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Emotions, religion, and morality in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*

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Abstract Graham Greene (1904–1991) is critically-acclaimed as one of the best storytellers of the twentieth century. Part of Greene's distinction lies in his depiction of the ever-conflicted emotions that plague human beings. This emotional complexity is intensified as the Catholic religion conflates with the sensual and sexual values sanctified in the mundane world. Thus, although Greene frequently expressed his irritation at being labeled a Catholic writer, many critics maintain that understanding the close connection between religion, politics, and the theme of betrayal in Greene's works is crucial. In *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), Greene presents Major Henry Scobie, an upright assistant police commissioner, who is involved in a triangular love relationship with his wife and a young widow in a West African coastal town. Torn between his sense of responsibility and his passion, Scobie is ensnared in love and guilt at the same time. Scobie's emotional complexities, coupled with his troubled faith, paradoxically make him a heroic coward with tragic flaws as well as a sinner engulfed in a terrible conflict between passion and faith. This paper aims to discuss the emotional ambiguities of Scobie that arise from the conflations of love and marriage, pity and duty, humanity and divinity, evaluating the morality of Scobie and its implications.

Keywords Emotions · Religion · Morality · Graham Greene · *The Heart of the Matter*

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They had been corrupted by money and he had been corrupted by sentiment. Sentiment was the more dangerous because you couldn't name its price. A man open to bribes was to be relied upon below a certain figure but sentiment might uncoil in the heart at a name a photograph even a smell remembered
Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter

Introduction

Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* deals with sexual sin, damnation, and the unusual salvation of Henry Scobie, a middle-aged Assistant Commissioner of Police that had converted to Catholicism. In this fiction, Greene fully explores issues such as pity, fear, love, and despair (Saroha and Vasishta 2013, p. 2). Louise, Scobie's wife, is a pious Catholic and a woman who has been left childless since the death of her daughter. Out of his over-developed sense of pity and responsibility, Scobie, having promised Louise a holiday in South Africa, borrows imprudently from a Syrian trader and suspected smuggler named Yusef. This is followed by a series of corrupt actions. Later, while Louise is away, Scobie encounters Helen Rolt, a survivor of a ship torpedoed in the Atlantic, and falls into further misery. Torn between the love for his women, Scobie is forced by Louise to take communion in a state of sin and to keep up the deception. Unable to face the two women and God any further, he commits suicide as a final resolution.

Many critics denounce Scobie's strong sense of pity, proclaiming that pity in his case is both dangerous and destructive. Roger Sharrock argues that the most dangerous heart of the book is "a painful sense of a separation from other people which is distinguished by his (Scobie's) steadily maintained life of pitying service" (Sharrock 1984, p. 142). According to Rama Rao's evaluation, pity "debases Scobie and reduces the people whom he pities to pitiability" (Rao 1990, p. 87). For Lamba, Scobie is corrupted by the devouring "sentiment of pity" (Lamba 1987, p. 29). Likewise, Philip Stratford suggests that pity corrupts Scobie and that the novel portrays "the prepossessing theme of the degeneration of love into destructive pity" (Stratford 1964, p. 235). In an interview, even Greene himself criticizes Scobie's pity. According to Greene, Scobie is a victim of pity. In writing the novel, Greene recalls, "I wanted not only to pose the problem of suicide for a Catholic… but also to show that pity is a corrupting force" (Donaghy 1983, p. 21). In *Ways of Escape* (1980), Greene stresses that "the character of Scobie was intended to show that pity can be the expression of an almost monstrous pride" (Greene 1980, p. 120). In other words, Scobie's pity for others, particularly for Louise and Helen, derives from his sense of superiority to others rather than from compassion, which is a form of love. Overall, analyses of the fiction and its film adaptions have been dominated by questions of fidelity, religious crisis, and the sins that trouble the protagonist (Stollery 2012, p. 216). But, is Scobie such an unpardonable sinner?

Despite bundles of critiques on Scobie's unique sense of pity and responsibility, his suffering in the face of his fellow human beings and God arouses considerable empathy from readers. By focusing on the connection between emotions and religion in *The Heart of the Matter*, this paper argues that, however unfaithful and disloyal Scobie may appear from a rigid religious perspective, paradoxically this

sinner is not so distinct from the saint. In addition to textual analysis and interpretation, Immanuel Kant's ethical philosophy is brought into discussion to help determine Scobie's morality and examine the nature of Scobie's emotions, his sufferings, and its implications.

