

ENTERTAINMENT

A man, a plan, a canal - Panama

Getting to Know the General
Graham Greene
Lester & Orpen Denny, Ltd.
\$16.95 hardback

review by David Jordan

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, France decided to connect the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean by excavating a trough through Central America's narrowest point. When the de Lessep project ended ten years later in bankruptcy, the U.S. stepped in.

Panama at the time happened to be a province of Colombia, and when negotiations with Colombia proved difficult, the U.S. simply declared Panama an independent country. Ill-equipped to offer resistance, the handful of Colombian soldiers on hand simply looked on as a treaty was drawn up and signed by French and American diplomats.

The bogus Panamanian government immediately ratified a canal treaty giving the U.S. jurisdiction over a fifty-mile swath dissecting the tiny Central American country.

The Canal Zone — a strip of manicured lawns and private golf courses, all decorated by American flags — proved to be a continual source of protest and violence for nearly three-quarters of a century. However, despite riots and repeated attempts to work out a more equitable treaty, the 1903 treaty stood intact until 1977.

In 1969, when world-wide anti-American sentiment was at its height, a left wing Colonel took over Panama's National Guard to become the leader of the Panamanian people. Colonel Torrijos' first priority was to end the conflict with the U.S. Armed combat was a last resort which Torrijos (now General) was fully prepared, maybe even secretly anxious, to fall back on. He believed that his tiny nation of two million could hold out in a guerrilla war against the superpower for two years, during which time international sympathy would come to his aid.

Perhaps sensing the General's impatience, the U.S. appeared to soften throughout the 70's. In 1976, the latest round of negotiations took on a unfamiliar seriousness.

It was in this year that Graham Greene (then 72) received a mysterious telegram inviting him to the small Central American nation he had never visited, as the guest of a General he had only read of in newspapers. Almost unwillingly drawn away from his

comfortable home in France, Greene was immediately swept up in an international powerplay: "Another year," he reports, "and it would seem quite natural for me to be travelling to Washington carrying a Panamanian diplomatic passport as an accredited member of the Panamanian delegation for the signing of the Canal Treaty with the United States."

Getting to Know the General is Graham Greene's account of his seven-year friendship with General Torrijos — a relationship that came to an abrupt end with the General's death in a helicopter crash in 1983. Neither a communist nor a disciple of American capitalism, Greene gives us an impartial look at a Central American nation's struggle for independence.

What emerges from Greene's account is a warm portrait that contrasts strikingly with U.S. intelligence reports which had described General Torrijos as a "brutally aggressive extreme Left dictator."

Greene's personal contact allows us a view of the General that no C.I.A. agent could ever glimpse: "These are the most enduring memories I have of Omar," Greene recounts, "... the young beginner at the art of writing who was finding the choice of words difficult; the visitor to his home town rocking back and forth on the porch of the garage mechanic in Santiago who had been his schoolboy friend; and one other memory which was to be planted three years later of a man tired out, perhaps a little drunk, fallen asleep with his head on the shoulder of his young mistress, who had recently borne him a child."

The list of Greene's contacts throughout this seven-year saga is stunning. One day, Greene will be chatting over shrimp salad with Daniel Ortega (now leader of the Sandinista junta); the next he will be hobnobbing with Eden Pastora — then Sandinista commando, now leader of the C.I.A.-backed opposition. From rum punches with Gabriel Garcia-Marquez, Greene passes to an intimate birthday party for father Ernesto Cardenal, now Nicaragua's Minister of Culture.

Getting to Know the General is not a novel but neither is it pure documentary; the book is an intriguing blend of two genres. Throughout his Panama adventures, Greene is haunted by a novel that he would never write, with the envisioned title *On the Way Back*, a fascinating insight into how fact and



Graham Greene strikes up friendship with "brutally aggressive extreme left dictator," General Torrijos.

fiction are intertwined in the mind of a novelist. An anecdote that both amuses and illustrates the power of fiction is the one in which Greene tells Chuchu, his guide and companion, of his role in the projected novel:

"Am I killed?" Chuchu asked with excitement.

"Yes, do you mind being killed in a novel?" "Mind?" He bared his arm. His skin had risen in lumps. "You must write it. Promise me you'll write it."

Greene's prose is definitely British, of the Old School. His sentences are ornate, sometimes confusing. Take, for example: "... In England, I think, more than ever before, we are prepared to recognize other forms of democracy, even under a military chief of state, than our parliamentary one, which worked satisfactorily for about two hundred years in the special circumstances of those

two hundred years."

Such grammatical wizardry will have Henry James fans squirming in their chairs with delight, but for the rest of us it merely deadens the pace.

For all his personal contacts, and the thousands of miles of tropical landscape he traverses, Greene remains oddly distant from his subject. There are almost no physical descriptions; the only "local colour" we get are the continual references to the country's poor food and terrible liquor.

