

# Perpetuation of love and hate in the end of the affair

[Environment](#), [Air](#)



“ The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it’s indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it’s indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it’s indifference.” -Elie

Wiesel Throughout the novel *The End of the Affair*, Bendrix is drawn, or rather, dragged irrevocably towards G-d. His reluctant propensity towards redemption, however, is not through any great desire for or faith in the divine. Rather, it is his hate, his suffering, his indignation at the absurdity of the mortal condition that hounds him towards salvation. Maurice Bendrix begins the novel by explaining, “ This is a record of hate far more than of love,” (p. 7) and in doing so, sets the tenor of the book. Hate, or at least Maurice’s concept of hate, becomes the driving force of the story.

Throughout, Bendrix struggles with his conflicting feelings of love and hate towards Sara, but the two should not be seen as opposites. The true opposite of love is not hate but apathy. Apathy connotes complete lack of interest or feeling, whereas hate requires some deep emotional investment. In the beginning of the book, it is evident that Bendrix hates Sarah, his former lover. On a “ black wet January night,” he runs into Henry, Sarah’s husband, and the two men decide to go to the bar together. He asks after Sarah: ‘ How’s Sarah?’ I asked because it might have seemed odd if I hadn’t, though nothing would have delighted me more than to have heard that she was sick, unhappy, dying. I imagined in those days that any suffering she underwent would lighten mine, and if she were dead I could be free: I would no longer imagine all the things one does imagine under my ignoble circumstances. I could even like poor silly Henry, I thought, if Sarah were dead. (p. 8) Bendrix hates his former lover with a passion, a complete inversion of the energy he

had once invested in his love for her. The kind of hate he feels is no apathy – it can only have stemmed from an intense connection with her: Hatred seems to operate the same glands as love: it even produces the same actions. If we had not been taught how to interpret the story of the Passion, would we have been able to say from their actions alone whether it was the jealous Judas or the cowardly Peter who loved Christ? (p. 27) Maurice's hatred began with love. Shortly after he meets Sarah, they began a wild, zealous affair: There was never any question in those days of who wanted whom – we were together in desire. Henry had his tray, sitting up against two pillows in his green woolen dressing-gown, and in the room below, on the hardwood floor, with a single cushion for support and the door ajar, we made love. When the moment came, I had to put my hand gently over her mouth to deaden that strange sad angry cry of abandonment, for fear Henry should hear it overhead. (p. 49) Sarah loved him and he Sarah, deeply and to the utmosts of their hearts. Maurice's hate could only have mutated from love. Even in the midst of their affair, Maurice was insecure, unsure of her love, always needing to be reassured. He's the very picture of a doubting Thomas – his faith is dependent on constant tactile reinforcement: I woke with the sadness of her last cautious advice still resting on my mind, and within three minutes of waking her voice on the telephone dispelled it. I have never known a woman before or since so able to alter a whole mood by simply speaking on the telephone, and when she came into a room or put her hand on my side she created at once the absolute trust I lost with every separation. (p. 48) From the very beginning, Sarah's and Maurice's approaches to love were divergent. While she was relatively secure, he only

felt validated or fulfilled when in her presence. One of their conversations highlights this divergence, and foreshadows the trouble it will arouse: ‘ My dear, my dear. People go on loving G-d, don’t they, all their lives without seeing Him?’ ‘ That’s not our kind of love.’ ‘ I sometimes don’t believe there’s any other kind.’ (p. 69) One night, during a bombing, while Sarah and Bendrix are together at his house, Bendrix goes downstairs to check and see if his landlady is in the basement. As he is walking down, a bomb hits the building next-door, partially destroying the ceiling above him. A door falls on top of him, and he is knocked unconscious. Though she isn’t a believer, when she sees his form under the door, Sarah begins to pray frantically: I knelt down on the floor: I was mad to do such a thing . . . So I said, I love him and I’ll do anything if you’ll make him alive. I said very slowly, I’ll give him up forever, only let him be alive with a chance, and I pressed and pressed and I could feel the skin break, and I said, People can love without seeing each other, can’t they, they love You all their lives without seeing You, and then he came in at the door, and he was alive, and I thought now the agony of being without him starts, and I wished he was safely back dead under the door. (p. 95)[As you say, Brother, for the nonbeliever, that’s a coincidence; for a believer, that’s the providence of G-d.] The deal that Sarah strikes with G-d and the subsequent “ reincarnation” of Bendrix is the first of what could be seen as several miracles. Unfortunately, though, this “ miracle” marks the end of the affair. Sarah, the unwilling believer, feels obligated to keep her promise with G-d until she can disprove Him and resume her liaison with Bendrix. Bendrix’s wealth of love for Sarah quickly mutates into hatred – deep, penetrating, corrosive hatred. He convinces himself that Sarah has left

