CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Greene's Catholic novels, four in number, selected for this study, chronologically start with a tender hint of discontent and gradually become broad-based and intensified and end up with an explosive note of protest in the last Catholic novel and almost Greene's last novel. A hint—too faint to be grasped—felt in *Brighton Rock* develops into a loud, riotous protest—too strong to be missed in *Monsignor Quixote; The Power and the Glory* and *The Heart of the Matter* mid-way stations, cultivate this hint into a protest, functioning like intervening soil. Since this study traces this intensification of discontent, with growing criticism of the functioning inadequacies of the Church, into a riotous protest against the materialistic corruptions of the religious core of the Church, it clubs those overtly Catholic novels into a sequence of four novels and groups them into a significant tetralogy. They almost take the shape of an epic-sequence in which this common strand of
subjecting the Catholic Church to a sincere and honest speculative scrutiny becomes noticeable.

Earlier, it was *The Heart of the Matter*, which forged the trilogy and drew the attention of critics to a pattern in the contents of the earlier two Catholic novels. What stood independently fell into a pattern with the publication of the third novel, namely, *The Heart of the Matter*. Previously, the first two Catholic novels were not linked in the views of critics. It was the publication of *Monsignor Quixote* in 1982 that compelled me to broaden the trilogy into a tetralogy. It signalled me to look back at the other three novels and a pattern evolved in their order and number.

Therefore, in the Conclusion it is better to reverse the chronological order so far followed and to take up the last novel with its unmistakable note of loud and active 'protest' and then to trace its tender origins in the earlier novels. With this in mind, *Monsignor Quixote* is taken up first and the analysis moves backward to end up with *Brighton Rock*.

Generally, the critics have viewed Greene as a catholic soaked in the traditionalities of the Catholic Church in spite of his late conversion to it. Greene, like his Monsignor was of the opinion that no one is "ever fully converted. Not even the Pope".

Also the non-serious, non-spiritual motives behind his conversion has not been sufficiently highlighted by the earlier critics. Like Scobie, he "just became a Catholic to marry" a Catholic and the conversion didn't "mean a thing" to him. Even Greene's criticisms of the Church have been intentionally underplayed by the earlier critics. For which an unusually great number
of Catholic critics—many of them nuns and priests—who have written on various aspects of Greene’s novels, short stories and plays are responsible to a great extent. They have all intentionally or unintentionally ignored the negative comments of Greene on the Roman Catholic Church and its practices that even the non-Catholic critics of Greene have casually been satisfied with highlighting the achievements of Greene as a writer without paying special attention to the note of discontent or array of criticisms against the Church. Even the violent protest by Monsignor Quixote in the last of Greene’s catholic novels has been allowed to slip behind their active scrutiny of the more visible Marxist parallel running alongside the adventures. The very intellectuality of the scrutiny of the parallel ideologies of Catholicism and Marxism has been ignored by the critics and they get distracted enough to say that “all speculation had ended” for Catholics like Greene and that they shifted their responsibility on to the broader shoulders of an institution like the Roman Church. But this is not borne out by a close reading of the texts of this tetralogy. Or if one develops “a complete belief”, even “in the prophet Marx” or “Isaiah”, then “You don’t have to think for yourself”. One can be “happy” with “complete belief”. But there’s only one thing you will ever lack—“the dignity of despair.” They impress an attentive reader as highly speculative in the active sense of the term and the author Greene and his dominant characters seem simultaneously to be aware of their existential responsibilities which are almost always shirked by the Churchmen and also to be anticipating the corrective steps taken or to be taken by the Second Vatican Council of the same Roman Catholic Church. One cannot
but be impressed by the total absence of any attempt by Greene to resort to miracles in delineating the churchified lives of his important characters. His characters very often escape ending up as symbols of spiritual abstractions. They emerge as flesh and blood characters.

