

# Travels with Graham Greene

## Bernard Diederich

Graham Greene had a divine habit of turning up when a place was about to break into the news. He really did not need my help. He knew how to sniff the air and while not endowed with language skills except English, in which he became a master, he had a sixth sense and extraordinary clairvoyance about people and places. I had the pleasure of accompanying him on some of his forays in the Caribbean and Central America and can be accused of placing him at the center of controversy in the 1970s and 1980s by opening his passage to Panama and introducing him to the country's strongman, Brig. Gen. Omar Torrijos Herrera.

Even in Graham's later years, during the last of his trips to Central America, he was able to march through the area's political quicksand sorting out its labyrinth of intrigue. Undaunted, the author of *The Quiet American* looked for some familiar faces from Indochina days as the Contras' not-so-secret "secret war" with its CIA handlers heated up. On his last trip to the region in December 1985, he went to Nicaragua and, with U.S. President Reagan's words ringing in his ears—that the anti-Sandinista Contras "are our brothers and these freedom fighters we owe them our help . . . they are the equivalent to the founding Fathers and the brave men and women of the French Resistance . . ."—Graham received a decoration from the Sandinistas, who were grateful to have a friend in the famous British author.

Since his death, Greene and his writings have been the object of concentrated analysis,

which would have amused him. Some of the allegations are outrageous and unfounded. If Graham could stand up in his grave he might shout a word he learned in his travels in Spanish America: "basta!"—enough!"

When I first met him, I realized that he was really a shy man. But over the years I also learned just how committed he was in his incessant quest. Greene was proud of an ancestral connection to the beautiful islands of the Caribbean. In fact, I often wondered whether his ancestors had not communicated their love for the islands and adventure to him.

In 1963 when dictator Francois ("Papa Doc") Duvalier was at the height of his terror in Haiti, Graham went back to Haiti to test that terror. At the beginning when I first met him, in Haiti in 1954, he was to me just a famous writer on vacation, very English and very quiet. Much later I saw him as a literary sword (he preferred a long bow and a full quiver of arrows) striking at Papa Doc, whom we both equated with fascism of the Hitlerian strain. Graham needed no prodding. In targeting Papa Doc in the novel *The Comedians* and later the movie version of the book, Graham gave poor Haitians a voice when they had no voice. And this voice was heard around the world. For his effort he came close to becoming another of Papa Doc's victims.

Greene's elimination, which was seriously considered by Duvalier and his aides, attested to the effectiveness of *The Comedians*. It was only after he died, and while researching my book in Haiti, that I learned how infuriated Papa Doc was, not so much by the book but by the movie version of it, which was the last script Greene wrote. Duvalier was prepared to take extreme action against the writer. Graham suspected, but never knew, the true danger

he had faced. Ultimately, Papa Doc decided on an alternative plan to strike at Graham, spending thousands upon thousands of dollars from the Haitian state treasury to have the film banned in France.

Panama and Central America were to be his last hurrah, and what a pleasure it was accompanying him. It helped him produce two more books—*Getting to Know the General* and *The Captain and the Enemy*. The “*Viejo Ingles*,” the “Old Englishman,” as he was known affectionately in Spanish-America did not win the Nobel Prize but he was honored by men in those countries whose causes he supported. His cause was not always Washington’s cause, but then in the ‘80s there were many Americans who did not agree with Washington fanning the fires of the Cold War in Central America.

Some of the anecdotes he told me along the trail still enliven my memory. He was a great raconteur. The Graham Greene I came to know often reminded me of my own father who had a similar sense of humor, love of pranks, and enjoyment of applying a little shock treatment during a dull moment.

Who was Graham Greene? Like all complex human beings, and perhaps all of us, he was not one person, but many. Greene himself once told a newsman in Haiti that he was pursued by an adventurous, rather indiscreet man by the name of Graham Greene. I knew him best as an inexhaustible voyager who detested boredom. From time to time I reported on his travels in snippets for *Time* magazine’s “People” section.

One of the most fascinating stories of that time never made it to print: *The Forgotten Hostage*. Greene’s efforts to save a kidnap victim in El Salvador were complicated and required massive amounts of time. I had agreed to Graham’s request to embargo the story until the kidnapped victim went free.

He died.

