpretation. It does not mean, as certain critics and the statement itself seem to imply, an impersonal assent to the articles of the Roman faith. It suggests rather that in Catholic dogma Greene found a logical explanation and affirmation of some of his earliest private perceptions. His conversion to Catholicism may not have coincided with any emotional experience—that took place long before—but it came as the consolidation of an attitude which was at the very basis of his vocation as a novelist. It is in this sense that one should interpret Greene's confession in Journey Without Maps:
"I had never experienced a conversion... I had not been converted to a religious faith. I had been convinced by specific arguments in the probability of a creed." As far as his work as a creative writer was concerned, the important fact was not the conversion, but the fact that his responses to religion were to begin with, and were to remain, fundamental and personal ones.

The only other reference that Greene has made in his books to his conversion is to state, again in Journey Without Maps, that it left him with an impression that he had "taken up the thread of life from very far back, from so far back as innocence," and in his Mexican travel book he speaks of the atmosphere of the border as giving the same illusion of "starting over again." In the long run, however, the idea of conversion as change remains illusion for Greene. "Conversions don't last," he writes, "or if they last at all it is only as a little sediment at the bottom of the brain." But he allows that perhaps the sediment has some value, and certainly the idea of the possibility of change remained a necessary one for him. It was one which he experienced at the beginning of each of his trips, to Africa, Mexico and elsewhere, and undoubtedly he felt the same sensation of hope and excitement at the outset of his adventure into faith. In Ronald Matthews' book, Mon and Graham Greene, speaking of his conversion Greene remembers "a slight feeling of fear. One had started out on a new road and one had covered a certain distance. And one felt the question stirring in oneself 'Where is this going to lead me?'" The border mentality is characteristic of all Greene's early heroes. Andrews is caught between the romantic heaven represented by Carlyon or his mother, and the realistic hell of life at school or on board his father's smuggling ship. Oliver Chant is a "Happy Man," and by that token is not religious by nature. But by the end of the novel, through a series of disillusionments, he has been led up to the border of unhappiness. In Rumour at Nightfall the balance of interest swings uneasily between Crane and Chase representing the two countries of heart and mind. This much at least of these early novels is closely linked to the obsessive personal experience which was at the same time essentially religious in character and very fertile ground for the novelist's imagination. This much is true, just as in Young Man in Chaos the feeling of imprisonment, if not the final release, is the true part of the novel, stemming from the deepest source of Mauriac's sensitivity.

But now one must pose an interesting and awkward question: Does Andrews' salvation through Elizabeth, or Crane's through Euelia, correspond to as fundamental a level of experience as the disquieting sense of divided loyalties, uncertainty, and fear of betrayal (as well as the excitement) which characterizes a border existence? Or is it simply, like Jean-Paul Jahanet's conversion, a well-intentioned convenience to illustrate the letter of the author's belief? One must inevitably doubt the sincerity of Greene's endings. The conversions of his heroes are as unconvincing as the misty characterizations of his heroines, and it is enough to point to the fact that he is only able to sustain Andrews and Crane in the converted state for the briefest moment before dispatching them to a violent end.

Tracing the process of their enlightenment back several steps, however, one may ask what characteristics in these heroes permit Greene to envisage a conversion for them, even if it is not convincingly realized in the novel. Here we touch solid ground again and some of those prepossessing personal themes which are at the root of his inspiration. In the chapter on childhood experiences the theme of betrayal was singled out as one of these obsessions. It is now interesting to observe further that Greene's typical hero is not only betrayed but betrayer, as Carlyon says of Andrews, "He's a sort of Judas." The same could be said of Chant, Chase and Crane: these and many later heroes are
unwillingly but inevitably failures in faithfulness. This characteristic of inevitable weakness is the one that sets Greene’s hero apart from the traditional hero of melodrama, for not only do circumstances run against him, but he betrays himself by not living up to the romantic ideal of heroic steadfastness. Consider a character like Andrews in a religious context and one cannot fail to see in him an embodiment of the Christian concept of fallen man. Moreover, Andrews’ oppressive awareness of his own shortcomings is another trait which situates him in a Christian framework. In short, what Allott calls the theme of the divided mind, in this and other early novels, is simply a literary term which embraces the psychology of the sinner.

