Catholic Matters in the Correspondence of Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene

The Graham Greene Papers in the Georgetown University Library include one hundred and thirty-seven letters and cards that Greene received from Evelyn Waugh over a period of thirty years, together with thirteen replies from Greene in carbon copy. Fifteen items are from the years 1936 and 1937, most of them about the business of Night and Day, a weekly magazine of which Greene was "part-editor"\(^1\) and for which Waugh wrote book reviews. No letters of the war years survive. When the two resumed their correspondence after the war—the first letter from this period is dated "Ash Wednesday 1946" and the last "Midwinter 1966"—they wrote as personal friends. Thirty-eight of Waugh’s letters to Greene in the Georgetown collection are printed in Mark Amory’s edition of The Letters of Evelyn Waugh.\(^2\) Although very different in temperament and politics, Waugh and Greene were drawn together in mutual admiration and affection. One reason for this is that both were Roman Catholics as well as writers. Religion was a central theme in many of their works, so much so that they came to be identified as Catholic novelists. I would like to show how this double profession—of writer and of Catholic—is reflected in their post-war correspondence.

In a letter dated May 3 (1948) and written at Piers Court, his house in Gloucestershire at the time, Waugh rejoices with Greene in the success

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1 This is how Greene describes his function in the autobiographical volume Ways of Escape (Simon and Schuster, 1980), p. 43.


of *The Heart of the Matter,* which was a Book Society choice in the United States. At this point he had not yet read the novel. After imparting some advice on how to manage his American earnings to best advantage, Waugh asks, ‘Will your book be taken up by Catholics as specifically popish? If so, you will fall in with another great wave of annoyances, including a reprimand from the Bishop of London, Ontario, and an honorary doctorate at Loyola College, Baltimore.’* Shortly thereafter, Waugh reviewed Greene’s novel very favorably in the English Catholic periodical, *The Tablet,* but included a mild theological reproof. For Waugh the central issue of *The Heart of the Matter* was whether its protagonist, Henry Scobie, was damned eternally for taking his own life. ‘I believe that Mr. Greene thinks him a saint,’ writes Waugh, and then lists five reasons why this is impossible: Scobie violates his trust as a police officer; he is unfaithful to his wife; he occasions his servant’s possible betrayal and death; he receives Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin; and he deliberately takes his own life. It may be that Scobie offers his sacreligious Communion and his suicide out of love of God and neighbor, but such an offering cannot be acceptable to God, who is never pleased by sin. Waugh infers that Greene considers Scobie a saint on the basis of a quotation from Charles Péguy which is placed at the beginning of the novel: ‘Le pécheur est au coeur même de chrétienté. Nul n’est aussi compétent que le pécheur en matière de chrétienté. Nul, si ce n’est le saint.’* Greene thanked Waugh for his praise but took issue with this interpretation of his protagonist: ‘A small point—I did not regard Scobie as a saint, and his offering his damnation was intended to show how muddled a man full of goodwill could become once ‘off the rails.’* Waugh wrote in reply,

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4 The Graham Greene Papers in the Georgetown University Library; also found in Mark Amory’s edition of *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh,* pp. 278-79. The final sheet of this letter, which is said to be lost in *Letters,* p. 279, is present in the Georgetown collection and reads as follows: ‘[I should advise you against your going over to enjoy your] success in person. Your publishers are sure to try and make you. From all I hear it is an excruciating experience. You will automatically be offered $100,000 cinema rights. There are no two ways about it, despite all incidental horrors, it is a thing to be pleased about. Yours Evelyn.’ Waugh had received an honorary doctorate from Loyola College, Baltimore, on December 3, 1947.


7 Greene’s letter of reply is excerpted by Amory in *Letters,* p. 280, but without a date.
Dear Graham,

I am delighted that you did not take the review amiss. My admiration for the book was great—as I hope I made plain.

It was your putting that quotation from Péguy at the beginning which led me astray. I think it will lead others astray. Indeed I saw a review by Raymond Mortimer in which he stated without the hesitation I expressed, that you thought Scobie a saint.

I think you will have a great deal of troublesome controversy in USA. The bishops there are waiting to jump on decadent European Catholicism—or so it seemed to me—and I just escaped delation by sending everyone to heaven.

Do please come whenever you have a spare night or nights.