Pity, responsibility, and morality

Scobie's relationship with Louise is miserable because nothing except for his great sense of pity and responsibility—"a corruptive sentiment" (Snyder 2013, p. 127)—for her remains. After fifteen years of marriage, Louise ironically attracts Scobie with "the pathos of her unattractiveness" (Greene 1977, p. 32). Pitiably, only when Scobie considers Louise a victim of life for which he imagines himself to be responsible does he endeavor to love her, "when pity and responsibility reached the intensity of a passion" (Greene 1977, p. 28). Scobie's obsessive sense of pity and responsibility entangles him in an endless net of suffering and despair. When urged by Louise to let her go on a holiday to South Africa, Scobie, though not knowing how to get enough money for the trip, promises it because he is always ready to shoulder the burden of responsibility (Greene 1977, p. 30). As a consequence, he borrows money from Yusef, a merchant suspected of diamond smuggling by Wilson, the British agent who secretly loves Louise. Due to the disproportionate connection between love and pity, this act initiates Scobie's corruption.

During Louise's absence, Scobie is drawn to a woman called Helen Rolt, not out of love but pity and a sense of responsibility. Scobie's heart goes out to her when she is brought ashore on a stretcher, having endured terrible agony after her ship was torpedoed by a submarine. He cannot help feeling pity for this fragile creature, whose wretchedness is so monstrous that he "always remembered how she was carried into his life on a stretcher grasping a stamp-album with her eyes fast shut" (Greene 1977, p. 95). The image of Helen's child-like weakness again triggers Scobie's pity and sense of responsibility, and consequently traps him into further suffering. Their friendship soon becomes a secret adulterous affair. However, Scobie strives to look after Helen less out of love than out of pity, a fact reminiscent of the relationship between Scobie and Louise. "He had sworn to preserve Louise's happiness," remarks the narrator, "and now he had accepted another and contradictory responsibility" (Greene 1977, p. 123). But pathetically, Helen can only have Scobie's pity. The overwhelming power of the protagonist's sense of pity is highlighted by Greene:

> Pity smoldered like decay at his [Scobie's] heart. He would never rid himself of it. He knew from experience how passion died away and how love went, but pity always stayed. Nothing ever diminished pity. The conditions of life nurtured it. There was only a single person in the world who was unpitiable, oneself. (Greene 1977, p. 132)

Scobie's sense of pity leads him not merely to suffering and despair but also to conscious blasphemy in his note, which is used to save Helen from pain, on which he proclaims that he loves his mistress more than he loves God (Greene 1977, p. 134). This statement is a perilous sin, for the superiority of divine love sanctified

in the Catholic religion is wrongly replaced by Scobie's morbid human love. This sexual love "becomes a moral and theological problem that requires the protagonist to twist his ideas about God into paradoxical shapes" (Steinglass 2005, p. 32). As a Catholic, Scobie is doomed to be condemned for articulating such blasphemous words.

Scobie's blasphemy emerges again as he manages to protect Louise from the truth of his adultery by going to communion with her. Tormented by the pressure of confession urged by Louise, Scobie is lost spiritually: "To abandon Helen to Bagster or Louise to what? I am trapped, he told himself" (Greene 1977, p. 161). Helpless and bewildered, Scobie goes to confession, trying to obtain relief and instruction from Father Rank. Nevertheless, since Scobie cannot promise Father Rank that he will not meet Helen again, he is refused absolution. Scobie is denied relief because he cannot "believe in the mercy of God" (Greene 1977, p. 161). He is afraid that Helen will live miserably without his care, which is another overriding fallacy. He cannot trust God, so he must keep pitying others at the expense of his own peace and happiness. Therefore, as he steps out of the church, "there was no hope anywhere he turned his eyes" (Greene 1977, p. 162). Forced by Louise in desperation to take communion while in a state of sin, Scobie consciously chooses human love in place of divine love, a choice which brings only suffering and pain. Fearing that Louise or Helen may suffer, Scobie naively shoulders the intolerable responsibility for his women's happiness and thus damns himself. In the communion scene, to ward off any suspicion of his adultery, Scobie receives communion while guilty of a mortal sin. He willingly risks eternal damnation rather than inflict pain on Louise. Likewise, his sense of responsibility for Helen is so strong that he cannot end the affair. Therefore, Scobie makes a desperate offer to God, one that irrevocably excludes him from God's blessing.

