Panama Short Guide

Panama by Eric Zencey

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Contents

Characters

It is important to recognize that because Panama's plot is so complex, understanding and analyzing its characters must rely heavily on scrutinizing the plot. The following discussion will focus only on characters central to the plot.

Jules Dingier, who served as the chief engineer of the French Interoceanic Canal Company, never appears alive in Panama; however, Adams's musings about Dingier are a key to understanding the story. Dingier, "a man whose faith in the power of moral rectitude against disease had not been enough to save his family from malaria," believed that disease would not affect those who lived pure lives. Ironically, his wife and children died of malaria, and he returned to France where he later died. Adams is intrigued to learn that before leaving Panama, Dingier saw his wife's favorite horse and, in a fit of rage, shot it. Adams feels a kinship with Dingier, having lost his own wife, Clover. He remembers burning diaries, "his own and Clover's," as a "negation to match negation," much like Dingler's having shot his wife's horse. Perhaps this kinship Adams feels causes him to return secretly to take the picture of Dingier and other officials of the French Interoceanic Canal Company. This picture later helps him to become embroiled in the Panama affair—and provides the reason for this historical figure to become involved in this fictional event.

Zencey's development of the character Henry Adams hinges on his accurate depiction of this historical figure. True to life, then, Adams is identified as grandson and great-grandson of two presidents of the United States and described as "a short man," one who, at his house on Lafayette Square in Washington, "directed that all the chair legs be shortened, so that his feet might rest comfortably on the floor." Zencey chose to write about Adams because of his interest in Adams's work and his thinking.

He knew enough about Henry Adams to understand how his analytical skills might operate in the face of a mystery.

In Panama, Adams travels to France as a part of his tour of the world. There, he meets with his friend John Hay, and with his confidante Elizabeth Cameron. By accident, he becomes acquainted with a woman whose disappearance will cause him to become caught in unraveling the scandal involving France's attempt to build the Panama Canal. While Zencey places Henry Adams in a situation that never actually occurred, he remains true to Adams's real character. For example, when he learns of the French police's preliminary use of fingerprinting, he volunteers because "the idea of seeing the whorls and ridges on his fingers come out on paper intrigued him," just as it might have in real life. Also, Zencey knows that the real Henry Adams had little use for the "theater" of politics, so the character Henry Adams becomes involved in the French scandal not because of politics, but because his search for Miriam Talbott "led inexorably into the Panama scandal."

A painter dressed unusually for the time in "boyish clothes . . . dark wool pants and shapeless black jacket," the woman who introduces herself as Miriam Talbott so

captivates Henry Adams that he finds himself stammering in her presence. He angers his companion, Elizabeth Cameron, by choosing to follow Miriam up the mountain to see her painting. The following day, as Adams travels with the painter to Chartres "to look at twelfth century glass," he finds himself "wondering what it would be like to feel this young body pressing against him," perhaps because "her way with an anecdote" reminds him of Clover. Adams spends time with her every day while he is in Normandy, but when he looks her up in Paris upon his return, her building concierge professes not to know her, and when pressed, he tells Adams that she moved out.

When Adams later is summoned to identify Miriam Talbott's body, he is startled to discover that the dead woman is not the woman he met in Normandy. It turns out that the body is Miriam Talbott, the mistress of Jacques Reinach, who has the list of checquards in the Panama Canal scandal, and the woman he met at Chartres was actually Louise Martin. Louise Martin's character is hardly developed; the reader knows her through Adams's imagination. His desire to find her is motivated by romantic interest, but the character he has invented evaporates when he finally meets her and the two know there will be no romantic involvement.

Adams's friend, John Hay, "built to the same scale" as Adams, also knows "the daily experience of looking up to people."

Adams sees his friend as "[s]mooth of skin, tanned, dark-eyed . . . in some essential quality similar to an aquatic mammal—looking this way and that, pausing with head held high, as if to sniff the air. An otter. A mink.

Minkish." The resemblance of the mink to the weasel may bring to the reader's mind that perhaps Hay should not be trusted completely, as Adams later discovers.

Hay tries to dissuade Adams from continuing his search for Miriam and her list of chequards because, he says, finding the list will advance "the cause of the Boulangists," which would not be "in the best interests of the United States." Hay refuses to help Adams throughout his investigation, saying, "I'm involved in some extremely sensitive negotiations, and if these people I'm talking to get word that I'm prowling around, that might be the end of it." In the end, Adams realizes that Hay's disappointing lack of support has little to do with the American desire to "get a treaty assigning the French rights under the concession" to the United States. In fact, Hay did negotiate that treaty, the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, in 1901, which allowed the United States permission to build the Panama Canal.

