

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR “*THE END OF THE AFFAIR*”

1. “A story has no beginning or ends” (p.1). Do you agree with this statement in regards to the structure of *The End of the Affair*?
2. Do you think that Sarah and Bendrix were in love or lust?
3. Is Greene correct when he says that the book only has two tones: “obsessive love and obsessive hate”?
4. “I write a story. How can you prove that the events in it never happened, that the characters aren’t real?” (p.139) Do you think that book is based on Greene’s own experiences? Look at different aspects of the novel including: - Bendrix, the author - the bomb explosion - Sarah’s decision to convert to Catholicism - the location of the book, Clapham Common
5. In *Ways of Escape* Greene laments of using the first person “I” for *The End of the Affair*. Is he correct to think it may have been the wrong perspective to use? What benefits and disadvantages would the third person have brought to the novel? Which do you think is best to convey the emotional and religious struggle: first or third person narration?
6. Sarah claims that she is “a bitch and a fake.” Does she hide her true self from everyone, including herself? Who do you think Sarah really is?
7. Sarah and Bendrix use the image of an onion as a code word for their love and it also becomes a metaphor for their affair. Do you think this is a good metaphor for the novel? Look at the way Bendrix reveals the story of their affair in retrospect.
8. Did Henry know about Sarah’s affairs? Or was he truly blind to her actions?
9. “War had helped us in a good many ways, and that was how I had almost come to regard war as a rather disreputable and unreliable accomplice in my affair.” (p.45) How important is the setting and timing of the affair? Is the war an accomplice or an enemy?
10. a) Does Bendrix accept “the possibility of God”? Or does God remain a mystery to him? b) Does Sarah really work through her feelings about God?
11. Sarah sticks to two promises that she doesn’t fully believe in: her marriage and her promise to God that if he saved Bendrix she would leave him. Does it seem believable that she would stick so unwavering to both? Why does she do it?
12. “I look forward to these evening walks of ours,” Henry said. (p.160) What do you make of Bendrix and Henry’s relationship at the end of the novel? Is this the beginning of another kind of affair?
13. “The film was not a good film, and at moments it was acutely painful to see situations that been so real to me twisted into the stock clichés of the screen.” (p.32) Bendrix considers the adaptation of his book into a film. Most films rely on the action, the visual and conversation to drive the plot. Do you think that a book that examines inner turmoil can be turned into a successful film? If you and your reading group have time watch one of the film adaptations of *The End of the Affair* so you can discuss whether you prefer the book or the film adaptation.