The dislocation of human love over divine love brings Scobie endless suffering. He can leave neither Helen nor Louise because, as he tells God, "You don't need me as they need me" (Greene 1977, p. 170). However, when Scobie revisits the church later, he feels regret for what he has done: "This was what human love had done to him—it had robbed him of love for eternity" (Greene 1977, p. 185). Scobie is always conscious of his great sin, yet his strong sense of pity and responsibility discourages him from re-embracing God at every crucial moment. Sometimes, he even tries to justify his own choice: "I've preferred to give you (God) pain rather than give it to Helen or my wife because I can't observe your suffering. I can only imagine it" (Greene 1977, p. 185). However, Scobie cannot see God insulted just as he cannot see Louise or Helen suffer. Intriguingly, even God becomes an object of his pity: "They are ill with me and I can cure them. And you too, God—you are ill with me… You would be better off if you lose me once and for all" (Greene 1977, p. 185). Therefore, Scobie not only fails to perceive that human love can only be an indirect reflection of the emotion that God feels for His creation, but also haughtily endeavors to arrange God's peace. Again, this is an intimation of his hubris because he mistakenly "puts himself on a par with the Creator of the universe" (Hoffer 2004, p. 86). According to Anne Salvatore, Scobie's pity as pride, which departs from the love that comes from connection with God, cannot provide happiness for

the objects of his pity (Salvatore 1988, p. 79). For Salvatore, Scobie only loves his own human ego. Thus, his love, pity, and responsibility have "become a meaningless habit in his life" (Salvatore 1988, p. 80).[1] In fact, although Scobie acknowledges the existence of God, he never trusts Him. Although a voice tries to persuade him to renounce his death-wish, Scobie stubbornly sticks to his habit of pity, responsibility, despair, and hubris. The imagined voice from God says: "All you have to do now is ring a bell, go into a box, confess.… the repentance is already there, straining at your heart. It's not repentance you lack, just a few simple actions" (Greene 1977, p. 186). Obviously, God's voice is beaming with love, mercy, and tenderness. He is benevolent toward Scobie, urging the sufferer to take the necessary actions—either to leave Helen or Louise. God even promises to take care of the women if Scobie believes in Him, but he refuses to look to God as a reliable resort: "No. I don't trust you. I've never trusted you. If you made me, you made this feeling of responsibility that I've always carried about like a sack of bricks" (186). In brief, Scobie's sin lies in his trusting himself rather than God. He cannot put his faith in trust of God, thereby failing to comprehend the nature of divine mercy and love. This mindset leads to his doom, "an impasse" (Greene 1977, p. 186) as he tells God later.

In fact, the narrative point of view is used effectively by Greene to highlight the guilt-ridden protagonist's inner struggles. Instead of adopting the first-person point of view widely used in depicting the main character's sufferings, this fiction is generally dominated by both the omniscient point of view (all-knowing perspective) and the dramatic point of view (a perspective through which the story is allowed to present itself dramatically through action and dialog). This is arguably the best way to present Scobie's plight because on the one hand, the all-knowing narrator is able to summarize the events, provide details of setting, reveal the main characters' state of mind, and even comment on the events (Pickering and Hoeper 1981, p. 47). For example, in Part 3, Book II, the narrator remarks, "She (Helen) said furiously, 'I don't want your pity.' But it was not a question of whether she wanted it–she had it. He (Scobie) knew from experience how passion died away and how love went, but pity always stayed" (Greene 1977, p. 132). As demonstrated in this passage, the omniscient narrator does not merely present the episode but participates in illustrating the main characters' plight. The ironical discrepancy between Helen's wishful thinking about shunning away from pity and her vulnerability to pity, coupled with Scobie's hard-won experience of pity, reiterates the quandary Scobie is plunged into. The omniscient point of view aside, the dramatic point of view is employed by Greene to dramatize the internal and external conflicts typical of Scobie.

> "Do you know one of the things that worry me? I was afraid you wouldn't be much of a Catholic without me around ….
>
> 'You'll have to go to the confession this afternoon.'
> 'I haven't done anything very terrible.'

[1] Elizabeth Schafer reminds readers of the inter-textual relationship between *The Heart of the Matter* and Shakespeare's plays. For example, Scobie and Hotspur in *Henry IV* share many traits in common. Both characters are troubled by certain "overweening pride and suicidal heroics" (Schafer 1991, p. 589).

> 'Missing Mass on Sunday's a mortal sin, just as much as adultery.'
> 'Adultery's more fun,' he said with attempted lightness. (Greene 1977, p. 152)

This dramatic presentation of the dialog between Louise and Scobie showcases Scobie's predicament. His disbelief of God and his adultery with Helen puts this Catholic in an awkward situation, driving him to incessant conflicts, inwardly and outwardly, with his emotions and Catholicism and the attempted compromise between them. All in all, the dramatic point of view helps "show" the main characters' struggle, whereas the omniscient narrative point of view provides the narrator with an approach to "tell" readers their observation of the characters and their interpretation of the events. Taken together, through showing and telling, both narrative perspectives are used successfully in highlighting the dilemma which is confronting Scobie.