Another historical figure in Panama is Elizabeth Cameron, "the famously beautiful" wife of Senator Donald Cameron and a good friend to Adams. At the beginning of the story, Elizabeth insinuates her amorous intention with Adams, squeezing his arm in a way that grants him "an intimate knowledge he had not known outside his marriage." Elizabeth's fondness for Adams is not lost on her husband. In fact, at one point, Senator Cameron calls on Adams and tells him, "It's no secret that she's fond of you." Cameron inquires, "are the two of you in love, exactly or what?" The question is too complex for Adams. He can see both sides of it. "Yes. And of course no," he thinks. Senator Cameron interprets

a movement of Adams's head to signify that they are not romantically involved, going on to tell Adams he finds him "trustworthy."

The senator admits, "My wife bores easily," but then he encourages Adams to spend time with her, because, he says, "I'm sure you're a gentleman."

The real cause of Adams's change of heart about Elizabeth is his growing obsession with finding Louise Martin. But in the end, when the mystery is solved, it is Elizabeth's insight that causes him, impulsively, to propose to her, for she realizes that he "seized upon . . . this woman as a way of avoiding" her (Elizabeth). She tells him "you wanted to save someone you could save. Someone who needed you as much as Clover." Elizabeth's understanding of Adams helps him on his journey from the past to the future. Just as she comprehends his motives in avoiding her, she knows that she and Henry will never marry. Her continued and valued friendship is what she offers him.

Adams first sees Madame LeBlanc in the background, behind the concierge at Miriam Talbott's building. When he recognizes her again at the trial with John Hay, Hay identifies her as a woman who has "customers." Adams attempts to meet her because he thinks that she might be able to lead him to Miriam Talbott, but when he does, she tells him, "I know of no such woman." Finally, Madame LeBlanc assures him that the dead woman is Miriam Talbott, but when asked about the dead woman's possible connection with the Panama scandal, LeBlanc asks her maid, Avril, to show him the door. Adams cannot fathom LeBlanc's involvement in the scandal, other than the fact that he observes important political officials with her, from Premier Loubet to Delahaye to Clemenceau. It turns out that in her professional capacity, Madame LeBlanc knows the government and French Interoceanic Canal Company officials involved in the scandal. So, her residence is where they secretly meet to discuss the location of the list of chequards. While LeBlanc tells Adams that she has hidden Louise Martin for her own safety, and ultimately delivers the Adams's message to Louise, it turns out that LeBlanc has been a party to Louise's kidnapping. However, because LeBlanc agrees to deliver Adams's message to Louise Martin and her response to him, Adams is ultimately able to find and rescue Louise. As a character, Madame LeBlanc serves to illustrate the erosion of the social contract; the notorious Madam's association with the men who govern France and those who police it demonstrates the chaos that so concerns Henry Adams.

Chief Inspector Charles Pettibois, of the Paris Police, first appears to ask Adams to identify the body of Miriam Talbott. Walking into his quarters at the hotel, Adams is surprised to find Inspector Pettibois, but his suspicion about Pettibois's having entered the hotel room without permission evaporates when Adams learns of Miriam's death by suicide, at least according to Pettibois. While the expectation is that the Inspector would be a trustworthy contact, the sinister circumstances surrounding his every appearance in the story make him suspect to Adams. First, Pettibois is conspicuously surprised when Adams observes that "[t]he dead woman was apparently mixed up in the Panama affair" because she carries "a business card from the man who killed himself yesterday [Reinach]." But he explains that the coroner may have mixed Reinach's personal effects with those of Miriam Talbott. Although at the surface, Pettibois appears to respect Adams and respect his opinions, it turns out that Pettibois, who himself is embroiled in

the Panama affair, is actually responsible for framing Adams for Miriam Talbott's murder and imprisoning Louise Martin.

Luckily for Adams, Michelle DuForche, a young medical examiner, befriends him.

Together, they begin to unravel Miriam Talbott's murder. DuForche's job at the prefecture is to take a series of measurements from crime victims, "height, length of head, breadth of head, length of right ear, etc."

DuForche says, "In combination, these measurements can be used to identify individuals ... that is the theory at any rate." However, the problem is that what is called the "Bertillonage report" cannot be generated if the victim is lacking a head or an ear.

