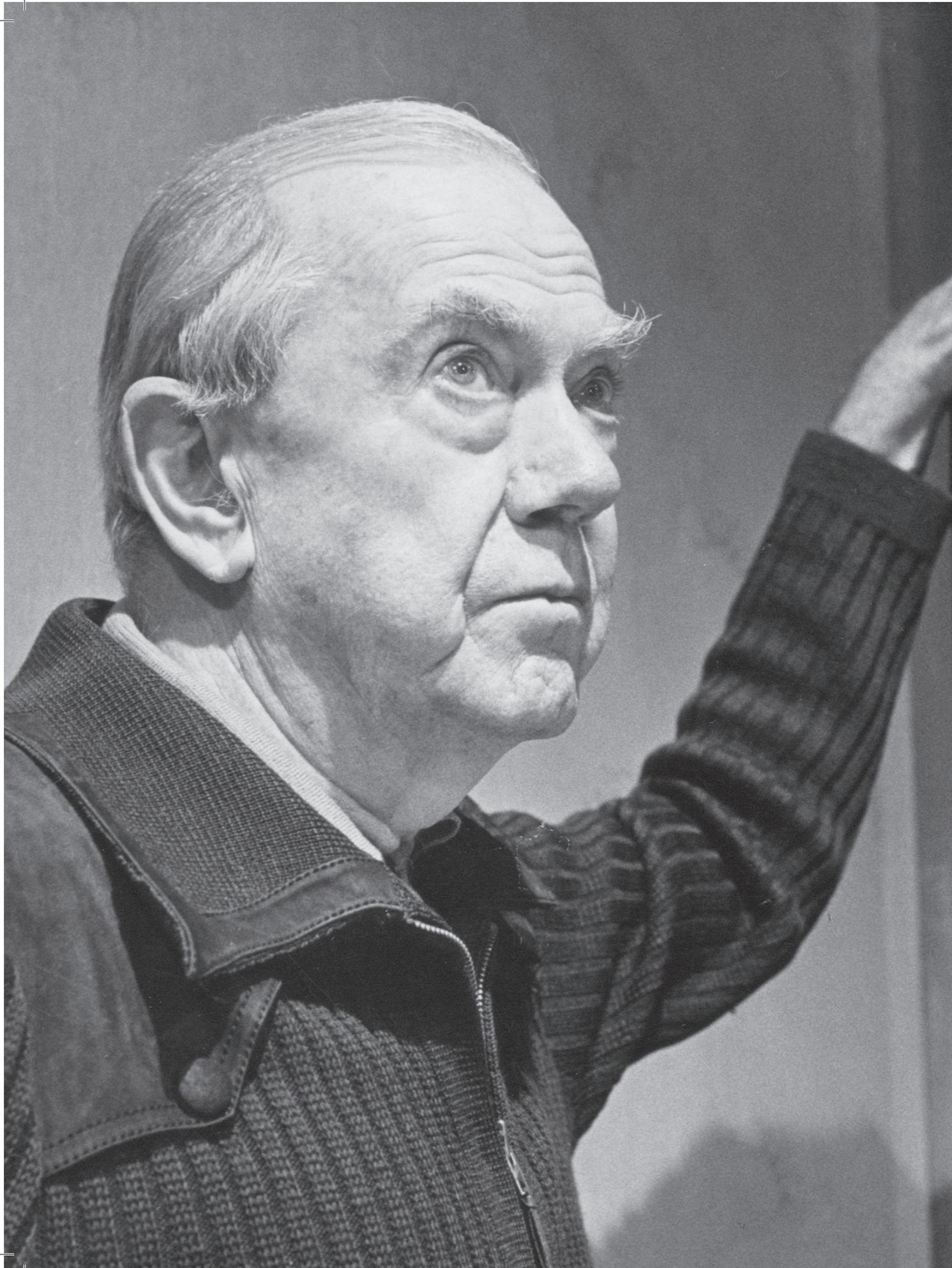


TRAVELS IN GREENELAND

THE CINEMA OF GRAHAM GREENE



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THE CINEMA OF GRAHAM GREENE

revised and updated fourth edition

Quentin Falk



University Press of North Georgia
Dahlonega, GA

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For Hannah

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FOREWORD

Graham Greene's relationship with the cinema was as complex as his relationship with Catholicism, though perhaps not as enduring. There must be a book to be written about the two halls that dominated his youth and early adulthood—one a church, the other a fleapit—and about the pleasures he sought in both, sacred and profane.

During his period as a critic, he was one of the most incisive to have written in England, even given his strange miasma about the work of Alfred Hitchcock. And there must be another book to be written—perhaps there has been—about the lack of contact between those two poets of English criminality and bad conscience.

Anyway, cinema informed Greene's work, even if Hitchcock never filmed it, and in his passage towards what was called the 'absurd fame' of his middle years, he didn't rest until he had significant international success with it. That came, of course, through Alexander Korda, Carol Reed and *The Third Man*.

But behind that universally known film, there are a host of other screenplays including adaptations by him of the work of others and adaptations of his own work by others. Quentin Falk's admirable account of the entire of Greene's contacts with the cinema, and of the cinema with Greene, is a must for anyone with an interest in either.

Neil Jordan
Ireland, June 2000



Above — Neil Jordan shooting *The End of the Affair* on location in Brighton

PREFACE TO NEW EDITION

The borders of “Greenland” appear infinite. Though Graham Greene professed to hate the expression, it remains a potentially rich and rewarding fictional landscape that continues to provoke some of the world’s best filmmakers well into the second millennium. Since the last edition of this book, there have been new cinema versions of *The Quiet American* and *Brighton Rock*, two of Greene’s most essential works, as well as a fresh, appropriately brief, screen adaptation of his short story, “A Little Place off the Edgware Road”, all three of which are reflected in these updated pages.

At the last time of writing, and in another corner of the back story, the Graham Greene Festival, held annually in his birthplace of Berkhamsted, was in its infancy. Now sixteen years on, it keeps the flame of his work across all media brightly lit. What better forum then for the premiere in 2012 of *Dangerous Edge*, a fine documentary about the author’s life and work by the American academic Thomas O’Connor, which later was shown all around the world on Sky television. It was, in fact, the first documentary about Greene since his Centenary in 2004 when BBC’s *Arena* unveiled, with a present-day introduction by me, never-before-seen footage secretly filmed from the projection booth during my on stage interview with the great man at the National Film Theatre twenty years earlier, as mentioned below.