Are Scobie's actions morally justifiable? Immanuel Kant's ethical philosophy is illuminating in this regard. In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant proposed his non-consequential moral theory. Unlike the utilitarian moral philosophers who take into account the consequences of our actions when making moral judgments, Kant claims that the only thing in the world that can be good is a good will; something is good, he claims, only because the person wants to do his or her own duty (Kant 1996a, pp. 53–54). In other words, for Kant, a morally worthy act must be done purely from the motive to do one's duty, to always act out of respect for the moral law: "Duty is the necessity of an action from respect for the law" (Kant 1996a, p. 55). When evaluating Scobie's strong sense of responsibility from the Kantian perspective, his actions are morally justifiable. Scobie takes responsibility for protecting people around him not because he manages to gain any profit, but because he is well-intentioned in lessening others' suffering and boosting their happiness. He is more than willing to stick to his duty for Louise. Some critics propose that the Kantian ethics is too idealistic because it dismisses human inclinations and stresses people's inherent drive to rationally perform their duty. However, although Kant generally argues for a strict ethics of duty in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he discusses some concepts such as sympathy and benevolence in another work, *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), regarding sympathetic feeling as a duty.

> *Sympathetic joy* and *sadness* (*sympathia moralis*) are sensible feelings of pleasure or displeasure…. at another's state of joy or pain (shared feeling, sympathetic feeling). Nature has already implanted in human beings receptivity to these feelings. But to use this as a means to promoting active and rational benevolence is still a particular, though only a conditional duty. It is called the duty of *humanity* (*humanitas*) because a human being is regarded here not merely as a rational being but also as an animal endowed with reason. (Kant 1996b, pp. 574–575)

In a nutshell, Kant is not ignorant of the necessities of human emotions as many critics suggest. Instead, certain human emotions such as sympathy to others for their suffering are innate to most human beings. Kant's distinction between a

merely "rational being" and "an animal endowed with reason" is noteworthy. According to Kant, we are by no means purely rational beings without emotions but rather animals with an emotional life. Our commitment to the moral law often works through certain emotions such as sympathy, an important and appropriate medium for the fulfillment of one's duty. For Kant, it is an "indirect duty to cultivate the compassionate natural (aesthetic) feelings in us and to make use of them as so many means to sympathy based on moral principles" (Kant 1996b, p. 575).

Following Kant's rationale, we find Scobie's sympathy to his fellowmen more plausible. In a sense, Scobie's great sympathy for their suffering is indispensable because it enables him to carry out his moral duty. Scobie's pity for the Portuguese captain manifests his universal love of his fellow creatures, which is obviously far from mere sexual love. He feels sympathy for a total stranger, the captain, who has hidden a letter for his daughter in Germany in the cabin, which is a breach of the law during wartime. For him, the captain appears to be an unattractive child, "the fat boy of the school" (Greene 1977, p. 47). Listening to the captain's painful story of his loving daughter, Scobie puts the letter in his pocket and later burns it. He cannot see other people suffer, especially those who are underprivileged. In this case, Scobie is spiritually and morally praiseworthy. Just as God loves his followers, so Scobie loves his fellow humans. Scobie's prayer for the dying six-year-old girl in the hospital triggers another threat to his well-being, yet the prayer is another embodiment of God's mercy and love. Reluctant to see the girl suffer, Scobie prays, "Give her peace. Take away my peace forever, but give her peace" (Greene 1977, p. 98).

Suicide, sin and morality

Not knowing how to solve his triangular love for Louise, Helen, and God, Scobie is convinced that no one will need him, no one will make demands on him, and no one will be hurt by him once he is dead. Therefore, he pretends to have the symptoms of pain, is given evipan, and feigns taking one tablet daily but instead saves them up to administer a fatal dose (Greene 1977, pp. 184–185). As a Catholic, Scobie realizes that suicide is an unforgivable sin, which makes him hesitate. However, he manages to convince himself that Christ's crucifixion is also a suicide: "Christ had not been murdered—you can't murder God: Christ had killed himself" (Greene 1977, p. 140). Finally, Scobie cannot deceive himself by this easy justification because he monitors his way to self-destruction.