In this light it does not much matter that Andrews’ conversion under Elizabeth’s guidance is unconvincing. It is interesting but not essential to note that Greene provides a fictional structure for him to achieve a state of grace (“confession” of his cowardice to Elizabeth, “penance accepted” in performing several dangerous acts on her instigation, and finally the realization of a kind of inner peace or “absolution”). What is important is that Greene, who once defined the only distinguishing marks of a Christian civilization as “the divided mind, the uneasy conscience, the sense of personal failure,” conceives him to be, in this sense, a Christian hero—a sinner, but, to quote Péguy whom Greene quotes in Brighton Rock and The Heart of the Matter, “the sinner is at the very heart of Christianity.”

Many of Andrews’ other obsessions besides betrayal—fear, flight, and a frustrated sense of justice—can be related to this basic sense of sinfulness. Unlike Mauriac who works within a narrower ethical frame, Greene does not usually consider sexual promiscuity a sufficient symbol of evil. But after his night with Lucy, Andrews is stricken by a sense of “a terror of life, of going on soiling himself and repenting and soiling himself again,” and elsewhere in the early work there is a suggestion of a certain queasiness before the animal appetites. But the “terror of life” has other roots than this, and it is again associated with the idea of betrayal and self-betrayal. What really disturbs Andrews is not so much having given in to his lust for Lucy as having betrayed Elizabeth. Referring to the physical passions which bedevil his own fallen heroes, Mauriac speaks in several places of “the sin we cannot commit.” One might parallel this sentiment by describing Greene’s heroes as living in a constant terror of infidelity as the temptation to which they inevitably submit.

Similarly the pattern of fear and flight in The Man Within, although successfully exteriorized in action, operates on an internal level and, as I have suggested, Andrews’ flight from Carlyon through the fog is in reality a flight from himself, as oppressing and as futile as the sinner’s attempt to evade his guilty conscience.

Finally, the idea of justice is characteristically complex in this novel. We are asked to sympathize with a Judas figure and no simple code of conventional justice will allow us to understand him. In all his novels Greene willfully complicates the issues, the allegiances, the calls on his hero’s better nature, and a more intricate and more paradoxical solution than that of the “poetic justice” of conventional melodrama is necessary to resolve his perplexities. In the end Greene appeals beyond a humanitarian sense of justice to a Christian one.

The choice of a fallen hero persecuted by a deep-seated sense of sin is also a constant one in Mauriac’s fiction, and we have traced its origin to his own Jansenistic background. Greene’s borderland is Mauriac’s prison. In place of Greene’s sense of betrayal in deed, which is related to the adventure novel, Mauriac uses the classical conflict of French fiction—betrayal of the spirit by the flesh. Greene’s hero is tried in terms of physical action, Mauriac’s in terms of passion, but beneath these traditional differences both are recognizably the same type, sharing a sense of insuffi-
ciency, a terror of life, a haunting preoccupation with death; they are complex, tormented figures who cannot be simply catalogued and judged if they are to be fully understood. This fundamentally Christian and Catholic view of man is the starting point and guide for Greene's and Mauriac's characterization. In fact, in their middle, pre-Catholic novels they scarcely leave the ground of fallen nature, indicating only by intimation the presence and counterbalancing action of Grace. The general subject of Mauriac's novels of the twenties might be described in a phrase of Pascal's that Mauriac has often used: "La misère de l'homme sans Dieu" and Kenneth Allott chooses "The Fallen World" as title for his discussion of Greene's novels of the thirties. In mid-career both novelists turned sharply away from the religious speculation of their early novels, from any attempt to solve their heroes' difficulties in last chapter conversions, and restrained themselves to describing "a world in revolt against the tribunal of conscience, a miserable world emptied of Grace." In the closing lines of The Enemy Mauriac writes: "Where is the artist who may dare to imagine the processes and shifts of the great protagonist—Grace? It is the mark of our slavery and of our wretchedness that we can, without lying, paint a faithful portrait only of the passions."

Behind this sense of limitation lay Mauriac's desire to break with the past and associate himself more closely with the prevailing literary powers of the N.R.F. One has only to compare two interviews given at ten years' interval, the first while he was writing Young Man in Chains in 1911, the second just after the publication of A Kiss for the Leopard, to measure the change in his ambitions. The first is full of hopes for a Catholic renaissance in literature and praise of contemporary writers who show the way; the second is a caustic disclaimer of any strong literary or religious influence on his work and an assertion of his own artistic independence. But if Mauriac was to sever ties with his Catholic youth, his work, nonetheless, repose on a Catholic foundation. In a score of places in his critical writings of the twenties he tried to rationalize his apparent descent of Catholic themes by stating that it was "impossible to reproduce the modern world as it is without showing God's laws violated," and by claiming that in this way his work was an indirect apology for Christianity. He sincerely felt that he could best combat the influence of Gide, Proust and Freud in a world in full crisis of dechristianization by meeting them on their own ground. He did not deny their influence, but insisted on what he felt to be a grave shortcoming in their outlook. Of Gide he wrote: "His internal disarray becomes the matter of his art . . . that is the most noble use that man without God can make of his own misery." His reserves about Proust's art centered in the assertion that "God is terribly absent from the works of Marcel Proust." And his criticism of Freud's influence is implied in this statement: "The thing that is common to all literary and philosophical extremes in vogue today . . . is that they are mystiques divorced from God." Although his own novels often rived those of his non-Christian contemporaries in cynicism and pessimism, and described the absence of God more forcefully than the presence of Grace, the awareness of this absence marked all his work with an essentially Christian stamp.

