

English Literature Activities



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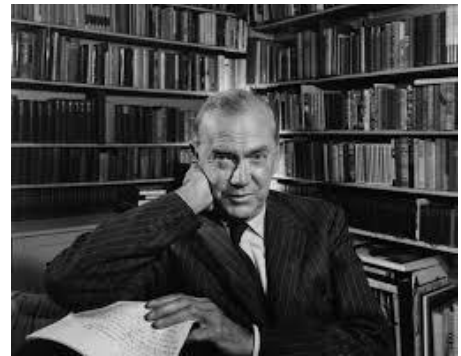


The end of the affair by *Graham Greene*



Read the text about the author and the book and answer the questions:

Graham Greene, born on October 2, 1904, in Berkhamsted, England, is considered one of the most significant British novelists of the 20th century. His literary career spanned over six decades, during which he published numerous novels, short stories, essays, and plays. His works are renowned for their intricate exploration of moral dilemmas, the human condition, and the intersection of faith and doubt. Often referred to as a "novelist of moral anxiety," Greene's narratives frequently delve into themes of betrayal, guilt, and redemption, reflecting his own complicated relationship with religion and ethics.



Educated at Berkhamsted School and later at Balliol College, Oxford, Greene's early experiences shaped his worldview and informed his writing. He began his career as a journalist and worked for various publications, including *The Times*. His first novel, *Brighton Rock* (1938), introduced readers to a world of psychological complexity and explored the nature of evil through the character of Pinkie Brown, a young gangster. This work established Greene's reputation as a writer capable of melding suspense with profound moral inquiry.

One of Greene's most acclaimed novels, *The End of the Affair* (1951), exemplifies his thematic preoccupations and narrative style. Set in London during and after World War II, the story revolves around a passionate affair between Maurice Bendrix, a writer, and Sarah Miles, the wife of a civil servant. Greene's own affair with Catherine Walston formed the basis for this book. The novel is notable for its introspective examination of love, jealousy, and the role of faith in human relationships. Greene employs a first-person narrative, allowing readers to immerse themselves in Bendrix's turbulent emotions and complex psyche.

The narrative begins with Bendrix reflecting on his affair with Sarah, which begins in the backdrop of wartime London. Their relationship is characterized by intense passion, yet it is also fraught with insecurity and anxiety. As the affair progresses, Bendrix grapples with feelings of jealousy, particularly towards Sarah's husband, Henry. This emotional turmoil is compounded by the omnipresent specter of war, which serves as a catalyst for both their desires and fears.

The novel takes a dramatic turn when Bendrix, during a chance encounter, discovers that Sarah has ended their affair abruptly, citing her newfound faith in God as the reason. This revelation ignites a profound existential crisis within Bendrix, who cannot comprehend how Sarah could abandon their love for the sake of belief. The narrative unfolds as he attempts to uncover the truth behind Sarah's decision, ultimately leading him to confront his own beliefs and the nature of love itself.

Greene skillfully interweaves themes of faith and doubt throughout the narrative. Sarah's struggle between her earthly desires and her spiritual convictions raises questions about the nature of love and the sacrifices it demands. Bendrix, on the other hand, represents the skeptical, rational perspective, grappling with his inability to understand Sarah's transformation. Their conflicting views on love, morality, and faith create a tension that resonates throughout the novel.

As the story progresses, Greene delves deeper into the characters' inner lives, revealing the complexities of human emotion and the often contradictory nature of love. The novel culminates in a poignant exploration of loss and the enduring impact of love, even in its absence.

The End of the Affair remains a powerful meditation on the nature of love, faith, and the human experience. Greene's masterful prose and psychological depth invite readers to reflect on the intricate dynamics of relationships and the moral ambiguities that define our lives. His ability to capture the nuances of human emotion, set against the backdrop of historical turmoil, solidifies Greene's legacy as a novelist of unparalleled insight and sensitivity.