In the early years of our friendship in the mid-1950s, I helped introduce Greene to what was then the pleasantries of Haitian life. Later, in the early 1960s, I helped navigate him through the Byzantine labyrinths of the Duvalier dictatorship of the early ‘60s. During these latter years, I took him to meet a band of Haitian guerrillas hibernating in an old insane asylum in the Dominican Republic. The group had failed to overthrow Papa Doc and had been forced into exile. Greene, in fact was to have more impact on the Duvalier regime than the guerrillas and all the many attempts to dislodge the Haitian tyrant. But our relationship was not one of reporter and invariant subject.

As noted, the Graham Greene I knew did indeed enjoy living on the “dangerous edge of things,” as he put it, and the closer to the edge the better. No one could have loved more than he the thrill of a Volkswagen “bug” skirting the edges of a sheer precipice along the Dominican-Haitian frontier, or flying in an old Cessna with a seemingly mad Panamanian poet. Greene scorned movie-formula heroes and villains. He detested mediocrity. Nor did he actively seek public acclaim. He didn’t consider himself a news story when he occasionally “escaped” from England, and later from Antibes during the crowded tourist season on the French Riviera, but instead preferred a low profile, avoiding public attention and interviews. From his perspective, the Americas offered him one of the last frontiers to live and explore as he chose. At times, he spurned his friends’ advice and appeared to be swimming against the tide. He was a man who, when all was said and done, relied on his own instinct.

My book, *Seeds of Fiction*, is about Graham Greene and how he drew inspiration to write seven of his books. Greene’s first important

book, *The Power and the Glory*, was the result of his first trip to Mexico in spring of 1938, and his last, *The Captain and the Enemy*, published in 1988, ended a few hundred miles to the south in Nicaragua. Though Graham Greene is associated with Indochina, (*The Quiet American*) and the Cold War intrigues of Europe (*The Third Man*) and Africa, the fact is that seven of his books (conspicuously also including *The Comedians*, *Our Man In Havana*, *The Honorary Consul*, *The Lawless Roads*, *Travels with My Aunt*, *Getting to Know the General* and *The Captain and the Enemy*) were drawn from his odysseys through the Americas encompassing—in addition to Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America and South America.

The “*Viejo Ingles*” will be sorely missed by those who loved and respected him. To salute his memory, and to imbue his historical persona with accuracy it deserves, I rummaged through my old notebooks and unearthed some 130 odd letters I received from Greene over years of our friendship. My book, *The Seeds of Fiction*, is the product of that friendship.

## In Greene’s Footprints

It was May Day 1968. The old town of Villahermosa, the capital of the Mexican state of Tabasco, was paralyzed by students demanding the removal of their governor. On one side of the main city plaza, before the Catholic *Templo de la Concepcion*, militant students stood their ground expectantly. One held a sign, “No dispares”[don’t shoot].

Rifle-bearing soldiers prepared to fire bristled on the other side before the plaza’s largest building *Palacio de Gobierno*. They were not the sloppy, grubby, uniformed soldiers that Graham Greene described after

his 1938 trip here, but smartly uniformed elite paratroopers from Mexico City. What had not changed were the black vultures that Greene so hated. Gliding above, their ugly little heads peered down on us, sensing that there would be “carrion” that day. From the time, three decades ago, when Greene had stood in the same old city main *Plaza de Armas*, and written “If I had moved a camera all round the edge of the little plaza in a panning shot it would have recorded all the life there was in the capital city.” The *Templo de la Concepcion*, partially destroyed in 1925 during the religious persecution period, had been rebuilt with a new imposing façade, seven years after Greene’s visit. This had been the fief of governor-dictator, *Jefe Máximo*, Tomás Garrido Canabal (1920-35) the vicious anti-clerical leader in Mexico who created the Red Shirts, a fascist paramilitary group to hunt down Catholic priests and shout at Garrido’s command, “God does not exist, nor ever has existed!” He was finally booted into exile in 1936 by President Cárdenas. One foolish act, a single stone, could trigger bloodshed as the two groups faced off across the plaza in a high noon scenario.

The students were standing firm next to a flag draped coffin. It would be an ideal photograph to illustrate my *Time* magazine story. Earlier, a student running from the police had drowned. Students said he had been swallowed up by the smelly, muddy Grijalva River below the town’s plaza. They swore that he had been running from the governor’s “corrupt police.” I lifted my camera and focused on the students surrounding the coffin.

“No, no puede tomar fotos.”

A soldier had suddenly materialized next to me and barked the order, “No, you can’t take photos.”