If one now reconsiders the triple bondage of Mauriac's heroes in the novels of the twenties, what one might call his "negative Catholicism" comes into focus. The sense of uncommunicability and solitude which haunts his tragic figures is answered, not by a contrived fictional release but by the operation of the communion of saints. The failure of human love in his novels is not a condemnation of passion but points to another kind of love. This other love, in turn, is the only force which can alter the fatality which governs the destinies of his characters.

To illustrate Mauriac's Christian response to the triple
bondage of his characters, one must briefly review the major novels examined in the last chapter, and one may begin with the question of the characters' imprisoning sense of solitude. In The River of Fire a minor character buried in the background of the novel, Marie Ransinangue, a young peasant girl who had first excited Daniel Trassis' sexual appetite, lingers in the limbo of his memory and expiates for his life of debauchery by her life in a Carmelite convent. Lucile de Villeron is likewise, but in a much more open fashion, charged with Gisèle's salvation; yet Mauriac has the realism not to present her as a plaster saint, but enters fully into the doubts and fears and suspicions of her own hypocrisy which plague her while she tries to rescue Gisèle. A similar theme runs through The Enemy where the hero's mother, despite her narrow Catholicism which as much as anything has estranged her son from her, assumes the one part she can in the drama of his degradation—suffers for him and offers her suffering on his behalf. In the later novels where the isolation weighs more heavily and extends to include all the characters, as for example in The Desert of Love, no one figure, major or minor, is singled out as the expiatory victim. But the continuous operation of this supernatural communion is suggested when, for example, Thérèse identifies her loneliness with the loneliness of the priest: "He too had chosen the way of tragedy. In the solitude within he had added that desert which the sotané creates around those who wear it." And the whole idea of the interaction of human destinies through suffering and sacrifice is thrown into a Catholic perspective in this thought of Pierre Gornac's in Lines of Life: "He saw, with the eyes of the spirit, God fastened there with three nails, motionless upon the cross, incapable of doing anything for man save shed His blood. Thus must His true disciples do: intervening only by way of sacrifice and blood offering. One can change nothing in human beings...All one can do is bleed and obliterate oneself for them."

CATHOLIC THEMES

Such passages are rare enough in these dark novels, but they do situate suffering and isolation in a Catholic context. And although he was unwilling to go further than to suggest the Catholic answer without applying it, there can be no doubt that in Mauriac's mind only this belief makes the desolation tolerable.