1. What is the central plot of *The End of the Affair*?

2. How does Greene structure the narrative in *The End of the Affair*? What is the effect of that?

3. What themes does Greene explore through the characters of Bendrix and Sarah?



Read the extracts that follow. The first extract (A) is from the very beginning of the novel and it refers to "hate" while the other three that follow (B-C-D) have "love" as a central idea. Read all of them carefully and summarise in a paragraph the main themes as well as your opinion on them. Do you agree with the writer? Justify your opinion:

A

A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead. I say 'one chooses' with the inaccurate pride of a professional writer who - when he has been seriously noted at all - has been praised for his technical ability, but do I in fact of my own will *choose* that black wet January night on the Common, in 1946, the sight of Henry Miles slanting across the wide river of rain, or did these images choose me? It is convenient, it is correct according to the rules of my craft to begin just there, but if I had believed then in a God, I could also have believed in a hand, plucking at my elbow, a suggestion, 'Speak to him: he hasn't seen you yet.'

For why should I have spoken to him? If hate is not too large a term to use in relation to any human being, I hated Henry - I hated his wife Sarah too. And me, I suppose came soon after the events of that evening to hate me: as he surely at times must have hated his wife and that other, in whom in those days we were lucky enough not to believe. So this is a record of hate far more than of love, and if I come to say anything in favour of Henry and Sarah I can be trusted: I am writing against the bias because it is my professional pride to prefer the near-truth, even to the expression of my near-hate.

B

When I began to realise how often we quarrelled, how often I picked on her with nervous irritation, I became aware that our love was doomed: love had turned into a love-affair with a beginning and an end. I could name the very moment when it had begun, and one day I knew I should be able to name the final hour. When she left the house I couldn't settle to work: I would reconstruct what we had said to each other: I would fan myself into anger or remorse.

And all the time I knew I was forcing the pace. I was pushing, pushing the only thing I loved out of my life. As long as I could make-believe that love lasted, I was happy - I think I was even good to live with, and so love did last. But if love had to die, I wanted it to die quickly. It was as though our love were a small creature caught in a trap and bleeding to death: I had to shut my eyes and wring its neck.

C

‘Sar-ah’ he called. ‘Sar-ah,’ spacing the syllables with an unbearable falsity.

How can I make a stranger see her as she stopped in the hall at the foot of the stairs and turned to us? I have never been able to describe even my fictitious characters except by their actions. It has always seemed to me that in a novel the reader should be allowed to imagine a character in any way he chooses: I do not want to supply him with ready-made illustrations. Now I am betrayed by my own technique, for I do not want any other woman substituted for Sarah, I want the reader to see the one broad forehead and bold mouth, the conformation of the skull, but all I can convey is an indeterminate figure turning in the dripping macintosh, saying, ‘Yes Henry?’ and then ‘You’ She had always called me ‘you’. ‘Is that you?’ on the telephone, ‘Can you? Will you? Do you?’ so that I imagined, like a fool, for a few minutes at a time, there was only one ‘you’ in the world and that was me.

D

If this book of mine fails to take a straight course, it is because I am lost in a strange region: I have no map. I sometimes wonder whether anything that I am putting down here is true. I felt that afternoon such complete trust when she said to me suddenly, without being questioned. ‘I’ve never loved anybody or anything as I do you.’ It was as if, sitting there in the chair with a half-eaten sandwich in her hand, she was abandoning herself as completely as she had done, five minutes back, on the hardwood floor. Most of us hesitate to make so complete a statement - we remember and we foresee and we doubt. She had no doubts. The moment only mattered. Eternity is said not to be an extension of time but an absence of time, and sometimes it seemed to me that her abandonment touched that strange mathematical point of endlessness, a point with no width, occupying no space. What did time matter - all the past and the other men she may from time to time (there is that word again) have known, or all the future in which she might be making the same statement with the same sense of truth? When I replied that I loved her too in that way, I was a liar, not she, for I never lose the consciousness of time: to me the present is never here: it is always last year or next week.



She wasn't lying even when she said, ‘Nobody else. Ever again.’ There are contradictions in time, that's all, that don't exist on the mathematical point. She had so much more capacity for love than I had - I couldn't bring down that curtain round the moment, I couldn't forget and I couldn't *not* fear. Even in the moment of love, I was like a police officer gathering evidence of a crime that hadn't yet been committed, and when more than seven years later I opened Parkis's letter the evidence was all there in my memory to add to my bitterness.