him for another man, whom he refers to as X: . . . It is in my profession to imagine, to think in images: fifty times through the day, and immediately I woke during the night, a curtain would rise and the play would begin: always the same play, Sarah making love, Sarah with X, doing the same things that we had done together, Sarah kissing in her own particular way, arching herself in the act of sex and uttering that cry like pain, Sarah in abandonment. (p. 75) Little does he realize just whom X is, in fact, it's quite out of the scope of Bendrix's imagination: Sarah has left Bendrix for another man, but He's no human being. Bendrix could not hate as he does were it not for the love he once had for Sarah. All of the energy that he invested in thinking of and pining after her, in making her happy, becomes focused in the opposite direction. He begins to hate with the same intensity and devotion that he had loved, incessantly brooding and thinking of ways to hurt her. However, because his hate arose from love, it is fated to return to where it began. One day Sarah telephones Bendrix, and they agree to meet and talk. Instantly, the icy rage he had harbored melts: I sat with the telephone receiver in my hand and I looked at hate like an ugly and foolish man whom one did not want to know. . . sitting there, my fingers on the quiet instrument, with something to look forward to, I thought to myself: I remember. This is what hope feels like. (p. 29) He had hated Sarah only for her absence, replacing the weakness that affection brings with anger so that he might shield himself from the grief of losing her. It is evident, though, that he really only hated because he loved. Some time after Sarah and his meeting, Bendrix, through the private investigator Parkis, obtains Sarah's journal. He learns several things from reading the journal. He begins to

understand the connection that Sarah feels between herself and G-d, but, more important to Maurice, he reads, in her own hand, how and why Sarah ended their relationship, and immediately he has another surge of hope: . . . I thought of that day when she had packed her suitcase and I sat working here, not knowing that happiness was so close. I was glad that I hadn't known and I was glad that I knew. I could act now. Dunstan didn't matter. The air-raid warden didn't matter. I went to the telephone and dialed her number. (p. 125) Sarah refuses to meet him, but Maurice goes to her house anyway. He sees her running out the door, and follows her into a church – one that Sarah has been frequenting. In the church, as Bendrix sees it, begins a struggle between himself and G-d; two lovers vying for Sarah's affection. Maurice is triumphant, confident that his hands and mouth will win over the "vapor:" She loves us both, I thought, but if there is to be a conflict between an image and a man, I know who will win. I could put my hand on her thigh or my mouth on her breast: he was imprisoned behind the altar and couldn't move to plead his cause. . . I thought with triumph, almost as though he were a living rival, You see – these are the arguments that win, and gently moved my fingers across her breast. (p. 128-30) For a cursory few days, Maurice feels victorious – he has beat out all of Sarah's "suitors," Smythe, Henry, Dunstan, and faith. To Bendrix, at least initially, G-d is nothing more than an obstacle to his being with Sarah. He loves her the same way as he did when their relationship had just begun – possessively and with an over-emphasis on the tangible. He firmly believes that the appeal he holds to her flesh will overwhelm the desires of her spirit. His love is rooted in and limited to the physical world. It extends no farther than his

