

Georg M.A. Gaston

*THE PURSUIT OF SALVATION: A CRITICAL GUIDE TO  
THE NOVELS OF GRAHAM GREENE*

New York: Whitson Publishing Company, 1984. Pp. 162,  
\$18.50

Grahame Smith

*THE ACHIEVEMENT OF GRAHAM GREENE*

Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986. Pp. 228, \$22.50

Reviewed by Elizabeth Davis

It is a challenge indeed to produce a study of the novels of Graham Greene that offers any startlingly original insight into his creative output. The proliferation of Greene criticism has been such that one is now almost resigned to finding, in any new addition to the canon, a reworking of ideas put forward, with varying degrees of discernment, over the past thirty-odd years since the first good critical study of Greene by Kenneth Allott and Miriam Farris (1951). *The Pursuit of Salvation* in many ways fits into this category of remakes, but redeems itself on two counts. First, Gaston has the obvious advantage of having at his disposal the whole range of Greene's fiction which, one assumes (as the novelist approaches his eighty-second birthday) is nearing its limit. He includes in his survey the latest novels, *Dr. Fischer of Geneva* and *Monsignor Quixote*, which are young enough to be crying out still for attention as independent beings and for eventual synthesis into the whole fictional family. Second, and more importantly, the author of this guide insists that Greene's gallery of critics must shift its collective gaze (heretofore elephantine) away from a fixation on the religious bent of the earlier novels. After *The End of the Affair* in 1951, as Gaston rightly says, Greene's fiction moved onto a secular track, and his outlook beyond that point has continued to expand, to move onto ever more capacious and eclectic ground.

Gaston's plea for a shedding of the old critical skin, heavy as he says with "theological esoterica," is most welcome and long overdue. This is so not only because Greene himself claims not to be "a religious man" (though religion "interests" him), but also because such established opinion has run counter to the central motif of Greene the man: an insatiable need to experience life on the other side of the border. Gaston writes: "Greene is a very restless kind of writer drawn by the uncertainty and variety of experience. He is not a philosophically inclined writer in search of an intellectual system. This is why, as he continues his thematic pursuits, what often happens to him is that once he crosses into a new area, he undergoes a longing or curiosity to see what is ahead or even what he might have left behind" (p. 122). This need, he suggests, has only deepened with time: "... the more Greene has written, the harder it has become to place a critical label on him" (p. 123). Gaston himself ventures to rank him "among the novelists of the great humanistic tradition" (p. 123): safe, perhaps, but sensible for such a chameleon as Greene.

Apart from these virtues, this volume provides little that is exceptional. The analyses of the novels is competent enough, although discussion in the biographical chapter of Greene's course of psychoanalysis and its influence on his career would have given depth to the statement that Scobie's "despair is less religious than psychological" (p. 36) and to the notion that the thriller genre fitted perfectly Greene's boyhood obsessions with terror, guilt, and betrayal. There are occasional flashes of inspiration (reader "engagement" with Pinkie in *Brighton Rock* as necessary to the demonstration of moral struggle; the structure of *The Quiet American* as a reflection of the changing state of Fowler's mind). As for the style, it is workmanlike, but lacking in bite; Gaston is too easily seduced by the honeyed ease of tired phrases such as "spiritual journey" and "moral vision." Nevertheless, the even and fair-minded tone, and the evident desire to correct a longstanding wrongheadedness about Greene's scope, make this guide a useful work of reference.

Grahame Smith remarks, in this new study of Graham Greene, on the sheer bulk of the writer's output over the course of his long career. Quite rightly, he points to Greene's lesser-known pieces (the short stories, the travel books, and the essays) as worthy of critical attention. Although he himself relegates discussion of them to the final chapter only, he evinces such enthusiasm and writes with such keenness here that one could wish he had made this side of Greene's talent the focus of his study in the first place.

It is clearly a question of freshness. So little has been said about Greene's other personae—critic, dramatist, cinema connoisseur—that one can hardly blame Mr. Smith for twitching his critical nose in that direction. He ought to have followed his instincts. What he plumps for of course is yet another probing of the novels, which by now are beginning to weary under the strain of constant dissection.

After a biographical introduction in which he gives due stress to the rather neglected issue of Greene's experience of psychoanalysis as an adolescent, Smith embarks on the path through the novels that so many others have traveled before him. There are a few notable digressions: to *The Ministry of Fear*, which he views as a major book, to the appeal of the so-called religious novels in terms of a secular morality as well as spiritual, and to the *The Human Factor* as the "culmination" (p. 191) of his literary career (not many would be so hasty to dismiss the more recent novels so categorically).

There are other, minor, features of Smith's analysis that are unique, though regrettably so. One is his odd use of pointless analogies of this sort: *The End of the Affair* "opens with an intimate immediacy . . . like Lockwood's diary at the beginning of *Wuthering Heights*" (p. 106), or "If Dickens's *David Copperfield* is 'saturated' in his love for Dora, it seems fair to say that Greene was saturated in cinema for a large part of his career" (p. 205). Another is his singular display of bad judgment regarding *The Quiet American*, a novel he claims is full of "flabby writing" and "general banality" (p. 131). There are, too, lapses into stylistic vagueness in such phrases as "the authority of imagined detail" (p. 139), or "fusion of character, setting, theme and language allows [for] richness and intensity of meaning" (p. 167). And one final, petty, complaint: why is Wormold of *Our Man in Havana* referred to continually as "Wormald"?

How much more stimulating and valuable an elaboration of his tantalizing comments in the final chapter would have been. Smith is right to point to *Collected Essays* as a mine of valuable clues to Greene's artistic leanings, and to link Greene's love of the cinema (and distaste for the experimental prose of Joyce and Woolf) to his own popular instincts as a writer. But as for the rest, perhaps Smith's own estimate of Allott and Farris's 1951 study, *The Art of Graham Greene*, as "the most distinguished critical book on Greene so far" (p. 215) is indictment enough.

Saad El-Gabalawy, trans & ed.  
*THREE PIONEERING EGYPTIAN NOVELS*  
Fredericton: York Press, 1986. Pp. 122. \$12.95  
Reviewed by Victor J. Ramraj

This is Saad El-Gabalawy's third volume of translation of Egyptian fiction into English. The first two—*Modern Egyptian Short Stories* (1977) and *Three Contemporary Egyptian Novels* (1979)—were carefully chosen to be representative of the current thematic and formal trends in Egyptian fiction. The three novellas of this latest volume are taken from three different decades of the twentieth century—1900s, 1930s, and 1980s. El-Gabalawy's intention is to indicate the main phases in the development of the Egyptian novel. The first piece, Mahmūd Tāhir Haqqī's *The Maiden of Dinshway* (1906), is one of the early attempts at the novel in Egyptian literature, which then did not have a strong tradition in this genre. The second, Mahmūd Tāhir Lāshīn's *Eve Without Adam* (1934), shows the influence of the traditional, nineteenth-century European novels. The third, Sa'd al-Khādīm's *Ulysses's Hallucinations or the Like* (1985), is a modern, experimental work, employing stream-of-consciousness techniques. The novellas, of course, are not just of formal interest. They offer us graphic portraits of Egyptian society and, particularly in the second and third novels, perceptive studies of human experience that transcend the Egyptian ethos.