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History and Ambiguity: Graham Greene's  
*The Third Man* And *The Quiet American*  
In Print and On Screen

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of English  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in English

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by  
Valentina Reshetova  
August 2003

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Professor Stanley, Chair  
Professor Giles  
Professor Hurd

Keywords: *The Third Man*, *The Quiet American*, Novels and Films

## ABSTRACT

History and Ambiguity: Graham Greene's *The Third Man* And *The Quiet American*  
In Print and On Screen

by

Valentina Reshetova

In this master's thesis, I shall examine Graham Greene's place in criticism of the British novel by focusing on *The Third Man* and *The Quiet American*. In terms of theoretical approach, I shall focus on a close, critical reading of the texts employing elements of cultural, historical, psychological, and genre criticism. With the films, I shall focus on lighting and shot formation along with the abilities of the directors and actors. These works have not been studied jointly before as literature or as film or as a combination thereof. Nevertheless, such study proves worthwhile. My thesis is also the first lengthy comparison of the two film versions of *The Quiet American*. Given that Phillip Noyce's 2002 film is so new, little lengthy criticism exists. Even though Joseph Mankiewicz's 1957 film has been available for over forty years, no serious scholarship exists on it. My thesis will fill this critical lacuna.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Graham Greene (1904-1991) is one of the most popular British novelists of the twentieth century. He also wrote plays, film scripts, short stories, children's books, literary criticism, poetry, biography, autobiography, political reportage, and travel books. Early in his career, Greene wrote a number of thrillers, or entertainments as he called them, involving action, mystery, and political intrigue. These include *Stamboul Train*, *The Third Man*, and others. His novels include *Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory*, *The End of the Affair*, and *The Heart of the Matter*. Critics often refer to these as his "Catholic" novels because they deal with issues of sin, confession, and salvation.<sup>1</sup> The novels also contain strong psychological insight on behalf of the characters. I have chosen *The Third Man* and *The Quiet American* because these works have not been studied jointly before as literature or as film or as a combination thereof. Nevertheless, such study proves worthwhile. My thesis is also the first lengthy comparison of the two film versions of *The Quiet American*. Given that Phillip Noyce's 2002 film is so new, little lengthy criticism exists. Even though Joseph Mankiewicz's 1957 film has been available for over forty years, no serious scholarship exists on it. My thesis will fill this critical lacuna.

There are no happy endings in Graham Greene's novels, and there are precious few happy endings in lives in the modern world. Greene employs stark settings and characters lacking a great number of choices in his fictional works in order to explore the condition of human existence. His intricate plots and complex characters with their many layers of motivation and interpretation only fuel the concept of ambiguity. Uncertain, equivocal, indistinct, and obscure characterize the places, people, and events of *The Quiet American* and

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<sup>1</sup> While Greene himself was a Catholic, he did not like the term "Catholic novelist." Instead, he preferred to be thought of as a Catholic who just so happened to write novels.

*The Third Man*. While these two works may seem disparate and lacking in commonalities, upon closer examination we see that they are not so different. The setting for *The Third Man* is Vienna shortly after World War II. Indo-China during the French occupation in the early 1950s forms the backdrop for *The Quiet American*. These foreign settings are sordid and corrupt showing that man's attempts at civilization are often ineffective. Both works are detective stories at heart. Martins, in the latter, and Fowler, in the former, search for the truth behind the murder of a friend. *The Third Man* begins and ends with Lime's funeral. Martins searches for the killer of his friend only to become Lime's killer himself. Englishman Thomas Fowler comes to realize that he is responsible for the murder of his American friend Alden Pyle. The novel begins and ends with Pyle dead, and Fowler slowly reveals the story of his own culpability in the death of the titular character. The events or actions of each work are not the everyday affairs of ordinary lives, yet we as readers can easily identify with the themes of friendship, love, betrayal, and subjective morality.

*The Quiet American* and *The Third Man* also exist in film versions that viewers can enjoy in addition to the print versions. The film of *The Third Man* is an accepted classic of the film noir genre. Starring Joseph Cotten and Orson Welles, this film was shot on location in Vienna. British filmmaker Carol Reed directed this picture. There are subtle differences between the book and the film even though Greene wrote both. I shall examine these differences between the two and also focus on the psychology of the piece as well as its realism of place and action. With the film, I shall discuss lighting and shot formation especially. Reed's canted frames provide an excellent commentary on the action within the frame. The musical score on the zither by Anton Karas also directs the viewer to a certain interpretation of the scene.

Two film versions of *The Quiet American* have been released. The first is American Joseph L. Mankiewicz's production starring Audie Murphy as Alden Pyle and Michael Redgrave as Thomas Fowler.<sup>2</sup> The novel has often been attacked as anti-American because of its political commentary. Displeased with the perceived anti-American elements, Mankiewicz took nearly all of them out of the film. While Audie Murphy may be the most decorated American soldier from World War II, he is horribly miscast in this picture, as I shall demonstrate by discussing several scenes from the film. Greene himself loathed the butchering of his work that appeared on screen. The most recent film version appeared in November 2002. Michael Caine delivers what many critics have called his best performance yet, and he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor. Brendan Fraser fills the role of Alden Pyle in the film directed by Australian Phillip Noyce. I shall begin by examining the novel itself paying particular attention to the treatment it received in the American press when Greene first published it. I refute the assertions that Greene was anti-American. The novel is anti-imperialist, and, because of American involvement in the politics of so many countries, America stood as a symbol of global imperialism in the world. Greene was opposed to imperialism, and the novel happens to contain an American. Thus, some conclude that this individual character who is criticized in the novel represents Greene's criticism of America as a whole. From here, I shall compare the novel to the films and the films to each other paying particular attention to the Mankiewicz version and its many shortcomings.

We should not completely condemn Joseph Mankiewicz's film, however. Greene did his historical research in writing both *The Third Man* and *The Quiet American*. Mankiewicz adds realistic historical elements to his film as well. One example comes in his consultation with CIA

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<sup>2</sup> Actually, Mankiewicz's film never actually names Pyle. The characters and the film's credits refer to him as "The American."

operative Col. Edward Lansdale made famous in the *Pentagon Papers*. Lansdale helped put Ngo Dinh Diem, a Vietnamese national who had lived in New Jersey, into power by the time of the 1955 publication of *The Quiet American*. Thus, in the 1957 film, Pyle, in the 1952 setting, refers to “a very prominent Vietnamese living in exile in New Jersey” (Franklin 44). Another covert CIA operation later killed Ngo Dinh Diem. While that is beyond the historical reach of the 1955 novel, it certainly demonstrates the validity of Greene’s comments on American foreign affairs.