I looked down into a very Indian face and saw angry eyes. Ignoring the soldier's order I snapped away with my little Leica camera. The soldier pushed me behind the Army líneas. When I gained my balance, I demanded in Spanish; "Take me to your general!"

"I am the general," the soldier snapped.

It was then I recognized the angry soldier. He was the short, barrel-chested Gen. José Hernández Toledo, commander of the paratroopers, and scourge of the students protesting that year across Mexico against their government's "corrupt one-party rule."

The general was furious. Hot and sweaty Tabasco heated tempers. He demanded my film. "One moment please," I said, "Excuse me but on what authority?" adding that I was a newsman with government credentials. Had he, I asked, declared martial law and taken over the town? He did not answer. His orders were to crush student protests. The government in Mexico City did not want bad publicity. It was the year Mexico City would host the Olympic Games and they did not wish the role of the Army in squashing dissent to become a story.

Checking my papers and searching my camera bag, the General held up a small book.

"Qué es esto?"

"What is it? "Nada," ["Nothing"] I replied. Then I added, "It is an old guide book."

Graham Greene's 1939 non-fiction tome *The Lawless Roads* was to me still relevant as a guide to this area of southern Mexico. It was a good read and filled with good quotes for a story on the region. General Hernandez dropped it (published as *Another Country* in the U.S.) as if it were contaminated. I would have liked to ask the General if he had

read *The Power and the Glory* but he shooed me off like a vagrant.

Villahermosa proved to be only a curtain-raiser for the bloody government clamp down on the students at Tlatelolco's *Plaza de la Trés Culturas* in Mexico City five months later. As in Europe and elsewhere, students in Mexico in the 1960s were out to change their world. They marched out of the autonomous universities shouting every known leftwing revolutionary slogan against social injustice, repression, and one-party monopoly on power, and paratroopers marched into the centers of learning, violating their prized autonomy and it became bloody. President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz had become paranoid, and had convinced himself that it was all a communist conspiracy.

As the Tabasco student protest fizzled and their flag-draped coffin proved to be empty—only symbolic, I made a note to write a report on "The Beautiful City" to Greene. I recall how Greene described the Villahermosa police chief's welcome, telling him he was home, that the place was populated by Greenes and Grahams. I could report to Graham that the Mexican Greenes of Villahermosa were prospering, having opened a motel. In my brief note to him I had enclosed an updated brochure of Villahermosa. Graham replied with his usual whimsy, "I was delighted to have details of the Motel Greene which I feel I must visit one day. The Maria Dolores seems to be exactly as I remember it!"

A month earlier, reporting on Mexico's main archeological sites for a *Time* "Modern Living" cover story (10 May 1968) designed to set the scene for the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, I had taken a two-seater puddle-jumper light plane to Palenque from Villahermosa.

"I think there were only two classes of men I really liked in Mexico—the priests and

the flyers,” Graham writes in *The Lawless Roads*. “They are something new in Mexico,” he recounts, “with their pride in history, their dash, their asceticism; non-drinking and non-smoking . . .”

My pilot had insisted on finishing his lunch. I waited impatiently. Finally we were airborne. The sun beat down on our cockpit. He flew in a steady line over the plains that were dotted with basins of water flashing silvery in the sun. His large belly was wedged against the controls. The combination of that overloaded plate of enchiladas and the heat had my pilot fighting an airborne siesta. Over the roar of the little plane’s engine, I did my best to question him about the history of his state where Hernán Cortés had landed to conquer Mexico, only to receive a series of grunts. When we approached the mountains he was wide awake and carefully guided the plane down to a dirt strip where a thin little girl holding a faded red umbrella acted as the Palenque control tower.

Graham recounted in *The Lawless Roads* riding a mule from Salto de Agua to Palenque and eventually to his “very Catholic city” of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Any trip by mule back, especially in Tabasco’s heat and humidity and cold nights on the high mountains on that slow-moving animal, I imagined the ordeal as a form of torture. Nevertheless, the ruins at Palenque, called the Athens of Mayan civilization, were worth the trip. Greene had been more interested in the fate of the Catholic priests than ancient Mayans. As we arrived, workers were digging out more of the ruins from the encroaching jungle. Of all the ruins of a bygone civilization I visited in Mexico, Palenque was definitely the most impressive. Its murals had been restored. The temple of Inscriptions loomed across from the palace, whose four-storied tower archaeologists believed was an

observatory built about A.D.692. They were digging, hoping to find other pyramids buried in the mountainside. Young children hocked pieces of pottery and small figures they claimed were the genuine articles found in the dig.