Yours ever,
Evelyn

Waugh published a letter in The Tablet on July 17, 1948, which corrected his earlier interpretation. 9 When his review of The Heart of the Matter was published in French, he altered the text to read, “Some critics have taken Scobie to be a saint.” 10 Waugh subsequently lectured on Greene’s novels, and in a note, postmarked January 12, 1949, he says, “I found myself expounding my (revised) views of ‘Heart of Matter’ in many incongruous circles.” 11

Whatever his initial anxieties about its theological correctness, Waugh held Greene’s novel in high esteem. He sent Greene a card postmarked 23 September 1948: “I admire H. of M. more each time I read it and I seldom stop reading it.” 12 It may have been Waugh’s rereadings that uncovered some slight liturgical inaccuracies in the text. On page 256 of the first edition of The Heart of the Matter Scobie remembers that tomorrow “was November the First—All Saints’ Day, and this [i.e., today] All Souls’ Night.” A moment later on page 257 the narrator says, “The ghosts of distrust came out on All Souls’ Night and gathered around his glass.” A card postmarked October 6, 1948, suggests that Greene “change ‘All Souls’ Night’ to ‘All Hallowe’en’ on pp. 256-7.” 13 A card from Waugh postmarked October 4 had discussed the terminology and Catholic practices of All Saints’ and All Souls’ Day:

Hallowe’en is quite certainly the last day of October.
The Indulgence Toties Quoties for the Dead begins at mid-day on All Saints’ Day Nov 1st & extends to midnight All Souls’ Day Nov 2nd. Pre-

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8 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 280, where it is dated (July ? 1948).
9 Tablet, p. 41.
10 Letters, p. 280.
11 Graham Greene Papers.
12 Graham Greene Papers.
13 Graham Greene Papers.
sumably the souls in purgatory try to attract attention to themselves on Oct 31st so that they shall be prayed for next day at noon.
So everything is correctly set for Scobie’s whiskey and evipan.

E.14

Without Greene’s part of the exchange, the discussion is difficult to reconstruct. The point of Waugh’s correction is that the eve of November 1, the Feast of All Saints, is not “All Souls’ Night” but “All Hallowe’en.” November 2 is traditionally called “All Souls’ Day.” Greene followed Waugh’s suggestions up to a point. In the first American edition of The Heart of the Matter the first passage reads, “It was November the first—All Saints’ Day and this All-hallows Eve,”15 but the second passage, “The ghosts of distrust came out on All Souls’ Night,”16 is left unchanged. Interestingly enough, the later English edition of 197117 and the American edition of 197418 return to the original readings of the first English edition.

Two years after their exchanges about The Heart of the Matter, Waugh found occasion to tease Greene, not for heterodoxy this time, but for the alleged licentiousness of his fiction. In a letter dated 27 March (1950) thanking him for a signed copy of The Ministry of Fear & Journey Without Maps, Waugh writes, “You see the Pope has condemned you almost by name? ‘Violent & immoral books cloaked in the glitter of aesthetics.’ Hard words.”19 Waugh had doubtless read in that morning’s Times that Pope Pius XII had delivered a sermon the day before in St. Peter’s in Rome denouncing “a series of shameful publications which encourage vice and crime, veiling the shame and ugliness of evil under the tinsel of aesthetics, art, and false courage.”20 Unfortunately, Greene’s reply to Waugh has not survived.

Catholicism and the writer’s art were once again the subject of their correspondence when Greene’s play, The Living Room, opened in Lon-

14 Graham Greene Papers.
16 The Heart of the Matter, pp. 264-65.
17 (London: Heinemann), p. 278.
19 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 322.
20 In The Times, March 27, 1950, p. 3. The original may be found in Discorsi e Radio Messaggi di Sua Santità Pio XII (Roma: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1951), xii, 11-18. The passage in question reads: “Una serie di spudorate e criminali pubblicazioni apprestano ai visi e ai delitti i mezzi piu obbrobriosi di seduzione e di traviaimento. Velando l’ignominia e la bruttezza del male sotto l’orpetto della estetica ...” (14).
don on April 16, 1953, and Waugh and his wife were the playwright’s guests at the first performance. Waugh records the event in his diary:

London, Thursday 16 April 1953. To London with Laura for the first night of Graham’s play, The Living Room. . . . Went to play in high spirits which the performance failed to dispel. More champagne between acts. With the result that I was rather inattentive to the final scene which presumably contained the point of the whole sad story. On reflection I felt the tone was false. The piety of the old Catholic ladies wasn’t piety. The tragic love of the heroine wasn’t tragic; her suicide clumsy. But as I didn’t listen to the last ten minutes it is not fair to judge.21