However, apart from the new films, perhaps the most unexpected cinematic addition to “Greenland” arrived last year in the form of a very belated memoir by Robert Henrey, better known as little, golden-haired “Bobby Henrey,” who, as an eight-year-old, was the fêted young star of

1948’s *The Fallen Idol*. In *Through Grown-up Eyes*, Henrey suggests he was somehow scarred by the experience of finding, albeit fleeting, fame in his first and only film at so young an age, and that it took him years to come to terms with the experience. Oddly mirroring the plight of the youngster in the source material, “The Basement Room.”

“What,” he asks, less controversially, “was it like having Carol Reed tell me exactly what to do day-in and day-out? Was Michele Morgan nice to me, what were people like Ralph Richardson and Jack Hawkins really like off camera, did I remember meeting Graham Greene?” Answers to the first three questions are helpfully revealed. The fourth, however, remains, rather disappointingly, unaddressed.

* * *

The publication of the original hardback edition in 1984 coincided, quite fortuitously, with Graham Greene’s eightieth birthday. But it was eighteen months earlier when, much more in vain hope than any genuine expectation, I wrote a letter to Greene via his London publishers outlining my ideas for this book and gently inquiring whether he would be prepared to “discuss some of the films” and any “specific memories” in connection with them.

I told him that in no way could I be described as a “student” of his writing but had, as a journalist and critic, been particularly struck not just by the sheer scope of his filmography but also by the various “tantalizing titbits” he’d offered about some of the movies in his autobiographical writings. “I would dearly love your help and, hopefully, your approval in this venture,”

I simpered. When I posted the two page letter, I'm not sure that I really even knew what Greene actually looked like. I was aware he lived abroad, must be quite old, and was said to be notoriously reclusive. I did, however, recall seeing a TV documentary about him which compounded the legend by showing only his knees.

Less than three weeks later, I tore open an envelope containing a sheet of notepaper headed "La Residence des Fleurs, Avenue Pasteur, 06600 Antibes." Without any preamble, he wrote, "I would be happy to help you in your cinematic biography as I have strong feelings about a lot of these films. Perhaps even some anecdotes!" He then added he didn't know when he would next be coming to England but suggested that if I could make it to the South of France... "Anyway let me know," he politely concluded this eight-line reply.

Two-and-a-half months later (during which time I had galloped through all his published writings), I was standing outside his apartment in the modern block above the old port as the door was opened by a tall, stooping man with rather bulging eyes who if he was still, understandably, rather suspicious about this latest intruder on his preferred privacy nevertheless contrived to make me feel instantly welcome. There was plenty of time to talk—virtually no small talk, straight into those anecdotes—before dinner for which Greene had booked a table that evening at, naturally, his beloved Chez Felix.

Before setting out on our chronological scamper through his filmography, Greene warned me that he had some sort of jinx when it came to tape-recording interviews, so I remember asking him to stop after about twenty minutes so I could check that our voices were intact. Despite being some flights up, the sometimes deafening noise of traffic below on that pleasant late afternoon in spring regularly punctuated the soundtrack. It was getting on for eight when Greene suggested we now adjourn to Felix. I insisted that he was my guest for dinner, but he made it equally clear he wanted to pay for the wine—a rather good red, I recall.



After dinner we walked back up to the apartment where we resumed taping our question-and-answer session. When he offered me a liqueur, I was amused to see he secured my selection from his colorful collection of airline miniatures (cf *Our Man In Havana*). I finally returned to my nearby hotel in a haze of good food, drink, and often pungent reminiscence, remembering—just—to make another check of that precious tape-recording. His late septuagenarian voice, with those characteristic guttural r's, was, thankfully, strong and clear. The next morning we met again, more briefly this time, to dot i's and cross t's before I headed away for the airport.

Our correspondence between that time and the occasion when, a year-and-a-half on, he agreed to mark the publication of my book and his own impending eightieth birthday by giving a *Guardian Lecture* at the National Film Theatre, was always short and very much to the point. I was, for example, keen to find out what sort of films he had recently enjoyed. "I find I'm not very interested in films these days and have seen remarkably few in the last ten years," he replied. *Breaker Morant* impressed him and so did *Heat and Dust* "in spite of its being spoilt as is often the case by the bad performance of Julie Christie."

A couple of months after that, I heard from him again this time giving me permission to use lines from some private correspondence. I had also told him about the latest publicized antics of The Other, someone calling himself Graham Greene who, for twenty-five years, had been

Above — Graham Greene with the author on stage at the NFT for the 1984 Guardian Lecture (photo: Sten M. Rosenlund)

passing himself off as the writer in various corners of the globe. “How interesting about the Other,” he wrote. “I wish you had noted the date. The CIA had me arriving in Hawaii which I had never visited. I found this when I demanded references to me under the Freedom of Information Law.”

His final pair of letters to me concerned the impending *Guardian* event on the South Bank. Although denoted “Lecture” it actually takes the form of a Q & A with an on-stage interviewer (on this occasion, me) who then invites further questions from the audience. Greene was patently unclear about the format. “I made it clear to them [the NFT] that I would not give a lecture but make some impromptu criticisms and tell a few anecdotes about the films they are showing [in a selective season] and then answer questions. I am no lecturer and when I accepted I did not even know that this was to be regarded as a *Guardian* lecture. I shall be glad of your help on the platform in keeping the affair reasonably light.”

I wrote back reassuring him that informality was the keynote, adding that it might, though, be a good idea if we could meet earlier that day just to iron out any possible problems. He replied, “I am afraid I shall probably be arriving very shortly before the affair at the NFT and it would be difficult to arrange a meeting. However I think it is no disadvantage. On the previous occasion [a John Player Lecture in 1972] I found it much easier to answer questions impromptu and without preparation. Preparation is apt to kill the spirit of conversation. I suggest that you just introduce me with a few words and I will reply with almost as few and perhaps an anecdote or two and then begin to let the audience ask questions about the films which are being shown. I really think there would be more fun this way than in preparing a platform talk.”

