



Purity and impurity in *The Power and the Glory*

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Purity and impurity in *The Power and the Glory*

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Le pur et l'impur est l'une des multiples paires de notions qui s'entrechoquent et qui constituent la clé de voûte de *The Power and the Glory*. La pureté et l'impureté ne sont pas aisément définissables puisque parfois elles sont contradictoires, et parfois elles se ressemblent. L'impureté peut dissimuler ou, au contraire, faire ressortir la pureté. Tous les personnages du roman, en particulier le prêtre, sont en proie à des dilemmes et paradoxes existentiels. Ils voguent entre des extrêmes qui parviennent à se rejoindre et à se confondre. Tel est le cas de la pureté et l'impureté, matériellement visible dans le sordide état de Tabasco, caractérisé par la putréfaction, le délabrement, la pourriture et la corruption. Le conflit religieux et politique a deux adeptes, le prêtre et le lieutenant, qui défendent la pureté de leur noble tâche, mais leurs actions, lorsqu'ils mettent en pratique leurs idéaux, sont empreintes d'impureté. Même si aucun n'est digne de sa mission, c'est le prêtre qui semble évoluer et acquérir une purification spirituelle lorsqu'il abandonne l'ambition, l'avidité et la fierté pour se rapprocher humblement de ses ouailles. Malgré les consonances religieuses de ce roman et son arrière-plan politique, Graham Greene réalise un thriller efficace grâce à un style épuré, un langage simple et dépouillé qui n'encombre pas le déroulement de l'action.

pur, impur, Eglise, Etat, thriller

The Power and the Glory, as already visible from its very title, relies heavily on the complex dialectics of pairs of dual terms which go beyond their apparent contradiction to offer complementary affiliations. The characters, especially the whisky priest, have a dilemma: they live and voice paradoxes and navigate between extremes, an example of which is the states of purity and impurity. Impurity is obviously perceptible in the dirty, infected and contaminated state of Tabasco characterized by putrefaction and corruption, be it material, physical, political, or religious. Theoretically, within the conflict between the political and the religious poles, both the lieutenant and the priest consider that they are endowed with a pure, perfect mission, but unfortunately, neither's mission is absolutely "pure". Those who are supposed to bring comfort to the world and eradicate imperfection are not pure and worthy themselves. The reader is constantly lead to wonder which of the two has a better ideal and who is more likely to win this competition for people's salvation: a sinful priest or a morally good man with no religious faith? The two characters are both noble and flawed at the same time; they share the same virtues and goals, and they have their own vices. However, only the priest seems to undergo a sort of spiritual purification. *The Power and the Glory* could therefore be considered as a novel retracing the priest's journey from an impure state of greed, ambition and pride to humility and understanding. The priest's progress, despite all the

religious resonances emanating even from the title, is contained in a perfectly entertaining format which incites the reader to follow the hero's "labyrinthine ways".

The prevalent atmosphere of *The Power and the Glory* is characterized by dirty and decaying surroundings in a spiritually soiled and impure environment. The sordid universe proliferates with crawling insects and parasites, and dilapidated shabby houses, the façades of which peel off and show the mud beneath, give shelter to dejected people. The material decay is due to the coalition of elements ("the blazing sun" [1], "bleaching dust" [1] and torrential rains which dissolve the hard ground into mud) which seem to act together and disintegrate the whole state of Tabasco. The running water emanates a "sour green smell" (104) and generates either material putrefaction or human diseases, while pure water is rare and available only in bottles. The godless government reigns over this sordid, sterile and moribund state. The crumbling of Tabasco is seen in images like the *General Obregon*, the ship which is on the verge of sinking, in the busts of mildewed "ex-president[s], ex-general[s], ex-human being[s]" (1), in the playground swings which now resemble gallows next to a ruined cathedral, and so on.

The oppressing and repressive laws in the state of Tabasco go hand in hand with the sordidness of the place. As opposed to this situation, the relatively free world in Chiapas, where the Lehrs live, is characterized by cleanliness and the more tolerant attitude of the State towards the Church. In Tabasco, the more stiflingly and tyrannically the laws weigh on people, the more physical degradation seems to dominate the landscape, and physical decay (rotting teeth, dysentery, bodily fluids and smells) gnaws at the human beings from the inside. Diseases and putrefaction thus reflect the impurity of the political regime with its strict laws, prohibition, violence and corruption.