With sufficient notes, interviews, and “color” for our editors in New York, my pilot was happy to take off as the mist descended down the mountains like a heavy blanket. The little Indian girl smiled and unfurled her umbrella as I blew a kiss to her. The City of Snakes quickly disappeared into its shrouds.

For Graham dare-doing paid off in raw material for his masterpiece which had won critical acclaim the world over. *The Power and the Glory*, about personal salvation and the human condition in the person of a Mexican priest, had been read by every Roman Catholic priest and nun I ever met. My eldest sister, a Nun whose faith was strong and unremitting, found the book a triumph of her faith.

Returning to the land of the fugitive “Whisky Priest” did make me ponder Greene’s faith and my own. Personally, I preferred not to discuss religion. It was a private affair, especially as I had become a fugitive from my Irish Catholicism pumped into me as a child. As the underdog minority religion in my native New Zealand, we defended it with our fists when necessary. Graham, as a convert and writer, knew more about theology and did believe in God, whereas I respected the belief of others and their many Gods.

In our correspondence during the late 1960s, Graham and I discussed his visiting Mexico again. In a 19 April 1969 letter he was seriously thinking about returning:

“I’d very much like to visit you, but probably late July or August would be the only

time and I should imagine the weather would be rather unbearable then? Another problem is that I would have to pay for my journey by arranging an article in one of the Sunday papers on the situation in Mexico and I could hardly stay with you or be connected with you if I did that as I suspect my report would not be very favorable!”

I assured him that he need not worry about getting me into trouble, as I already was on President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz’s black list for my sympathetic coverage of the student demonstrations, and especially the Tlateloco Plaza massacre on the eve of the Olympics. I was one of the lucky ones. Along with thousands gathered to hear a student speaker, we stood amid the remains of Aztec ruins next to a colonial church and surrounded by high apartment buildings. Having recognized secret service agents among us, I warned my *Sports Illustrated* colleagues in Mexico to cover the Olympics to leave the area, as there would be trouble. When the flare signal that launched the shooting went up, it was the Aztec ruins that saved many of us from the fate of the students killed that night. The army and plain clothes agents, in an organized ambush that ran amok, began shooting in all directions precisely as a student began to speak from high up on the Edificio Chihuahua. Who was in command? None other than Gen. José Hernández Toledo, and he was wounded leading his troops, and wounded by a government agent, not a student. My eye-witness *Time* story, “Noche Triste”, did not endear me to government officials, nor did my coverage of the students’ protests in *Life En Español*:

“I still very much want to visit you in Mexico, but the winters are not so easy

for me,” Graham wrote on 2 July 1971. “Who knows though—I might be able to make a brief two-week visit around Christmas. Would that be an impossible time for you? I am afraid it’s too late for me to make any very definite plans.”

He went instead to Chile to meet with President Salvador Allende, as the Marxist chief of state was the other major hemispheric story in the making.

Years later atop a helicopter landing pad on a high Sierra Madre peak the author met General Toledo again. Happily the General was in charge of an anti-poppy (opium) campaign.

## Red and Black Greenes of St. Kitts

In the winter of 1993, I found myself on the island of St. Kitts. I was sailing as a lecturer through the eastern Caribbean on the four-mast bark *Sea Cloud*—it had been built sixty-one years earlier for Mrs. Marjorie Merriwether Post and later became Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo’s yacht, the *Angelita*—and I had not forgotten that afternoon in 1956 on the verandah of the Oloffson, and Graham Greene’s telling of his tropical relatives in the Caribbean. When we anchored off Basseterre, the tidy capital of St. Kitts, I decided to pursue the Caribbean Greenes. It was as if I were prolonging our journeys together.

My genealogical research proved fascinating. Graham’s Great Uncle Charles, it turned out, as Graham said, died on the island of fever at age nineteen after having sired thirteen children! Charles’ prolific performance had occurred after the emancipation of the slaves on St. Kitts. Two years before Charles died, Graham’s paternal grandfather, William Greene, then

fourteen, had joined “Uncle Charlie” on the island to help the latter run the family plantation. Grandfather William went back to England after his brother’s death in 1842. Much later, William Greene returned to St. Kitts where he himself died.