DuForche goes on to tell Adams of the work of Francis Galton, an English scientist who theorizes that fingerprints may be used as the "most scientific way to identify people." DuForche is an important key to the plot because, since Adams is under suspicion for Miriam Talbott's murder, DuForche agrees to retrieve the message from Louise Martin at Madame LeBlanc's residence.

However, DuForche is assassinated most likely because the conspirators believe he is Henry Adams.

Another reason why DuForche's part in the plot is a critical one is that he introduces Adams to his Uncle, Alphonse Bertillon, the Chief of the Service of Judicial Identity.

Bertillon is the sole reason Adams is not arrested for Miriam Talbott's murder, and ultimately he rescues Adams from the deranged Pettibois, allowing him to solve the mystery.

Social Concerns

Panama is a historical novel based on Henry Adams's imagined part in unraveling the French Panama Canal scandal at the end of the nineteenth century. The primary social concern of Panama is the tension between past and present—the order of the pre-industrial era and the chaos of industrial age progress. Author Eric Zencey is a social ecologist and historian who has studied Henry Adams extensively.

In Virgin Forest, a collection of his essays, Zencey discusses Adams's awareness "that the orienting traditions of political life were crumbling in the face of industrial and social change." Had Adams truly been involved in the Panama affair, the scandal most likely would have signified to him the political "crumbling" of which he theorized as a natural result of the industrialization that so disturbs the character Henry Adams throughout Panama.

The tension that results from rapid technological advancement is familiar to the twenty-first-century reader. The end of the nineteenth century was a period much like the end of the twentieth century in the proliferation of technological advances. The advent of instant communication anywhere in the world via email and wireless telephones, immediate access to information through the Internet, and even the use of DNA in forensics dramatically changed life in the twentieth century. Such technological advancements are comparable in scope to the ones Henry Adams faces in Panama and the ones he faced in real life: fire engines, telegraph, telephones, electricity, and the forensic uses of fingerprints. Adams muses on "[t]he progress of Science. . . [n]o need of narrative, of understanding, human motivations, there would be fingerprints. These little swirls represented the rationalization, the industrialization of police work."

Another social concern of Panama is the corruption of government, also familiar to many twenty-first-century readers. At the center of Panama is the scandalous behavior of officials of the French Interoceanic Canal Company. As a consequence of the company's mismanagement, the canal has not been built, at great expense to the French people. Adams reads in a French newspaper, "the crash of the Panama Company . . .

'assaulted 800,000 French men and women . . . as it wiped out the savings they had so nobly entrusted to the cause.'" Furthermore, "a hundred and fifty million francs a year had been taken out of France in order to move mud, to kill a small army of workers, and to leave machinery of Gallic design scattered, rusting, in the tropics." Adams realizes that "France had lost ground in the race for industrial might" and that "cash flow alone doesn't establish power." He later observes, "The political culture of the city was under siege. It was a wonder that Paris hadn't slipped back completely to a state of nature, a war of all against all." This musing of the character Henry Adams brings to mind social historian Henry Adams's real-life awareness of the decay of government in the face of industrialization.

The type of government portrayed in Panama is probably as familiar to the twenty-first-century reader as the scandals surrounding President Clinton of the United States, as familiar as stories of government corruption in the Philippines or Colombia.

Government corruption as a social issue forms the emotional foundation of Panama.

As a part of the social contract, the public must trust in the government, expecting honesty and work for the common good. In Panama, government corruption is shown on a large scale, demonstrating that the people can no longer trust those in power.

This disillusionment is mirrored in the smallscale chaos of the corruption of individuals: Adams finds he cannot trust even those he most expects to be honest. The chaos that arises from the rupture of the social contract sets the tone for Adams's unraveling of the carefully sewn plot.

Techniques

Zencey so masterfully melds history with fiction in Panama, several of his critics noted difficulty with separating historical fact from fictional details. This mixture of fact and fiction was one Henry Adams himself attempted. In his essay, "The Contemporary Relevance of Henry Adams," Zencey explains that Adams wrote a "complex tale of [Tahiti's] genealogies, presented as the firstperson memoirs of Marau Taaroa, the queen of Tahiti." Zencey says that, "in her memoirs Adams was exploring the median between history and fiction." While Adams did visit Panama in 1892 on his way to visit John Hay in France, and at the time various deputies, or chequards, were identified as having been bribed in the French attempt to build a canal in Panama, the events surrounding Miriam Talbott and Louise Martin are purely fictional.