Pursued so relentlessly by his fate, Scobie continues in his self-pitying. As he foresees the possibility of a future of sacrilegious masses, he has a "picture before his eyes of a bleeding face, of eyes closed by the continuous shower of blows: the punch-drunk head of God reeling sideways" (Greene 1977, p. 172). Another blow to God is the murder of Ali, his servant of fifteen years because of Scobie's unjust suspicion that Ali would unveil his adultery with Helen. The corpse of Ali reminds him of God because he has betrayed both even though he loves them. Tormented by his religious hypocrisy and by the perception that his dilemma will lead him to

inflict unnecessary pain on Louise or Helen, Scobie has no alternative but to commit suicide. Nonetheless, suicide is normally accompanied by despair and cowardice. Committing suicide means distrusting God's capacity to administer and protect his followers from despondency and suffering.[2] Scobie contends that "one forgets the dead quite quickly; one doesn't wonder about the dead," (Greene 1977, p. 181). His last mistake is to believe that his sins are too great for God to forgive them. He cannot trust the mercy of God. This self-centered pride leads him to destruction. Refusing to depend on God, Scobie jumps to the conclusion that his suicide will release God, along with Louise and Helen, from his painful presence. He imprudently plays the role of God in arranging others' happiness and peace. As Evelyn Waugh maintains, "Scobie arrogates to himself the prerogation of providence" (Waugh 1973, p. 97). In other words, Scobie's suffering comes mostly from his attempt to administer "authority, pity and condescension" (Chace 1990, p. 163) like a demi-god. In this sense, he is like the tragic hero introduced in Aristotle's *Poetics*, a hero who "on the one hand is not pre-eminent in virtue and justice, and yet on the other hand does not fall into misfortune through vice or depravity, but falls because of some mistake (hamartia)" (Aristotle 2012, p. 1153).[3]

It is unfair to say that Scobie does not love God only because he chooses to commit suicide. In fact, he suffers not merely for Louise and Helen but also for God. On one occasion, when feeling estranged from God while praying, all of a sudden, Scobie has a sense of love, "the love one feels for what one has lost, whether a child, a woman, or even pain" (Greene 1977, p. 156). Although not specified, the object of love may be the love of God, which is temporarily overshadowed by his intense human love. Scobie realizes his sin in so doing when he ruefully tells Helen that his putting human love above everything else is "striking God when he's down" (Greene 1977, p. 155) in his own power. It is not that Scobie does not care about the consequence of his sin, but that he is too obsessed with his fellow's happiness to embrace the love of God. Scobie's act of looking after others tragically leads him to die as a scapegoat. However, his efforts are not entirely in vain.

In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant generally promotes a prohibition of suicide, which for him results from one's motive of self-love, particularly in order to avoid continued suffering. This principle of self-love cannot become a universal law for Kant because "a nature whose law it would be to destroy life itself by means of the same feeling whose destination is to impel toward the furtherance of life would contradict itself" (Kant 1996a, p. 74). It is not acceptable because suicide is primarily employed as a selfish means to escape a burdensome condition. Nonetheless, in his discussion of Cato's case in *Lectures on Ethics*, in which the Roman general committed suicide to stop himself from being

[2] Edward Sackville-West, a friend of Greene's, points out the terrible implications of suicide for Catholics in the following: "You may be maimed, bankrupt, deprived of friends, relations and all support, broken in health, persecuted, tortured, imprisoned, but there is one reprisal you must never take: suicide … Suicide is unpardonable, quite as much because it is final, as because it is the goal of despair, than which no insult to God can be more profound" (Sherry 1994, p. 294).

[3] Reference to Aristotle's *Poetics* is quoted from *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* edited by Martin Puchner, in which some representative excerpts of Aristotle's theories of literature (tragedy in particular) are collected.

subjugated to the ambitions of Julius Caesar and encourage his comrades to sacrifice their powers to defend their freedom, Kant allows suicide its legitimacy (Kant 1997, p. 145). In this case, suicide becomes the only free choice left for Cato to preserve freedom, for otherwise his choices will be manipulated by Caesar. That is, when suicide is performed not out of self-love but out of one's attempt to preserve freedom, it suggests to Kant to be consistent with duty and morality. Judging from this perspective, Scobie's suicide is not that unpardonable because first of all, he does not kill himself out of self-interested self-love as most of those committing suicide do. Additionally, his suicide is conducted not so much to avoid further suffering as an attempt to prevent the further devastation of freedom in himself or in those around him. If Scobie survives amid the torture of guilt and sin, he will never have real freedom, but will be further preoccupied with more emotional turmoil. Nor will Louise and Helen have a peace of mind because they will be tempted to make heavier demands on Scobie, both spiritually and financially. Consequently, suicide provides Scobie with an alternative to his suffering and lack of freedom and, from a Kantian perspective, is morally warrantable.