A priest like Padre Quixote, elevated by mistake to the higher rank of a Monsignor in the Roman Church’s hierarchy is repeatedly using the obscene expression “Bugger the bishop” is a sufficient rebel act as per the outer appearance of the Church. His reference to Abraham as “that old scoundrel” is, to say the least, immodest; but calling God “a much worse scoundrel” is nothing short of blasphemy. The Church cannot tolerate such blasphemous references to God and Padre Quixote does not regret this remark at any time in the novel. The picture of the Church that emerges with a Bishop who has not heard of Father Heribert Jone’s Moral Theology is not a very glorious one. Even at that infamous level it cannot ignore an ordained priest giving a patient, half-willing hearing to the Mayor’s attempt to rewrite the Parable of the Prodigal Son from the Marxist angle changing “the official version” approved by the Church. No Catholic will or can do that; much less a priest and a Monsignor. Then how can a Catholic novelist like Greene do it in print? He extends his commentary to the Old Testament’s Book of Job. Job is a classic example of piety and holiness for the Churchmen. To say that “Job . . . was obscenely rich” is at least un-christian and un-Catholic.

While generally a Roman Catholic is not even encouraged to read the Bible, in Monsignor Quixote one notices the atrocious exercise of one’s religious freedom. A Roman Catholic, usually, is not expected to tamper with
the "official version" of the parable even to suit the religious purposes but here the Mayor does it to suit the requirements of Marxism. The Monsignor does not raise his objection to the Communist Mayor rewriting the parable from the Marxist point of view. They even start questioning the appropriateness of Christ comparing the faithful to the sheep. If this makes Christ a Good Shepherd it also implies the final slaughter of the sheep as inevitable. Comparing a monastery to a brothel, terming both as "sanctuaries" is as unpardonable to the Church as blasphemy. Such intemperate remarks, though, are attributed to "a great deal of wine" in Rocinante. 'A Maiden's Prayer' is also given two interpretations: on one level it is Señorita Martin, a Nor­man girl who assumes the role of Dulcinea to the Don; on another level, it is a prayer, for a sexually potent young partner, in the film the two wit­nessed during their open-road journey. Professor Pilbeam researching on Saint Ignatius of Loyola who "often pray(ed) for Descartes" and sometimes "to Descartes". Though he, like Greene, was a "nominal" Catholic who was not bothered to change the label" and "being a catholic" helped him in (his) research—it opened doors that will remain closed otherwise. Once again the Monsignor repeats the obscene expression "Bugger the bishop"; it could almost mean 'Bugger the Church' for the bishop is but the representative of the Church. "By this hopping (one) can recognize love." The forbidden "Mass went rapidly on". By giving the non-existing Host to the Mayor, he receives him into the fold of the Church—his Church. Both address each other as 'companheiro'. the Monsignor's mission seems to be over and his life reaches completion. This totality is indispensable for Greene's commentary to be
valid. Almost all the important characters in the four Catholic novels ensure not only their totality but also their finality to be evaluated as Christians so that the one question—the only significant question—can be answered ‘Are they saved or damned?’ The art of Greene convinces the readers that they are all ‘saved’, even if they have all broken some rules of the Church. The infinite mercy of God cannot condemn them to hell. They all leap over the Church.

As a priest Padre Quixote speaks rather too frankly when he says to Father Herrara:

“I believe (in Hell) from obedience, but not with the heart.”

Though the Church tries diplomatically to avoid references to Hell, it cannot tolerate such open defiance of its tenets. If one doesn’t believe in Hell, what is to happen to its binary opposite, heaven?

The Bishop is not able to tolerate the Monsignor’s choosing “very unsuitable friends and travelling companions” like a Communist, former Mayor of El Toboso.

These are extreme examples culled out of Greene’s novels: less extreme examples abound. They show that in the rituals and dogmas of the Church, the essentials have slowly and inextricably mixed with some non-essentials: and they spoil the sanctity of those rituals and dogmas. A thinking Catholic has got to be aware of his faith; and he has to be aware of what the non-essentials are, so that he can be a discriminating Catholic. Speculation alone can help him to discriminate; a non-discriminating Catholic cannot escape being superstitious.
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All the four novels end up as physical tragedies and spiritual comedies. As the characters reach their completion Greene’s ‘speculations’ too reach their completion: his novelistic career also comes to an end: No more Catholic novels. Though this research was started when Greene was alive, writing the thesis started only after his death so that the arguments here have gained a totality and a finality of their own and the scope for future evolution has been nullified. At least, the raw materials won’t evolve any further.