Panama could be placed in the detective genre along with the historical genre. Whereas the beginning of the novel makes a great effort toward realism, the second half devotes itself to true suspense. For example, in one scene at the opera, John Hay introduces Adams to the Italian ambassador.

"Tell the Ambassador where you've been," Hay tells him, to which Adams replies, "Hawaii, Tahiti, Burma, Ceylon . . . . Panama." In scenes like this, Zencey is careful to weave in historically accurate details so that readers who are aware that Adams did in fact travel around the world after his wife's death are satisfied that the story could be true.

Although Zencey never ceases to be historically accurate, because he is so careful with historical details at the beginning he is able to spend more time later in the novel generating suspense. For example, when Adams begins to uncover many suspicious facts about Miriam Talbott's death, he returns to the scene of her drowning. There, he gets the sense that he is being followed and demands that his pursuer identify himself. "Who are you? What do you want?" he shouts into the quiet night, looking hard for a face. "Was it coming toward him? Good!

Adams moved closer."

At the truly exciting parts of the story, Zencey enhances excitement by using short sentences and choppy phrases to make events seem to transpire breathlessly. For example, Henry Adams first becomes aware that his desire to contact Madame LeBlanc may be a dangerous one when he catches her gaze across the theater at the opera.

When he leaves his seat to get a drink of water for the Italian ambassador, he realizes that someone has been listening behind the curtains of the box. "[A] head appeared thrust between them: oiled hair, no beard.

The head rotated left, then right. The man's wide-set, bulging eyes stared right at him.

Delahaye!" Later, when Adams returns to the concessionaire's house he finds himself in a dark hallway, "Pressing his back against the wall, holding tight to his razor, he listened. Nothing." Adams moves on. "After a dozen more steps, his razor, with a quiet chink, ran into something unyielding."

These short phrases give the illusion of the character's own nervous gasping for breath.

Without such suspense, Panama would not be a genuine detective novel.

In a detective novel, the complexity of the plot hinges on the precision of the details. For example, when we meet Henry Adams in the story, he is visiting John Hay in Panama and he asks Hay if he might take a picture from the wall at Jules Dingler's house. Hay responds, "The French have been very kind, letting us stay here . . .

that's no way to repay their hospitality."

But, rationalizing it as an anomalous impulse, Adams returns in the dark of night, reaches into the room, and grabs the picture, only finding out later that it isn't really the one he wanted. That picture turns out to be what embroils Adams in the whole Panama scandal, since it is the picture that will prove the involvement of several officials in the scandal. Another important plot element occurs when Adams witnesses a burning building, observing "that steam-breathing behemoth," the fire engine. Later, when he goes to find the photographer who took the picture of the Panama Company officials, he sees the same building where he witnessed the fire days before, where he had seen the fire engine and the "fireman arrange his unlikely salvage of bottles"—bottles that contained the chemicals used to develop photographs. The photographer's studio has been burned, he realizes, most likely to eliminate the photographic negative—evidence against the Panama Company officials.

Still another important detective genre technique Zencey uses is the coincidences that draw Henry Adams into the Panama affair. He might not have befriended the woman he knew as Miriam Talbott had she not reminded him of his wife, Clover. Then, as he is called to identify Miriam Talbott's body, he relives his sister's painful death and at the same time is reminded of events surrounding Clover's suicide. So even when he sees that this dead Miriam Talbott is not the woman he had come to know by that name, his desire to find the real woman is intensified, independent of any interest in the Panama affair. Although the corrupt Pettibois expects Adams to give up, he does not count on Adams's emotional connection to the elements of the scandal, or his power of reasoning. Such coincidences are the very thread that winds the plot so tightly.

Themes

The overarching theme in Panama is change, or the tension between past and future, in a man's life and loves, and in the world around him. Concern about the future cannot be separated either from the boy-meets-girl theme or from the study of the evolution of architecture as a metaphoric structure for understanding change in the modern world.

In The Education of Henry Adams, Adams says, "Chaos often breeds life, when order breeds habit." Zencey likely intended to reflect Adams's view in depicting the tension between the chaos of the future and the order of habit. In Panama, Adams, mired in habit, feels "outpaced by a world that seemed no longer to need his kind." His observations prove that he is mystified by the trappings of the early industrial age. He observes a cobbler's shop with boots . . . dozens and dozens of boots on display in the window, enough to have been, just a few decades ago, a sure sign of the cobbler's dementia, but unremarkable in a world where shoes were made in advance of orders, on speculation, in standard sizes, before any need.