As Scobie decides to enter into an eternality of deprivation by committing suicide so that he can save others, his relationship with God has changed. A voice from God tells him that "there are no capital letters to separate us when we talk together. I am not Thou but simply you, when you speak to me; I am humble as any other beggar" (Greene 1977, p. 186). The dialog has become immediate and intimate. God lowers his dignity because Scobie sides with Him from the bottom of his heart. Like God, who is merciful and charitable, Scobie is willing to guard and protect his fellows, though he lacks the power exclusive to Him. God's mercy and love are by no means absent in Scobie even though he fails to follow the rules of the church. Scobie perceives the approach of God right before his death. Before his demise, his last words are, "Dear God, I love…" (Greene 1977, p. 190). Wittingly or unwittingly, the appearance of God is sensed by Scobie, whose intolerable suffering and firm perseverance have motivated God's mercy. Although his last sentence remains open-ended, in a sense, Scobie is like God, who offers love to anyone that may need it.[4] In short, Scobie's concept of God changes through his own ordeal of love and self-sacrifice. Christ becomes a real suffering being for Scobie, as real as Dicky Pemberton, who committed suicide, or the dying little girl in the hospital. As Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan maintains, "Scobie's spiritual autonomy turns him into an exile, and paradoxically leads him back to the truest Christian ideal of altruistic love in defiance of the official dogma of its church" (Erdinast-Vulcan 1988, p. 53). From this standpoint, Scobie is impelled by his own pity and sense of responsibility to defy the conventions of his church and to challenge its sacred doctrines. Intriguingly, his relationship with God becomes more direct and immediate when it is stripped of the conventional formulas of religion. Maria Couto's comments illuminate the heart of Greene's fictions:

[4] In a letter to Marcel More, a French scholar, Greene acknowledges that he deliberately makes the ending entirely vague as to whether Scobie is expressing his love for his women or for God. According to Greene, Scobie is uncertain himself near the end of the story. He tends to be lenient when proposing that "the point I would like to make which is probably heretical is that at the moment of death even an expression of sexual love comes within the borders of charity" (Greene 2008, p. 174).

> Greene's vision of fallen man is not pessimistic—faith is made to transcend despair in a complex and ambiguous way and his novels offer something better than symbol or allegory. They offer life itself where the transgressions of the protagonists bring them face to face with God. (Couto 1988, p. 66)

As a result, Scobie's deterioration into despair paradoxically paves the way for his reevaluation and re-embrace of the love of God. Although the field over which he struggles is different from that of the norm typical of the church, Scobie fumbles painfully and discovers his true connection with God at the last moment. While externalizing the concept of original sin, Greene creates a world that is dark and despairing, from the depths of which comes the redemptive power of God's love.

Deconstructing catholic theology

Scobie refuses God's mercy, but Greene makes the meaning of Scobie's suffering distinct from that in orthodox Catholic fiction. On one hand, Scobie suffers in the mundane world. But, on the other hand, his altruistic love for others, like what Christ does for his followers, seems to lead him to heaven. He certainly loses his peace due to his affair with Helen. To lose one's peace for good is to be in hell and, according to the law of the Church, he has absolutely selected hell when he takes communion in mortal sin and when he ends his life in despair. However, Scobie's gratuitous sacrifice for a human being with whom he has no special ties is a purely Christian act. Roger Sharrock points out this paradox: "What from the prudential human side is dangerous blind pity is from the religious side charity, a selfless and spontaneous love which resides in Christ" (Sharrock 1984, p. 144). Thus, while Scobie's charity for the girl is a flaw in human judgment, it is regarded as an act of charity from a religious perspective.

In appearance, Scobie is a sinner who chooses disordered, human love. However, in Greene's view, the sinners as well as the saints are at the center of Christianity. Greene's quote from Peguy's apothegm as the epigraph of this fiction illustrates such a paradox: "The sinner is at the heart of Christianity… No one is as competent in the matter of Christianity as the sinner. No one, unless it is the saint" (Greene 1977, front page). In other words, the conventional distinction between saints and sinners is blurred and even deconstructed. According to Neil McEwan, Greene is always fascinated by paradox, by the closeness of opposites, and the fine line between sinner and saint (McEwan 1988, pp. 70–71). With this deconstruction, Greene may suggest that the general sense of our old values of religious dogmas is no longer applicable in modern times. However, it is the rigidities of the Church that Greene attacks, not the validity of God's power and love. In the fiction, Scobie believes in the existence of love. Otherwise, he would never try so hard to communicate with God. Nonetheless, when confronted with the entangled human affairs, Scobie is disappointed at the dogmas of the Church and loses his patience with religion. In fact, religious doubt abounds in the fiction.[5] For example, Father

[5] According to Michael G. Brennan, this religious doubt to a certain extent mirrors Greene's attempt to fathom the role of religious belief and Catholic faith after his adulterous relationship with Catherine Walston since 1946 (Brennan 2010, p.82).