By this time, he had also received a copy of the finished book. But if I had hoped for some obvious sign of approval, I was to be disappointed. For in a PS to his letter about the NFT arrangement, he merely noted, “Please if your book is reprinted in paperback, correct the mistake on page 4 or it will be endlessly repeated. *Brighton Rock* sold 8,000 not 80,000.”

The Lecture itself, on September 3, 1984—just a month before Greene’s eightieth birthday—seemed to be a huge success. This rare public appearance in England by the self-exiled writer was reported in the manner of a rather important news event with headlines like “Greene attacks film makers,” “Hollywood scorn from Greene,” and “Trials and errors of filming in Greenland.”

After that memorable evening, during which Greene answered my questions and others from the rapt audience with a mixture of wit, brevity, some affection, much acid, and complete frankness, we never communicated again. There had still been no hint of his thoughts about my book when, three weeks after the Lecture, I read an interview with Greene in the *Observer*. Deep down in the piece written from Paris by Martin Amis, he was quoted thus: “As you see, I’ve got nothing new to say. One’s said it all in one’s work. It was embarrassing at the National Film Theatre the other day. I’d just received Quentin Falk’s book about my experiences with film and films, and I had time to read it beforehand. Luckily it had been published only the day before. Because every word that I uttered in response to questions at the NFT had been taken from this book. I’d got absolutely nothing further to contribute.”

I have, from that day, always liked to think that Greene’s comments somehow amounted rather more to a gesture of faint praise than any obvious suggestion of damning.

Little Marlow, 2014

INTRODUCTION

“The great muted chromium studios wait... the novelist’s Irish sweep: money for no thought and the inhuman romance: money for forgetting how people live: money for ‘Siddown, won’t yer’ and ‘I love, I love, I love’ endlessly repeated. Inside the voice goes on ‘God...I pray...’ and the writers, a little stuffed and a little boozed, lean back and dream of the hundred pounds a week—and all that’s asked in return the dried imagination and the dead pen.”—“Film Lunch,” 1937

Graham Greene, who died in 1991 aged eighty-six, has been translated to the cinema, and continues to be, more than any other major novelist of the twentieth century. More than Maugham, Conrad, Hemingway, D.H. Lawrence, Fitzgerald, Steinbeck, Faulkner, and Waugh. More even than Alistair Maclean or Harold Robbins. With and without his connivance there have been more than thirty cinema and television films of his published works, including twenty-two of the novels, over nine decades. Filmmakers of the caliber of John Ford, Fritz Lang, Joseph Mankiewicz, the Boultings, Carol Reed, George Cukor, Cavalcanti, and Neil Jordan have been attracted to his work. He has also adapted other writers for the cinema, been a playwright, journalist, perceptive critic, and essayist on film.

Restored by the National Film Archive, *The Third Man* was given a fiftieth anniversary rerelease in 1999 and, in that year, was also voted Greatest British Film of the Century in an all-industry poll, organized by the British Film Institute. In all, more than 25,000 votes were cast, covering no fewer than 820 different films. In the same survey, *Brighton Rock* was placed at fifteen.

The extent of the adaptations tends to take people by surprise. Everyone tends to remember *The Third Man*, *Brighton Rock*, and probably, *The Fallen Idol*, in which I happily had a tiny stake in its archive restoration. In any year, television also regularly schedules *Our Man In Havana*, *The End of the Affair* (1955 and 1999 versions), *The Confidential Agent*, *The Heart of the Matter*, and *The Quiet American* (1958 and 2002 versions). Nevertheless, it is all too easy to mislay *This Gun for Hire*, *The Ministry of Fear*, or *Across the Bridge* in the monochrome past. As with any great body of work, the quality of their translation has been extremely variable—both in terms of fidelity to the original and/or in any innate merit as pieces of celluloid. In fact, it is likely that inferior adaptations considerably outnumber successful ones for reasons I will suggest later. But Greene’s own blanket dismissal that “my books don’t in fact make good films,”¹ even taking into account the exceptions he is prepared to make for the handful with which he has been personally involved, is more the justly prejudiced cry of a tampered author than the rational observer of a prolific filmography that is ripe for reassessment.

“Born a child of the film age” is how filmmaker and historian Basil Wright has described Greene, and even on the very first page of his first volume of autobiography, Greene is found evoking, in loving detail, his home town Berkhamsted’s High Street cinema with “its green moorish dome.” His father, who was headmaster of Berkhamsted school—where Greene agonized with divided loyalties and increasing traumas through a troubled adolescence—once gave permission for some of his senior boys to see *Tarzan* “under the

false impression that it was an educational film of anthropological interest and ever after he regarded the cinema with a sense of disillusion and suspicion,"² two emotions which Greene himself would probably admit to in varying degrees over the ensuing years. The first film he ever saw is indelibly printed in his memory—a silent version of the Anthony Hope adventure, *Sophy of Kravonia*; that was in about 1911 and more than seventy years later, "I can hear still the rumble of the Queen's guns crossing the high Kravonian pass beaten hollowly out on a single piano."³ Barely surviving the teenage years, with visits to the psychiatrist's couch and a flirtation with Russian roulette, all set against a backcloth of boredom (which would forever continue to dog him), he went up to Oxford at eighteen and after graduating in 1926, joined *The Times* as a sub-editor. In that same year he enjoyed an extremely brief attraction to the Communist Party and was received into the Catholic Church. The following year, he married Vivien Dayrell-Browning; the marriage produced two children.

Between 1929 when his first novel, *The Man Within*, was published and 1935 when he started a four-and-a-half-year stint film reviewing for the *Spectator* and the short-lived magazine *Night and Day* (at Oxford he had been critic for a university magazine), five more novels appeared as well as a short story, "The Basement Room" (later to be turned into *The Fallen Idol*).

Greene adopted the role of film critic "from a sense of fun" and for ulterior motives too—"those films were an escape—escape from the hellish problem of construction in Chapter Six, from the secondary character who obstinately refused to come alive, escape for an hour and a half from the melancholy which falls inexorably round the novelist when he has lived for too many months on end in his private world."⁴ Greene was, all seem agreed, one of the finest critics of the 1930s, and revisiting his reviews today is as fresh an experience as it must then have been for all but the most regular recipients of his critical whiplash—British cinema in

general and Korda and Hitchcock in particular. He admired René Clair, Lang's *Fury*, Wyler's *These Three*, Duvivier, Pabst, and Capra, but his praise was never unqualified.