Probing deeper in this direction to include the second aspect of the characters' bondage, the failure of human love, one must alter the previous statement that there is no expiatory victim in these novels; there is none, one should have said, whose role is purely expiatory, for Mauriac's heroes and heroines, no matter how warped or thwarted their passions, are at the same time the hunters and the hunted, tormentors and tormented. "One of two things she must be," a stranger thinks on seeing Thérèse for the first time, "either criminal or victim." But he hesitates to choose, and it is obviously Mauriac's intent that we, too, should reserve judgment. Through his long line of heroines condemned to passion but never granted its fulfillment, Mauriac suggests that there is a close analogy between insatiable sexual appetite and spiritual love. "Only some mystical experience could offer a haven for that drifting and dismasted heart," the narrator in Questions of Precedence says of his sister Florence. Augustin, who had been Florence's victim in love but who had accepted his misery in a spirit of Christian sacrifice, draws a parallel between his life and hers. Speaking of "the doctrine which sets an infinite value on suffering," he says: "Perhaps lives which, by the standards of this world, have been a failure, will, by those of the absolute, show as the only true successes." In the novel, although Florence is not saved, her potentiality for salvation, and even more, is thus indicated. Similarly, in The River of Fire, although Gisèle succumbs to her passion, the theme of the novel might be stated in these words of Lucile de Villeron: "Was not that passion for self-destruction which can be found in passion at its most intense,
that utter surrender to sin, sometimes the sign of a vocation?" Maria Cross is another of these heroines whose life by worldly standards is a failure, but who is caught up in a mystique of passion from which some striking analogies are drawn to a religious vocation. At one point the doctor observes that she "speaks of sexual pleasure precisely as Pascal has spoken of the faith." She dreams of "someone with whom we might make contact, someone we might possess—but not in the flesh—by whom we might be possessed," and her passion for Raymond partakes of this desire to make a pure contact with another being. Just as Florence is drawn irresistibly to the young Augustin, Maria is fascinated by what she takes to be the secret of Raymond's innocence and in his face she sees "the outward and visible sign of a soul I longed to possess." She is disillusioned but, as the doctor says, there are in Maria Cross "the makings of a saint." In the same fashion Thérèse, by her passionate nature, her curiosity about the souls of others, her suffering, her martyrdom of solitude, experiencing "a sense of complete detachment which seemed to have cut her off from the rest of the world, and even from herself," bears the marks of a dark, unrealized sanctity. Jean Azévédo, detecting in her "a hunger and thirst after sincerity," tells her: "Accepting ourselves for what we are forces each of us to come to grips with his real nature, to see it clearly and engage it in mortal combat." Thérèse lacks the heroic virtue to do this, but she does have the lucidity which Mauriac says is a prerequisite of sanctity. She briefly envisages release in the form of faith; once in a dream she sees herself performing miracles; but finally she remains one of those whose vocation it is to experience with passionate intensity the longing for an absolute fulfillment without ever finding the means of satisfying it. And, as in the case of all Mauriac's outcast heroines, her drama is heightened by the fact that she is surrounded on all sides by the hostility and indifference of those who are not passionate by nature, that "blind, implacable race of simple souls" who are dead in spirit.

The third imprisoning element, which encompasses the other two, is the characters' sense of being controlled by an inescapable destiny. "We can paint, without lying, only the passions." This is what Mauriac called "the servitude" of the novelist at a time when, from the evidence of Souffrances du chrétien, he felt with particular vividness the tyranny of the flesh and the misery of man's fallen state. His acute sense of his own limitations led him to portray a corrupt world, one in which solitude is the overwhelming reality and love is turned from its true source. This was man's fatality. But just as Grace moves behind the isolation in the mystical operation of the communion of saints, and love, though thwarted and deformed, echoes a greater love (the original title of Genetrix was Il n'est qu'un seul amour), so the sense of predestination which shackles his characters to their unhappy fates, while it is presented with disconcerting intensity, calls forth an answer from its opposite. "There is only one force in the world which offsets the rules of the game, which breaks fatality to create a new fatality," Mauriac wrote in an essay contemporary with these novels. "It is only Grace that can sometimes surmount nature." Among other reasons, because he had not then experienced the renovating power of Grace in his own life, it did not make a strong appearance in the novels of the twenties. But it was there all the same, moving like a hidden presence behind the tragic lives of his characters. Greene's main concern, like Mauriac's, in the novels which followed his juvenilia was to perfect his technique and to suppress those personal obsessions, religious in character, which had obtruded in the early novels. This search for a new objectivity was not, in his case, complicated by religious scruples of any kind. He had never offi-
cially declared his religious affiliations as Mauriac had done, nor was he writing for a Catholic public. He had rather overstated his ideas about Catholicism in *Rumour at Nightfall* (as he had overstated nearly everything else), and it was a natural move in the general sense of his new efforts at self-discipline that he should strictly curtail references to religion in the fiction that followed.

A few characters in the novels of the early thirties cling to a remnant of belief. Czinner in *Stamboul Train* feels a vague nostalgia for the Catholic faith of his childhood. Minty in *England Made Me* is an Anglo-Catholic, but all his religion gives him is a little twisted aesthetic pleasure, and perhaps a sense of his own futility. Jules Briton, the Soho waiter in *It's a Battlefield* takes some reassurance in the notion of sin. But these are incidental points and have little bearing on the general development of these three novels which describe a world where religion plays an insignificant part.

If the world that they described was irreligious, however, Greene was not. He was keenly aware of his predicament as a Christian writer in an apathetic society, and although at this time he did not express his concern directly in stories with Catholic heroes and themes, his work, like Mauriac's in the twenties, was tacitly critical of "la misère de l'homme sans Dieu." The novels from 1932 to 1936 were Catholic by omission, and it would not be difficult to find in them parallels to Mauriac's themes of solitude, frustrated love, and an overriding sense of fatality, as well as variants on Greene's own obsessive and inherently religious themes. Instead of reviewing them all in this light, however, I would like to concentrate on one in particular which I have not yet examined, *A Gun for Sale* (1936). As the last novel in this series, in many respects it foreshadows *Brighton Rock*, his first openly Catholic novel. But it is also typical of the preceding novels where an unstated religious view inflates and colors the narrative, as brief references back to these will show.