The corruption of the political and military power is visible in the attitudes of most of its representatives. There are numerous examples in the novel of the slovenliness of soldiers, their torpor, boredom and laziness and their involvement in illegal activities such as drinking. Ironically enough, it is this corrupted state which endeavours to fight the corruption of the Church which seems to have failed to fulfil its mission. The corruption of the church is hinted at through reminders of its past celebrations, communions, and fat remote priests who used to present their gloved hands to be kissed by parishioners.

The corruption, perversion and parody of the Mass liturgy and rituals are especially presented in Part II, Chapter 1, when the priest has to shorten, distort and truncate the pure rite of Mass because of the imminent danger of the police approaching, but also because he has lost touch with the Bible, the written word, and half-believing in his homily, he performs only a shortened, oversimplified version of the mass. The truncated sacramental ceremony is contaminated with the priest's impure gestures and thoughts which remove the sacredness of the mass.

Numerous voices in the novel castigate the church: the lieutenant, Mr Lehr and the schoolmaster all carp at the Church's luxury and oppose its opulence to the scarcity and hardships of starving parishioners. The criticism of the Catholic Church seems at first sight justified, as the reader is given some insight into why people such as the lieutenant, Mr Lehr and the schoolmaster have such negative opinions about priests. The lieutenant, for instance, deplores the shallowness of the priests' faith, the weakness of their flesh, their deception of the population, the ignorance the people are kept in, and the way the Church adds to the misery of peasants. He reproaches the personal enrichment of priests and the way they turned a blind eye and refused to take action against injustice. However, because of the corruption of the system the lieutenant stands for or the very life the Lehrs lead, their criticisms appear superficial and hypocritical. Because of the way they formulate their criticism (based not on reality but on childhood memories, visceral hatred and stereotypes), their criticism is not convincing and their vision of impurity is obstructed by their own blindness.

The remains of the Church have only two representatives left in Tabasco, both of them impure and flawed: “[...] the Church is Padre José and the whisky priest” (22). Their weakness supports the lieutenant’s criticism of the Church. Father José, corresponding to a lower degree of impurity on the pure-impure scale which displays so many variations and combinations in *The Power and the Glory*, is in fact a parody of the representation of the Church: he is a pathetic and grotesque buffoon. The sacredness and respect related to his function is completely gone. He is therefore at the lower end of the impure scale, an idea which is reinforced by the narrator’s insistence on his relinquishing his “gift” (23), surrendering in front of danger and accepting his not so glorious fate as a fattening “pig” (24).

Both Father José and the whisky priest lower “the standards of priesthood” (63) as defined by the whisky priest himself, but the latter is convinced he stands somewhere above Padre José, despite his flaws, despite his being a drunkard and having fathered a child. A parallel between the two impure figures would suggest two degrees of impurity: the whisky priest seems to have more merit than Father José, since he chose to stay in Tabasco. Despite living in dire conditions, half-starved, feverish, hunted by the police, he still carries on God’s will. He still retains the power to give God to the people by performing Mass. Thus, the impure whisky priest has higher moral grounds than the other priest. He is lustful, guilty of mortal sin, he drinks, has tasted “human love” and committed adultery, but he still has moral and spiritual values and, above all, a sense of duty.

At the higher end of the purity scale lies the ideal, unattainable perfect image of young Juan. Luis’s mother reads for her children the story of this martyr. The insertion of the hagiography as a parallel story to the priest’s and as another layer of fiction has a reversed effect: instead of throwing an unfavourable light on the whisky priest, and casting him even lower on the impurity scale, the romanticized story of young Juan, a model of purity who forsakes his family and secular world and completely abandons himself to God’s hands, seems fake and so unlike the real down-to-earth preoccupations of the whisky priest. The story read by the mother stresses the discrepancy between the “reality” of the priest’s fate and the fictitiousness of Juan’s sugared, romanticised progress. Genuine purity and devotion are therefore just a myth, an inaccessible position reached only by characters in legends. The idealized portrait of what the Church would like the faithful to believe is just a chimerical idea of purity; however, in reality, the whisky priest is as pure as you can get under the circumstances in the totalitarian state of Tabasco. The priest is a flawed anti-hero begging for brandy, negotiating prices for baptisms and Mass and robbing a dying dog of a bone. But his progress, because of the temptations he gives in to and the sinuous impure ways he follows, appears more honest, truthful and credible than Juan’s.