Whether it can be said that he established a set of critical principles to guide his reviewing and his own subsequent work at first hand in the cinema, is a little hard to discern: Championing the "frankly commercial" he nevertheless would reiterate "life as it is, life as it should be," which he believed was too often missing within the green, moorish domes of the Odeons, Empires, and Essoldos. He perhaps came closest to a personal affirmation when, in December 1935, he wrote, "The cinema, as much as poetry in the eighteenth century, needs patrons. Little good work can come from the commercial companies under the pressure of popular taste...the modern commercial picture has not merely learned nothing in the last six years, it has even forgotten what it once seemed to be learning from the Russian cinema..." Later though, in the same review, he rightly warns: "I doubt if the best work has ever been produced in complete independence of a public...popular taste makes a thoroughly bad dictator, but the awareness of an audience is an essential discipline for the artist."⁵ This and his regular sentiments about the British Board of Film Censors (now renamed The British Board of Film Classification)—"a curious body...rumored to consist of retired Army officers and elderly ladies of no occupation"⁶—would find considerable sympathy in a British film industry today which, despite the promise of more "choice" offered by multiplexes, remains hog-tied by an ever-stifling system of cinema exhibition and distribution.

The most notorious moment during this distinguished period of reviewing should also be mentioned—the successful libel action brought by Miss Shirley Jane Temple (then aged only nine) and Twentieth Century Fox against Greene and *Night and Day* magazine for his remarks on the moppet's proto-sexual appeal in a review of *Wee Willie Winkie*. The settlement caused the magazine to grind to a halt after a six-month run.

During this time, the first film adaptation of his work by another writer (*Stamboul Train*,

which he labeled an “entertainment” to distinguish it from his more serious work) had come and, rather rapidly, gone, and he too had slipped into screen-writing for no more relevant reason than that he needed the money. His books were not earning enough to support his family and any profits remained obstinately obscured by the constant debt to publishers on account of advances. It was not until *Brighton Rock* (1938) which sold 8,000 copies that he was able to clear the debt—“and the war was a salvation too; I was able to get a job.”

A child of the film age and a writer, said Basil Wright, who always “had a built-in filmic style; nor was it by chance that he became one of the acutest and best film critics of the 1930s. Indeed his experience as a critic may have helped him intensify his cinematic approach until it was fined down to the exquisite ‘Chinese box’ flashback technique in a book like *The Quiet American* (1955) which, in a sense, becomes more elaborate than film, at its present stage, can cope with.”⁷

Greene readily acknowledged the influence of the moving camera as opposed to the frozen image of the photographer’s eye. He told me, “When one describes something, it is in moving terms, as if one were going down the street in a taxi, looking from one side to the other. That’s the way I’ve been influenced just as Victorian novelists like Scott were influenced by paintings or, later, Henry James by the theater.” Evelyn Waugh, noting Greene’s camera eye in *The Heart of the Matter*, concluded, a little waspishly: “Now it is the cinema which has taught a new habit of narrative. Perhaps it is the only contribution the cinema is destined to make to the arts.”⁸

Yet the apparent perfection of a writer-director collaboration—as manifested in *The Fallen Idol* (1948) and *The Third Man* (1949) with Carol Reed—and even the confession some years after this that “my own experience of screen-writing has been fortunate and happy”⁹ was to lead to a clear disillusionment with the medium by the



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end of the 1950s. By then, he had also acted as co-producer on a film twice in *The Stranger's Hand* (1954) and *Loser Takes All* (1956)—“the wrong actors, the wrong director, the wrong color process, won't come together and produce a lucky accident”—and endured the revisionist version of *The Power and the Glory* by John Ford and the “treachery” of Joseph Mankiewicz's adaptation of *The Quiet American*, neither of which he was directly involved in. In his memorable essay “The Novelist and the Cinema” (1958), he is perhaps as much ventilating his fury at the very nature of film's bowdlerization as at his own sporadic role in that process: “even if a script be followed word by word, there are those gaps of silence which can be filled by a banal embrace; irony can be turned into sentiment by some romantic boob of an actor. No, it is better to sell it outright and not connive any further than you have to at a massacre...a writer should

not be employed by anyone but himself. If you are using words in one craft, it is impossible not to corrupt them in another medium under direction...This is the side of my association with films that I most regret and would most like to avoid in future if taxation allows me to.”¹⁰

The disillusionment was either momentary or the demands of the taxman too pressing for he went on to write two more movies. And although he had not written a screenplay since *The Comedians* (1967), he was, almost up until his death, still sought out by filmmakers to whom he responded with varying degrees of helpfulness in the continuing adaptations of his work.

Greene, who settled in the South of France in 1966, denied that he wished to use literature for political or religious ends—“even if my novels happen incidentally to be political books, they're no more written to provoke changes than my so-called ‘Catholic’ books are written to convert



anyone.”¹¹ It is, though, “the theology that gives the tone that attracts people to buy the stuff to film in the first place,” asserts Guy Elmes, who adapted two of the films. “Then,” he goes on, “they actually have to script it and it becomes rather frightening and a concern whether mass audiences will be able to take this internal agony thing he’s trying to externalize all the time. It’s a constant battle between commercial considerations and trying to be honorable and decent to the writer’s concept. Incidentally, I once asked Graham why he was perverted to the Catholic faith. He told me, ‘Well, I looked at them all and the only one that measured up to my evil was the Catholic faith.’”

Elmes tells another nice story of his collaboration with Greene, on *The Stranger’s Hand*. “We’d be sitting together in the Piazza in Venice, and we’d come to a halt in the writing. First I’d ask him to stop twitching his pencil as he flicked at flydirts on the edge of the paper (it made me terribly nervous), and then I’d say, ‘You’re a bit like a British documentary. When they are in any doubt, they cut to seagulls; in your case, you cut immediately to God. Can we please avoid cutting to God?’”

Elmes’s point about the inevitable conflict between commerce and original conception and attempting to reconcile the two as honorably as possible is not only the eternal problem of literary adaptation but may be, paradoxically, at the core of the often less than successful efforts to translate Greene’s filmic style to film itself.