Graham Greene is both well respected as a writer in literary circles and widely popular with the general reading public. Given his two-fold appeal, I shall begin any critical discussion of book or film with a brief glance at contemporary literary and cinematic reviews in order to gauge the popular reception of Greene’s works. From there, I shall move on to a much more critical examination using scholarly responses to *The Third Man* and *The Quiet American* from an international audience of American, British, Canadian, and Russian critics.<sup>3</sup>

The books have strong ties to Greene’s own life. Martins, a writer of westerns in *The Third Man*, is actually Graham Greene’s persona, a man trying to find out the truth about life in post-war Vienna in 1948, a labyrinth of customs, practices, and governmental regulations. Martins’s school chum Harry Lime also has a real-life prototype in Kim Philby, a long-time friend and former chief of the British Secret Service. Greene maintained loyalty and friendship with Philby, a double agent, even after his treasonous defection to the Soviet Union. Martins admires Lime for his wit, and Greene subtly prompts us that Lime is Martins’s alter ego. Lime is everything that Martins wanted to be in life. Philby must have been a similarly charismatic person in Greene’s own life, especially since Greene remained friends with him after his treachery until Philby died in 1988. Martins and Lime share their past through mischievous adventures at school and stayed friends for twenty-five years. However, once Martins becomes

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<sup>3</sup> For articles originally published in Russian, I have provided my own translations into English.



aware of Lime's crimes against humanity, he finds the strength to separate himself from Lime and becomes a mature, responsible adult (Gomez "The Third Man" 334-335). So, too, does Graham Greene develop a skeptical approach to British intelligence services and its value because of Philby's betrayal. Greene did not kill Philby as Martins shot Lime; instead, Greene officially withdrew from the intelligence world and devoted himself to writing.

*The Human Factor* deals with betrayal of country, *The Power and the Glory* deals with betrayal of Catholicism, *The Third Man* deals with betrayal of friendship, and *The Quiet American* deals with this same type of perfidy. Philby gave the title "the quiet American" to Kermit (Kim) Roosevelt, grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt. Kim Roosevelt was the top CIA man in Iran during the CIA's supported overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953 in favor of the installation of the Shah.<sup>4</sup> This is not the end of the historical parallels, however. As I mentioned before, Greene was a journalist in Vietnam. Fowler's High Church Anglican wife Helen Fowler denied her husband a divorce for religious reasons; and the same was true in Greene's own life (Whitfield 69-70). Both Fowler and Greene share the same name; Greene took Thomas as his confirmation name when he joined the Catholic Church. The implications of 'Doubting Thomas' are so obvious that they do not need to be discussed. Thus, one can see Greene as Fowler in some ways, though Greene himself insisted that he should not be identified with Fowler. Greene even partook of opium as well and describes it at length (*Ways of Escape* 172-175). A final historical parallel between fiction and reality concerns bombing. Pyle plays a role in the bombing of civilians in Saigon. A similar incident actually occurred. The real-life General Tré (called General Thé in the novel) was responsible for the bomb set off in the city square. Tré was a renegade fighting both the French and the Vietminh

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<sup>4</sup> For more on this, see David Halberstam's eminently readable *The Fifties*, pp 359-369.

(73).<sup>5</sup>

Graham Greene's autobiographical writing shows and Norman Sherry's excellent two-volume biography confirms Greene's involvement in espionage. Michael Korda, son of Alexander Korda the producer of *The Third Man*, also reveals Greene's penchant for intelligence work even after his official role ended. Greene put Michael Korda in touch with the British Intelligence service MI6 before the young man went to Budapest, Hungary, to fight in the anti-communist revolution (48). Korda also recounts how Greene was on the forefront of political turmoil in Indo-China, Cuba, and Haiti, the settings of *The Quiet American*, *Our Man in Havana*, and *The Comedians*, respectively. Greene also had ties to Panama. He used them to sneak into the White House in 1977 disguised as a Panamanian diplomat in the company of then Panamanian president General Omar Torrijos. Greene was even photographed with Torrijos and American President Jimmy Carter (50). Hence, we can see Greene's actual involvement in a secret life in addition to the literary example of his characters.

Graham Greene's *The Third Man* and *The Quiet American* both involve a search for the truth. William Chace argues that Greene as a novelist is like a spy searching for superior knowledge of a situation (159-160). The writer then applies this knowledge in creating the story. Chace continues saying that the spy is glamorous. "He represents an unattainable world of clear and decisive action, total control and perfect authority" (163). The characters in the novels do not have clear action, total control, or perfect authority, and that is what makes the novels so lifelike. Martins, Lime, Fowler, and Pyle inhabit a complex, sordid world lacking in simple solutions. Our own world is equally obtuse and opaque morally, ethically, and spiritually.

Greene researched the real-life situation in Vietnam in the early 1950s and later

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<sup>5</sup> If these sets of parallels are not enough, more can be found between Greene's novel and Paul Theroux's *Saint Jack*. Both titular characters are Americans from Boston, and older narrators tell both novels, set in Southeast Asia, in flashbacks about the titular characters. For more on this, see Thomas Olsen's "Unquiet Americans."

combined the results of his research with pre-existing literary expectations of a “thriller.” However, *The Quiet American* is so much more than an ordinary thriller. Robert Pendleton discusses the mixed genre of the novel: “In narratives which blend the psychological processes of a protagonist with a more formulaic plot involving conspiracy, pursuit, and rescue, the emphasis upon action is paralleled by a depiction of interiority” (83). *The Quiet American* is of a mixed genre because Greene blends the techniques of his earlier novels together to produce a work of political narrative, full of action, with psychological introspection, that has an historical background and Catholic sensibility in its confessional narration. Thus, structural, psychological, social, and historical criticism together with close textual analysis all inform a reading of *The Quiet American*. I shall analyze *The Quiet American*, the complex story of Fowler and Pyle, using these varying critical perspectives. In order to accomplish these objectives, I shall provide specific references to the novel as well as recent criticism on Graham Greene’s life and work.