The ‘protest’ marks the final disillusionment of Greene but he doesn’t think of leaving the Church since the Church also leaves him alone. Since Father Leopaldo Duran ignores Greene’s individualistic speculations however un-Catholic and anti-Catholic they are Greene too doesn’t feel the need to leave the Church, since other institutions are none the better. They too are human, defective, and use physical punishments like shooting, imprisonment etc. The climactic riotous protest in Monsignor Quixote caps the long time musings of Greene on the Church. But the climax came only in the end; in the last novel, Monsignor Quixote.

The earlier three novels prepare the readers and the novelist for this climax: The Heart of the Matter which preceded Monsignor Quixote is a story of inaction and very little speculation: but the hero, is a very complex figure, creating problematic situations for the Moral Theologians: the voice of the moral theologian is totally muted throughout and events simply roll in front of our eyes. He lives only once, and has had no rehearsals for this life. that is the absurdity of all life on earth. The only preparation for life, is life itself. And when this one life slips by, we cannot revise it. Rehearsal and
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revision are not possible; that is the tragedy of life; the same is the glory of life. And any creature, including man, has got to accept this reality; even if one doesn’t accept it, that is what happens to him. There is no escaping it.

To accept this fact of life one needs a stoic bent of mind. And this stoic bent of mind includes the right to take full control of one’s own life: Suicide, then, becomes a heroic action: and by taking his own life, Scobie becomes a hero. But the Roman Church is against this stoic outlook considering it, an element of paganism; the everlasting has fixed his canon against self-slaughter: “Thou shalt not kill”, even thyself. To go through life even when life becomes unbearably undignified, is also an act of dignity.

When one starts thinking in terms of theology at times one has to walk in a blind alley. This is what happened to Hamlet who thought so much about self-slaughter but strangely enough he does not think about slaughter: and even while slaughtering, he is not satisfied with killing the body but wishes to damn the soul eternally—a very unchristian thought in the most thoughtful character: this is the effect of putting instinct before reason. The same tragedy overtakes Scobie. The suicide by Pemberton takes him straight to the Mission to see Father Clay—“a man without resources”—He is helplessly repeating the word “terrible”. The best he does to Scobie is to “mix aspirin” for him! What a priest! He says suicide “puts a man outside (the) mercy” of God. But Pemberton “wasn’t a Catholic” and his ignorance of God’s commandment could make a “difference”. The priest’s question: “Mightn’t there be a hope that it’s murder?” after “He hanged himself”—is, to say the least—stupid.
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This dialogue between Father Clay and Scobie is a prediction of Scobie’s own suicide, in whose case the point of “ignorance” doesn’t arise. He is a Catholic. Scobie’s suicide brings out a commentary from Father Rank. In the place of Pemberton’s “ignorance” is, now, Scobie’s “knowledge”. But the heart of the matter is not known to the Church. God’s mercy can still act on Scobie. The Second Vatican Council had discovered it, though Greene never openly refers to it. But cases have been noticed where the Church has ignored the Second Vatican Council’s recommendations! But Greene does not ignore it.

The frequent occurrence of the word ‘responsible’ in The Heart of the Matter is another clue to the individualism of Scobie’s brand of Catholicism. The Church usually claims collective and total responsibility for all its members and doesn’t tolerate individual deviations from the norms fixed by it. There are two keys of the Kingdom and they are with the Church and only with the Church. The golden opens and the iron one shuts. What the Church closes, now after reformed Churches came into being, another Church can open. Now, the authenticity of the Churches has become a matter of controversy.