He sees that the stores sell goods different from the ones sold only ten years before, listing such novelties as the "[t]elegraph [and] [f]lavored ices." He finds such rapidly changing times uncomfortable, "less artistic." He tells John Hay, "there's a time toward the end of a man's life when all he wants is for the world to stay the same."

The loss of his wife, his decision not to pursue a life in politics (in his family's tradition), and perhaps even his function as a historian, cause Adams to become wistful at the transformation in the world around him. He realizes that progress does not always bring the best for the world and that remaining in the safety of the past is futile. The world cannot remain the way it was when his wife, Clover, was alive, but perhaps for Henry Adams accepting the changes around him will mean accepting his wife's death.

Lost without his wife, Adams calls the present his "posthumous life." He would like nothing better than to return to the time he spent happily with Clover; life without her is like a living death. Elizabeth Cameron hints to him romantically about what a man "needs for the second half of his life"— meaning perhaps herself—but Adams replies that it "depends . . . on whether the second half [will make] a departure from the first." He seems to be "a man who intends his life to stay the same." Nevertheless, he fatefully meets Miriam Talbott and in a twist of the classic boy-meets-girl theme finds himself attracted to Miriam (whose name he at first confuses with Marian, Clover's real name). In fact, Adams is attracted enough to endanger himself to find her when he learns she is imperiled.

The loss of Clover makes Adams's search for Miriam all the more intense. When he realizes that Clover's death "had taught him that the lesson of light and the tragedy of its eclipse grew no more palatable with recognition," he becomes aware that Miriam has become his "light" and that her disappearance is another "eclipse." Part of Miriam's appeal is her youth. Her "modern dress . . . strange to him" represents the modern age in which Adams feels so uncomfortable. The notion that the two of them could be

"perfect and complete" is comforting to Adams. Maybe, by letting go of Clover and by holding onto Miriam, Adams will find a way to be "of use" in the modern age that so concerns him.

Yet another theme in Panama involves the use of architecture as a metaphor for understanding the changes of modern life.

From the beginning of the story, Adams muses on the architecture he sees around him. When he meets Miriam Talbott, they travel to Chartres, where she tells the story of two competing patrons who paid the glaziers to "represent [their] political doctrines" in constructing the stained glass windows of the cathedral. Rather than arguing verbally, they argued through the artistic design of the stained glass they commissioned. Adams begins to read about twelfth-century life, and as the plot moves forward, he becomes more aware of the incipience of progress in that long ago time.

He views Notre Dame and reflects that "[m]aybe every church stands as a symbol for something in the lives of those who live within its purview." When he realizes that architecture represents the changes and tensions of the culture around it, he begins to understand modern life not as some dramatic change that has just occurred but rather as a process that occurs over a long period of time.

Adams later convinces himself, "the curve of change ran down from twelfth-century architecture to pass right through nineteenthcentury biography." His re-awakening from his "posthumous life" comes when he recognizes that electricity, the telegraph, even fingerprints are not the results of the industrial age changes he has observed, but rather the consequence of a series of transformations that began hundreds of years before.

At the end of Panama, we see Henry Adams searching for his pen, beginning to write his real-life book about the cathedrals, MontSaint-Michel and Chartres.

Adams resolves his interest in Louise Martin, who he met as Miriam Talbott, when he realizes upon finding her that his search "had been as much an escape as it had been a thing worth undertaking itself."

Later, he apologizes to Elizabeth Cameron for behaving "abominably" and ignoring her. She tells him that they might have "improved upon the merely acceptable," or deepened their friendship romantically, if he had taken the opportunity. But knowing that will never be, Elizabeth chastises him for pining for his wife, Clover. "[L]et me tell you, Henry Adams, life with a real woman . . . is more difficult. It would change you, make no mistake. Think you wouldn't have changed if Clover had lived?" In this way also, Adams is forced to face the inevitability of change. Gone is his fascination with the youthful Louise Martin. He has chosen instead to "remain lifelong friends" with Elizabeth Cameron. Thus the boymeets-girl and tension of progress themes collide and are resolved. And the metaphoric structure of the architecture he has observed around him becomes the structure he will use to give order to his life, his next project, his future.

Key Questions

In discussing a novel that relies on actual events, consider the elaborate research process the author had to use. Try to distinguish between historical and fictional events.