“Look in at St. Kitts under its strange dictator. There’s an excellent hotel there on a black volcanic beach called The Golden Lemon kept by two Americans . . . they give good food and local food and the rooms are charming, furnished mainly from Haiti,” Graham had written to me in 1977. He also wanted me at the time to pick up the trail of the Caribbean Greenes. Later, reporting for *Time* about St. Kitts and its longtime premier, Robert Bradshaw, there was no time to pursue Graham’s tropical relatives. Now, on a break from my lecturing voyage, I had the chance to do so. Graham had traveled to St. Kitts once with his brother Hugh and encountered a Greene that Graham was satisfied was a grandchild of Charlie Greene and therefore his cousin. During a 1977 visit in the company of his friend Yvonne Cloetta, they had discovered Charlie’s tomb and met another cousin called Victor.

Like many of the other Caribbean islands, St. Kitts was fought over by the British and French, who left a mixture of English and French names of places and people. At St. Kitts and Nevis Telecommunications Company (Nevis being the adjoining island), the twin nations’ 142-page 1993 telephone directory revealed, on Page 64, a listing of 21 Greenes. Later my taxi driver said, pointing down Fort Street, “Down there is a Greene.”

“Greene’s Boutique & Musiquarium” had one of the best locations in town. And it was more than a boutique—it offered music, and included the “Why Not Bar: Good Times Bar.” Three attractive young shop girls were arranging rows of T-shirts adorned with

either parrots or a vernacular Caribbean warning: “Tak you mouth out of me Damm business.” I asked to see Mr. Greene. A young, well-built mulatto emerged, a gold chain dangled from his neck.

“You are Mr. Greene?”

“Lorenzo Greene.”

“Could I ask you about your roots? Look, I had a friend, a writer named Graham Greene. He is dead now. He has the same last name as yours. Have you ever heard of him?”

“Yes I think so.

“Well I wonder if you are any relation.”

Lorenzo Greene was not sure of his family’s genealogy. “There is a tomb of an old Greene in the Christchurch cemetery they tell me,” he said, adding, “My grandfather was Benjamin Greene and he lived in Sandy Bay. He was an estate [the local term for sugar plantation] manager for the Lamberts six miles west of Basseterre. My grandfather was high-color; he had very light skin like you. My Uncle Clarence Greene, he is 65-years-old and works at St. Kitts Sugar Manufacturing Company, in the electric department. He might be able to tell you more.” At the sugar mill’s electric workshop they said Clarence Greene had retired to run a grocery shop in Sandy Point. On the main road running through Sandy Point town I found the shop, despite the fact that it bore no name. Mrs. Clarence Greene came to the counter and summoned her husband from the back. Standing behind the counter, Clarence Greene was as tall as Graham. Clarence had hazel eyes and a reddish tinge to his hair. He did not mind discussing his roots.

“I’ve heard of that Englishman, the one who writes,” he said. Yet like his nephew

Lorenzo, Clarence didn't know where their family had acquired the name Greene. "My grandfather was the same color as you," Clarence continued, "No; I've not read his books." "They say my grandfather was Irish," interjected Clarence's wife, who was a shade darker. They lived upstairs in what appeared comfortable circumstances. On a little "Coke is it" blackboard appeared the day's special written in chalk: Pig snout and bags drink (cordial drinks sold in plastic bags).

"At work they used to tease me that I was Portuguese," Clarence explained. (During the 1840s after the abolition of slavery on St. Kitts in 1838, local planters imported some one-thousand, five hundred workers from Madeira to work their sugar plantations. Most returned home after fulfilling their contracts but some stayed and went into business.) Clarence suggested I go back down the road to Basseterre to the village of Challengers. "There is an elder Greene sister there; she might be able to help."

But the house of the elder Greene woman on the main road through Challengers was boarded up. The villagers said she had died two years earlier—Clarence had evidently been unaware of the fact. When I told the villagers I was looking for Greenes, they directed me to another Greene, an older woman who was black.

"That Greene lady died two years ago, she was a red Greene. I am a black Greene," was how the woman identified herself. ("Red" is used widely in the Caribbean to denote a person of lighter skin.) She confessed that she had not the slightest idea how the black Greenes had come by their name. A small group of villagers had gathered and were sympathetic to my search. The 1840s were a long time ago, they reminded me, but they agreed that Uncle Charlie's thirteen offspring could have produced a lot of Greenes.