Scobie’s search of the ship was something like the interference of the Roman Church in the private lives of its members. The captain was not a criminal: “he might be merely breaking regulations enforced on the shipping companies by the navicert system. Prying in brought out “humiliations”; little, petty vices ... tucked out of sight like a soiled handkerchief. He himself had broken some of the rules and regulations of the Church; his own private, bedroom had its own secrets. But the Church interfered fully with
his private life. This novel is unique in that it parades the names of three priests: Father Clay, Father Brûle and Father Rank always ready with their comments. Scobie too is like a fourth priest; the fourth Wise Man. He is married but immoral. His character is very strong; he never gets angry with any one under any circumstances: Life's little ironies did not trouble him. Greene, in his aside on Scobie's character says that Scobie was not vengeful but showed his anger in harmless ways like "pushing at the sluggish starter" of his old Morris. "Scobie thought that a man was surely entitled to that much revenge. Revenge was good for the character: out of revenge grew forgiveness." though the psychology of this argument is weak, its individuality cannot be questioned: it couples the Old Testament "revenge" with the New Testament's "forgiveness". We'd forgive most things if we knew the facts" Both qualities belong to the same God, at a gap of some historical time. Scobie has "always been a planner," he even "planned for other people." He seemed to be doing everything, as Pinkie appeared to be. But deep inside they realised that God was doing everything and "no one can arrange another's happiness." It was His Will, which was being done. This is the deep religiosity that both Pinkie and Scobie stand for in their lives; though stripped of all other non-essentials of Roman Catholicism. One has to reach "the heart of the matter". Every individual is special and Greene questions the textbook moral theology and prefers to treat every individual in a different and unique way. Love is not love when it falls into a definition; Scobie later tells Helen that "against all the teachings of the Church, one has the conviction that love—any kind of love—does deserve a bit of mercy."
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Although “one will pay terribly”, he does not believe that one will pay for ever.” Scobie dies with the word ‘love’ on his lips. We again see that the Church’s rules don’t matter, and that one could be saved even when one breaks those rules.

The traditional theological dogma that the Roman Catholic Church was the final, infallible arbitrator in matters of religion, spirit and life after death, is being rejected by Greene with the strength of his artistic imagination. He creates characters like Pinkie, the whisky priest, Henry Scobie and the Monsignor Quixote with such artistic power that they take a very strong hold on the imaginations of the readers, both Catholic and non-Catholic, that they cannot accept their damnation as per the dogmatic stand of the Church.

Finally, the Church has to alter its dogmatic stand and take refuge in “the strangeness of God’s mercy” as beyond the grip of the Church. This is the great achievement of Greene. His artistic, creative imagination forces the Church to keep quiet when he goes on saving sinners and sometimes even canonizing them! The Church adopts a diplomatic silence or takes a more diplomatic refuge in the mystery of God’s Will. This is at best only diplomacy; or cleverness; but not straight-forwardness.

The *The Heart of the Matter*, which comes third in the tetralogy, doesn’t register any riotous attack on the Church. But the leading character Scobie, a Roman Catholic, systematically violates rule after rule of the Catholic Church, and through these violations condemns himself to ‘damnation’! He commits adultery; as a police officer he misuses his power to save a Portuguese captain because he was a Catholic. He lies to his wife. He goes to confession
without any intention of amendment. He receives communion in a state of mortal sin. All these actions of Scobie are serious violations of the rules of the Catholic Church. The climax of these series of violations comes in the end when he indulges in self-slaughter by taking excessive sleeping tablets. Until the Second Vatican Council suicide was condemned by the Church as an unforgivable sin which put the guilty soul beyond redemption. He decided to remove a dose every night, for nine nights and consuming ten doses on the tenth night. “No one must even suspect. It was not only the question of his life insurance: the happiness of others had to be protected.” “More evidence must be invented in his diary . . . He must make engagements for the following week.” “This was the worst crime a Catholic could commit—it must be a perfect one.” “then Hell will begin, and they’ll (the two) be safe from me, Helen, Louise and you.” After breaking so many rules of the Church! “After all, in spite of everything, he was a Catholic.” “He was a — bad Catholic.” But Father rank said, “that he really loved God,” and Louise added “He certainly loved no one else”.

Scobie, like Pinkie, is a “planner”: “I’ve always been a planner. You see I even plan for other people.” And,

“My plans always start out well.”

This is because he “has a terrible sense of responsibility.” This “terrible sense of responsibility” tempts him to arrange the happiness of others. He “forgot for the while what experience had taught him—that no human being can really understand another, and no one can arrange another’s happiness.” “He had sworn to preserve Louise’s happiness, and now he had accepted another
and contradictory responsibility. All this knowledge or awareness takes him towards his damnation since Catholics are damned by their knowledge. “I am the responsible man” Scobie repeats. He has too much responsibility and too many responsibilities. Scobie, “in spite of everything”, in spite of what these novels show of Greene, “he was a Catholic.”

