

“Welcome, foreign brother”¹

GRAHAM GREENE... PHOTOGRAPHER?

One of my first memories is a conversation over coffee between my parents and some relatives, in which my parents told a story about having run into Graham Greene at the terrace of the Hotel Guarani, lonely skyscraper of a provincial Asuncion in 1969. I faintly recall the smell of tobacco, some familiar voices, and the British writer's name.

Years later, when I asked my father if they had indeed ran into Greene or if the meeting was just a figment of my imagination, he told me they had actually met. He remembered vaguely that a diplomatic service officer had introduced them, apparently because my father was the only person who spoke English correctly and could handle a conversation. He also said that they had drunk a bottle of gin together, while Greene confessed that a bunch of undercover policemen had snatched his camera in front of the *Partido Colorado's*² offices the previous morning, just as he was shooting what appeared to be preparations for a parade. The Paraguayan diplomat added that the British embassy had dismissed any attempts of getting it back, as Mr. Greene insisted on avoiding a diplomatic incident.

Pressing him for further details, he remembered that they also discussed the government, foreign policy, a few exclusive parties Greene had attended, and the Nazis who had taken refuge in Paraguay.

A few months ago, while I was looking over police files from the Stroessner dictatorship related to missing persons during *Operación Condor*³, I found an ordinary envelope which had “photos seized in front of the A.N.R.⁴” written on it. Inside, wrapped in newspaper, two strips of photo negatives, somewhat damaged. When I asked the person in charge of the files about the envelope, he simply answered that I would find hundreds of yet unidentified documents.

My father never read *Travels with My Aunt*⁵, the second part of which takes place entirely in Asuncion (and ends with a lavish party organized by an Italian smuggler and war criminal wanted by the CIA). In fact, he was pretty surprised when I pointed to the extraordinary coincidences between his story, the novel's final scenes and the photographs found in the envelope.

Fredi Casco,

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¹ “*Bienvenido hermano extranjero*” is the title of a popular Paraguayan song that welcomes foreigners into the country.

² General Alfredo Stroessner's (1954-1989) political party.

³ Plan of coordinated operations between South American dictatorships - Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia - and the CIA that took place in the 1970's and 1980's .

⁴ A.N.R. (Asociación Nacional Republicana), *Partido Colorado*.

⁵ Graham Greene, *Travels with My Aunt*. The Bodley Head Ltd. 1969.



"We have had our ups and downs, and the photographs of what we call the great party and of our distinguished guests have proved useful more than once" (Graham Greene, *Travels with my Aunt* p. 254).



"The guests crowded the floor as the harpist and the guitarist played another polka: we could see beyond the terrace through the window of the sala the ebb and flow of the dancers" (Graham Greene, *Travels with my Aunt* p. 249).



"Most of the men in the street wore red scarves round their necks, and many scarves were printed with a picture of the General. There were red flags everywhere: you would have thought the town had been taken over by the Communists, but red here was the colour of conservatism" (Graham Greene, *Travels with my Aunt* p. 216).



"The movement of the crowd edged me towards the Avenue Mariscal Lopez where the processions were passing" (Graham Greene, *Travels with my Aunt* p. 217).