1. Observing the many changes around him, Adams begins to feel like an anachronism, a man out of time. He describes the pneumatic tubes that carry communications around Paris as delightful old technology, and compares them to the distancing dots and dashes of the more up-to-date telegraph. How do the technological changes at the turn of the twentieth-century age of industry compare to those at the turn of the twentyfirst century? How might a fifty-or sixty-year-old person feel today about learning technologies such as e-mail or Internet surfing?

2. As Adams begins to unravel the mystery surrounding the French Interoceanic Canal Company, the story becomes more and more suspenseful. In what ways does Zencey challenge expectations about the characters to build suspense in the story?

3. Although he pursues her and vows to protect her, Adams in the end does not seek a romantic affair with Louise Martin.

Why not? What part does Elizabeth Cameron play in his decision?

4. When Adams meets Miriam Talbott, who he later learns is Louise Martin, they discuss the cathedrals and the use of colors in the cathedrals. How does this discussion later figure into the plot of the story?

5. Adams's good friend, John Hay, appears to be unconnected to the Panama affair for most of the story. However, Adams later uncovers the fact that Hay is indeed involved, even to the extent of paying Louise Martin and Miriam Talbott's rent. Why would Hay, a U.S.

government representative, involve himself in France's part of the Panama Affair?

Literary Precedents

Panama is a historical novel with many literary precedents, not the least of which is Sir Walter Scott's Waverly (1814), which is considered to be the first historical novel.

Two important American writers, Norman Mailer and William Styron, have written contemporary novels about American history. In his 1948 novel, The Naked and the Dead, Mailer writes about the United States at the time of the Second World War, casting fictional characters against a background of real events. Styron's Confessions of Nat Turner (1967) tells the story of slave Nat Turner, who led the 1831 slave rebellion in Southampton, Virginia.

Critic David Cowart defines historical fiction as "fiction in which the past figures with some prominence." Depending on the author's preference, historical novels may place fictional characters in situations based on historical facts (as does Mailer), or they may include historical persons in fictionalized situations (as does Styron). Zencey melds the two methods.

Being able to write about a historical figure living fictionally in historically accurate circumstances requires careful study.

Zencey studied Adams in depth during his graduate work. In writing his doctoral dissertation about the social history of the second law of thermodynamics, or entropy, Zencey studied Henry Adams's philosophy of history. Because Zencey understands not only the historical details but also Adams's mindset and approach to life, according to one critic, "Panama doesn't depend upon, but is enhanced by knowledge of Adams's work and biography." Furthermore, Zencey did extensive research specific to details in the novel, such as traveling to Paris, touring the city, and examining documents pertaining to the Panama Canal scandal.

Zencey's comprehensive understanding of the historical period and of Henry Adams's life makes it easy to categorizePanama as a historical novel. However, Zencey also was intentional about his choice of a detective-style plot. In a personal interview, Zencey explained to this author that the key to understanding Panama could be found in his essay, "The Contemporary Relevance of Henry Adams." In that essay, he quotes Adams's description of himself as a man "aching to absorb knowledge, and helpless to find it," saying that such curiosity made Adams "a natural choice for a detective" and that Adams's "perseverance in the pursuit of moral vision" made Adams a good detective since that perseverance "has always been the defining purpose of the detective as a literary type and one great source of the genre's appeal." So, although it's clear that Zencey's deep understanding of Adams's personal philosophy was important, his familiarity with the detective novel genre came into play as well in determining the format of Panama.

Related Titles

While Panama can be enjoyed thoroughly as a good detective story, an understanding of the real-life Henry Adams makes the historical accuracy of the novel that much more impressive. Interested readers should consult Zencey's most important source about Adams's life and interests, The Education of Henry Adams. This autobiographical account provides historical and philosophical details about Adams and both parts figure equally in importance in the narrative. Another work by Henry Adams, MontSaint-Michel and Chartres is evidence of Adams's fascination with architecture that Zencey portrays in Panama.

Knowledge of Henry Adams's life and philosophy will give the reader a preliminary understanding of some of the historical background of the novel. However, the best way to develop a keen understanding of some of the novel's finer points and to get a clearer sense of Zencey's own focus as a social ecologist is to read his essay collection, Virgin Forest, and, in particular, the essays "The Contemporary Relevance of Henry Adams," and "Some Brief Speculations on the Popularity of Entropy as Metaphor." These two essays demonstrate how Zencey came to understand Henry Adams so thoroughly and they explain Adams's philosophies about the nature of society.

Zencey's essays, though they may sound esoteric, are as entertaining as his novel, Panama, and are an excellent resource for the reader who wants to know more.

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