One more step behind: we meet the whisky priest showing the power and the glory of God. Like The Heart of the Matter, The Power and the Glory tells a neatly laid out story that grips the minds of the readers: the speculations are in the form of action. Therefore, makes interesting reading. The Communist-Priest duo, who became companíeros in Monsignor Quixote are sworn contrasts in The Power and the Glory. No longer enemies; not yet friends. The Church is portrayed in very unattractive colours, but the impression it leaves on our minds is very solemn. Greene gives obscene details but the total picture is one of holiness. Padre José, the whisky priest and the unnamed priest in the last scene who comes to fill the vacancy created by the shooting down of the whisky priest—all carry on the mission of the Church. But they are all, probably, very unsatisfactory ministers of the Church. But that doesn’t belittle their ministry. But Captain Fellows reflects our reaction when he says: ‘What a religion!’ “Begging for brandy. Shameless.” With an illegitimate child, fighting for rotten meat with a hungry bitch all these degrade the Churchman in our eyes. All these defects are obvious; but what forces the whisky priest not to renounce his faith even at the cost of his life—this is not obvious. Greene focuses our attention on this aspect. The hierarchy of the Church has been rooted out; the Bishop is absent; the
Church has been destroyed; the priest is the hunted man; the hunter is a Lieutenant, honest, uncorrupted, dignified and morally spotless. What a picture to portray of the Church! No wonder the book was banned, locally, for some time. But the Pope ‘thought’ differently. There are hints scattered throughout the novel—the hints of Greene’s discontent. Being a Catholic his picture of the Lutheran pair Mr. and Miss Lehr is adulatory indeed; they help the whisky priest. the non-essentials in the Roman Church are brought to the foreground. A mini-reformation is enacted. Greene seems to mean that the Roman Church is Church-like when it is not Church-like. The priest is admirable in his differences with the other priests. The masses said by him are powerful because they are unlike any mass by any other priest. Does it not convey Greene’s dissatisfaction with the other priests, with the other masses? This discontent is slightly hinted at in *The Power and the Glory* that any casual reader is likely to miss it. We don’t miss it because we are coming in the reverse direction after assessing the last two of the tetralogy.

If the hint of discontent is slight in *The Power and the Glory*; it is slighter in *Brighton Rock*. In *Brighton Rock* the hero’s religion—he is irreligious—itself is a question mark. He is a Christian atheist: strange indeed! In his young age, he was intended to be a priest; he doesn’t suffer; he makes others suffer. He acts—indulges in action without knowing that “action is suffering” and “suffering is action.” He is acting and for all appearances he seems to be planning and doing everything: but Greene lets the readers guess that really it is God who is doing everything.

Rose is a powerful Catholic character: she has no doubts. She is clear
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in her objectives. She wants to share Pinkie's damnation and if possible save him from damnation. Her child, his child, too, should also pray for his salvation. Ida, with her secular objective to uphold the Right and Rose, with her religious objective to uphold the Good, fight invisibly. While these two are fighting a shadow fight Pinkie is fighting his own battle—all unaware—and strangely makes the Kierkegaardian 'leap' literally and metaphorically that we agree with Greene that Pinkie might have been saved. When the lay characters are fighting on behalf of God, as usual, the priest is of practically no help; he just comments and argues. The Church disappoints its members. This hint of disappointment is what interests us in this novel, but it is very faint in this first novel of the tetralogy we are dealing with in this thesis.

"You a Roman?" the Boy asked.
"Yes", Rose said.
"I'm one too", the Boy said. 

", the Boy said. 

", the Boy said sharply, "I don't go to Mass."
"But you believe, don't you," Rose implored him, "you think it's true?"
"Of course it's true," the Boy said. "What else could there be?"
he went scornfully on.
"Why" he said, "it's the only thing that fits. These atheists, they don't know anything. Of course there's Hell. Flames and damnation," he said ... "torments."
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"And Heaven too", Rose said with anxiety, ...

...........

"Oh, may be", the Boy said, "may be".