What's more, Greene admits that he speaks no Spanish whatsoever. This liability would seem to make him an unlikely candidate for the "friendly observer" General Torrijos had wanted to witness his struggle with the U.S. When a writer reaches Graham Greene's monumental status, though, it seems that there are no barriers to a good story.

Cello and piano strike rough note

Duet at Con Hall

Guy Fallot
Cello Recital
Department of Music Concert

review by John Charles

The program read: Guy Fallot and Rita Possa in Recital. But if you substitute "vs." for "and," you have a better description of how the evening progressed.

This Swiss cello and piano duo have received considerable plaudits in Europe, and Monday night they performed the annual Kilburn Memorial Concert in Convocation Hall, a series which began auspiciously a few years back with a mesmerizing Jorge Bolet recital.

But this concert found these artists in uninspired form. The immediate problem, in Beethoven's *Second Cello Sonata* (Op. 5, no. 2), was the hard brightness of the Con Hall piano sound, in conjunction with the deep, easily muffled cello sound.

The second problem was that Ms. Possa seemed to be more an accompanist than a full partner, as Beethoven requires. Fallot played the *Adagio* opening in an appropriately slow style, but Possa sounded mannered, as if she had been told to play it that way, instead of feeling it.

Fallot played with a beautiful, burnished tone, and this was just about his best playing of the evening. But Possa continued in a rather brittle manner, and by the *Rondo* they both sound scrappy and perfunctory.

The little Schumann *Adagio and Allegro* went quite well, with Fallot clearly in control, pouring out a long, soulful melody while Possa appropriately remained in the background this time. But once the *Allegro* began, Fallot had intonation problems.

Murray Adaskin's *Sonata*, a relatively recent work by the well-regarded Saskatchewan composer (now retired to Victoria), was written for Fallot. And it finally gave Possa a reason for playing with a spiky tone. The opening movement consisted of declamatory phrases flung out by both instruments, which subsided into cello musings, and was highly dramatic and pungent. If the slow movement seemed sentimental, the final *Scherzando* offered an engaging contrast of fantastic and ruminative ideas.

Nin's *Quatre Chants d'Espagne* are light-weight show-off pices, with fiery, incessant dance rhythms, and haunting evocations of moonlight. But Fallot lacked the fire, and his frequent inaccuracies qualified the exuberance.

The evening's major work, Brahms' somberly magnificent *First Cello Sonata* (Op. 38) began beautifully, with the duo working together smoothly, and Brahms' ideas coming to life. But Fallot tried to wrest intensity by pushing the music aggressively, then dramatically slowing down, which made it sound spasmodic, and impeded the natural flow.

The *Allegretto's* scruff humor was missed, and the finale, though excitingly pell-mell, was incoherent. The enthusiastic audience nevertheless gave the artists a standing ovation, and received another fiery Spanish dance as encore, this time by Manuel de Falla.

Movement improv at HUB mall

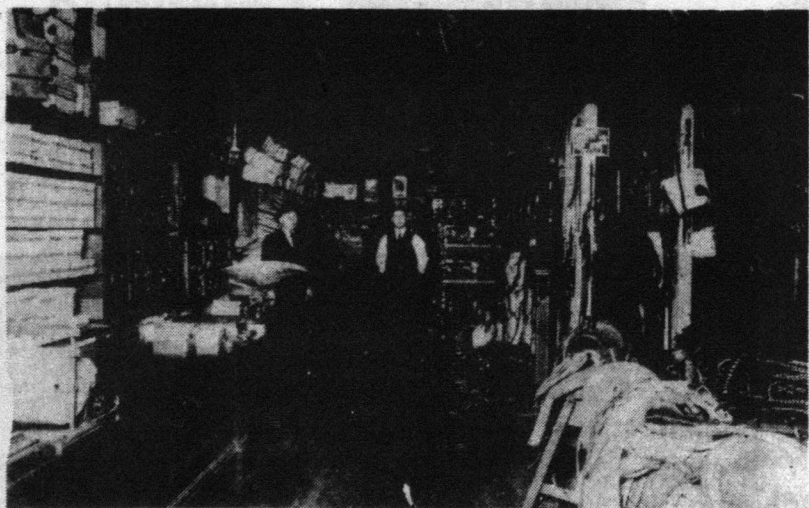
The U of A Drama Club is sponsoring "Freedom," a movement improvisation production based on a poem by director Deborah Norriss this week in HUB mall.

Performances will be from 12 noon to 1:30, in the Arts Court Lounge. That's the big lounge to the left as you come out of the library skywalk — if you still don't know where that is, just be in the HUB mall half an hour before the performance; a town crier will be announcing the time and place of the Drama Club production.

Just in case the weather clears up (Ha!), performances will be in the Fine Arts courtyard, between the Fine Art building and the Law building.

"Freedom" continues through Sunday, Oct. 21. Weekend performances will be afternoons, from 2:00 to 5:00.

Bring a friend, it's free.



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