## Stolichnaya for a Bon Blan

The young University students craned forward in their seats. They shared an eagerness, a thirst, for knowledge of the lost decades when dictatorship had turned their country into an intellectual wasteland. The scene in Port-au-Prince on the afternoon of Friday, 26 May 1995, was a rare official homage to British author Graham Greene—this particular tribute being offered by grateful Haitians. Greene's 1966 novel, *The Comedians*, and the film version for which he wrote the script, had lifted the shroud and exposed Dr. Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier's tyranny in Haiti to the world. Greene had also won the enmity of Papa Doc, who at one point contemplated having Greene tracked down abroad and physically eliminated.

At the May 1995 *hommage* in French and Creole-speaking Haiti, the Caribbean republic's new Minister of Culture, Jean-Claude Bajeux—former Roman Catholic priest, and exile, who had accompanied Greene and me on our 1965 border trip, a victim of Duvalier's tyranny—was well qualified to lecture on "*La Metaphysique du Mal Chez Graham Greene*" (The Metaphysics of Evil as Seen by Graham Greene). And Bajeux's audience was all too familiar with the metaphysics of evil, their country having only just emerged from three bloody years of post-Duvalierist military repression during which many of these same students were forced to flee for their lives in boats or to seek refuge in rural Haiti, becoming exiles in their own country. Some of their fellow students had been killed.

The white walls of the newly established non-governmental Info-Service lecture hall, located in an old, renovated Port-au-Prince gingerbread mansion, were covered with

posters (provided by the London-based British Council) illustrating Graham Greene's long and productive life. While carrying out his book research at the height of Papa Doc's terror in August 1963, Greene, traveling by taxi, often passed this house on Avenue Charles Sumner in Turgeau, a residential section of the capital, while returning from the Hotel Sans Souci to the venerable Grand Hotel Oloffson. He spent many an afternoon writing up his notes at nearby Hotel Sans Souci where foreign newsmen were staying during the crisis. Now, after thirty-two years, a Greene had returned. Graham's niece, tall, handsome red-haired Louise Dennys, had been invited as the representative of the Greene family. Among the guests was Haiti's best known radio announcer, Jean Dominique, who was later assassinated.

Haiti was no longer Greene's nightmare republic. Haitians were enjoying—at least for the moment—some hope of a better future. A force of twenty-two thousand American troops had made a “soft landing” in Haiti in September 1994 and restored democratically elected President Father Jean-Bertrand-Aristide to power, after he had spent three years in exile. On 31 March 1995, U.S. President Bill Clinton, from a reviewing stand in front of the National Palace, had watched the change of command from U.S. to United Nations peacekeepers. It was an historic sight: an American president seated on a reviewing stand on the steps of what was once a palace of terror. As the bagpipes of a battalion of peace-keepers from Bangladesh wailed, the regimental colors and country flags of the various foreign troops and nations involved in the peacekeeping mission fluttered like colorful *Vodou* flags [beaded *Vodou* flags carry images of their gods in many colors] on the palace lawn.

Of Haiti and *The Comedians* Greene had written, “I would have liked to return yet a fourth time [to Haiti] before completing my novel, but I had written in the English press a description of Doctor Duvalier's dictatorship, and the best I could do in January 1965 was to make a trip down the Dominican and Haitian border—the scene of my last chapter [of *The Comedians*—in the company of two exiles from Haiti. At least, without Doctor Duvalier's leave, we were able to pass along the edge of the country we loved and to exchange hopes of a happier future.”

Bajeux and I were the two exiles from Haiti and Graham's traveling companions. The former priest knew his subject well. During his 23 years in exile, now-Culture Minister Bajeux had been professor of European and Caribbean literature at the University of Puerto Rico, and Greene had been a favorite writer since the ex-cleric's youth. In his ninety-minute lecture Bajeux traced Greene's literary form and emphasized the author's belief in human value and purpose. He defined at length the famous writer's treatment of good and evil. Bajeux stressed that Greene, through his anti-heroes like the whisky priest in *The Power and the Glory* [1940] and Pinkie the murderer in *Brighton Rock* [1938], showed that good and evil coexist within all of us. It is a lesson to all of us, Bajeux said, to be reminded that good and evil coexist in our own souls and that is where we have to look, not outside ourselves. In stating that he had found evil [hell] in Duvalier's Haiti the famous author meant, Bajeux explained, that he (Greene) had found some evil characters in Haiti—whom he later portrayed in *The Comedians* [1966]. The lecture ended with a discussion among professors attending the *hommage* on the origins of violence in Haiti, without reaching any conclusive point. Nevertheless,

Bajeux made reference to the suggestion that a “*Makout* lies in all of us.” [The name *Makout* by 1995 had become a Haitian generic term for an evil person.]