In this master’s thesis, I shall examine Graham Greene’s place in criticism of the British novel by focusing on *The Third Man* and *The Quiet American*. Since film is such an important force and popular medium in the modern world, I shall also examine these literary works in their cinematic versions. Many times people are inspired to read a book after seeing the film and vice versa. In terms of theoretical approach, I will focus on a close, critical reading of the texts employing elements of cultural, historical, psychological, and genre criticism. With the films, I will focus on lighting and shot formation along with the abilities of the directors and actors. While seemingly disparate works, *The Third Man* and *The Quiet American* by Graham Greene share many common elements.

## CHAPTER 2

### *THE THIRD MAN*: FICTION AND HISTORY

One of Greene's most popular books on screen is *The Third Man*. More critical attention has been paid to the film, but the book merits attention as well. In this study, I shall examine both the book and the film versions of Graham Greene's *The Third Man* paying particular attention to the way the story develops in each medium. The print version focuses more on character development, and the film creates atmosphere through camera angles, lighting, and shot formation. I shall also discuss the differences between the book and film. Most are minor differences, but the biggest change concerns the ending of each version. Finally, I shall investigate the historical reality of post-war Vienna and how it adds to the total experience that is *The Third Man*.

Let us begin with a brief discussion of the title of the work. Graham Greene took the title *The Third Man* from three different sources. The first is T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* which contains the following lines:

Who is the third who walks always beside you?  
When I count, there are only you and I together  
But when I look ahead up the white road  
There is always another one walking beside you  
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded  
I do not know whether a man or a woman  
--But who is that on the other side of you? (359-365)

Eliot's inspiration for these lines is the biblical story of Jesus meeting with two of his followers on the road to Emmaus. Jesus is the third man of that particular story told in the twenty-fourth

chapter of the Gospel of Luke. A.A. DeVitis notes these two sources but does not mention the third source (43). Eliot also drew on the diary of the famed British explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton from his Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914-1916. Shackleton and two companions crossed uncharted areas of South Georgia, Antarctica. During their thirty-six-hour trek, all three felt the presence of another person accompanying them, as Shackleton himself notes (211). Greene would have been an adolescent when Shackleton's expedition took place and later when he published his diary. Thus, Greene might certainly have known Shackleton as a source for Eliot. Either way, there really are three sources, historical or otherwise, for Greene's title *The Third Man*.

More often than not, a book inspires a film. Not so with *The Third Man*. The film came first. To complicate matters even more there are two versions of the film, one for each side of the Atlantic. The British version of the film *The Third Man* was released in London in September of 1949 after having won the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival. The American film version premiered in February 1950. The primary difference between the two films occurs in the voice-over narration in the prologue. Carol Reed, the film's director, provides the narration in the British version. Joseph Cotten as Holly Martins provides the narration in the American film. The only version available today in America, strangely enough, is the British version.<sup>6</sup> Thus, I shall use the British version in my discussion of the film. During the narrated prologue, we see several sights around war-torn Vienna. The city is not the pristine, old Vienna of Strauss. The narrator says, "Vienna doesn't really look any worse than a lot of other European cities, bombed about a bit." The images we see on the screen ironically undercut the narrator's words because the city suffers much greater damage than just a little bit of bombing.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Raskin provides the text of each voice-over in and analysis of the differences in "European versus American Storytelling."

Another disturbing, jarring image floats down the Danube—a dead body. We see what Gwenn Boardman calls “a haunting picture of sad Vienna” (120). Indeed, we are not viewing the glamour and easy charm of old Vienna. Instead, we see Vienna as “a macabre backdrop,” a character of latent evil (Van Wert 343).

In the preface to *The Third Man* published in 1950, Graham Greene writes that the work “was never written to be read but only to be seen” (7).<sup>7</sup> While we could take the author at his own word, he did, nevertheless, publish the book.<sup>8</sup> Many similarities and differences exist between the book and the film, as we shall see. Greene admits that the film is better than the book (8), but the book is an excellent achievement in and of itself. A final point from the preface concerns politics. Greene emphasizes the fact that the story is not a political statement. It is simply an entertainment for the enjoyment of the audience (10).

Early criticism of the book and film is often divided. Contemporary book reviewer Paul Dinnage suggested that the reputation of the book might outlive that of the film (158). That is a bold assertion to make, but careful study of the text reveals its excellence. Contemporary film reviewer Gavin Lambert calls the story “not particularly exciting—sinister and chilling, rather” (159). While the film is sinister and chilling, I do indeed find it quite exciting. An unsigned review for the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* faults the print version as lacking the visual qualities that make the film so popular (19). Obviously, the film is more visual, and the book is certainly more verbal than the film. Each medium has different qualities that separate it from the other. John Cournos’s review of the book calls it “disappointing” because “its chief

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<sup>7</sup> *The Third Man* and *The Fallen Idol* were originally published together in one volume.

<sup>8</sup> What name we ought to give the genre of the print version remains a difficult question. Should we call it a novel, novella, thriller, entertainment, or even an “urban western” as Norman Macleod calls it (“A Trip to Greenland” 204)? I think of it as a novel, but we are on safe ground by simply calling it a book.

fault is its lack of build-up of character which legitimate fiction demands” (182). As we shall see, particularly with Lime and Martins, this charge lacks merit.

The basic plot of *The Third Man* revolves around vindication (Sandoe 6). In the book, Rollo Martins arrives in post-war Vienna to find his school-boy chum Harry Lime has been fatally struck by a car. As Martins investigates Lime’s death, he comes to the conclusion that Lime has been murdered. The police accuse Lime of having been a black market racketeer. Martins strives to vindicate the name of his friend. Martins, Lime, and the book’s narrator Colonel Calloway are all British. In the film version, American actors Joseph Cotten and Orson Welles play Martins and Lime, respectively. Thus, the characters become American, and Rollo Martins becomes Holly Martins because Cotten objected to the name Rollo. For some unexplained reason, Calloway, played by Trevor Howard, holds the lower rank of major. These are just a few examples of the basic differences between the book and film.

One constant, though, remains the setting in Vienna. Following the liberation of Vienna by the Russians in 1945, the city suffered a ten-year occupation by its British, American, French, and Russian allies. Only with the State Treaty of 1955 did the occupying allies leave. The country of Austria was divided into four zones of occupation, and Vienna was also partitioned. The city itself did not have four, nice and neat quadrants of occupation. Instead, the Russians and the British each had two zones, the French and Americans one each. The city center, where the Austrian Parliament was located, was under quadripartite control. This led to the “four in a jeep” policing where one member of each of the Allies would ride together in a vehicle (Stadler 257-258).

