Graham Greene’s late modernist novel *The End of the Affair* (1951) is a Lacanian text par excellence, a literary avatar of Lacan’s *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality/The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (1972-73). To begin with an illustrative distraction: if we consider Neil Jordan’s film *The End of the Affair*, based on the book, we can glimpse this analogy between Greene’s novel and Lacan’s twentieth seminar on Woman’s jouissance, Love, and God. Jordan’s film misses the mark precisely because it fails to take into account the Lacanian dimension of Greene’s work. Viewers of Jordan’s film tend to agree on its primary flaw, which exposes the filmmaker’s non-Lacanian mindset. As one reviewer writes, Neil Jordan cut[s] the heart out of his movie in its last twenty-five minutes by having Sarah renege on her promise to God. She resumes the affair. . . . it is a dramatic, artistic mistake. The force of Sarah’s character, her fate (and that of the two men in her life), and the central irony and piteousness of the story, all flow from Sarah’s determination to keep her promise. Jordan dumps all this and opts instead for simple domestic pathos. . . . [T]his made Sarah’s promise over Bendix’s (seeming) corpse nothing but a temporary stumbling block to the affair and not, as Greene intended, a transformation of it into a crucible. [Greene’s] Sarah is . . . a worldly creature who stumbles on transcendence but, once awakened, clings to her divine lover even as her heart yearns for the earthly one. This is precisely what gives the novel its cruel, creepy strength.

—Lacan, *Encore*
Sarah is just another sensual, good-natured person – one of us, glamorized. (Alleva, 19)

This film critic is by no means a Lacanian. Nevertheless, he puts his finger on the very flattening aspect of the film that precludes it from being about the impossibility of a sexual relation. From this, Alleva astutely deduces that Jordan’s *The End of the Affair* fails, in the most banal sense of the term – fails to mark the failure of the sexual relation, which failure the novel successfully devotes itself to conveying.

Offering us a St. Teresa figure (one of Lacan’s favorites in his drama on love) in the guise of Sarah Miles, Greene’s *The End of the Affair* puts forth Lacan’s idea of Love as impossible at the level of human interaction. As Samir Dayal writes, in analyzing Jane Campion’s film *The Piano*, “The sexual relation is ‘impossible’ because sexual difference is enigmatic, because it is as though feminine desire and masculine desire were not speaking the same tongue. But beyond this always failing love is something else that we can trace, an inhuman love” (Dayal, 3). This “inhuman love” would seem to be what Saint Teresa, as represented by Bernini’s statue in Rome, experiences but does not know: “you need but go to Rome and see the statue by Bernini to immediately understand that she’s coming. There’s no doubt about it. What is she getting off on? It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics consists in saying that they experience it, but know nothing about it” (Lacan, 1998, 76). In the first two sections below, Lacan’s reasoning behind his notion of the impossibility of human Love will be laid out: first, in terms of his three orders of Love and in particular the gap between the love object and the objet a, or cause of desire, that dwells deceptively in the love object; and second, in terms of his idea of sexuation and the gap between the man and the Woman. Tying the unfeasibility of Love to the collapse of the sexual relation, which by no means detracts from desire, Lacan asserts that “love is impossible and the sexual relationship drops into the abyss of nonsense, which doesn’t in any way diminish the interest we must take in the Other” (Lacan, 1998, 87).

*The End of the Affair* approaches Lacan’s concept of impossible love asymptotically through writing that accesses Sarah’s relation to God, thus raising the question of a connection between Greene’s Catholicism and Lacan’s God. One early reader of this essay has already posed the question of whether Lacanian analysis allows for the possibility of a “real God.” But what is a “real God”? Lacan’s God is definitely, or indefinitely, Real: Lacan’s register of the unsignifiable; the “mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious” (Lacan, 1998, 131). And Greene, in an interview, stated that his God is “an inexplicable force,”