Graham Greene presents two divergent ways of envisaging purity and purification: the Church advocates keeping away from sin, but this is difficult in a world devastated by poverty, violence, interdictions and corruption; conversely, the State imposes the population to stay away from religion, but again, this is too demanding in a world in which religion is the only thing poor people can take comfort in. Purity remains a religious utopia in this impure dystopian state. Both secular and religious powers are corrupt and neither philosophy is perfect, but in the end, the people’s need for spirituality prevails. The message of the regeneration and survival of the church through the arrival of the new representative at the end of the novel is unequivocal.

The opposition between the two philosophies of life is debated by two representatives of the State and the Church, namely the lieutenant and the whisky priest. The struggle between State and Church is exemplified by the two crusaders, each standing for a specific ideology. Both men have a function and represent precise values and beliefs. They both agree the world is a corrupt place, and the poor and the children are a common battleground for the two protagonists. Both have power and authority: the lieutenant has the power to kill the priest and

the priest has the power conferred by his sacramental authority; he is the representative of the power of Rome, even though he himself is, as a man, a sinner.

Both the priest and the lieutenant seem to have a pure, lofty mission. The former's task is to purify and save people's souls. The latter's consists of purifying and freeing people's spirit by forbidding religion, irrespective of how this ideal is achieved. He conforms to the totalitarian ethic according to which the end justifies the means. In Part I, Chapter 2, "The Capital", we are offered his point of view on religion as the root of all evils. The lieutenant lives a more ascetic, simpler, soberer and stricter life than priests themselves. His crusade against religion leads to an almost religious desire to destroy and eradicate the past, purge the religious elements from people's lives and build a future on a different basis. He is determined to cut from the body politic the institutions that caused him (as a child) and other children much pain.

Both characters encompass an amalgam of purity and impurity, good and evil, noble idealism, but also vice, flaws and ambition. This is why they resemble each other, and their positions are even interchangeable. Ironically, the lieutenant shares the attributes of the priest whom he is hunting: thus, the lieutenant looks more like a priest and leads more of a monastic life than the priest himself. However, one of the main differences is that while the lieutenant hates the weakness of the flesh, the priest is more tolerant as he has "tasted" it himself and loves its result.

The priest and the lieutenant have two visions of the world, at times coinciding, at other times diverging. They are both right and both wrong during their discussion in Part III, Chapter 3. The pure, spiritual aspirations and point of view of the priest, who sees the condition of the soul as being purer and more important than that of the body, are marred by the materialist view of the Church interested mainly in accumulating money and not in helping ordinary people improve the condition of their lives. The lieutenant points out the fact that the Church has sponsored a spy network of religious persecution, in which one villager was encouraged to inform on another less "holy" citizen who missed Easter duty and the sacraments. However, ironically, this is exactly what the lieutenant does when he takes hostages and executes them in order to force the villagers to denounce the priest. The same perverse system of coercion puts the priest's spiritual organisation on a par with the lieutenant's political movement. Both contrasting and apparently noble theological and Marxist ideologies are in reality flawed and unfulfilling.

During their encounter, both characters have impure feelings and thoughts while trying to justify their ideal. On the one hand, the lieutenant experiences various negative feelings of disgust ("A look of physical disgust crossed the lieutenant's face" [190]), anger ("He broke out furiously with one hand on his gun, as though it had crossed his mind that it would be better to eliminate this beast, now, at this instant, for ever" [191]), hatred and scorn ("You are so cunning, you people" [191]). The priest, on the other hand, is afraid of his approaching death. The fear of the firing squad makes him think of physical pain: he fears the bullets as much as a possibly unhappy afterlife. The long-awaited exchange between the two characters proves to be uneven: the lieutenant looks for a proper, heated argument but, to his frustration, the priest always admits he is a flawed, weak person. He mainly anchors his preoccupations in the reality of the flesh and not in the mere verbal, esoteric, or theological considerations. The essence of the priest's argument is that good, pure men are not necessary to the Church, since even a bad, unworthy priest can give the sacraments.

From a religious and moral point of view, impure actions are those which make one ashamed and provoke culpability. The whisky priest is most of the time ashamed of his fearful reactions and the opulence of the life he has led at Conception. He especially broods over his carnal sin. However, his sin is overpowered by the love of the fruit of this sin, Brigitta, his daughter, although she is a constant reminder of his weakness. Pure feelings of love are