Post-war Austria in general and Vienna in particular faced a number of problems. The country found itself in “a state of complete exhaustion and disorganization” separated from its

sources of food and raw materials and also lacking markets for trading its own goods (März and Szecsi 124). The situation in the capital city was even worse because the lack of food imports resulted in near-starvation conditions. März and Szecsi deem that the details of Vienna are unnecessary because the situation “has so often been described in the literature on postwar Europe” (124). Graham Greene’s *The Third Man* is one of those pieces that described the problem so very well. The novel “has contributed both an epithet and atmosphere that have become distinctive marks of Cold War fiction. The phrase ‘the third man’ has become part of the language of espionage” (Miller 104). Historian Richard Hiscocks even mentions *The Third Man* by name as representing the situation in Vienna accurately (83).

Graham Greene shows the capital of Austria as a separate entity, a “city that had lost its *raison d’être*” (Hiscocks 2). Readers and viewers get a haunting image of the sad city where bombed-out houses lacking windows stare as if with broken, toothless smiles. From the vivid descriptions in the book, we come to know Vienna with material deprivations, disturbances of the public order, and confrontations between Viennese and foreigners. Historically, refugees also poured into Vienna from the Austrian countryside as well as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The increased population exacerbated the already deadly food shortages. The refugees also “added dangerously to the irresponsible element in the city” (16). Film producer Sir Alexander Korda sent Greene to Vienna for a story based on historical fact about the four-power occupation. Journalist that he was, Graham Greene was committed to researching his subject fully. In *Ways of Escape*, he details his own research into the blackmarkets and in particular the penicillin racket. He even toured the sewers with the underground police and talked with surgeons involved in the stealing of penicillin (131-133). *The Third Man*’s setting is not arbitrary, but a story that could occur in Vienna at this time.



The black market is an historical fact, as many historians have shown. Karl Stadler goes so far as to argue that the Russians fueled the black markets: “Much of their merchandise, particularly cigarettes from eastern Europe, was smuggled into Austria by various gangs enjoying Soviet protection” and “extended to kidnapping of persons wanted by the Russians, blackmail, and demands for protection money” (263). Thus, it is no wonder that Harry Lime hides out in the Russian zone. With all of the shortfalls in food, fuel, and other necessities, it is no wonder that a black market existed. Food supplies in 1947-1948 were inadequate. Suicide rates and tuberculosis deaths increased. Inflation skyrocketed in the fall of 1947, prices rose, and people began to hoard goods. The cost-of-living index also increased greatly going from a baseline of 100 in April of 1945 to 248 in 1947 and to 378 in 1948 (Hiscocks 136, 139). The black market problem further increased because of an inexperienced and under-strength police force in Vienna at a time when the city needed policing the most (34, 84). The government in war-stricken Vienna was not able to protect legally or to provide for the needs of its citizens. “Life not only lacks dignity in war time. War shrinks individual freedom to a choice between slow and sudden death” (Wolfe 129). Thus, with all of the shortfalls in food, fuel, and other necessities, it should come as no great surprise that a black market existed and thrived in such conditions.

Vienna of *The Third Man* is “a post-Apocalyptic Babel” (Vineberg 34). In the biblical city of Babel, a tower was built, a tower that would reach up to God in Heaven. God, in his anger, struck down that tower and made men’s tongues incomprehensible. The Apocalypse refers to the end time of the world. Vienna is a city in which the Biblical seals of war, famine, death, and terror have been broken open (Revelation 6). Vienna is also Babel because the English, French, Russians, and Americans do not understand one another: “We see the real

Vienna, but we see an unreal view of Vienna” (Van Wert 344). We see an unreal view of Vienna because the Vienna in our minds and the Vienna of history we want to believe is the old Vienna of Strauss and waltzes and cuckoo clocks. We do not want to believe a ruinous, desolate Vienna that serves as a setting for such a macabre crime. Graham Greene did not make Vienna a ruin; World War II did.

*The Third Man* as a book on film provides readers and viewers with valid visual information of the post-war Austrian capital through numerous shots on location, especially night scenes. The ruins of Vienna that Reed captured could easily pass for documentary footage. From the vivid description in the novel and the rich visuals of the film, we come to know Vienna with material deprivations, disturbances of the public order, and confrontations between Viennese and foreigners. The film emphasizes the internal problems of the capital rather than the political relations among the allied forces. Some excellent professional and amateur Austrian actors with authentic Viennese accents keep the viewers, as well as Holly Martins, intrigued and sometimes puzzled. Reed eschewed a sound stage and filmed in the streets and in the underworld of Vienna’s sewer canals for the film’s final scenes. He even used the real, Viennese canal police in the chase for Harry Lime to cement the film’s authenticity.

In the realistic setting of Vienna, Colonel Calloway narrates the print version of *The Third Man*. He opens the book by saying, “One never knows when the blow may fall” (13). From the very first sentence of the story, readers must ask the question what blow Calloway is referring to. We are put on the defensive, back on our proverbial heels. Calloway is a limited narrator, and through him, Greene demonstrates his talent for great writing. The British officer tells readers about the friendship between Martins and Lime and about Martins’ arrival in the city just in time for Lime’s funeral. Because these two were such good friends, “that was why

what happened later was a worse shock to” Martins (13-14). Greene as author foreshadows events through the mouthpiece of Calloway. The latter tells the story in the present about past actions. Thus, the policeman knows that Martins will be shocked to see Lime alive. We as readers do not have that information yet, so again Greene challenges his readers to guess at what that shock might be. Calloway comes across as a reliable narrator with statements such as “I have reconstructed the affair as best I can from my own files and from what Martins told me. It is as accurate as I can make it” (15). Calloway, like Thomas Fowler the narrator of *The Quiet American*, appears to be an unbiased reporter of the action, a man who does not take sides. Nevertheless, both interfere and participate in the story (Macleod “This Strange, Rather Sad Story” 226). They are less innocent and less detached than they pretend to be (227).