A letter of thanks and congratulations followed in five days, together with a confession that “your hospitality before & during the performance dulled my old nut a bit and I must return in very cold blood to enjoy much that I missed. All I was able to realize was that you had written a first class play & had been well advised in your choice of performers (except perhaps the priest—but no one can act priests).”22 Having given the play a sober reading, Waugh repeats his praise but adds “one criticism”: “The old ladies did not seem to me Catholic. Of course the Church abounds in dotty & disagreeable spinsters, but I thought that pair much more like Christian Scientists or members of some odd sect. The atmosphere was more that of Strindberg or Ibsen. Is it possible that you conceived of them as Protestant & then thought it would be rather unsporting to hold up Protestants to odium & contempt? I don’t see how one could be a Catholic, however dotty, and nurse that fear of death.”23 Waugh’s quarrel here is not with doctrine but with verisimilitude. He seems to require of Greene’s characters a high degree of consistency between religious belief and emotional experience.

Greene’s orthodoxy was at issue the following year when The Power and the Glory was condemned by Giuseppe Cardinal Pizzardo of the Holy Office on the grounds that it was “‘paradoxical’ and ‘dealt with extraordinary circumstances.’”24 In A Sort of Life Greene writes that he was summoned by Cardinal Griffin to Westminster Cathedral and told that “my novel The Power and the Glory, which had been published ten years before, had been condemned by the Holy Office, and Cardinal Pizzardo required changes which I naturally—though I hope politely—

22 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 400.
23 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 404.
24 Ways of Escape, p. 90.
refused to make."25 In Ways of Escape Greene says that he based his refusal "on the casuistical grounds" that his copyright was in the hands of his publishers.26 At the close of their uneasy interview "the Cardinal gave me, as a parting shot, a copy of a pastoral letter which had been read in the churches of his diocese, condemning my work by implication. (Unfortunately I thought too late of asking him to autograph it.)"27 The document he refers to, a pastoral letter for Advent 1953, deplores the fact that novels by Catholic writers "which purport to be the vehicle for Catholic doctrine frequently contain passages which by their unrestrained portrayal of immoral conduct prove a source of temptations to many of their readers."28

Although professedly "cantankerous" about theology,29 Waugh thought this treatment of his friend unfair and was quick to offer his support. In a letter of May 2, 1954, he writes,

Dear Graham,

Since you showed me the Grand Inquisitors letter my indignation has waxed. It was as fatuous as unjust—a vile misreading of a noble book.

Do you want any demonstration by the admirers of The Power & the Glory? I shall be delighted to take any part in it. I dont think that in your position I should (shall?) want anything of the kind. I know you have the best ecclesiastical advice. It seems to me, as a layman, that it is the business of the Inquisitors to make every move. You have not asked for an impri-matur. It is their business to propose detailed alterations & to make themselves ridiculous in doing so. They have taken 14 years to write their first letter. You should take 14 years to answer it.

But if you do feel that any public protest is needed, please count on me.

Yours ever,
Evelyn30

Waugh mentions the Pizzardo affair five other times in their correspondence that year. On June 2 he invites Greene to join him at a conference in Florence, adding, "It might be a good stroke against the Holy Office

26 Ways of Escape, p. 90.
27 A Sort of Life, p. 77.
30 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, pp. 422-23.
boys.” In a card of June 16 addressed to Greene at the Grand Hotel, Rome, he writes, “Love to papa and Holy Offices.” A card of July 10, apparently in reply to an inquiry, has this: “Only Tolstoy on Index is Demitry Tolstoy La [sic] Catholicisme romain en Russie 1866 (why not ‘romaine’ I wonder).” In a letter written sometime in October of 1954 he says, “I was at Cambridge the other day and told some Catholic girls about your letter from the Inquisition condemning Power & Glory. I hope you don’t think that this was a betrayal. I think you told me you didn’t mind so long as nothing appeared in print. Now I have cold feet. Was it all right?” Apparently it was, because on October 28 Waugh writes again, “It is a great relief to hear you don’t mind my mentioning you & the Inquisition at Cambridge. It was not part of my lecture there. In the question time a girl asked whether I had ever had any trouble with the Holy Office. I said no, but a friend had, and then blurted out your name. I wish you had heard the gasp of incredulous indignation from all those unpainted young persons. No ‘passionate disloyalty’ there.”

