

or part of them, of a vacant bishopric and to present to those ecclesiastical benefices which were, *sede plena*, the gift of the Bishop. Miss Howell's book can be divided into two parts. The first three chapters trace the growth of the 'right' and are the least satisfying. Lack of evidence makes her conclusions tentative. But there is a wealth of material for the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and it is used well to describe the administration of the vacant bishoprics and the resulting profit for the Crown. These later chapters not only shed new light on the techniques of government employed and the men used to carry them out, but show at close range the King's often successful attempts to define spiritualia and temporalia to his own advantage. The book contains useful appendices, although it is a pity that the author did not include a full bibliography.

Donald Matthew has made a worthwhile study of the possessions of the Norman monasteries in England. He argues that the majority of gifts to them after the conquest were never intended as foundations for conventual priories, but were simply a means of enriching the monasteries 'back home'. He shows that between 1204 and the mid-fifteenth century, it was in the Crown's interest to keep these properties in the hands of those who were now its enemies, so that they could then be fully exploited. It was only when the Crown became weak that an avaricious laity was able to appropriate them.

J. RILEY-SMITH

A SENSE OF REALITY, by Graham Greene; The Bodley Head; 15s.

When Mr Graham Greene published his last volume of short stories, *Twenty One Stories* in 1954, he described it as a by-product of his activities as a novelist. Though the present volume is much more ambitious in scope the general description still holds true. At first sight, this must seem unlikely. Three out of the four stories, for instance, explore a vein of fantasy which we don't usually associate with Mr Greene's work and also all the stories give the impression of having been carefully worked over, of being given an independent artistic life of their own, which is hardly done justice to if we think of them in terms of by-products. Nevertheless, as the following notes try to suggest, three of the four stories, for all their self-contained air, are really footnotes to Mr Greene's major work.

The first story 'Under the Garden' is by far the most ambitious, occupying half the volume, and presumably, accounting for the title of the book as a whole. Though it offers a dominant impression of fantasy, it would be more accurate to think of this in terms of Mr Greene giving a free rein to an element which has always been present in his fiction, ever since he started writing over thirty years ago. I mean the use of the dream or nightmare, particularly as this is associated with recalling the past innocence of childhood. At the centre of the tale we have that familiar Greene figure, an ageing man, slightly bored, sceptical

in mind, satiated with travel, coming home, finding himself called upon to make a decision, which involves him in making an assessment of life itself. This takes him into the past and there he finds different versions of reality. There was the view of his mother, a believer in human progress, a bedtime reader of Beatrice Webb, a Fabian, nourishing a life-long contempt for imagination and mystery. She has a long line of ancestors in Greenland. Then we have the central character evoking his own boyhood in terms of the great house, the long, hot summer, the mysterious island in the garden, and a term's reading of *The Golden Age* topped up with *The Romance of Australian Exploration*. Where life, subsequently, has shown up his mother's views as arid and excluding, his own boyhood views now look sentimental and romantically bookish. With his life now reaching a climatic point, the protagonist looks at his childhood again and recalls an episode which seems to point to a truer 'sense of reality', an episode which underlies what Mr Eliot once thought of as the poet's necessary subject, 'the horror, the beauty and the boredom.' It is here, in this episode, that the fantasy of the story is located. The boy recalls an adventurous trip to his island in the garden, and a strange stay of several days in a tunnel under the garden with an old man who liberally dispensed his wisdom more or less in aphorisms. The scene seems a new one for Mr Greene, but looked at rather more closely, it seems that he has simply taken his potting shed, from his play of that name, and buried it under Beatrix Potter's garden. Beatrix Potter has long been admired by Mr Greene, and here he seems to be paying her the tribute of an 'influence'. There is the style, for instance. In an essay on Miss Potter Mr Greene writes, 'her dialogue had become memorable because aphoristic' and he goes on to quote, 'I disapprove of tin articles in puddings and pies. It is most undesirable (especially when people swallow in lumps)'. And here we have the tone and sentiment of the old man in Mr Greene's story, 'We don't use tins up here because there's always broth and cabbage and that's more healthy and keeps the scurvy off, but we've no more teeth to lose and our gums are fallen as it is, so if we have to fall back on tins we would.' There is the same kind of *simplesse* and sedulous attention to trivial detail in both. In *The Potting Shed*, we had the confrontation of visible, logical reality with the inexplicable and numinous, worked out in overtly Christian terms, with the crucial encounter being the hoarded secret of a sceptical lifetime. Mr Greene has buried his symbols in *Under the Garden*, much more deeply, so that we only detect their outline, Mr Javitt (Jahweh?); Mark his helpmeet; the fateful tree under which it all takes place, a later meeting with the gardener who resembles the old man in appearance. But all this is very obliquely presented and Mr Javitt merges into Mrs Potter's Mr McGregor. It is not a happy merger, and for all its casual skill in telling, the story issues into a coy whimsicality, a 'see-no-hands' expertise, which, in the end, blunts the sense of reality of the world both above and below the garden.

'A Visit to Morin', originally published some years ago in *The London Magazine*, *pace* the publishers' announcement that none of these stories have been

published before, is very much a by-product of the writing of *A Burnt-Out Case*, the role of the architect in the latter being played by a writer in this. There is the usual Greene fusillade on the conceptual presentation of religion and the perils of piety, but in fact the whole story turns on a distinction between 'faith' and 'belief' which exhibits as neat a piece of scholastic in-fighting as one could hope to witness. 'Your characters carry their ideas to extreme lengths', the observation made of M. Morin's literary art, has a relevance to the creation of M. Morin himself. 'Dream of a Strange Land' is a beautifully expert evocation of place and atmosphere, but it terminates in an irony too reminiscent of the slick finalities which punctuate so many of Mr Somerset Maugham's closing paragraphs.

By far the most successful story in the book is the last one, 'A Discovery in the Woods'. Here the irony, unlike the story which precedes it, really functions and forms an inseparable part of the meaning and emotional effect of the tale. Though it would spoil the story to relate its plot, it is not on surprise that it relies for its power. Rather it is on the quality of the imagination behind it, a quality which lifts this story at least, quite clear of the class of 'by-products', and establishes it, in its tact, insight, and effortless confidence with some of the best pieces of Mr Greene's work.

IAN GREGOR

THE DYER'S HAND AND OTHER ESSAYS, by W. H. Auden; Faber; 42s.

In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, *Making, Knowing and Judging*, W. H. Auden declares, 'Because of his limited knowledge, a poet would generally be wise, when talking about poetry, to choose either some general subject upon which if his conclusions are true in a few cases, they must be true in most, or some detailed matter which only requires the intensive study of a few works. He may have something sensible to say about woods, even about leaves, but you should never trust him on trees.' It should be said at once that, in this fascinating book of essays and lectures, Mr Auden shows himself to be an expert on woods, leaves *and* trees. His approach to literary criticism seems to me to be the very best kind—wise without being esoteric, general without being superficial, and original without being eccentric. Mr Auden has an immense fund of out-of-the-way knowledge but he never shows off with this information or uses it to stun the reader into respect and submission. He is, one feels, always on one's own level and yet, at the same time, he has the ability to see more clearly and to express himself more pungently than one could oneself.

*The Dyer's Hand* deals with many subjects, from Italian opera to the animal poems of D. H. Lawrence, from Mr Auden's own experiences as a young poet to the fine humanist poems of Robert Frost; even the most fragmentary pieces here contain important insights and illuminations. Above all else, perhaps, Mr Auden is a generous-minded critic, quick to see and respond to the especial gifts