arms can reach, and so, as is with everything that can be touched, his joy is fated to end. Only eight days after Bendrix's love is finally requited, Sarah dies. As Dante Rossetti once said, "The worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has no one to thank." The same could arguably be said of blame. When Sarah dies, Bendrix looks for someone to blame, someone to direct his pain and indignation towards. He can't blame himself, and he certainly can't blame Sarah for dying. Neither can he be angry at Henry. Still, Bendrix needs someone or something upon which to lay the blame for Sarah's death. The conclusion that Bendrix arrives at is, for him at least, somewhat paradoxical. The only "culprit" that could reasonably be blamed is Sarah's faith, and, by extension, the object of that faith: G-d: I thought of the stranger I had paid Parkis to track down: the stranger had certainly won in the end. No, I thought, I don't hate Henry, I hate You if you exist. I remembered what she'd said to Richard Smythe, that I had taught her to believe. I couldn't for the life of me tell how, but to think of what I had thrown away made me hate myself too. (p. 136) Bendrix, though, is a staunch unbeliever, and at first, his atheism is only reinforced by Sarah's faith.: "I mustn't hate, for if I were really to hate I would believe, and if I were to believe, what a triumph for You and her." (p. 138) In this sense, though, his atheism is tainted - he is too invested in the concept of G-d to not believe. True, or "pure" unbelief would be apathy, which is quite the opposite of Bendrix's poignant, painful anger. However repulsed Bendrix is by the thought of faith, it pursues him like a dog on the hunt. Over the course of the weeks and months following Sarah's death, an odd string of occurrences manifest. The first of these is a dream Maurice has in which Sarah speaks to

him: “ ‘ Don’t worry,’ she said. ‘ Something always turns up. Don’t worry,’ and suddenly I didn’t worry . . . I woke, still hearing ‘ don’t worry,’ like a whisper lodged in the ear, a summer sound belonging to childhood.” (p. 140)

Bendrix, though, is unaffected by the dream – he refuses to budge from his spiritual stoicism. Some time later, Lance, Parkis’ son, falls ill with a serious stomach illness. He is bedridden, and Parkis is worried that a doctor will have to operate. One day, though, Parkis gives his son one of Sarah’s old books, which contains a strange inscription: ‘ When I was ill my mother gave me this book by Lang. If any well person steals it he will get a great bang, But if you are sick in bed You can have it to read instead.’ (p. 179) Almost instantly after reading the book, Lance’s health returns – his stomach pain goes away and his temperature drops back to normal. Still Bendrix insists that it’s no more than “ A coincidence . . .” (p. 179). Bendrix’s struggle against belief only becomes more intense as time goes on – the “ coincidences” begin to mount. The weight of Sarah’s faith begins to bear down upon his spirit. When Father Crompton, Sarah’s old priest, comes to visit Henry at house that he and Bendrix share, Maurice becomes furious. He rages at both of them, and furiously storms out and into his room. There he sees Sarah’s journal: From the drawer of my bedside table I took her journal and opening it at random, under a date last January, I read: ‘ O G-d, if I could really hate you, what would that mean?’ And I thought, hating Sarah is only loving Sarah and hating myself is only loving myself . . . Nothing – not even Sarah – is worth our hatred if You exist, except You. And, I thought, sometimes I’ve hated Maurice, but would I have hated him if I hadn’t loved him too? O G-d, if I could really hate you . . . (p. 182) One day, Bendrix gets a call from Smythe,



the Rationalist thinker. Smythe, who once had hideous spots on his face, has, for reasons unknown, been cured of the blemish. With this, his wall of secularism begins to crumble: I tried to summon up all my faith in coincidence. . . Perhaps after all it was the truth. Another coincidence, two cars with the same number plate, and I thought with a sense of weariness, how many coincidences are there going to be? Her mother at the funeral, the child's dream. Is this going to continue day by day? I felt like a swimmer who has over-passed himself. . . (p. 189) Finally, Bendrix relinquishes himself to the hound. He is a believer, albeit a reluctant one: I sat on my bed and said to G-d: You've taken her, but you haven't got me yet. I know Your cunning. It's You who take us up to a high place and offer us the whole universe. You're a devil, G-d, tempting us to leap. But I don't want Your peace and I don't want Your love. I wanted something very simple and very easy: I wanted Sarah for a lifetime and You took her away. With Your great schemes You ruin our happiness like a harvester ruins a mouse's nest: I hate You, G-d, I hate You as though You existed. (p. 191) And so Bendrix has found belief, but it is a belief founded in anger, in hate. He is no closer to salvation than when he began his affair with Sarah. The book ends with a weary, fearful sort of anger – more resentment than hate. Greene leaves the denouement open-ended, and never makes clear whether or not Bendrix resolves his inner turmoil. It cannot, however, be forgotten, the way in which love and hate perpetuate each other in the novel. Hatred never begins as hate – it can only arise from love. As is with all things, organic and not, while passion lives, in love or in hate, it retains its essential components. Hate originates in love, and, whether in this world or the next, to love it must return.