The film version of *The Third Man* does not use Calloway as narrator. Other than a Carol Reed voice-over narration for the prologue of the film, the camera follows Holly Martins around because the film is his story. Many critics see this change as a big improvement. Peter Wolfe is disappointed with Calloway as narrator in the book claiming that his narration lacks drama (126). Seymour Chatman argues that Calloway as narrator “dissipates much of the suspense implicit in the situation” of the novel (185). I disagree. Greene has tremendous skill as a writer and maintains the suspense of the action through Calloway in different ways. A few examples will demonstrate my point. When Martins questions the porter from Lime’s building, the porter compares Lime being run over in the accident to a rabbit. Greene through Calloway writes about an event from the shared childhood of Lime and Martins:

It was only then, Martins told me, when the man used the word “rabbit,” that the dead Harry Lime came alive, became the boy with the gun which he had shown Martins the means of “borrowing”; a boy starting up among the long sandy

barrows of Brickworth Common saying, “Shoot, you fool, shoot! There,” and the rabbit limped to cover, wounded by Martins’s shot. (21).

This brilliant example of writing resonates through the book. In the end of the story, Martins will shoot but only wound Lime with his first shot. Lime then crawls off into another passage like a wounded rabbit. Also in that scene, Calloway implores Martins, “There. There. Shoot” (153). He recalls the earlier scene with his narration. “He lifted his gun and fired, just as he had fired at the same command all those years ago on Brickworth Common, fired, as he did then, inaccurately” (153).

*The Third Man* in both versions takes place in winter. A film script contains stage directions, but nothing like this description by Calloway in the book:

The snow gave the great pompous family headstones an air of grotesque comedy; a toupee of snow slipped sideways over an angelic face, a saint wore a heavy white mustache, and a shako of snow tipped at a drunken angle over the bust of a superior civil servant called Wolfgang Gottman. (22-23)

The camera might linger over the monument long enough for a viewer to read the name. But not every viewer is going to consider the headstones “pompous” or the comedy “grotesque.” Nor will the audience of the film necessarily know that a soldier’s stiff headdress with an upright plume has the technical name “shako.” Most viewers will simply see it as a hat.

In the film, Holly Martins arrives at the train station expecting to be met by his friend Harry Lime. When Lime is not there, Martins heads for Lime’s apartment. In front of Lime’s building, Martins walks under a very tall ladder, a superstitious sign that bodes ill. The visual element has no equivalent in the print version, but it clearly establishes that Martins will have bad luck while he is in Vienna. That misfortune quickly presents itself in the fact that Lime is

not home when Martins arrives. The porter informs Martins that Lime is dead and his friends have just taken the coffin to the cemetery. During this scene, the porter is on a ladder on an upper floor replacing light bulbs. Martins stands far below the porter, and Carol Reed shoots the scene at a sharply canted angle. It looks like the porter's ladder will fall over at any second and take him with it. Thus, the visual image of the scene is nearly as shocking to the viewer as the verbal information about Lime's death.

*The Third Man* is an intensely psychological film because of the odd camera angles and the use of light and shadow causing Ulrike Schwab to note the "distinctive atmosphere of the film" (3). Director Carol Reed's use of the wide-angle lens gives the viewer the opportunity to see the characters' action in the foreground of the shot in addition to lots of background. For example, when Holly Martins visits people's dwelling places, viewers see those lodgings from the front or on the diagonal. This positioning of the camera is symbolic; either Martins must confront someone or something head-on or he must escape at an angle. The canted camera angles offer him an avenue of escape from the situation. It also shows the viewer the possibility of and need for escape and evasion by Martins. Canted frames imply two meanings. Objectively, they represent danger, struggle, and instability. Subjectively, they convey "shock, fear, and insecurity or skepticism" (5).

The ladder and the canted frames are not the only elements of cinematography that limit, confine, or even threaten Martins. Carol Reed also uses physical features such as buildings, alleyways, and debris-strewn areas to echo the inner confusion of Martins as he tries to sift through the maze of lies and deceptions he encounters from other characters. People, places, and camera angles all work together to frustrate Martins, unfamiliar with Vienna as he is (Gomez "The Theme of the Double" 10). The canted camera angles along with the rackets we see in the

film's prologue, not to mention the penicillin ring we learn of later, show us from the very beginning of the film that Vienna and its inhabitants are morally askew (Rea 162). Not only are the characters within the film presented off center, the viewers become disoriented by skewed camera angles. Thus, we share in Martins's feeling that things are not quite what they appear to be (Man 176).

Greene's screenplay increases the tension and suspense of the mystery with a scene not found in the book. We see Baron Kurtz, Popescu, and Dr. Winkle talking to another man with his back to the camera. The four of them are standing on a bridge. Reed shoots the scene with a street-level long shot and then an extreme high angle shot from even further away. Thus, the camera reveals no information about the identity of this fourth man nor do we hear any of their conversation. Since Martins related the story to Calloway as narrator in the book, this scene does not occur as neither Martins nor Calloway witness it.

This tension from the film resembles that of the book. Calloway creates the suspense that Seymour Chatman thinks is lacking when Calloway describes his first conversation with Martins over drinks in a café. Martins has told him that Lime "was the best friend I ever had" (26). Calloway responds, "I couldn't resist saying, knowing what I knew, and because I was anxious to vex him—one learns a lot that way—'That sounds like a cheap novelette'" (26-27). At this point in the story, the detective does not know the occupation of Martins. What Calloway does know—"knowing what I knew"—is that Harry is involved in the penicillin racket. Calloway does not reveal what he knows to us as readers until later in the story. Thus, we are left in suspense with expectation of the plot to develop. Another suspenseful moment occurs when Martins talks to Crabbin, the British cultural attaché in Vienna. Martins asks if he knew Lime. "'Yes,' Crabbin said cautiously, 'but I didn't really know him'" (38). The film script might

contain the stage direction “cautiously,” but not every actor can convey caution with hesitation, nor is every member of the audience going to interpret his body language as caution. Only Calloway as narrator can be certain of getting across Crabbin’s caution. We as readers then must ask ourselves why Crabbin is being cautious. What does he have to hide? Thus, we have more drama and suspense with Calloway’s narration.

Another issue of novel vs. film script occurs in Martins’s first conversation with Anna. Martins tells her his theory that Harry Lime was murdered. Note the narrator’s description of her response: “She said with hopeless calm, ‘I’ve thought that too’” (55). How does an actor or actress depict hopeless calm? A print narrator can be assured of conveying the idea. The script may have the word in the stage directions, but only readers can ask themselves why does Anna have hopeless calm in this scene.