With Andrews, and with Conrad Drover in *It's a Battlefield*, Greene had already experimented with a criminal hero. With *Raven* in *A Gun for Sale* he investigated the basic type, the professional gangster, and for the first time used the criminal underworld as a metaphor for the fallen world. It is a world characterized by violence, treachery and brutality, a world on the verge of war where petty crime and crooked international politics overlap. As part of his job—"Murder didn't mean much to Raven"—the gangster hero has killed the War Minister of a small foreign state without knowing that, in the interests of the munition makers, this assassination is calculated to touch off an international conflict.

Opposed to this anarchy and evil is the system of organized justice whose representative is a police officer, Detective-Sergeant Mather. Like the Assistant Commissioner in *It's a Battlefield*, Mather is motivated by a dogged sense of duty and does not speculate on the nature of the criminal world to which he is opposed. He is simply "part of an organization." "He liked to feel that he was one of thousands more or less equal working for a concrete end... to do away with crime which meant uncertainty. He liked to feel certain..."

Already realism is on Raven's side for he does not devote himself with hopes of certainty but is an inmate of Greene's hell, and we are led to take his point of view throughout most of the novel. Almost immediately he is associated even more intimately with Greene's private vision and forced into a borderland between good and evil, for he is betrayed by the lawless when he is paid off for his killing in counterfeit notes. Stung by an unusual sense of injustice, he moves to settle scores with his betrayers and, since he is wanted by the police as carrier of the coun-
terfeit notes, he finds himself in the complex double role of hunter and hunted.

Most of Greene's obsessive themes are present in the story as set: pursuit, betrayal, life on the border, a frustrated sense of justice. They are entirely objectified in the rapid action of the novel and might well be passed over as having no connection with religious questions, if Greene did not follow up his story on a deeper level. A Gun for Sale would lose all its significance except as entertainment if it were simply the account of Raven's revenge. As much as anything else, however, it is a study of conscience. A study of awakening conscience, one should say, for what interests Greene even beyond the excitement of the double chase is the painful thawing out of Raven's icy heart.

At first Raven is just an instrument for murder, a weapon "formed by hatred." But he is driven by betrayal, by the unaccustomed "sense of injustice" to act independently. In the course of his hunt he becomes involved with Anne Crowder, a chorus girl very much like Coral Musker in Stamboul Train. He uses her as a cover and, although she is frightened, she is plucky and open with him and does not betray him to the police despite the fact that she is Detective-Sergeant Mather's girl. Trust, too, is an unaccustomed emotion for Raven, but he grows to trust Anne. Alone with her in a deserted coal shed, gratefully feeling "her sympathy move silently towards him in the dark," he confides in her, tries to tell her in his inarticulate way something of his past, and feels "a low passionate urge towards confession." When Anne discovers that he is the murderer of the old War Minister, however, revulsion replaces her sympathy. In the end she, too, betrays Raven and he is left bitterly to reflect: "There was no one outside your own brain you could trust: not a doctor, not a priest, not a woman." But having been able to call Anne his friend has nonetheless changed him, and he has felt "the ice melt at his heart

with a sense of pain and strangeness as if he were passing the customs of a land he had never entered before and would never be able to leave."

Raven's revenge is successful, and before he is shot himself he is able to track down and kill the men who had betrayed him and who had planned the political assassination. This satisfies an elementary sense of justice, the poetic justice of conventional melodrama. But Greene transforms his melodramatic material and transcends poetic justice by letting religious overtones invade and color the conclusion. Because our sympathy has been stirred for Raven, his final betrayal and death leave a sense of unfulfillment which is reflected in Anne's mind at the end of the novel. Although she has helped to prevent a war, she is haunted by Raven's ghost and by a sense of failure in her responsibility towards him, by the feeling that she has betrayed a friend. And she briefly feels a need to atone by suffering. This is a lightweight novel, and something that can be construed as a happy ending is required to round it off. So Anne's sentiment of failure fades beside the glow of happiness that she feels in the prospect of marriage to Mather, the man she loves. But for an entertainment, the novel carries a great deal of meaning between the lines. Greene intimates that the "safety" which Anne feels in Mather's love is really illusory and speaks ironically of "feeling safe, like feeling in love without the passion, the uncertainty, the pain." (One remembers his description of a Christian civilization as characterized by "the divided mind, the uneasy conscience, the sense of personal failure.") Although war may have been temporarily averted, its shadow hangs over the end of the novel. Although criminals may have been brought to justice, we have been led to see a continuation of the underworld in the shoddy suburbia of Nottingham and London, a wasteland of tired, corrupt little lives. And finally, throughout the novel the betrayal of Raven is coun-
terpointed by references to another betrayal: It is Christmas
time and Raven sees a crib scene in a religious shop by the
Cathedral:
He stood there with his face against the glass staring at the
swaddled child with a horrified tenderness, “the little bastard,”
because he was educated and knew what the child was in for,
the damned Jews and the double-crossing Judas and only one man
to draw a knife on his side when the soldiers came for him in the
garden.