Rank, a representative of the institutional church, is described as impotent and pitiable. He is aware that he can do nothing for other people, and that he does not have the "right words for them" (Greene 1977, p. 136). Ironically, when despair grows in him, Father Rank even turns to Scobie, a sinner, for help (Greene 1977, pp. 135–36). The priest has come to the sinner for confession, so the traditional hierarchy of saints and sinners is overthrown. Scobie refuses to help because he has lost faith in the rules of the church. In a later scene, when he determines to confess after a long agonizing ordeal, a sense of futility haunts him. But, Father Rank cannot absolve him unless he promises not to see Helen again. Frustrated by this failure, Scobie deliberates,

> This is the formula used so many times on so many people. Presumably people promised and went away and came back and confessed again. Did they really believe they were going to try? He thought: I am cheating human beings every day I live. I am not going to try to cheat myself or God. (Greene 1977, p. 162)

Scobie's reflection reveals his dissatisfaction with the practice of religious confession, which suggests to him not so much a meaningful act as a repetitive formula. He would rather be true to himself and to God than accept ready-made formulas to solve his problem.

Father Clay, another representative of the institutional church, is as helpless as Father Rank when he has to cope with human tragedies. When referring to the suicide of a policeman called Dicky Pemberton, Father Rank can only interpret the act of despair based on the doctrines of the Church. He is helplessly trying to find a way out of the contradiction, hoping that it is a murder or that Pemberton is not a Catholic. He sticks to the idea that suicide "puts a man outside mercy" (Greene 1977, p. 71). Obviously, Father Clay's rigid adherence to the Church's doctrines exposes him all the more cruelly in a situation that is far too tragic and complicated to be comprehended by his narrow code. He cannot face a situation where he may have to reassess this code. In contrast to this clergy, Scobie appears to be more religious because he is ready to spare mercy and love for poor Pemberton. Dismayed at Father Clay's inflexible attachment to the creed of the church, Scobie considers "unquestionably there must be mercy for someone so unformed" (Greene 1977, p. 72). Whereas Father Rank adheres to the Church's teaching, Scobie states that "even the Church can't teach me that God doesn't pity the young" (Greene 1977, p. 73). He outsmarts the priest in granting Pemberton God's grace and salvation out of his sympathetic understanding of human misery in connection with religion. While Scobie casts doubt on rigid Catholicism, the meaning of human life is accentuated in the conflict with religion. In other words, Greene's fiction subverts orthodox Catholicism by stressing humanism, a human-centered concern for human beings. This emphasis on humanity is endorsed by Greene when arguing in an interview that his fictions "are not about Good and Evil, but about human beings" (Philips 1969, p. 219). Such a humanistic value is echoed in the argument that for Greene, Catholicism at its best should be "revolutionary, opposing tyranny and oppression in defense of the poor and powerless" (Barrett 2009, p. 429).

Scobie's ambiguous, open-ended last sentence has been debated by critics. Despite Scobie's sin, Greene seems to credit him with a spiritual experience that is generally

reserved for the saints. Even if Scobie does not explicitly articulate his love of God, at least the prayer itself exhibits his mercy and love for others, a spirit akin to the characteristic of God. Scobie's compassion for his fellow creatures is so profound that he is involved in this suffering and torture. However, his futile attempt to reenact God's action leaves us with something like the sense of judgment and forgiveness of the Gospels. According to Nathan Scott, Scobie's last sentence brings him the hope of salvation: "And the resonances of meaning and implication that have been stirred up within us by the total action persuade us that he [Scobie] is himself loved and shall be forgiven in some 'brave new world'" (Greene 1977, p. 41). Paradoxically, Scobie's sin makes him closer to God when purified with pain and suffering. In other words, sin causes the sinner to recognize the insufficiency of humans and the superiority of the divine. According to Georg Gaston, "Scobie will not be canonized; still, in his fall to grace he has experienced the agony of man's impotence and the power of God's love with the terrible intensity of a saint" (Gaston 1984, p. 42). As a consequence, Scobie's agony bridges the gap between himself and God, so that he can reassert the power of God's love. Scobie's "act of despair," proposes Paul O'Prey, "is also an act of atonement, an act born not out of a sense of evil or hatred of God, but out of a sense of goodness and love of God" (O'Prey 1988, p. 84).