hidden by shame (the “shame-faced overpowering love” [63]). When meeting with the embodiment of his “mortal sin”, in his heart and thoughts he feels love for her, but his discourse condemns his impure past act. He has two opposing reactions to his sin: shame and love, which reflect the dual aspect of his deed and his double position (as a Father, or a clerical figure and as a father, or a genitor). The Father has fathered a child: the priest has made a human mistake. The priest’s sympathy and love for Grigitta remain inarticulate during their conversation. Because he is unable to put into words his thoughts and convey his feelings, he remains trapped in his function. There is a difference between the man (as the narrator offers the reader insights into the priest’s tormented state of mind grappling with his feelings of love) and his office (expressed in the icy gestures and the verbal sphere during the dialogue with his daughter in Part II, Chapter 1). Despite the priest’s unconditional love, his daughter is not the result of a pure conception. Brigitta is the fruit of negative, impure ingredients of “fear”, “despair”, “loneliness” and alcohol. The benefit of experiencing such a sin, nonetheless, is that it allows the priest to discover the beauty of his sin, to empathise with his parishioners, to become more responsive to basic human needs and consequently to get closer to his mission as a priest.

Indeed, the priest feels closer to people and to God, and therefore he is more suited to fulfilling his function, when he is contaminated by “impurity”. The contact with the sinful and the impure makes the priest approach the purity of his mission. A case in point is the prison scene in Part II, Chapter 3. The priest spends the night in prison, surrounded by criminals and victims of society. He speaks to a murderer and sits next to an old man longing to see his illegitimate daughter, taken away from him by the Church. It is when closer to the sinners in the stinking environment of the prison, closer to those impure beings who incarnate, like him, the weakness of the flesh, closer to their basest instincts and most natural, physiological needs, that the priest performs his job better. It is when he is at the nadir of physical and moral degradation that he learns more about humility and compassion and he is ready to commune with his fellow human beings and attain “a sense of companionship which he had never experienced in the old days when pious people came kissing his black cotton glove” (126).

The description of the prison cell dwells on the stench coming from a mixture of all bodily fluids and excrements (“stench from the pail” [123]), as well as on the combinations of various vices, “lust, and crime, and unhappy love” (123) which “stank to heaven” (123). The bare-handed priest, who has long given up his black cotton gloves, will clean the impurities of the stinking cells in the morning, like God will save the man from his “stinking” sins. Thus, for the first time, in the impure, sinful environment of the prison, the priest is endowed with a pure God-like mission, albeit on an earthly scale.

The priest doesn’t act like a typical priest: he defends the sinners and accuses the Church. He feels a sense of solidarity with his fellow prisoners. He sides with the old man who loves his illegitimate daughter, not with the Church officials who took his daughter away from him. He understands the sinners better because he himself is a sinner and committed the same sins. He also sides with the couple who are copulating in the dark. The real danger of allowing the love-making to continue in the prison cell, the priest says, is that “we discover that our sins have so much beauty” (128). He argues with a pious woman, trying to destroy her “sentimental notions of what is good” (125). The piety of the self-righteous woman in prison seems artificial compared to the genuine humanity of the priest. Accordingly, the theme developed as the thesis of *The Power and the Glory* is that the sinner is closer to the heart of Christianity than is the saint. For the priest, love (copulating) is better than rigid, authoritarian, strict religious views. In a cell full of murderers and thieves, it is ironic that it is the pious woman who turns out to be the least admirable figure.

This episode is reminiscent of many stories in the *New Testament* in which the pride of the moral rectitude is worse than the sins of flesh, like for example in the story in which Christ

intervenes between a mob of self-righteous people and a woman whom they are about to stone to death for adultery. Jesus, alarmed by their fanaticism and the violent display of self-righteousness, tells the crowd that only those who are without sin are allowed to condemn her and throw the first stone. Like Jesus Christ, the priest condemns the hypocritical confidence and pride in the woman's own moral rectitude. The story of the impure whisky priest often presents echoes to the life of Jesus Christ. His progress is sprinkled with Christocentric imagery, especially allusions to Christ's Passion, and he is surrounded by characters which bring to mind biblical figures. In this way, *The Power and the Glory* could be read as an allegorical story retracing the priest's journey from an impure state towards a form of purity. However, as will be discussed in the next part, Greene transcends this perfect linear pattern reminiscent of *The Pilgrim's Progress*; instead of reaching the "Celestial City" directly, the priest wanders astray, lost in Limbo, carrying the burden of his theological ideas which clash with the experiences he lives among the suffering humankind.

A parallel with the Christian story would present the priest as undergoing a journey towards purification and martyrdom. Little by little, the priest abandons his material, sacred possessions and priestly characteristics (Bible, attaché case, clothes) and his journey acquires spiritual dimensions: when "naked" and freed from earthly attributes and human flaws such as pride and ambition, he can finally sympathise with his fellow human beings.