In A Sort of Life Greene describes the end of the Pizzardo affair:

There was no public condemnation, and the affair was allowed to drop into that peaceful oblivion which the Church wisely reserves for unimportant issues. Years later, when I met Pope Paul VI, he mentioned that he had read the book. I told him that it had been condemned by the Holy Office. “Who condemned it?” “Cardinal Pizzardo.” He repeated the name with a wry smile and added, “Mr. Greene, some parts of your books are certain to offend some Catholics, but you should pay no attention to that.”

Waugh held Greene in great affection, and said so movingly in their correspondence. In a Christmas letter of 1955 he writes, “I wish we met more often. I am deeply fond of you.” Two years later he writes from Combe Flory House in Somerset, where Waugh and his family had moved in November of 1956, “Too long since I saw you whom I greatly like and admire. You cannot always be abroad.” But his letters to Greene also reveal growing anxieties about his friend’s religious faith.

31 Graham Greene Papers.
32 Graham Greene Papers.
33 Graham Greene Papers.
34 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 431.
35 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 433.
36 A Sort of Life, p. 90.
37 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 456.
38 Graham Greene Papers.
39 Waugh had long since resigned himself to disagreeing with Greene about politics. Writing about Greene’s book, The Lost Childhood and Other Essays (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1951), Waugh says, “Of course I
In a letter of February 6, 1958, Waugh thanks Greene for an invitation to the opening of his new play, *The Potting Shed*. It is about a man who, as a boy, committed suicide. His uncle, a priest, discovered his body and prayed, “Take away my faith but let him live.” Both petitions are heard: the boy is restored to life, and the priest loses his faith. Waugh congratulates his friend but carefully avoids praising the work itself. He does say, “I am not theologian enough to understand the theological basis. I wish you would write it as a novel explaining more fully to simple people like me.”

But in a letter written that same day to his wife, Laura, Waugh is less elliptical: “The play is great nonsense theologically & will puzzle people needlessly.”

Waugh was even more disturbed by *A Burnt-Out Case*, the novel which Greene published in 1961. He records his dismay in his diary for December 31, 1960-January 1, 1961:

*The Daily Mail* sent me an advance copy of Graham Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case* asking for a review for which, I suppose, they would have paid £100. I have had to refuse. There is nothing I could write about it without shame one way or the other. Coming so soon after his Christmas story it emphasizes a theme which it would be affected not to regard as personal—the vexation of a Catholic artist exposed against his wishes to acclamations as a ‘Catholic’ artist who at the same time cuts himself off from divine grace by sexual sin. The hero of *A Burnt-Out Case* is a bored, loveless voluptuary who hides his despair in the most remote place he can find—a leper settlement in the Congo—recovers a spark of humanity but not his ‘faith’ and dies in an absurdly melodramatic way. The efficient doctor is an atheist. The faithful missionaries have given up all attempt to impose the moral law and are interested only in building and finance. A grotesque Catholic layman seeks to impose mystical ideas on his adolescent wife. There is an excellent sermon by the Father Superior and a splendid creation of the heat and remoteness of the leproserie. The journalist intruder is sham—‘Quote—Wordsworth’. It is the first time Graham has come out as specif—

don’t often agree with you. I can never hope to do that this side of death” (Letter of March 17, 1951, in Graham Green Papers; and in Letters, p. 346). From time to time in their correspondence Waugh alludes playfully, though not without a certain bite, to Greene’s left-wing sympathies. Thus, in a note of September 1948, he writes, “I hope you are taking action against the scandal mongers who reported you had gone with the Dean of Canterbury to a Communist jamboree” (Graham Greene Papers). In a letter of February 27, 1952, he writes, “Some lunatic reporter said you said that the Catholic Faith forbade a ruler to employ spies to detect & denounce potential rebels. That is actionable. The same reporter said you thought Democracy was reconcilable with Christianity. I am not sure if that is actionable but it is very damaging” (Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 370). A postcard of July 1960 reads: “My Paper today says you don’t want Algerians tortured. Why not? We were tortured by Sir L. Olivier and paid for the experience” (Graham Greene Papers). A more serious exchange arose over Greene’s decision in January 1958 to allow the Polish Catholic political organization, Pax, to publish his books. See Greene’s letter to Waugh of January 9, 1958 (Graham Greene Papers); Waugh to Greene, January 10, 1958 (Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 501); and Greene to Waugh, January 16, 1958 (Graham Greene Papers). See also Greene’s account of his dealings with Pax in *Ways of Escape*, pp. 189-96.