At the end of the fiction, Father Rank returns to give comfort to the living, to reestablish the norm of the church, and to give hope for Scobie's soul in spite of his committing suicide. While Louise adheres to the rigid rules of the church, Father Rank suggests people cannot assume that Scobie's suicide damns him to hell. Father Rank's comment that the church "does not know what goes on in a single human heart" (Greene 1977, p. 194) sounds unusual. He warns Louise against jumping to conclusions because a man's eternal destiny by God is beyond the capacity of human beings. The inscrutable nature of divine love manifests in Father Rank's quick reminder to Louise: "Don's imagine you—or I—know a thing about God's mercy" (Greene 1977, p. 194). Due to his disinterested love for others, Scobie is paradoxically closer to God. The poignancy of Scobie's situation "is transcended in the great denouement of the action which consists in the disclosure of a conjunction between human charity and divine charity" (Scott 1963, p. 38). In other words, the conflict between the rigidity of the Church's rules and the individual human heart is accentuated in the final scene. In a sense, Father Rank's comment that Scobie, a virtuous sinner, does love God deconstructs the dogmas of the Church, degrading them as mechanical tokens of obedience rather than means of grace. If Scobie is redeemed at the end, then the system of the Catholic Church is criticized simultaneously. Louise judges Scobie only by the appearance of his sin. She never traces the background of the suicide and the development of Scobie's inner mind, thereby failing to do fair justice to her husband. The only source on which she depends is the rules of the church, which in Greene's view is inadequate when applied to an individual human heart. Consequently, Scobie's tragedy triggers one's pity for him. In loving God's creatures to such an extent, Scobie justifies Father Rank's final judgment that "he really loved God" (Greene 1977, p. 194). Grahame Smith reminds readers that Scobie dies with the word "love" on his lips (Smith 1986, p. 102). As Father Rank says in the story, "we don't know a thing about God's mercy" (Greene 1977, p. 194). What we do know is Scobie's impartial love

finally leads him to the embrace of God because God's mercy and love are always ready for those in need. This is true even though these so-called sinners' way of seeking it may not fit the orthodox forms of the Church. The idea that the divinity of Greene's fictions is a merciful God, the source of all love, has been generally accepted. For Francois Mauriac, in spite of the deprivation or even defiance of orthodox Catholicism, Greene's fictions reveal the truth of Christianity in still another form. God's grace and love in Greene's fictions are open to everyone, including the sinners. This tolerance to difference makes Christian charity and mercy most explicit (qtd. in Stratford 1963, pp. 237–238).

Conclusion

Is Scobie so detestable for readers? The answer is very likely negative. Notwithstanding the pain and suffering imposed on him, Greene's Scobie is from the outset a man of integrity. He is acclaimed as "Scobie, the Just" (Greene 1977, p. 25), who feels pity for people around him. In a sense, he is like the tragic hero introduced in Aristotle's *Poetics*, a hero, who is neither absolutely good nor entirely evil, who falls due to his tragic flaw (Aristotle 2012, p. 1153). Scobie is righteous, but he also deals with Yusef, a villain, and shirks his duty by burning the Portuguese captain's letter. However, these lapses are made not for his own benefits but out of his sheer sense of pity and responsibility. Scobie's over-sensitivity to the suffering of others amplifies his ever-increasing sympathy, which seemingly deteriorates into hubris, a notorious tragic flaw typical of Greek tragic heroes. Paradoxically, Scobie's virtue happens to be the cause of his evil. His sense of pity and responsibility is intended for good causes, but these emotional overflows turn out to be the root of his suffering that tortures him to a point of no return. Scobie's unusual sense of pity and responsibility has been criticized over the decades (Stratford 1964; Sharrock 1984; Rao 1990; Snyder 2013). Although quite a few academics endeavor to defend his slips from a more humanistic religious perspective (Scott 1963; Erdinast-Vulcan 1988; Couto 1988; Barrett 2009), Scobie seems to be overly-saddled with iniquity. Nonetheless, the application of Kant's moral ethics in this study helps explain that Scobie's actions are emotionally understandable and morally justifiable.

With regard to God's grace, Greene once remarked: "I can't bring myself to imagine that a creature by Him (God) can be so evil as to merit eternal punishment. His grace must intervene at some point" (Allain 1983, p. 150). In spite of the torment caused by human emotions, Scobie's sufferings remind us that this religiously "unjust" hero may be in the right morally, bringing home to us the dubious distinction between saints and sinners in Green's fiction and in the contemporary world.

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