As examined in the previous part, the priest comes to the prison cell as empty and forsaken as Christ was on the evening of his betrayal, and seems to begin his spiritual purifying rebirth among spiritual and physical corruption. For that matter, the prison cell acts as the priest's battlefield where his purity and impurity confront each other. His soul is beginning to purge itself; the priest feels concern and compassion for people (who, at the same time, physically "purge" themselves) and he finally accepts and embraces them with all their human flaws. For now, the purity of the priest overcomes, but old temptations will threaten to tip the fragile balance towards impurity.

The priest undergoes a spiritual rebirth in a dirty place characterized by darkness and misery. However, the priest is a Greek hero, that is to say he has flaws which participate in his downfall. Impurity is fatal for his progress. The pure, selfless actions worthy of a priest are counterbalanced by examples of impure actions, when he is deprived of humanity and reduced to animal attributes. For example, he pilfers the lump of sugar lying besides the Indian child's mouth and tricks a starving bitch out of a bone. The mock-heroic fight with the mongrel is not at all a glorious example of a tragic hero who defeats a monstrous beast: he is just a famished priest, deprived of any human dignity, who fights over a bone with a crippled mongrel bitch. In this ludicrous parody of a heroic and honourable fight, the priest is sinful, egoistic, fearful, violent, manipulative and devoid of compassion. The priest's refusal to allow a starving dog even a morsel and his theft of an essential part of a child's sacred burial rites are impure gestures in the progress of his pure spiritual awakening.

The priest's journey is made of different degrees of purity, as this concept is never absolute and the priest relapses several times into impurity. When it seems that the priest has undergone a symbolic cleansing, he is dirtied again by the mean, unworthy, insignificant material considerations to which he gives attention. He is constantly slipping back into his old habits. For example, in Chiapas, he begins to patronize people as they haggle over the price of a baptism. He is more concerned with how much he will be able to take with him to the city than with saving souls. He charges money for performing what is his duty to perform. He thinks more like a businessman when he assumes that the price must be kept high for the sacrament to be appreciated. His attitude towards money is a sign he is not quite ready to access martyrdom and saintliness. He still clings to earthly, material values. Thus, he is not quite ready to give himself to God; he is not completely and genuinely generous. It is only when he gives all the money away that he has given himself over entirely to his faith.

Paradoxically, this oasis of peace in Chiapas and the cleanliness of the Lehrs have a bad influence on him. Despite all of their soaping, the Lehrs remain superficial people. Their oasis of peace is a false, impure Eden. The priest is definitely a better man in a seedy environment. The squalor brings out the best in him. Only in an illegal context is he able to be closer to people and forget his authoritarian voice as a priest. He understands people when he is outlawed, persecuted, and when his function as a priest is in danger. Freedom seems to awaken impure feelings whereas the confinement of the prison cell reveals the best in the priest.

Because of the priest's relapses during his journey and because finally he is never fully purged, as illustrated by the fact that just before he is executed at the end of the novel he is inebriated, the story reads like an inversion of a Christian allegory and casts a different light on the progress of an unworthy priest. The parallel of the whisky priest to Christ is clearly mocked by the author when he suggests a similar parallel with the whisky priest's counterpart, Padre José, an ironic, laughable and pathetic Christ-figure. Besides, the whisky priest's journey is no hagiography or sentimental saga: he is far from being or becoming a saint. As *The Power and the Glory* is neither a pure history lesson nor a pure religious account, the author tries to find a specific style and a generic mould to contain a personal vision and follow the unique progression of a priest, the representative of a large spiritual organisation, who attempts to escape his fate in the context of ominous political oppression.

Greene's style is taut, "purified" from all superfluous, cumbersome descriptions and vocabulary, which is in keeping with the generic specificities of entertaining thrillers. The author does not use a great number of descriptive adjectives, his aim being to strip his narration down to a bare minimum. In the 1920s Greene became the sub-editor of *The Times*. He later confessed that the period of sub-editing had literary value, for it taught him to eliminate linguistic clichés and superfluities. His aim was to move away from "poetic prose", as he stated in *The Other Man*, and avoid the heavy and pompous style of earlier novels:

My first books were very bad, full of metaphors which I chose for their extravagance influenced as I was by my readings in the twenties, when I was very attached to the English Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, who devoted themselves to highly complex rhetorical exercises. Today my early novels horrify me, they're so absurd. There's nothing worse than poetic prose.¹