The writer-director Peter Duffell, who adapted and directed one Greene film, *England Made Me*, and made his own abortive attempt to film another, *The Honorary Consul*, claims that the apparent ease of adaptation serves only to deceive: “His novels are cinematic, but deceptively so. What he’s in fact doing is producing objective correlatives for states of mind; if you don’t get that over, you fail. In a sense, I think it is nonsense to get a writer of quality in his own right to adapt another major writer like Greene. Rather, it takes a filmmaker’s mind to translate his work, to honor the spirit of what he’s doing, not necessarily the letter.”

Greene himself believed that adapting the novel must, inherently, result in a flawed production. Unlike a short story which can be enlarged, the process of cutting down a novel must detract from aspects of all-important characterization: “It may be just that the man takes mustard with his fish; now this seems unimportant to the scriptwriter, he decides to cut it out and suddenly you find the character has no character at all and, finally, you end up with a narrative without characters. A successful film depends on believing and being interested in characters. A story without characters cannot succeed.”

Richard Attenborough, who has appeared in three of the adaptations—most memorably as Pinkie in *Brighton Rock*—told me, “You’d think that Graham had been an actor himself for so much of his dialogue is a joy to speak. At one time, I was going to make *England Made Me* and when we were putting the screenplay together, one felt one could lift whole bits straight from the page.”

Many critics have averred that while Greene’s entertainments tend to make good films, his serious novels, from *The Power and the Glory* to *The Honorary Consul* continue to resist filmic treatment. Is it that deepest Greenland, a word he hated and one whose attachment to this book’s title is intended in its widest possible context, simply defies adjustment from verbal imagery to celluloid flesh?

“White men going to seed in outlandish places. Unshaven, guilt-ridden, on the bottle.” These are the fictional inhabitants of Greenland as Greene reluctantly defined it; and it is fundamentally these characters that have fascinated, though more often than not flummoxed, filmmakers since 1933.

In the final analysis however, it is the range and variety of Greene’s filmography that, for me, fascinates perhaps even more than the mere perpetuation of the author’s characters and ideas; it encompasses everything from wide-screen spectacles to film noir, from Hollywood studio star “vehicles” to rural olde Englande. The cinema of Graham Greene is a microcosm of cinema itself.



PART ONE: THE THIRTIES

WRITER FOR HIRE

Alexander Korda summoned Greene to see him at the Denham Film Studios in 1937. This was on the principle that he would rather be joined by the writer than continue to be attacked by him in the consistently withering reviews of Korda and his films which appeared in the *Spectator*. The “usual Denham mouse” was a regular epithet.

“June 5th, 1936—England, of course has always been the home of the exiled; but one may at least express a wish that *émigrés* would set up trades in which their ignorance of our language and culture was less of a handicap: it would not grieve me to see Mr. Alexander Korda seated before a cottage loom in an Eastern country, following an older and better tradition. The Quota Act has played into foreign hands, and as far as I know, there is nothing to prevent an English film unit being completely staffed by technicians of foreign blood. We have saved the English film industry from American competition to surrender it to far more alien control.

“September 4th, 1936—(*The Man Who Could Work Miracles*) The direction and the production are shocking...the slowness, vulgarity, over-emphasis are typical of Mr. Korda’s production...a publicity man of genius who has not yet revealed a talent for the films, [he] casts his pictures with little regard for anything but gossip paragraphs...

“November 20th, 1936—Reverence and a good cameraman are not enough...[*Rembrandt*] is ruined by lack of story and continuity: it has no drive.”¹

In a masterpiece of understatement, Greene hazards that Korda was perhaps “curious” to meet his enemy.

“When we were alone he asked if I had any film story in mind. I had none, so I began to

improvise a thriller—early morning on Platform 1 at Paddington, the platform empty, except for one man who is waiting for the last train from Wales. From below his raincoat a trickle of blood forms a pool on the platform.

“Yes? And then?”

“It would take too long to tell you the whole plot—and the idea needs a lot more working out.’ I left Denham half an hour later to work for eight weeks on what seemed an extravagant salary, and the worst and least successful of Korda’s productions thus began.”²

Four Dark Hours—“and seldom have four hours seemed so long” said one critic—was how the project started out, with Greene’s story and preliminary scenario worked up into a final screenplay by Ted Berkman and Arthur Wimperis, and a new release title, *The Green Cockatoo*. The whole action takes place between one and five in the morning, and it is worth a close look at the story for even in this 65-minute Quota Quickie are echoes of many of Greene’s recurring themes—for example, innocence threatened in an alien landscape. It could also almost have served as a trailer for *Brighton Rock*, which would be published the following year.

Eileen, a naïve, young West Country girl is visiting London for the first time. On the train a kindly, but eccentric, old man advises her to ring Whitehall 1212 (Scotland Yard) on arrival. Obediently, Eileen tries to telephone from a call box but is interrupted by Dave Connor, who politely but firmly grabs the telephone in an urgent and vain attempt to make a call of his own. He persuades the bewildered Eileen to let him show her a dingy hotel where she can get a room for the night. She is unaware that Dave is dying from stab-wounds he received back at

the station from racetrack gangsters whom he had double-crossed. It was to his brother Jim he'd been trying to phone an SOS. As he dies, he mutters "find Jim Connor at the Green Cockatoo" to a horrified Eileen, who has picked up a dagger which had fallen out of the wound in Dave's side. Discovered thus by the landlady who accuses her of murder, Eileen flees remembering just one thing—Dave's dying message.

Eventually she finds the Green Cockatoo, a shady Soho night-club where Jim turns out to be the resident song-and-dance man.

Jim chivalrously shields her when the police swoop on the club looking for the fugitive from the hotel. Terrell, leader of the gangsters, has also followed Eileen to the club fearing that she will put Jim on their track. Eileen's ordeal increases as Jim gets suspicious of her and Terrell starts putting on pressure. When the gang tries repeatedly to silence Jim, he fights back with a vengeance and eventually has Terrell and his associates arrested.

No longer suspicious of Eileen, Jim has, of course, fallen in love with the hapless rustic miss and determines to take her back west so he can marry her.

There seems to be a little confusion about who actually perpetrated the direction of the film. Though listed as "A William K. Howard Production" with William Cameron Menzies credited as director, it is likely that, in practice, the two Korda faithfuls actually co-directed *The Green Cockatoo*. Menzies was better known as a production designer (he designed and co-directed Korda's *Things to Come* as well as later winning the second of his Oscars for his work on *Gone with the Wind*) while Howard had a string of directorial credits, including Korda's *Fire Over England*.