In describing later action in the novel, Calloway says this about Martins: “Unfortunately for him—and there would always be periods of his life when he bitterly regretted it—he chose to go back to Harry’s flat” (62). At this time in the story, we do not know why it is unfortunate for Martins. Only at the end of the novel when Martins shoots Lime do we gain this knowledge. In the sewer shoot-out, Martins tells Calloway that he put a bullet in his whimpering, wounded friend. When discussing the episode later, Calloway says, “We’ll forget that bit,” to which Martins replies, “I never shall” (155). Unfortunately for him, Martins will remember the details of Lime’s death so vividly over the years. Again, we only know this at the end. Greene keeps readers in suspense with mysterious bits of foreshadowing like this, and foreshadowing is easier and more effective in print than on screen because of narrational comments on the action.

When Martins meets Kurtz, one of Lime’s associates, Kurtz praises Martins’s writing. “Suspense. You’re a master at it. At the end of every chapter one’s left guessing” (45). Graham

Greene as author is also a master of suspense leaving his audience guessing, as we have seen. Another example of this occurs at the end of chapter eight. Martins is speaking with another of Lime's associates, an American named Cooler. Kurtz has told Martins that he thought it possible that Lime was involved in a racket, but Cooler does not. Cooler speaks the last line of the chapter: "Kurtz doesn't understand how an Anglo-Saxon feels" (77). Just how does an Anglo-Saxon feel? Greene and Calloway as narrator have left the readers in suspense yet again with this unexplained chapter ending.

The final moment of dramatic suspense I wish to discuss involves our first view of Harry Lime, and it occurs at the end of a chapter as well. Martins has been talking with Lime's girlfriend Anna Schmidt. When he leaves her building, he sees a man watching him from the shadows:

He called sharply, "Do you want anything?" and there was no reply. He called again with the irascibility of drink, "Answer, can't you," and an answer came, for a window curtain was drawn petulantly back by some sleeper he had awakened, and the light fell straight across the narrow street and lit up the features of Harry Lime. (117)

This is our first view of Lime, and it is greatly unexpected. We move from wondering "who is the third man?" and "who killed Harry Lime?" to wondering why did Lime fake his own death. Instead of answering these questions, Calloway ends the chapter and creates suspense by delaying the explanation. These are certainly not the only examples of great writing by Greene as author and Calloway as narrator, but they contain enough suspense to rebut Peter Wolfe and Seymour Chatman successfully. Calloway is not "the textual embarrassment" that Chatman makes him out to be (188).



A.A. DeVitis also points out critical dissatisfaction with Calloway (44). Though Calloway might not be the most insightful narrator, his character is based on a real person. As Graham Greene says in *Ways of Escape*, he had the “good fortune to lunch with a young British intelligence officer (the future Duke of Saint Albans) [Charles Beauclerk]—my wartime connection with SIS used to bring me useful dividends in those days” (132). This young officer and Greene “dressed in heavy boots and mackintoshes took a walk below the city. At lunch the officer told me of the penicillin racket, and now, among the sewers, the whole story took shape” (133).

The issue of Calloway as narrator relates to the genre of the detective story. In the classic form mastered by Arthur Conan Doyle, Dr. Watson tells about the investigations of Sherlock Holmes and openly admits that he is writing down the adventures of his inquisitive friend. The detective encounters clues and talks to witnesses. He must “read” and interpret both. We as readers follow right along (Diemart 69-71). Thus, the detective story can be seen as a metaphor for reading. Calloway’s belief that Lime is dead is merely one example of the many hypotheses that a detective makes in his interpretation of events that changes as new evidence comes to light. We as readers of the novel and critics of literature know that one writer/critics’s reading of a text is not the only possible solution (90-91). Thus, we do not necessarily have to like Calloway as a person or accept his reading of events. He is cynical because this is his “hard-headed pragmatic response to criminality” and because he is “a rational man trying to deal with an irrational world” (Palmer and Riley 19). Nevertheless, since Calloway must write an official report of the events, he becomes an ideal choice for a narrator.

While *The Third Man* and the Sherlock Holmes stories have this common element of narration, the comparison ends there. As Calloway remarks in *The Third Man*, “there are too

many ‘ifs’ in my style of writing, for it is my profession to balance possibilities, human possibilities, and the drive of destiny can never find a place in my files” (72). The crime, or “what,” is over before the novel begins. We as readers only hear of the crime because of “how” the storyteller reveals the events. The amateur detective of *The Third Man*, Martins, moves towards a full understanding of the crime as he gathers information that he reads and interprets. All these layers of interpretation, all these ciphers and filters fit in perfectly in a fragmented world arising from the chaos of a post-war society with modern audiences who “could not accept a single authoritative reading of events. The result was the emergence of new, more skeptical theories of reading...which stands in sharp contrast to the classical detective story...[that] presupposes the certainty of a correct reading” (Diemert 95-96). From a point of view of structural criticism, Calloway is a filter through which the story is read. He reads the story of the crime, and we read Calloway’s story. Calloway’s story is Rollo Martin’s story. Thus, we readers of the book are reading the reading of a reading. Calloway picks and chooses what to include in his story, just as we readers must carefully discern what is important in the investigation and what is a red herring. *The Third Man* is a thriller, after all.

The film follows the plot of the printed version faithfully until the café scene. Calloway’s aide Sergeant Paine still punches Martins in the mouth before the American can take a swing at the British officer. In the film, Paine is a devoted fan of Martins’s westerns. He admires Martins, treats him kindly, and calls him “sir” even after he punched Martins. Later in the print version, when Martins attempts to flee the police who have come to the literary lecture, Paine finds him hiding in a room with a squawking parrot. Martins tells him that he got lost. The polite policeman says, “Yes, sir. We thought that was what had happened” (99). In the film version, Martins escapes out of a window and leads the police on a wild goose chase. Whether

on the page or on the screen, Paine does much more than just his job dealing with Martins. Later in the film, Sergeant Paine again acts gallantly carrying Anna's bags to the train station and helping her onto the train. He calls her "miss" and does much more than officially required. Calloway, who is a gentleman and should behave in a more civil fashion, never treats her so cordially. Bernard Lee does an excellent job of depicting the polite, civil, human qualities of his character Sergeant Paine.<sup>9</sup>

In both the book and film, Martins has a problem with drinking and people's names. When he gets drunk in the café scene with Calloway, he calls him by the name of "Callaghan" (32-33). He tells Crabbin that he dislikes "Colonel Callaghan" (39). Martins goes to bed that night thinking, "Hadn't Callaghan too said that Lime had died instantaneously" (42). He even later tells Anna, "I tried to hit this man Callaghan" (88). Martins' repeated misnaming of Calloway demonstrates that it is a mistake on his part. Nevertheless, one could interpret it as an insult. Calloway is an English name and Callaghan is Irish. In modern America with all of the achievements of Irish Americans like the Kennedy family, few will notice a possible slur. Given all the ethnic, religious, and economic tensions and violence between England and Ireland over the centuries, no Englishman wants to be called Irish, and only an Ulsterman wants to be considered part of the United Kingdom.

