Christopher Hull, *Our Man Down in Havana: The Story Behind Graham Greene's Cold War Spy Novel*. New York: Pegasus Books, 2019. v + 338 pp. (Cloth US\$27.95)

In their memoirs British diplomats and spies—categories not always easily separated—are fond of calling themselves “our man in ...,” apparently unaware of the satirical origin of the phrase in Graham Greene’s 1958 comic novel, *Our Man In Havana*, the center-piece of Christopher Hull’s exhaustive investigation of Greene’s visits to the Cuban capital between 1938 and 1983. As well as Greene’s own published accounts, Hull draws on unpublished diaries, extensive letters that Greene wrote to friends and lovers, and interviews with Cubans whom Greene had met, notably Nydia Sarabia. There is little attempt at literary or filmic analysis, and there are occasional stylistic infelicities, but the research behind the book is impressively thorough.

Greene’s involvement with Cuba and the wider Caribbean was substantial. He eventually met Fidel Castro twice, as well as other important Cuban figures such as Armando Hart, Haydée Santamaría, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Lisandro Otero, Pablo Armando Fernández, Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Barnet, and Virgilio Piñera. Late in life, he developed a close relationship with Panamanian President Omar Torrijos, and was awarded a temporary diplomatic passport that allowed him to attend the ceremony in Washington DC to mark the eventual transfer of control over the Panama Canal. Greene and his new friend, Gabriel García Márquez, rubbed shoulders with—or more likely tried to avoid—Jorge Videla and Augusto Pinochet.

One of Hull’s main concerns is to trace the people and incidents that went into the making of Greene’s novel about James Wormold, an English vacuum-cleaner salesman in Havana who is recruited into SIS (the British Security Services) and invents a whole series of fictitious agents as well as a supposed missile site. Some suggestions were offered by Greene himself although, since he was a master of indirection, they should not be taken as gospel. Hull’s own suggestions sometimes stretch credulity, but there is a solid basis in what Greene learned of SIS operations during World War II, not least the exploits of Juan Pujol García (code name GARBO), a double agent based in Lisbon who created a fictional web of agents that wrong-footed the German high command.

Havana in the mid-1950s was very much Greene’s kind of place: good quality rum, drugs freely available, high-class brothels, and the frisson of the sex-shows at the Teatro Shanghai on Calle Zanja, where Superman would display his prodigious talent. But of course change was afoot in Cuba. Greene always denied any connection between his novel (and the 1959 film based on it) and the Cuban Revolution, but the imbrication between them is clear, as Hull demonstrates in some detail. The novel was published in October 1958, twelve

weeks before the Revolution triumphed, and the film was shot in Havana in April 1959, just as Revolutionary cultural policies were beginning to take shape. Greene's November 1957 trip to Santiago de Cuba is of particular importance here, leading to his closest contact with the rebel forces and to the introduction of a key episode into the novel when Wormold travels to the east of the island.

As a member of SIS, Greene had worked with one of its most infamous members, the spy Kim Philby. Even after Philby fled to the Soviet Union in 1963, the two remained friends: in January 1979 Philby sent Greene a postcard from Havana (one of the few places he could go on holiday), and Greene visited Philby in Moscow in 1986 and 1987. Hull speculates, on this occasion plausibly, that the pipe-smoking and stammering Carter—the enemy agent killed by “our man” Wormold at the end of the novel—was based on Philby, also a pipe-smoker and stammerer, Greene thereby indicating that he knew, or at least suspected, several years before Philby's defection, that his friend was a traitor. Perhaps unsurprisingly SIS failed to take the hint.

Greene's own career in the SIS is both well known and shady: well known in terms of his activities during the war, shady inasmuch as it's unclear for just how many years after the war he continued to produce intelligence. Hull suspects that Greene's consistently left-leaning comments and evident warmth toward Fidel Castro constituted “a willful attempt to create a smokescreen around his political persona, and distract from his intelligence gathering activities” (p. 281); in other words, on the basis of no firm evidence, the author suspects Greene to have remained “our man” in the Caribbean and Central America.

Peter Hulme

Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies, University of Essex,
Wivenhoe Park, UK
phulme@essex.ac.uk