John Mills, who played Jim Connor, had it clear in his mind that it was Howard at the helm, if none too firmly. "[*Green Cockatoo*] was directed by a charming American, William K. Howard, who, although no one suspected it at the time, was happily hitting the bottle. I discovered this quite by accident. During the mid-morning break I noticed that the property man always brought



a pot of tea and two cups to our director on the set. It was his habit during this fifteen minutes to discuss the previous day's work with his editor, whom he had brought with him from the States.

"On one occasion the editor was absent. I had missed the tea-trolley and asked Bill Howard if I could have a cup of his tea. He hesitated for a second and then said, 'Sure, Johnnie, black or with milk?' 'Milk please,' I said, and took a large gulp. It was neat whiskey.

"Bill smiled at me as I choked. 'Heart-starter time,' he said. 'We don't have tea-breaks in the studios back home. Great idea.'

"Bill Howard had made some excellent movies in America, but by the time we caught up with him he was, I'm afraid, slightly over the hill..."³

When the film was eventually released in 1940 the critics were pretty unanimous in their condemnation—a reaction underlined by Greene who had also found the whole experience "terrible." *Today's Cinema* wrote, "Melodramatic possibilities of plot are nullified by unconvincing behavior on part of the heroine and mass of far-fetched detail involving inept police, bloodthirsty racecourse gang, and cabaret-singer hero—existing entertainment being familiar matter of vigorous surface action, varied with

Above — René Ray and a dagger-clutching John Mills in *The Green Cockatoo*

songs from hero and Shakespearean quotations from naïve heroine...”

The *Kinematograph Weekly* found Mills “not bad” as Jim, but “René Ray is a colorless Eileen. Charles Oliver, Bruce Seton, and Julian Vedey trying to look like members of a racecourse gang seldom meet with success.” Greene’s connection with the production fortunately appears not to have been noticed.

If nothing else, the experience had sparked off between Greene and Korda a friendship which endured until the latter’s death in 1956. Greene wrote, “There was never a man who bore less malice, and I think of him with affection—even love—as the only film producer I have ever known with whom I could spend days and nights of conversation without so much as mentioning the cinema.”⁴

BRAND OF BILE

Writing scripts for Korda and reviewing the mogul’s work unfavorably actually coincided with his adaptation of John Galsworthy’s short story “The First and the Last.” Greene recalled that he was still not earning enough with his books to make a living for his family and therefore almost any assignment was welcome at the time. Made in 1937, the film sat on the shelf for two years before being released. With that two-year perspective Greene, as critic, unleashed his own brand of bile in the January 12, 1940 *Spectator*. He rightly declared an interest: “... perhaps I may be forgiven for noticing a picture in which I had some hand, for I have no good word to say of it. Galsworthy’s story was peculiarly unsuited for film adaptation, as its whole point lay in a double suicide (forbidden by the censor), a burned confession, and an innocent man’s conviction for murder (forbidden by the great public). For the rather dubious merits of the original, the adaptors have substituted incredible coincidences and banal situations. Slow, wordy, unbearably sentimental, the picture reels awkwardly towards the only suicide the censorship allowed—and that, I find with some astonishment, has been cut out. I wish I could tell the extraordinary story involving a theme-song, and a bottle of whiskey, and camels in Wales...”⁵

That final observation is so tantalizingly cryptic that it bears some investigation. The

screen story revolves around Keith Durrant (Leslie Banks), a brilliant lawyer who is poised to become a judge. His younger brother Larry (Laurence Olivier) is a wastrel. One evening, Larry takes Wanda (Vivien Leigh), a working girl with whom he is in love, back to her flat.

There he is confronted by her vicious husband Walenn (Esme Percy) who attempts to blackmail Larry and is then accidentally killed by him. After dumping the corpse in a lonely spot, Larry is accosted by a seedy, drunken ex-priest Evan (Hay Petrie). Larry fobs him off with a cigarette but unwittingly drops his gloves which Evan picks up. Larry makes a clean breast to his brother Keith who, desperately anxious to avoid any kind of scandal in view of his impending judgeship, begs Larry to leave the country.

Meanwhile Evan is arrested for the crime, and Larry refuses to let an innocent man suffer. To complicate things, Evan had robbed the dead man, and his sense of shame, heightened by a deranged mind, drives him to plead guilty. He is remanded for twenty-one days. Larry decides to enjoy himself with Wanda during this period and then he will give himself up. Poor Keith, still thinking about his own career, once again implores Larry to get out of England. At this point a convenient twist, represented by Evan’s

THE GREEN COCKATOO

a.k.a. *Four Dark Hours/Race Gang*, New World Pictures/
Twentieth Century Fox, 1937, 65 minutes, black and white

Director: William Cameron Menzies; Producer: William K. Howard; Screenplay: Edward O. Berkman, Arthur Wimperis from an original story and screenplay by Graham Greene; Photography: Mutz Greenbaum; Music: Miklos Rozsa

John Mills (*Jim Connor*); Rene Ray (*Eileen*); Robert Newton (*Dave Connor*); Bruce Seton (*Madison*); Charles Oliver (*Terrell*); Julian Vedey (*Steve*); Allen Jeayes (*Inspector*); Frank Atkinson (*Butler*)

Melodramatic possibilities of plot are nullified by unconvincing behaviour on part of heroine and mass of far-fetched detail.

Today’s Cinema

The worst and least successful of Korda’s productions.
Graham Greene

21 DAYS

a.k.a. *21 Days Together*, London-Denham/Columbia, 1937,
75 minutes, black and white

Director: Basil Dean; Producer: Alexander Korda; Screenplay: Graham Greene, Basil Dean from a short story "The First And The Last" by John Galsworthy; Photography: Jan Stallich; Editor: Charles Crichton; Production design: Vincent Korda; Music: John Greenwood

Vivien Leigh (*Wanda*); Leslie Banks (*Keith Durrant*); Laurence Olivier (*Larry Durrant*); Francis L. Sullivan (*Mander*); Hay Petrie (*John Aloysius Evan*); David Horne (*Beavis*); William Dewhurst (*Lord Chief Justice*); Robert Newton (*Tolly*); Esme Percy (*Henry Wallen*)

The tempo is very slow...the acting is extremely uneven.
Monthly Film Bulletin

Overpowering flavor of cooked ham.