Martins also makes another naming mistake with Dr. Winkle. In the book, the doctor's name is Winkler not Winkle, as Martins calls him, and the Viennese physician quickly corrects him (58). Later, Martins repeats his mistake and is corrected "with stony patience" (132-133). His name in the film is indeed Winkle, but twice Martins pronounces it with an Americanized "w" sound instead of the German "v" sound as it should be pronounced properly. While Martins

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<sup>9</sup> If Bernard Lee looks familiar to American audiences, he went on to play M, the Director of the British Secret Service in the James Bond films.

does get Kurtz's name right in the film, Kurtz has acquired the title of Baron Kurtz that he did not have in print. A final naming problem arises with Calloway's informer in Lime's gang. The British major calls him Harbin, and his name is the same in the book. In the film, Martins continually mispronounces his name as Hobbin.

The misnaming theme continues in the book because Martins uses the pen name Buck Dexter for his Westerns. Crabbin only knows that a writer by the name of Dexter is coming to Vienna. He thinks that Martins must be Benjamin Dexter, a much more highly regarded novelist than Martins can ever dream of being. Crabbin invites Martins to give a literary lecture in Vienna. This leads to the light-hearted comic scene. Martins is asked if he is writing a new book, and he replies that it is called "The Third Man" (92). He says that his favourite author is "Grey" meaning the American western writer Zane Grey, author of *Riders of the Purple Sage* (92), but the high-brow literary audience interprets it as the British poet Thomas Gray, author of "Elegy Composed in a Country Churchyard" and "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (93).

Martins as a writer of Westerns subtly affects the plot of *The Third Man*. One of his books, *The Lone Rider of Santa Fe*, details one man's attempt at revenge when a sheriff cold-bloodedly murdered the man's friend. Martins himself is a Lone Rider in Vienna as he tries to clear the name of his friend Harry Lime whom Martins thinks Calloway has falsely besmirched. *Death at Double X Ranch*, another Martins opus, foreshadows the double crosses of *The Third Man*'s plot. Lime's shooting at Martins and then Martins's killing Lime represent only two examples of double crossing in the story (Palmer and Riley 16). A final element of the Western in *The Third Man* occurs in the café scene when Martins attempts to punch Calloway only to be slugged first by Paine. The brawl in the saloon is a stock feature of the Western.

After meeting with Baron Kurtz and Dr. Winkle in the film, Martins meets Anna Schmidt and they go back to Lime's building to question the porter. He lets them into Lime's apartment. The lush furnishings reveal Lime's wealth. No other character's home is decorated in such a fashion. Anna lives very modestly compared to Lime. Even the building where she lives still shows evidence of the aftereffects of the war with rubble in the stairwells and passageways. The porter tells Martins that he heard the squeal of the brakes and looked out the window to see three men carrying Lime's body. He recognized Kurtz and a Romanian named Popescu. This character is the film's version of Cooler, and the change is a minor one. The porter only saw the back of the third man, not his face. This unidentified person becomes the goal of Martins's quest. Martins tells the porter that he must tell the police about it now and that he should have spoken at the inquest earlier. The porter becomes angry at Martins's repeated insistence that he should get involved. Carol Reed increases the tension of the scene by canting the camera strongly to the right and downward. It is as if the room were a ship listing dangerously to port. Such odd angles create confusion on the part of the viewer straining to get a clear picture on the action. This technique, plus the many chase scenes, led *Time's* reviewer to praise the film as being similar to the work of Alfred Hitchcock (82).

When Martins accompanies Anna back to her apartment, the police are searching the place. They take Anna's passport and her letters from Lime for investigation. Calloway is cold and uncaring in this scene, but Sergeant Paine again behaves kindly and honourably. He considerately assures her that the letters will be returned to her and writes out a receipt. The police as a whole and the Russians in particular want her passport because she is Czechoslovakian in the film. Greene based Anna's character on real actresses. He himself went

to the Josefstadt Theatre in the Russian zone as part of his research for *The Third Man*. This theatre becomes Anna Schmidt's home (Falk 76).

Anna's role in the film is much more prominent than in the novel. She is Hungarian in the novel, Czechoslovakian in the final version of the screenplay, and Estonian in an earlier draft of the screenplay. It would make more historical sense if Anna were Estonian in the book and the film. While Russians were grasping for more land to control, the Czechs or Hungarians were independent peoples with their own governments, even if these governments were propped up by the Soviet military. Estonia, on the other hand, was a Soviet republic at that time just like Ukraine or Georgia. Many people in post-war Europe were trying to flee the territories occupied by the Soviets and their allies. Anna questions her own national identity, as did many others during that time.

Armed with the porter's information about a third man, Martins returns to Dr. Winkle's house to ask him a few more questions. When Martins spoke with Baron Kurtz earlier, he had an annoying miniature Doberman pinscher. The exact same dog is at the doctor's house yapping at Martins. Thus, he and the audience know that something fishy is going on. How odd that Lime's friends were present when he was run over by his very own driver and then his personal physician just so happens to be walking by soon after. The still unidentified third man must be the key to this mystery.