Pinkie believes in Hell but his faith in Heaven is shaky. He is seventeen and she too is seventeen: "Life held the vitriol bottle and warned him." Even the "bare cold chapel" was secular, adaptable to any Christian creed. "A man, and not a machine, stood up in a black cassock" and he was saying "Heaven". The clergyman went on "Our belief in heaven is not qualified by our disbelief in the old medieval hell." Any dead person is "at one with the One," "reabsorbed in the universal spirit." this sounds almost oriental. One is believing only in Hell and another in Heaven. "Ida wept" like Jesus. "Death shocked her, life was so important. She wasn't religious." A Christian can "treat death with flippancy: life wasn't so important perhaps to them as what came after death: but to her death was the end of everything." "Lucky," she'd tell you, to be alive at all." Because she didn't believe in God "Vengeance was Ida's." But Greene's treatment of Ida as a "sticker" to the principle of "Right and Wrong" is definitely unkind. Faith in "Good and Evil," how can it be devoid of "Right and Wrong"? "Oh, she won't burn. She couldn't burn if she tried." says Rose: "I'd rather burn with you than be like Her," she tells Pinkie. Hers is a life of Faith. Even civil marriages are made in Heaven. They too cannot be put asunder. Scobie's second immoral longing is also fast, indissoluble. Pinkie's to Rose is also equally fast. Even a "betrothal" as the "Romans call it" has a sanctity of its
own. Why does a detective story get preoccupied with Hell, Heaven, Soul and salvation and damnation? What does a priest do in it? The story has been ‘converted’ into a Catholic fable. Otherwise it has “no cause to talk about souls,” Pinkie says in the very first chapter of *Brighton Rock*. A detective fiction deals only with bodies and not “souls.” A Kierkegaardian leap for Pinkie is Catholic Existentialism in action; the vitriol is a pre-enactment of Hell. Was he “whipped into zero—nothing” or into Something that is eternal? The priest makes his appearance in the last chapter: he is the one-man chorus, the epilogue as well—commenting on the “appalling ... strangeness of the mercy of God”. Pinkie is dead—but Rose “carried life” in her. The priest, the representative of the Church, as usual in each of three other novels in the tetralogy, stands ready with his comment, nothing more than mere comment—having done nothing, nothing at all, hinting at discontent. One can miss it; but only when one reads *Brighton Rock* alone, in isolation. But “the hint of discontent” cannot be missed if one comes from *Monsignor Quixote*, and *The Heart of the Matter* and the *The Power and the Glory* chronologically in the reverse order. In the first three novels priests are commentators, they stand like the pagan chorus but in *Monsignor Quixote* the priest acts, acts in the concrete tilting at Our Lady's statue decked with currency. In the other novels the priests have their names; they “come and go”. Even the whisky priest says Mass for Catholics. But the last novel voices the note of protest so loudly and that the Monsignor’s final Mass is so revolutionary that it is said for a one-man congregation, for a Communist, a compañero, after an unusually long mobile confession and conversion! Earlier
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the trilogy was born only with the publication of the third novel, until when, the earlier two novels were not clubbed together. Similarly, the concept of the tetralogy comes into being only with the publication of the fourth novel, viz., Monsignor Quixote and therefore this conclusion deals with the four novels in the reverse order of their publication. This order is also more revealing.

A matter of fact way of reading these four novels shows us another important Greenean intention: While the Catholic Church has always been speculating on salvation and/or damnation that follows death, Greene is always concentrating on the earthly lives of his characters, that life precedes death. Ironically this is Ida's preference too. Hell or heaven crops up only after death, neglecting our journey towards death as insignificant. The Pilgrim's Progress of Bunyan is a classic example of the Christian's journey towards the Heavenly City starting with his death. But the Greenean journey ends with death. And the post-mortem events are only commented upon, by priests with a reasonable amount of uncertainty. And salvation or damnation are left at the level of opinion, to be decided by the artistic power of Greene's imagination and not at the level of dogmatic theology. Greene's artistic compulsions on the readers are so strong that they have never disagreed in their opinion regarding the ending of these novels. This is the reason for the popularity of Greene among even non-Catholic readers and his novels remaining Catholic in their theme, remain human in their dealing with the lives of his characters.

Life before death is dealt with in detail. Life after death is just hinted at.