Graham Greene

sudden death from heart failure, leads to the inevitable happy ending.

Such melodrama and, as Greene said, "there was little of Galsworthy's plot left when I had finished." The film was directed by Basil Dean who had produced Galsworthy's own stage adaptation of the tale some fifteen years earlier at the Aldwych Theatre with the legendary Meggie Albanesi, "of unforgettable memory," as Wanda. More recently Dean, who divided a prolific career "between screen and stage," acquired the film rights "with the intention of making the girl's lover the central figure so as to provide Clive Brook, already working with us at Ealing, with the star part. Graham Greene was at work upon the scenario. Unfortunately Clive took a dislike to the subject, so I was forced to abandon it. Matters remained at a standstill until Alex (Korda) rang me up one morning offering to take over the project. Mrs. Galsworthy, my long-standing friendship with J. G. in mind, was adamant that I must retain general supervision...and that is how I found myself working at Denham."

Korda agreed to Dean's casting of Olivier and Leslie Banks as the judge but for the Albanesi role, "he brushed aside all other suggestions to announce that Vivien Leigh was to play the part.

I had my doubts about this because of her obvious lack of experience, but Alex was adamant... By the second or third day's shooting, I knew I was in for a difficult time for Vivien and Larry were in the first stages of their love affair. Their joyous awareness of each other took the form of much laughter and giggling on the set. It was impossible for them to take the film seriously. In the general hilarity, even the gentlest remonstrance was brushed aside. I was nicknamed 'Sugar' for what reasons I know not but the soubriquet pleased them mightily for they burst into laughter whenever they used it. What J.G. would have thought of this approach to his somber story of love and conscience, it is difficult to imagine. Certainly I found it embarrassing."⁶

Greene agrees there were "great production problems. Our producer was taken off the film because he had to get a lot of camels—or was it elephants?—to Wales because they were making *Elephant Boy*. Then there was this scene where the Lord Chief Justice is giving a dinner party and it was being done with a high crane shot above the table. Shooting started but then was almost immediately stopped by Basil who, after checking the table setting, declared, 'You haven't got coffee sugar, you've got lump sugar'" (Which seems to be the giveaway clue for Olivier-Leigh's "Sugar" reference).

All shooting was halted until a car had been sent down to London to fetch the right form of sweetener. Greene continues, "I had a collaborator on the film and we were sitting up until about two o'clock one morning trying to finish the film which then had to go to Lajos Biro (one of Korda's creative entourage) to be judged. Dean wanted it as a full shooting script and we got a little bit drunk while putting on the crew directions. And I said, 'Let's put in a theme-song'—no, I can't remember the words—and so we wrote alternate lines and this was inserted in the Southend sequence. Lajos Biro accepted the script and Dean seemed satisfied but not a word had been said about the theme-song. Then we went down to Southend—it was out of season—to see where to do the shooting and suddenly, while we were walking around the empty funfair,

Basil said to me, ‘Graham. I don’t quite understand that theme-song.’ At that precise moment, the cameraman shouted, ‘Hey Mr. Dean, please come over here!’ and he never mentioned it again. And the song didn’t turn up in the film.”

All of which accounts for the reference to “camels in Wales” and “theme-song” in Greene’s withering critique. As for the “bottle of whiskey,” that remains a mystery.

Despite its compromised content, *The First and the Last* was shot with some style. A typical London street-market was reconstructed on Denham’s Stage 5, and Basil Dean arranged with real stallholders to bring their harrows to the studios to help authenticate the sequence. It was part of a set which covered the whole stage and which showed another Soho street with its public houses, delicatessens, wine shops, and cafés.

Three cameramen worked on the set under the supervision of Jan Stallich. One of the cameras was situated forty feet above street level so it could shoot down through one of the windows to the busy street. The other cameras, at various points, picked up Laurence Olivier as he wended his way through the crowds followed by Vivien Leigh.



There was also filming on the Thames pleasure steamer, the *Royal Eagle*, and the locations in Southend including the Kursaal pier.

Meanwhile Korda was giving Basil Dean a tough time. The elaborate Old Bailey Number One Court was built and then swiftly dismantled after just a single shot when the director was planning for four days of filming. Korda had other plans for the space and dispatched his crew to shoot exteriors. When the Old Bailey set was rebuilt, the director ran into problems with actor Robert Newton as counsel for the defense. He had to make a long, impassioned speech to the jury: “Alas! That fine actor was far gone in alcoholism...Poor Bob had been struggling for days to memorize the speech. On the set he would manage to electrify the whole courtroom with a sentence or two before his memory vanished. Then he had to be led into a quiet corner while a sympathetic secretary fed him relentlessly with the forgotten lines. Finally, we came to the end of the painful episode by filming the speech in short sketches and using the breaks to cross-cut reactions in the courtroom...”

“Alex did not understand the essential ‘Englishness’ of Galsworthy’s writing. He decided to insert an additional sequence directed by himself. He further insisted that the title should be changed to *21 Days* which Mrs. Galsworthy thought pointless. I was not asked to see a rough cut of the resulting hotch-potch, nor did I even see the finished picture.”⁷

Clearly the film’s box-office potential was not considered very great as it lay unused for two years until Columbia bought it in 1939. For those two years, Korda had been able to claim the film as an asset, and in the end it was Columbia who had to bear the brunt of the film’s financial failure. It was eventually released in the wake of Vivien Leigh’s worldwide success and acclaim in *Gone With the Wind*, presumably with the hope that some of MGM’s blockbusting achievement might rub off on it. A forlorn hope, it transpired.

Reviews were mixed, from *Faulkner’s Film Review* of April 1939, “An unusual drama, well off the beaten track. Those who like strong, holding dramatic fare will appreciate this film...” to the *Monthly Film Bulletin* from May 31, 1939 which declared, “this telling Galsworthy story is not equally effective on the screen. This is partly

because the tempo is very slow, and partly because the acting is extremely uneven...the supporting players are noticeably good, Hay Petrie as Evan being outstandingly effective." And it was only Hay Petrie who escaped the main brunt of Greene's own criticism: "The brilliant acting of Mr. Hay Petrie as a decayed and outcast curate cannot conquer the overpowering flavor of cooked ham."