Greene offers no solution, he does not even suggest, as
Mauriac does, the means by which Grace may enter into
this fallen world. Yet “the passion, the uncertainty, the
pain,” and the sense of failure and betrayal experienced in
varying degrees by the major figures in this novel, as well
as in Stamboul Train, It’s a Battlefield, and England Made
Me, are not only a vestigial sign of Christian conscience but,
in opposition to the apathy and hostility of the irreligious
world, a positive footing for a religious attitude.

This attitude was declared openly and forcefully in the
next novel, Greene has spoken of A Gun for Sale as a dry
run for Brighton Rock (1938) and of Raven as a sketch for
Pinkie.56 The principal difference between this first Cath-
olic novel and the preceding novels is that an implicitly re-
ligious vision now becomes explicit, and themes formerly
scored in a minor key are now set in a major one. The gang-
ster hero is given a Catholic conscience. The underworld
setting is now unmistakably “ravaged and disputed ter-
ritory between two eternities.” Greene now deals with mur-
der in terms of mortal sin and states that the theme of the
novel is “the incommensurable consequences of any single
act.”57 Pinkie’s crimes in the novel are not measured by the
standards of moral right and wrong but are considered in
terms of the absolutes of good and evil. “He had started
something . . . which had no end. Death wasn’t an end; the
censer swung and the priest raised the Host . . . He had
no doubt whatever that this was mortal sin and he was

filled with a kind of gloomy hilarity and pride. He saw him-
self now as a full grown man for whom the angels wept.”

But the novel does not just deal with damnation. “One
wanted to make a character,” Greene says of Pinkie, “who
everyone would have said was destined to be damned, and
yet leave the reader wondering if he couldn’t be saved after
all.”58 However diabolical Pinkie’s pride, he remains a sinn-
er within reach of salvation. In their Catholic novels
Greene and Mauriac continue to prefer the prodigal, the
social outcast, the abnormal character, to force home the
principle that Christ came to save “that which was lost,”
or, to use the words which Greene gives the old priest at
the end of Brighton Rock, to illustrate “the . . . appalling . . .
strangeness of the mercy of God.”

To make this central character more sympathetic, he is
usually surrounded by narrow-mindedness, ignorance and
parasitism. Mauriac writes that in his Catholic novels one
of his aims was to convince a certain race of religious bigots
“that by their mediocrity, avarice, injustice, and above all
by their intellectual dishonesty, they create a vacuum
around the Son of Man ‘who came to seek out and save that
which was lost.’ . . . This monopolization of Christ by those
who are not of His spirit is the essential theme of The Knot
of Vipers.”59 It is typical that Mauriac attacks hypocrisy
and lack of charity in his fellow Catholics, while Greene
tends to oppose to Catholic heroes engaged in a spiritual
struggle the materialistic bias and lack of understanding of
an atheistic world. But Mauriac, too, is sharply critical of
modern substitutes for religion. Irène de Blénauge in That
Which Was Lost (1930), for example, is driven towards sui-
cide not only by the callousness of her husband and the arid
piety of her Catholic mother-in-law, but also by her reading
of Nietzsche, the writer whom Mauriac holds chiefly re-
sponsible for the modern decay of faith. And in this novel,
as in all Mauriac’s work, the frenetic pursuit of pleasure is
condemned as the sign of a rootless and irreligious society.
For his part, as he grew more familiar with Catholic characters and themes, Greene turned to Mauriac's perspective. After Brighton Rock with its rather overstated contrast between pagan Ida Arnold and Catholic Rose and Pinkie, he began to introduce internal criticism. The Power and the Glory (1940) contains both: opposition between the ascetic police lieutenant and the priest, and criticism of the self-righteousness of the pious Catholic woman in the prison cell. In Louise Scobie in The Heart of the Matter (1940) Greene again satirizes narrow piety; his play The Living Room (1953) contains a bitter attack against those who are Catholic in the letter but not in the spirit of their belief, and the religious bigot is epitomized in the person of Rycker in A Burnt-Out Case (1961).