40 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 502.
ically faithless—pray God it is a mood, but it strikes deeper and colder. What is more—no, less—Graham's skill is fading. He describes the hero's predicament three times, once painfully, in a 'fairy story' which is supposed to take up a whole night but is in fact told in ten minutes. The incident of Deo Gratia's [read: Gratias'] attempted escape and rescue is poorly handled. Graham can't carry corn [?]. His early books are full of self pity at poverty and obscurity; now self pity at his success. I am not guiltless as one of those who put him in the odious position of 'Catholic artist'. He complained of the heat of his sexual passions, now at their coldness. A book I can't review.  

On January 3 he wrote to Greene:

I have been sent an advance copy of *A Burnt-Out Case* and read it with deep interest. I could write much of my admiration for your superb description of the leper-village and for the brilliance with which you handle the problems of dialogue in four languages. I particularly admired the sermon of the Father Superior. But I am not reviewing it and I want to write a personal letter of apology.

I know, of course, how mischievous it is to identify fictional characters with their authors, but, taken in conjunction with your Christmas story, this novel makes it plain that you are exasperated by the reputation which has come to you unsought of a 'Catholic' writer. I realize that I have some guilt in this matter. Twelve years ago I gave a number of lectures here and in America presumptuously seeking to interpret what I genuinely believed was an apostolic mission in danger of being neglected by people who were shocked by the sexuality of some of your themes. In fact in a small way I behaved like Rycker. I am deeply sorry for the annoyance I helped to cause & pray that it is only annoyance, and that the desperate conclusions of Morin & Querry are purely fictional.

Waugh was genuinely disturbed by the book. The following day he wrote to Elizabeth Pakenham that "Graham Greene has written a most distressing work," and made this entry in his *Diary*:

4 January 1961: I wrote to Graham saying that taken in conjunction with his Christmas story, his new novel makes it plain that he is exasperated by his reputation as a 'Catholic' writer. I told him in all sincerity how deeply sorry I am for my share in this annoyance. Twelve years ago a lot of Catholics were suspicious of his good faith and I officiously went round England and America reassuring them. I pray that the desperate conclusions of 'Morin' and 'Querry' are purely fictitious. It has been a bad year for the old steeplechasers—Elizabeth Bowen, John Betjeman, Lesley Hartley down and out of the race; Nancy Mitford and Tony Powell just clinging in the saddle. *A Burnt-Out Case* will be a heavy fall.

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43 Diaries, pp. 778-79.
44 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 557. Morin is the subject of "A Visit to Morin," the "Christmas story" which appeared in *London Magazine*, IV (January 1957), 13-25, and was later collected in *A Sense of Reality* (London: Bodley Head, 1963). He is a French Catholic novelist who has lost his faith, though he is still admired as a "Catholic author." Rycker is an unpleasant ex-seminarian in *A Burnt-Out Case* who would canonize poor Querry despite the latter's disavowal of Catholic belief.
45 Letters, p. 558.
46 Diaries, p. 779.
Two fears trouble Waugh: first, that in lecturing many years earlier in England and America he had burdened Greene with a reputation which he had come to find oppressive, that of “Catholic author”; and, second, that the “desperate conclusions of Morin and Querry” in “A Visit to Morin” and A Burnt-Out Case are the author’s own—that in these works Greene “has come out as specifically faithless.” Waugh’s own prayer that he be mistaken is clearly genuine.

Greene replies to Waugh’s letter on January 4:

Dear Evelyn,

A typewritten letter always looks so formal, but I know you can’t read my handwriting. I’m very sorry to hear that you won’t be reviewing A Burnt-Out Case (I’m afraid I committed the indiscretion of suggesting that you should do so to Father Caraman), but I quite understand your feelings in the matter. I was all the more anxious that you should review the book because I realize it will cause a certain amount of hostility in the Catholic press and, although I expected severe criticism from you, I felt sure that it would be at least founded on genuine unemotional principles. Whatever Querry may have felt about his Catholic critics, I have certainly not felt at any time about you. I have always found our points of disagreement—as in the case of The Heart of the Matter—refreshing and enlightening and miles away from the suburbia of The Catholic Herald or the Universe. I do really assure you that never once have you behaved like Rycker!