Greene later made further public acknowledgment of his apprentice effort by saying it was "suffered with good-humored nonchalance by Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, who had much to forgive me." His review concluded with the humiliating *mea culpa*: "Let one guilty man, at any rate, stand in the dock, swearing never, never to do it again."⁸

FOLLOWING FASHION

To research *Stamboul Train*, his fourth book and his first "entertainment," Greene simply could not afford to leave his cottage in the Cotswolds. "I'd got a baby coming, only about £20 in the bank and I was receiving a total of just £600 a year from my English and American publishers. This was to be the last book on the contract. The previous two books had sold, at the most, about two thousand copies so I thought I really must get on with it." For the first and last time in his life, Greene recorded, he "deliberately set out to write a book to please, one which with luck might be made into a film."⁹ Train movies were all the rage at the time—Paramount had made *Shanghai Express*, which was directed by von Sternberg, with Marlene Dietrich and Clive Brook; Britain's effort was *Rome Express*, a Michael Balcon production with Conrad Veidt and Gordon Harker, and even the Russians had followed the fashion with *Turksib*.

Greene had started writing *Stamboul Train* a year earlier, in 1931, and recalls both the Dietrich and the Veidt films being discussed and indeed even possibly appearing while he was still finishing his book. "Anyway I remember thinking then that my last chance had gone because there was surely no way they were going to do a third—but they did." "They" was Twentieth Century Fox (who six years later would successfully sue Greene for libel in the Shirley Temple case). Fox bought the rights for £2,000, a sale which enabled Greene to go on writing without seeking other employment until Paramount bought *A Gun for Sale* four years later.

Stamboul Train is a stimulating read, funny, exciting, sad, and annoying in almost equal parts with a colorful set of characters interacting in claustrophobic settings—the ingredients of instant drama, if not melodrama. The dramatis personae are Coral Musker, a young dancer who is an early and less gutsy incarnation of *Gun for Sale's* Anne Crowder; Carleton Myatt, a merchant obsessed with his Jewishness in what appears to be a climate of rampant anti-Semitism; Mabel Warren, a blowsy lesbian journalist with a pretty friend, Janet; Dr. Czinner, a Balkan communist leader in constant danger of arrest; Josef Grunlich, a murderous crook on the run; the censorious Peters couple; Quin Savory, a home-spun English novelist (J. B. Priestley read this portrait as a slur upon himself and so sued Greene with the result that about twenty pages of the book had to be reprinted); and Mr. Opie, a cricket-obsessed clergyman.

Curiously, it took four screen-writers, including the film's producer-director Paul Martin and pianist-comedian Oscar Levant (later so memorable in *An American in Paris* and *The Band Wagon*), to work on material which Gene Phillips is right to point out was so essentially cinematic in the first place: "Greene wrote the book as if he was in effect moving a camera from compartment to compartment on the train, developing the story on the way."

The result of all those hands was, said *Picturegoer*, "an ambling and somewhat incoherent" narrative and a film, according to *Kinematograph Weekly*, "astonishingly destitute of clear, dramatic purpose." Greene himself caught up with the film—retitled *Orient Express* with stunning originality—a couple of years after its general release,





while he was in Africa, writing *Journey without Maps*: “It was a bad film, one of the worst I had ever seen; the direction was incompetent, the photography undistinguished, the story sentimental. If there was any truth in the original it had been carefully altered, if anything was left unaltered it was because...it was cheap and banal enough to fit the cheap and banal film.”¹⁰

Not surprisingly, the film had pared away the book’s ultimately rather tiresome preoccupation with anti-Semitism and the colorful depiction of lesbian jealousies and lusts, not to mention some of the jollier characters like Opie and Savory. The much-flawed Coral and Carleton of the book became simply, according to a florid blurb, “two youthful hearts fleeing from life, crashing across Europe on the wheels of fate,” impersonated by the pretty expatriate British actress, Heather Angel, and Norman Foster, who later switched from acting to directing movies like *Journey into Fear*, with rather more success.

Thirty years later the BBC produced its own version of *Stamboul Train*, which was summarily dismissed by Greene as even worse than Fox’s feeble effort. The BBC’s adaptation was more explicitly sexual—there was a seduction scene and

another scene showing Mabel’s proclivities—and caused a howl of protest from the public. So much so that the corporation actually admitted it was wrong to screen the play.

Replying to one protester, program controller Stuart Hood wrote, in best hair-shirt fashion, “I also consider that *Stamboul Train* offended against taste and against the standard of writing I expect for TV plays. I am afraid it is not possible to offer any excuse for the programme but I am sure you will understand if I say the matter is being dealt with internally.” Apparently the advertising had led viewers, like Reverend Donald Plumley of St. James, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, to expect something “in the nature of an Agatha Christie mystery play.” The problems of delinquency and lower moral standards were, he said, “large enough today without their being complicated by this effort which we imagine is either meant to shock us or to stimulate the present-day unhealthy obsession with sex.” And all Greene had originally wanted to do thirty years earlier was to make money!

ORIENT EXPRESS

a.k.a. *Stamboul Train*, Twentieth Century Fox, 1933, 73 minutes, black and white

Director: Paul Martin; Producers: Sol M. Wurtzel, Paul Martin; Screenplay: Paul Martin, William M. Conselman, Oscar Levant, Carl Hovey; Photography: George Schneiderman

Heather Angel (*Coral Musker*); Norman Foster (*Carlton Myatt*); Ralph Morgan (*Dr. Czinner*); Herbert Mundin (*Mr. Peters*); Una O’Connor (*Mrs. Peters*); Dorothy Burgess (*Mabel Warren*); Lisa Gora (*Anna*); William Irving (*Conductor*); Roy D’Arcy (*Josef Grunlich*); Perry Ivins (*Major Petrovitch*); Fredrik Vogeding (*Colonel Hartep*); Marc Lobell (*Lieutenant Alexitch*)

Rather too much story all of a sudden; auditors may be lulled to quiet by the easy, non-exciting early action.

Variety

It was a bad film, one of the worst I had ever seen; the direction was incompetent, the photography undistinguished, the story sentimental.

Graham Greene

Facing Page — Shirley Temple in *Wee Willie Winkie*, unwittingly stirring up a libel storm

Above — Ralph Morgan (center) and Heather Angel (foreground) in *Orient Express*