In the following extract (E) Bendrix compares his literary creations to a God-created world. You don't need to be interested in religion to feel implicated in this scene. Do we not face in these "global" days (politics, economics, global warming, poverty) our limits? Do you ever feel overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness?

E

I went back home and again I tried to settle to my book. Always I find when I begin to write there is one character who obstinately will not come alive. There is nothing psychologically false about him, but he sticks, he has to be pushed around, words have to be found for him, all the technical skill I have acquired through the laborious years has to be employed in making him appear alive to my readers. Sometimes I get a sour satisfaction when a reviewer praises him as the best-drawn character in the story: if he has not been drawn he has certainly been dragged. He lies heavily on my mind whether I start to work like an ill-digested meal on the stomach, robbing me of the pleasure of creation in any scene where he is present. He never does the unexpected thing, he never surprises me, he never takes charge. every other character helps, he only hinders.

And yet one cannot do without him. I can imagine a God feeling in just that way about some of us. he saints, one would suppose, in a sense create themselves. They come alive. they are capable of the surprising act or word. they stand outside the plot, unconditioned by it. But we have to be pushed around. We have the obstinacy of nonexistence. We are inextricably bound to the plot, and wearily God forces us, here and there, according to his intention, characters without poetry, without free will, whose only importance is that somewhere, at some point, we help to furnish the scene in which a living character moves and speaks, providing perhaps the saints with the opportunities for *their* free will.



Now read the final extracts (F-G) and answer the question that follows

F

It's just something to fill the brain with, so that I can forget the absoluteness of her death. A week ago I had only to say to her 'Do you remember that first time together and how I hadn't got a shilling for the meter?', and the scene would be there for both of us. Now it was there for me only. She had lost all our memories forever, and it was as tough by dying she had robbed


me of part of myself. I was losing my individuality. It was the first stage of my own death, the memories dropping off like gangrened limbs.

G

I came up the broken steps into the hall. Nothing but the stained glass was the same as that night in 1944. Nobody knows the beginning of anything. Sarah had really believed that the end began when she saw my body. She would never have admitted that the end had started long before: the fewer telephone calls for this or that inadequate reason, the quarrels I began with her because I had realised the danger of love ending. We had begun to look beyond love, but it was only I who was aware of the way we were being driven. If the bomb had fallen a year earlier, she wouldn't have made that promise. She would have torn her nails trying to release me. When we get to the end of human beings we have to delude ourselves into a belief in God, like a gourmet who demands more complex sauces with his food. I looked at the hall, clear as a cell, hideous with green paint, and i thought, she wanted me to have a second chance and here it is: the empty life, odourless, antiseptic, the life of a prison, and i accused her as though her prayers had really worked the change: what did I do to you that you had to condemn me to life? The stairs and banisters creaked with newness all the way upstairs. She had never walked up them. Even the repairs to the house were part of the process of forgetting. It needs a God outside time to remember when everything changes. Did I still love or did I only regret love?

Greene wrote: "Sometimes I think that the search for suffering and the remembrance of suffering are the only means we have to put ourselves in touch with the whole human condition".

After Sarah's death Bendrix grapples with how we make ourselves up. The two extracts above have "memories" as a central idea. After carefully reading them, express your thoughts on the subject justifying your opinion.

 **Watch the trailer of the film based on this book. Are the characters what you had expected when you read the extracts?**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JhelXvh8iQ>

The end of the affair Teacher's C1-C2

Biographical text:

1 What is the central plot of *The End of the Affair*?

The End of the Affair revolves around a passionate affair between Maurice Bendrix, a writer, and Sarah Miles, the wife of a civil servant, set against the backdrop of wartime London.

2 How does Greene structure the narrative in *The End of the Affair*? What is the effect of that?

The narrative is presented in the first person, allowing readers to immerse themselves in Bendrix's turbulent emotions and complex psyche.

3 What themes does Greene explore through the characters of Bendrix and Sarah?

Themes of love, jealousy, faith, and the moral ambiguities of human relationships, highlighting the conflict between earthly desires and spiritual beliefs.



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