With a writer of your genius and insight I certainly would not attempt to hide behind the time old gag that an author can never be identified with his character. Of course in some of Querry’s reactions there are reactions of mine, just as in some of Fowler’s reactions in The Quiet American there were reactions of mine. I suppose the points where an author is in agreement with his character lends [sic] what force or warmth there is to the expression. At the same time I think one can say that the parallel must not be drawn all down the line and not necessarily to the conclusion of the line. Fowler, I hope, was a more jealous man than I am, and Querry, I fear, was a better man than I am. I wanted to give expression to various states or moods of belief and unbelief. The doctor, whom I like best as a realized character, represents a settled and easy atheism; the Father Superior a settled and easy belief (I use easy as a term of praise and not as a term of reproach); Father Thomas an unsettled form of belief and Querry an unsettled form of disbelief. One could probably dig a little of the author also out of the doctor and Father Thomas!

Anyway whatever the rights and wrongs of this book I do want you to believe that never for a moment have I felt other than pleasure or an interested dismay at your criticisms and never for a moment anything other than affection for yourself. I do hope that we can meet sometime in the not too distant future. I heard rumours of your presence in London the other day which happened to coincide with one of my rare presences. I wish you would ring me up when you do come to town, but I know your hatred of the telephone.

Yours with deepest affection, 47

47 Graham Greene Papers.
Greene’s first concern is to assure Waugh that he never caused him the kind of annoyance that certain of his Catholic admirers caused Querry. Greene then turns to Waugh’s second concern, which Greene rightly assumed to be implicit there. His reply is clear and straightforward: he is not Querry, any more than any writer of fiction is identical with his characters. At this point he might have reminded Waugh of a remark which the latter had made earlier in their correspondence: “Why by the way do you suppose that papists are more prone than heathens to identify characters in fiction with their author? It seems to be a universal nuisance among the unimaginative.”

Whether or not Waugh remembered this earlier view, his reply to Greene was prompt. On January 5 he writes:

My Dear Graham,

I fear your secretariate must be working full-blast on Laos but I must interrupt them to thank you for the many kind things in your letter & to make clear a few points. No answer required.

I was not so dotty as to take Rycker as a portrait of myself. I saw him as the caricature of a number of your admirers (among whom I counted myself) who have tried to force on you a position which you found obnoxious. You have given many broad hints which we refused to recognize. Now you have made a plain repudiation. You will find not so much ‘hostility’ among your former fellowship as the regrets of Browning for his ‘Lost Leader’—except, of course, that no one will impute mercenary motives.

It was not the Month who wanted me to review A Burnt-Out Case, but the Daily Mail. They intend to make a splash of it. No doubt many papers will do the same. I don’t think you can blame people who read the book as a recantation of faith. To my mind the expression ‘settled and easy atheism’ is meaningless, for an atheist denies his whole purpose as a man—to love & serve God. Only in the most superficial way can atheists appear ‘settled & easy’. Their waste land is much more foreign to me than ‘the suburbia of The Universe’. I cannot wish your book success and I will not make a sensational attack on it, such as The Mail would relish. (At least I suppose they would. There was no specific invitation to do so in their proposal.)

God forbid I should pry into the secrets of your soul. It is simply your public performance which grieves me.

Yours ever affectionately
Evelyn

Waugh distinguishes between repudiating the role of “leading Catholic author” and recanting one’s faith. While protesting that he would not presume to pry into the secrets of Greene’s soul, Waugh does claim that publishing A Burnt-Out Case could reasonably be understood by the public as a rejection of Catholicism. He likens his sorrow at this

48 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 439.
49 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 559-60.
event to that of the speaker in Browning’s “The Lost Leader,” who voices his regret that a great poet, one whom he and many others took for their champion, has abandoned the cause.

Waugh’s objection to the expression that Greene had used to describe the attitude of the Doctor in A Burnt-Out Case—“a settled and easy atheism”—recalls his earlier criticism of characters in The Living Room, who, though Catholic, harbor an extreme fear of death. For Waugh the realities of faith are clear and compelling. Even one who professes atheism cannot be easily settled in that conviction. God is the whole purpose of human existence, and somehow even an atheist senses this.