On the Monday following the lecture, Louise Dennys, her husband Ric, an American priest friend, and I were escorted to the palace by Minister Bajeux. I couldn’t help thinking how pleased Graham would have been—a Greene in Papa Doc’s palace! Graham had requested an interview with Dr. Duvalier in 1963 but the then-President-for-Life had refused. The closest Graham had come to the palace was the *Casernes Dr. Francois Duvalier*, the forbidding police headquarters across the street from the alabaster-white presidential offices and residence.

There were no military sentries at the palace gate that Monday. In fact, Haiti no longer had an army. President Aristide had dissolved it upon his return from exile. The country’s traditional arbiter of power since independence from France, in 1804 after a long, bloody revolution by Haiti’s slaves, was no more. The palace itself had undergone several transformations since the hurried departure of Francois Duvalier’s anointed heir to power, his son Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, nearly a decade earlier. One short-lived, military-backed president had called in a *Vodou* priest to exorcise the place of Duvalier evil. When the “Little Prophet”, as Father Aristide was known, was swept to power by his *Lavalas* (flash flood) movement, orchids replaced guns in the palace. However, despite the elaborate presidential chair that street children he had rescued made for Aristide, which they presented to him when he entered the National Palace

February 1991—the children wanted to cover all bases as an old Haitian legend has it that the presidential chair is “*range*,” (bewitched)—the military dragged Aristide out of the palace, came close to killing him, and eventually booted him into exile.

At our meeting with him that Monday following the homage to Graham Greene, President Aristide talked amicably and enthusiastically to Ms. Dennys about his hopes for a literacy campaign (Haiti’s illiteracy remains high at 87 percent). A self-described voracious reader, Aristide said he had read *The Comedians* while studying at a seminary in La Vega, in the neighboring Dominican Republic. (Actually, I had presented him with a first edition copy of *The Comedians* in Washington D.C. while he was in exile and he promised to read it.) The meeting went on longer than the allotted time. When Aristide, himself an author, learned that Ms. Dennys had once had her own publishing business and currently represented a prominent American publishing firm in Canada, where she resided, the president invited us into his adjoining workroom to show off his books and to present her with a beautiful painted box—a modest but simple tribute to Greene. There was nothing in the decorative box, just the air of Haitian freedom, Aristide joked.<sup>1</sup>

With the homage concluded, while we were relaxing on the balcony of the Grand Hotel Oloffson, I mentioned to Louise, Ric, and Father Alberto Huerta, a professor of literature from the University of San Francisco who had corresponded with Greene over his religious beliefs, how I had left a bottle of Stolichnaya vodka at a *Vodou* temple as a tribute to Graham, following

<sup>1</sup> But Aristide himself put that precious air of Haitian freedom to the test. What many suspected about the violence-prone little priest manifested itself. Exhibiting characteristics not unlike Papa Doc Duvalier, he was overthrown, and today lives in exile in South Africa.

his death in Switzerland on 3 April 1991. After attending Greene's memorial service at London's Westminster Cathedral, at which Louise had delivered a warm and simple eulogy, I had returned to Haiti and left Graham's favorite midday martini at *Mambo Lolotte's hounfor* (temple), located on the Cul-de-Sac plain some dozen miles north of Port-au-Prince.

*Mambo Lolotte* and the other women of her family, I recalled, were sorting freshly harvested yams in her *peristyle* (central part of the temple) the day I motored out into the countryside to see her. I wanted to leave a bottle for Graham at a *Vodou* temple, in the *Vodou* manner for the departed. "It is for a *bon blan* [good white man]", I explained to the *Vodou* priestess. She interrupted her labors and unlocked the door to a small thatched hut, the *callie mysteres*, home of the *lwas*—the spirits. It was late afternoon. There was no embarrassment on my part. It seemed like the natural thing to do. I did feel she should know that the bottle was for the spirit of a writer "who did what he could to help Haiti."

The priestess's muscular arms and legs were caked with mud from harvesting yams. It had been a good harvest. She was a strong and handsome woman, who did not live off her religion, *Vodou*, but instead worked the land and never failed to pay dues to her gods, in the form of a rich ceremony to them. She traditionally celebrated the *man-ger-yam Vodou* ceremony in her sanctuary. It did appear to pay off. Most years she had a bumper crop. Graham would have liked her.