Taking the defense of the criminal against the police, of the outlaw against society, favoring the prodigal to the eldest son, the Publican to the Pharisee, Greene and Mauriac give all their novels a Christian orientation. But not satisfied with an appeal beyond conventional justice to the abstract principle of divine mercy, in their Catholic novels they went further to embody Grace in different forms. Usually it appears as some kind of innocence. Louis, the old miser in The Knot of Vipers (1932) is made sensitive to Grace by the purity of childhood in his daughter, Marie, and of youth in his nephew, Luc. “Your parade of high principles, your hints, your expression of distaste, your pursed lips,” he writes to his pious wife, “these things never made me so truly aware of evil as did that boy. I felt myself in comparison with him, deformed. In him I seemed to see Marie again: or, rather, what I felt was that the same fresh spring, which had bubbled up in her and then gone underground again, was once more gushing at my feet.” Scobie cherishes the memory of his dead daughter in the same way, and the priest in The Power and the Glory is also brought into touch with innocence condemned to death. “Why, after all, should we expect God to punish the innocent with more life?” is his bitter thought when he sees the dead Indian child. But the force of his love for his own daughter makes him realize at one and the same time the quality of love demanded of him as a priest and his own inadequacy. “One must love every soul as if it were one’s own child. The passion to protect must extend itself over a world. But he felt it tethered and aching like a bubbled animal to the tree trunk.”

In these novels Grace is also apparent in the priesthood. The Abbé Ardoin is another source of purity in Louis’s experience in The Knot of Vipers, and Mauriac’s two other Catholic novels, That Which Was Lost and The Dark Angels (1936), deal with the vocation of young Alain Forcas. The Mexican priest in The Power and the Glory, through his humility and his faith, is a recipient of Grace but, characteristically, he is at the same time not a heroic figure but weak and faltering in his ministry. The novel illustrates, as Mauriac says in his preface to the French edition of the book, “that mystical love which seizes a man in the depths of his ridiculous misery and absurd shame to make him into a saint and a martyr.”

When Alain Forcas first speaks to his sister Tota about his vocation, she misinterprets his words and thinks he is telling her that he is in love. The relationship between these two loves had already intrigued both authors, and I have referred to it in connection with Mauriac’s heroines in the novels of the twenties. The priest’s affection for his daughter in The Power and the Glory, the mixture of love and pity which governs Scobie’s life in The Heart of the Matter, Rose’s love for Pinkie in Brighton Rock, in each case leads the character to make a Péguay-like sacrifice of his own salvation for the sake of those he loves. Scobie speaks for them and their author when he says, “against all the teaching of the Church, one has the conviction that love—any kind of love—deserves a bit of mercy.” As much as Mauriac’s tortured heroines these characters belong to the
race of the passionate—passionate and passion's victims at the same time—and although they may misdirect their love, they are at least alive in the spiritual sense and know love's power. The most daring examination of this theme comes in The End of the Affair where the total abandonment and gift of herself in pleasure is the quality which leads Sarah Miles into sanctity. "Aren't lovers nearly always innocent?" Greene asks in this novel.

The insistence on the ties between sacred and profane love is another theme common to both authors in their Catholic novels because it permits them to emphasize the meeting of nature and Grace in the human medium. Of Gabriel Gradelère, the corrupt hero of The Dark Angels, Mauriac writes that despite his multiple crimes "he still belongs to the realm of the spirit. He is no stranger to the priest Alain Forcas but a citizen of the same invisible city. ... He communicates with the supernatural from below." And the reverse is as true, that Alain, despite his purity, knows better than any the depths of Gradère's degradation. "The Dark Angels," writes Mauriac, "illuminates the idea that in the worst criminal there still subsists some of the element of the saint he could have become, while, on the contrary, the life of the purest being holds terrible potentialities." This novel and Brighton Rock are two variations on one theme that might be stated in the words that Greene gives the priest at the end of his novel: "Corruptio optimi est pessima," or in these from The Dark Angels: "Those who seem dedicated to evil may, perhaps, be chosen above their fellows: the very depth of their fall gives a measure of the vocation they have betrayed. None would be blessed had they not been given power to damn themselves. Perhaps, only those are damned who might have become saints." The complex identification of sin and sanctity is further illustrated when Mauriac writes of this novel, which, finally, is the story of Gradère's salvation through Alain's purity: "This is the most carnal of my novels, the most deeply rooted in human filth." It is in the same spirit that the Mexican priest tells his miserable people, "Heaven is here; this is part of heaven just as pain is part of pleasure. ... The police watching you, the soldiers gathering taxes, the beating you always get from the jefe because you are too poor to pay, smallpox and fever, hunger ... that is all part of heaven—the preparation." And in The River of Fire Léaïle de Villeron states: "Nobody is absolutely pure: apart from sinners there are only the purified."