Greene’s answer followed on January 6:

My dear Evelyn,

This is rapidly becoming a Claudel-Gide correspondence! I think you have carried your identification in this novel much too far. Must a Catholic be forbidden to paint the portrait of a lapsed Catholic? Undoubtedly if there is any realism in the character it must come from the author experiencing some of the same moods as Query but surely, not necessarily, with the same intensity; I hope you don’t attribute to me Query’s suicided mistress! I suppose, if one chose to draw the character of an atom-scientist traitor, there would be an element in one’s own character which would make the description of his motives plausible, but I’m sure that you wouldn’t accuse me, as Dame Rebecca West did both of us, of having a treasonable inclination. I suggest that if you read the book again you will find in the dialogue between the doctor and Query at the end the suggestion that Query’s lack of faith was a very superficial one—far more superficial than the doctor’s atheism. If people are so impetuous as to regard this book as a recantation of faith, I cannot help it. Perhaps they will be surprised to see me at Mass.

What I have disliked in some Catholic criticisms of my work, particularly some of the books which have been written about it in France, is the confusion between the functions of a novelist and the functions of a moral teacher or theologian. I prefer the statement of Newman. “I say, from the nature of the case, if Literature is to be made a study of human nature, you cannot have a Christian Literature. It is a contradiction in terms to attempt the sinless Literature of sinful man. You may gather together something very great and high, something higher than any Literature ever was; and when you have done so, you will find that it is not Literature at all.”

I will match your quotations from Browning with Bishop Blougram:

All we have gained then by our unbelief,
Is a doubt diversified by faith,
For one of faith diversified by doubt:
We called the chess board white,—we call it black.

Ever affectionately,  

50 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 404.
51 Graham Greene Papers.
In this reply Greene quietly ignores the distinction that Waugh has drawn and takes up the more basic concern that *A Burnt-Out Case* is a recantation of faith, which he denies. He also suggests that, whatever one may infer from his fiction about his personal faith, he may still be observed practicing it at Mass. Greene then turns to Newman’s *Idea of a University* to support his view that a novelist must not be expected to perform the task of a theologian, that is, to demonstrate the validity of revealed truth. Greene also offers an “Apologia Pro Fide Sua” with another quotation from Browning to match Waugh’s earlier allusion to “The Lost Leader.” The lines are from “Bishop Blougram’s Apology,” a long dramatic monologue that expresses the thoughts of a worldly but ultimately believing Catholic prelate.

Two postcards bring this spirited exchange to a close. On January 8 Waugh writes to Greene:

> The inscribed copy of *A Burnt-Out Case* arrived this morning. Was it dispatched before or after poor old Claudel’s eyes were opened to Gide’s enormities? In either case thank you; and for your letter. Mud in your mild and magnificent eye. Hoping for glad confident morning. E.

A postcard from Greene to Waugh dated January 12, 1961, reads:

> My love to Milton, Burns, Shelley and warn them that Spender and Day-Lewis are on the way. I shall be grateful for all your copper.

> A Voice from the Rear and the Slaves.

In his card of January 8, Waugh picks up Greene’s earlier allusion to a celebrated correspondence between Paul Claudel and André Gide, wherein the former assumed the role of Catholic orthodoxy outraged by pagan enormities. Waugh also returns to “The Lost Leader” to wish “mud” in Greene’s “mild and magnificent eye” (line 10), and to hope for a “glad confident morning” (line 28) for his friend—presumably a return to the fold. Greene’s postcard to Waugh answers with more allusions to Browning’s poem (lines 7, 13, and 14), and gallantly accepts the place which Waugh had assigned him in the “Rear and the Slaves” (line 16).

Waugh refers to their exchange in two other letters in 1961. On January 21, he writes to Lady Diana Cooper:

> You may well ask, what about Graham Greene’s Christmas story? Is he Morin? He has now produced a novel with a precisely similar character—

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53 *Browning’s Poetical Works* 1833-1864, p. 651, lines 209-12.
54 Graham Greene Papers.
55 Graham Greene Papers.
distinguished Papist who has lost his Faith and is disgusted with those who still look to him as a leader. I have had a sharp little Claudel-Gide correspondence with him which ended by my saying ‘Mud in your mild & magnificent eye.’ His alienist Dr. Strauss kicked the bucket last week. No one to keep an eye on him now.56

And in a letter to Greene himself dated October 26 he says, “As you know, A Burnt-Out Case shocked me.”57 Nearly two years later, on August 29, 1963, Greene asked his friend for permission to quote from their correspondence.

Dear Evelyn,

I am doing a series of introductions for the collected editions of my books in Germany and France and in the introduction to A BURNT-OUT CASE I would like to mention our controversy and quote you. I enclose what I have written and I would be most grateful if you would give me permission to use your words.
Just back from Cuba and Haiti and off to Anacapri.