Graham Greene envisages a novel in which pure action does not stagnate too much and in which the plot is not slowed down by unnecessary literary devices. For this, he does not give elaborate descriptions, but he uses suggestive images which have a wider resonance. The relics of the earlier literary style are still visible in the profusion of metaphors and especially similes which flourish throughout the novel, bringing together concrete objects and abstract qualities. However, there is a visible effort in creating innovative comparisons which do not sound like clichés, but are carefully chosen to have specific resonances. The progress of action is mainly indebted to the simple, economical and efficient writing characterized by the multiplicity and variety of cinematic techniques, shifts in points of view, light dialogues made of a series of short, simple sentences, and concrete and colloquial vocabulary. The suspense of the story, stemming from the priest's strategies of escape, always outsmarting the police or playing a cat-and-mouse game with his pursuers, among whom the *mestizo*, his Judas, are characteristics of the thriller genre. Greene's purified, minimalist style relies therefore neither on elaborated linguistic and stylistic effects nor on complex narrative techniques. The author has nevertheless managed to achieve an intensely visual and highly enjoyable novel.

The specificities of Greene's generic product are very much used today in televised entertainment. Indeed, famous TV series such as *Prison Break* or *24* use not only the

¹ Marie-Françoise Allain (translated from the French by Guido-Waldman), *The Other Man: Conversations with Graham Greene* (London: Bodley Head, 1983), 130-131.

appealing themes of betrayal, the authorities' hunt and the escape and hiding of the innocent fugitive, not only hooking techniques such as the suspenseful multiplication of cliff-hangers and the hero's imminent "almost" captures, but also the pattern of constantly shifting planes to tell a story in a deliberately kaleidoscopic and disjointed fashion. The simple but effective method consists of building tension and taking the viewer to a zenith of unbearable suspense, then releasing this tension by moving to another plane in order to duplicate the mechanism. With a handful of minimal, unadorned ingredients, uncontaminated by superfluous sophisticated literary or cinematic devices, the recipe of successful entertainment seems to be guaranteed.

Like a number of Graham Greene novels, *The Power and the Glory* deals with the interaction of politics and religion. In this case, there is utter hostility between the two. Politics, as represented by the socialism of the lieutenant, concerns itself with improving social conditions, especially for the poor. Religion, as represented by the priest, concerns itself with the salvation of souls. The novel suggests that both ways of approaching life are flawed. The lieutenant cannot see that his zealous idealism may well create as much harm as it does good. In trying to stamp out religion, the lieutenant's approach ignores the deep longing people have for a transcendental reality and the comfort they seek in religion. But on the other hand, there are plenty of hints about the hypocrisy of the church, which is always ready to take people's money while ignoring the miserable social conditions in which they live. The priest as a representative of such a religious organisation is of course a badly flawed figure.

The complexity of the dialectics pure / impure can not be easily grasped, since in *The Power and the Glory* the two notions are not clear-cut and separate: they resemble each other, they echo each other, they balance each other, and they encroach upon each other. They can sometimes reject and sometimes attract each other as well, like the ends of two magnets, depending on the poles put into contact. The impure lies at the heart of the pure, and the pure is sometimes surprisingly to be found among the impure. Thus, the purity of the priest is revealed in the worst situations, as we have seen in the analysis of the prison scene. On the contrary, impurity resurfaces when the priest is free and old demons of the past re-emerge, when he barter for the price of alcohol and sacred rituals. Consequently, it could be said that purity is more likely to stand out on a background of danger and confinement of the strict political regime which brings out the best in the whisky priest. The priest is constantly crossing borders, figuratively and metaphorically, reaching limits and afterwards regressing.

Purity is sometimes camouflaged by impurity. Pure deeds and gestures must be skillfully hidden in order to pass unnoticed and endure in a hostile environment. For instance, the clothes chosen by the priest are a means to ensure his anonymity and disguise; his Bible is disguised inside the covers of an impure, erotic novel; finally, he pretends to be a drunkard in order to obtain some wine for the Mass (although here his pretense is half true). The profane can become a shield for the sacred, but it can also contaminate or corrupt the sacred, like for instance during the truncated mass which loses its sacred aura as rituals become diluted, adapted to the situation and distorted by the priest who must think of his survival at the same time. The paradox of mixing the pure and the impure also lies in the symbol of the whisky which ultimately encompasses opposing connotations: whisky is the pure essence of a substance which is extracted through distillation. Yet, this pure substance leads the not so pure whisky priest into temptation in *The Power and the Glory*.

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