Good and evil not only resemble each other in spiritual potential in the Catholic novels but also constantly interact. Mauriac calls the novels dealing with Alain Forcas "novels of the reversibility of merits as well as novels of vocation. Alain is one of the chosen, called from the midst of this fallen world to suffer and atone for all my miserable heroes." Pinkie and Rose, the Mexican priest and his betrayer, Sarah and Bendrix are linked in the same way. "What was most evil in him needed her: it couldn't get along without goodness," Greene writes of Pinkie. Alain experiences "almost a physical sense of the co-inherence of souls, of that mysterious union in which we are all of us involved alike by sin and Grace." And writing of The Power and the Glory, Mauriac describes its theme as "the use made of sin by Grace." What is particular to both Mauriac's and Greene's portrayal of the action of Grace is that they choose to describe it working, not in hygienic splendor, but through what is most corrupt in humanity. This dictates their treatment of themes showing the interaction of good and evil; it also decides the point of view adopted in their novels. Greene is certainly indebted to Mauriac for the form of The End of the Affair. The first person narrative technique and the complex shifting back and forth in time is that of The Knot of Vipers. More important, in each of these two novels the narrator considers himself to be an enemy of religion, cut off from Grace by the knowledge of his own moral ugliness. The hatred and avarice of Louis, the narrator in The Knot of Vipers, is matched by the hatred and jealousy of
Bendrix in *The End of the Affair*. But in the end this self-knowledge leads Louis towards God. He passes through his avarice, like Gradare through his degradation, and reaches the supernatural from below. He so frees himself that his grand-daughter speaks of him as “the only truly religious person I have ever met.” In the same way Bendrix’s “record of hate” is really a love story, and not only of his passion for Sarah but of his involvement in her love for God. At the end Bendrix is not immune from that other love himself, and his bitterness is a gauge of his commitment. At the end he feels “less hate than fear. For if this God exists, I thought, and if even you—with your lusts and your adulteries and the timid lies you used to tell—can change like this, we could all be saints by leaping as you leapt, by shutting the eyes and leaping once and for all if you are a saint, it’s not so difficult to be a saint.” In these novels Greene and Mauriac choose to write of their faith from a hostile point of view, not so much in a concern to persuade non-believers, as to show that the truth of their religion has a universal reach and conforms to human realities of the harshest kind.

These are the predominant themes of the Catholic novels. They develop naturally and inevitably out of the imaginative vision which shaped the novels that went before. Moreover, in each case the Catholic novels belong to a cycle which, for all its importance, comes to an apparent end. After these several experiments in Catholic fiction, religious themes go underground again and both novelists revert to their earlier style and subject. So if one attributes this overt treatment of Catholicism to some kind of “conversion,” one must also account for the following “relapse.” It is much more to the point to stress the consistency of the artistic vision, and this becomes even more striking when one considers these Catholic themes, not just as subjects for the two novelists, but as principles that profoundly influence their whole creative attitude.
36. Ibid., p. 16.
37. Ibid.
38. The Lawless Roads, p. 5.
39. Ibid., pp. 5-6.
40. Journey Without Maps, p. 263.
41. Ibid., p. 116.
42. The Lawless Roads, p. 15.
43. Journey Without Maps, p. 263.
44. Matthews, op. cit., p. 113.
46. "La Civilisation chrétienne est-elle en péril?" Essais Catholiques, p. 21.
47. The phrase is originally Gide’s. Mauriac quoted it in Supplément au “Traité de la Concupiscence” de Bossuet (p. 85), but omitted it from Souffrance et bonheur du chrétien.
49. Le Romancier et ses personnages,” O.C., VIII, 299.
50. Allott, op. cit., Chaps. III and IV. 
60. Ibid., p. 214.
61. Ibid., p. 197.
63. “Mes grands hommes,” O.C., VIII, 430. This article appeared originally as a preface to La Puissance et la gloire (Paris, 1940).
64. “Préface,” O.C., III, ii.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.