Affectionately,58

Two days later Waugh replies, “Yes. Do quote.”59

It may be worth noting that in his letter of January 21, 1961, to Diana Cooper, Waugh says that he ended the correspondence “by my saying ‘Mud in your mild & magnificent eye,’” and that Greene agrees with this account in Ways of Escape,60 whereas in fact it was Greene who had the last word in his card of January 12 “from the Rear and the Slaves.” More noteworthy is a remark in the letter to Diana Cooper and what it reveals about Waugh’s affection for his friend. Greene’s arguments, however reasonable they may appear to a disinterested reader, failed to dispel all of Waugh’s doubts. This, it seems to me, was because, despite his protests, the state of Greene’s soul mattered a great deal to Waugh. Rightly or wrongly, Waugh found in A Burnt-Out Case grounds for anxiety about his friend’s spiritual well-being. This is not the only evidence of such concern on Waugh’s part. His practice was to spend Holy Week each year at the monastery of Downside with “the masochistic monks,” and twice he suggests to Greene that he join

56 Letters, p. 560.
57 Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 575.
him.\textsuperscript{61} Waugh was the last person in the world to force his ministrations upon a friend, but there was in his affection for Greene an element of pastoral care which was a simple consequence of faith and love.

Of the five letters from Waugh that survive from the years 1964 to 1966, only the last one, written in January 1966, alludes to Catholic matters.\textsuperscript{62} These were the years when the Second Vatican Council (1962-66) began to revolutionize the Catholic Church, a revolution that brought Waugh close to despair. After congratulating Greene for The Comedians and for having been made a Companion of Honor, Waugh concludes,

1965 was a bad year for me in a number of ways—dentistry, deaths of friends, the ‘aggiornamento’.
I try to face all the new wars with resignation. Of course don’t answer.

Love,  
Evelyn

The “aggiornamento” of Roman Catholicism was painful for Waugh. On March 30 of that same year he writes to Lady Diana Mosley,

Easter used to mean so much to me. Before Pope John and his Council—they destroyed the beauty of the liturgy. I have not yet soaked myself in petrol and gone up in flames, but I now cling to the faith doggedly without joy. Church going is a pure duty parade. I shall not live to see it restored. It is worse in many countries.\textsuperscript{63}

Within a fortnight, on April 10, 1966, Easter Day, Evelyn Waugh died.

The relationship that is recorded in the thirty years of their postwar correspondence reveals several constants. One is the admiration and affection that Waugh and Greene felt for each other as writers and still more as human beings. Their affection is deepened by the Catholic faith which both men shared and which gave rise to the most dramatic exchanges in their correspondence. The two were light-years apart in politics and rarely touched on the subject, no doubt to avoid useless conflict. But the Faith was for both “the one thing necessary,” and so Waugh could not help but express his concern, first about the orthodoxy of some passages in Greene’s works, and then about the religious faith of their author.

Some remarkably frank replies in the series of interviews published in


\textsuperscript{62} Graham Greene Papers; Letters, p. 635.

\textsuperscript{63} Letters, p. 639.
1983 as The Other Man suggest that Waugh had misunderstood the direction that Greene’s faith was taking. Certainly his answers to Marie-Françoise Allain are not those of the “specifically faithless” writer that Waugh feared he saw in the author of A Burnt-Out Case. But, although Waugh’s anxiety may have been groundless, his affection for his friend was always generous and constant. In Ways of Escape (1980) Greene suggests that Waugh’s affection arose from a deep loneliness. Greene also acknowledges regret at his own failure to respond to his friend with equal generosity:

A few years ago I reread his letters to me—a sad memorial—and for the first time I realized what a lonely man he had been. Over and over again he suggests that I visit him and only three times I responded. It was always impossible. I was traveling, I was occupied, no, it was impossible this month . . . . I regret the lost occasions now.65

Still, as Greene reviewed the written record of their friendship long after Waugh’s death, he could speak with quiet assurance of its strength and by implication of his own essential fidelity. Quoting a letter of Waugh’s, Greene says, “He wrote to me in October 1952: ‘I am just completing my forty-ninth year. You are just beginning yours. It is the grand climacteric which sets the course of the rest of one’s life, I am told. It has been a year of lost friends for me. Not by death but by wear and tear. Our friendship started rather late. Pray God it lasts.’ It did.”66

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65 Ways of Escape, p. 272.

66 Ways of Escape, p. 271.