As she opened the door of the hut enough sunlight peeped in to guide me to the altar dedicated to the *lwas*. I chose a little space between the dust-laden bottles of liqueurs, wines and spirits, discernible only by their shapes, in which to place Graham's bottle

of *Stolichnaya*. It would, I was confident, remain there and gather its own coat of dust from the neighboring fields.

There was no need for a bottle of vermouth. Graham used just a drop of vermouth when mixing a gin martini but never with vodka. Lolotte asked no questions. "It is for a good *blan*," I repeated. "He did what he could for the Haitian people." The priestess murmured a prayer and called upon "*Bon Dieu*" to look after his spirit. "He wrote a book about Haiti; it was called *The Comedians*," I added, explaining briefly and as well as I could in this spiritual setting what Greene meant by "*Comedians*". *Mambo Lolotte* understood, exhibiting surprising sophistication. As she left to return to preparing her yams for market, she stood for a moment in the doorway of the little hut, in thought. "We are *les Komedyens*," she said, using the Creole word. "We Haitians are all actors. We must be to survive." Unlike Catholicism, *Vodou* has no heaven or hell. Graham's soul would be free to wander—he would like that—and even return to Haiti. After she left I remained for a long, reflective interval in the cool *Vodou* sanctuary. As had occurred at Graham's memorial Mass in London's Westminster Cathedral, memories of the man flooded back. Paradoxical as he often was, Graham, the Catholic convert, would have been more at home with this simple *Vodou* tribute in *Lolotte's hounfor* than high Mass at Westminster. The *Vodou* priestess's prayer would have been less embarrassing for him and he was easily embarrassed. Yet the Westminster service was in the Latin he loved.

A remarkably independent human being, Graham had continually challenged his adopted faith (He had been born into the Church of England.) This constant questioning had made him, I believed, a better

Catholic than most. I left the offering of Stolichnaya to repose in Lolotte's *bagui* and then worried that I should have gotten a larger-size bottle. The *Vodou* gods liked to be abundantly pleased.

The light was fading. I took leave of Mambo Lolotte, bidding her a generous farewell. Ironically, Lolotte's *peristyle* was a neighbor to Pont Beudet, Haiti's ancient but still functioning insane asylum. Not far down the road was what remained of Jean-Claude Duvalier's ranch. The entrance gate to the walled-in property was broken and hanging on its hinges. The unmanned, rusty guard turrets and high concrete wall were all that were left standing of the once-elaborate country retreat of Baby Doc Duvalier. Peasants in the area said that the army had looted the ranch residence and then set it afire, blaming the local people. Even the mounds of lead from spent bullets on Jean-Claude's private shooting range had been collected for scrap. (In Haiti, a poverty-ridden nation of automatic recycling, very little goes to waste.) As I

passed Baby Doc's ranch on my return to Port-au-Prince, vegetation rotted in the swimming pool and cows and goats grazed in his ex-wife Michele's garden. I thought to myself: How quickly can disappear the trappings of power.

When I finished the story of my memorial pilgrimage, Louise asked me to take them out to meet Lolotte. I agreed. We arrived unexpectedly at Lolotte's sanctuary to find the priestess officiating with a group of faithful at prayers. We were given chairs and waited until the prayers ended. *Mambo* Lolotte greeted us and graciously agreed to open her *bagui* with its offerings. To my pleased surprise, Graham's bottle of Stolichnaya had been elevated to repose on a red cushion on a miniature rocking chair. Father Huerta asked the *Vodou* priestess whether he could say a prayer, and she readily acceded. We four visitors stood before the small altar with the Mambo as Father Huerta led us in a silent prayer. It was an ultimate ecumenical act. Graham would have understood.

**Bernard Diederich** is a journalist and biographer who has devoted much of his career to covering political events in Central America and the Caribbean. He founded Haiti's English language newspaper, the *Haiti Sun*; he also served as a correspondent for The Associated Press, *The New York Times*, Time-Life, and the *Daily Telegraph* in London.

Diederich was with Fidel Castro on his victory march to Havana in 1959. In 1963, because of his news reporting, Diederich was imprisoned by the Haitian dictator, Papa Doc Duvalier, and was eventually expelled from the country. He is the author of many books, including *Seeds of Fiction: Graham Greene's Adventures in Haiti and Central America 1954-1983*, which chronicles events in his long-term friendship with Graham Greene. His recent memoir is *Pamir: Sailing the Pacific in World War II*.