We encounter two other animals in the film and print versions of *The Third Man*. While hiding from the police after the literary lecture, Martins encounters a parrot. It squawks loudly and even bites him on the finger. The other animal, a silent, crafty feline, prefers Harry Lime to all the other people in the story. Joseph Gomez suggests a totemic reading of these animals. Martins is loud and blundering as he moves through Vienna; whereas, Lime cunningly and

quietly moves his way through the city (“The Theme of the Double” 9). Not every critic reads the animals as symbolic figures from a totem pole. Judy Adamson and Philip Stratford argue that the cat, especially in the film version, creates sympathy for Lime. Carol Reed’s camera lingers on the cat rubbing against Lime’s trouser leg and playing with his shoelace while Lime hides in the shadows. Martins had brought Anna flowers and tried to get the cat to play with the string or ribbon that binds the flowers into a bouquet. The cat does not play with Martins leading Anna to say that the cat always liked Lime best. When we first see the cat cozying up to Lime, we have not yet seen his face; this is just some mysterious stranger lurking in the shadows. A few moments later, we see Lime’s face. These two critics argue that the cat’s loyalty and affection for Lime make Harry seem more human (40). He cannot necessarily be the worst possible racketeer if the cat loves him. Or at least this is the conclusion that can be drawn from the visual signal of the camera and the animal.

While Martins might be an experienced writer of Westerns, he is an amateur detective. He is naïve and innocent in his convictions just like Alden Pyle in *The Quiet American*. Fowler as narrator of that novel and Calloway as narrator of *The Third Man* are much more jaded, worldly characters. Calloway does have some praise for Martins’s detective skills:

An amateur detective has this advantage over the professional, that he doesn’t work set hours. Rollo Martins was not confined to the eight-hour day: his investigations didn’t have to pause for meals. In his one day he covered as much ground as one of my men would have covered in two, and he had this initial advantage over us, that he was Harry’s friend. (57)

Martins’s search for Lime’s killer is not a job to him. He is much more driven than Calloway and the police because of his personal ties to the case. Calloway continues making distinctions

between amateur and professional investigators. “The amateur has another advantage over the professional: he can be reckless. He can tell unnecessary truths and propound wild theories” (59-60). Martins does not have to worry about following police procedure or doing things by the book. Nor does he need to fear revealing too much information. A final bit of praise for Martins’s abilities is, “Martins had spent his lunchtime reading up the reports of the inquest, thus again demonstrating the superiority of the amateur to the professional” (72). His vested interest in the case easily allows him to forgo lunch, something an uninvolved policeman would not do. Calloway’s growing respect for Martins as a detective causes him to believe that Martins’s wandering through Vienna after drinking with Cooler and going to Anna’s apartment as a deliberate act to throw off the policeman who is following Martins. Instead, it is simply the luck of the amateur. Martins succeeds almost in spite of his less-than-professional methods of investigation (Diemart 102).

During his amateur but effective investigation in the novel, Martins visits Cooler who lives over an ice-cream parlour in the American zone (72). This is twice that Calloway as narrator and Greene as author have made mention of Americans and ice cream. The first example is the much more general comment on the American zone “which you couldn’t mistake because of the ice-cream parlours in every street” (22). Given Greene’s lifelong distrust and disregard for America and Americans in general, we should read deeper into the comment as opposed to this being a simple coincidence. Americans, with their gangster stories and westerns, are associated with lawlessness and criminality. The only obvious American in the print version is Cooler, who lives above an ice-cream parlour. “Americans are children who eat ice cream” (Hazen 13). They meddle in European affairs both then and now. Greene will make his feeling much clearer in *The Quiet American*. Pauline Kael argues that Greene depicts Martins as “a



shallow, ineffectual, well-meaning American” (359). One could say the same thing about Alden Pyle. He acts with a great sense of duty in *The Quiet American*, and Martins describes Cooler as “one of those Americans with a real sense of duty” (104). While Martins and Pyle are similar in terms of naivete, here Cooler and Pyle have similar senses of duty.

In Martins’s questioning of Cooler, another parallel between both novels becomes clear. Cooler tells Martins that Lime helped Anna procure false papers as an Austrian. In the novel she is a Hungarian whose father was a Nazi, so she fears being picked up by the Russians. In the film version, Anna is a Czechoslovakian who likewise fears the Russians.<sup>10</sup> Cooler explains Lime’s involvement in this illegal activity. “You have to break the rules sometimes. Humanity’s a duty too” (75). Humanity may be a duty, and duty is action. In *The Quiet American*, Fowler claims that he will not take action or have opinions. When he does act, it is to kill Pyle. In getting Anna false papers, Lime preserves life. In the penicillin racket, his actions destroy life. The film of *The Third Man* does not have this parallel. Since Welles, an American, was cast as the villain, Greene changed Cooler’s character in the screenplay to a Romanian named Popescu in order not to have so many American villains.

Among all this shady criminal activity, the film does contain a few light moments of humor among the tension. Martins and Anna return to Lime’s building late at night to ask the porter a few more questions. A crowd has gathered outside of the building. Martins approaches and learns that someone has killed the porter. A young boy named Hansel saw the porter shouting at Martins earlier. He looks up at Martins with his sweet, innocent, little face and begins shouting in German that Martins is the murderer. Martins and Anna quickly flee the scene. While this in and of itself might not be funny, the boy, who appears to be about 4 years

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<sup>10</sup> The film’s producer, Sir Alexander Korda, was born in Hungary. Thus, it is interesting that the film does not preserve Anna’s Hungarian identity.

old, runs after them. The Viennese adults follow along. Hansel leads them down the street, around the corner, down a flight of stairs and across a field of rubble all the time managing to outrun a group of adults. Another strangely humorous scene occurs when Martins returns to his hotel having avoided the pursuing crowd. A big, burly man awaits Martins and roughly pushes him into a car. This man--who certainly appears to be a thug--drives Martins at great speed through the city. The driver speaks only German and does not answer any of Martins's questions because he speaks only English. Bars separate Martins in the back from the driver in the front seat. This, plus the high-speed travel, leads Martins to believe the worst. He even asks the driver if he is going to kill him. Anton Karas's score on the zither with the strings jangling harshly only adds to the tension of the scene in particular, and to the haunting mood of the film in general (Phillips 74). When the driver stops, he drags Martins out only to lead him to the literary lecture that Crabbin had arranged earlier. While Martins certainly does not find the trip funny, viewers most assuredly have had their expectations of the scene shattered. This schism between appearance and reality leads to laughter that breaks the tension of the film for a brief respite.

Much has been made of Anton Karas's film score to *The Third Man* on the zither. Whenever characters discuss Harry Lime in the film, Karas plays a piece of music that we associate with Lime. We first hear it at Lime's funeral. Let us call this Lime's theme. It occurs during the conversations between Anna and Martins to show that Lime stands between them even if he is not physically present (Van Wert 344). We even hear it when the cat plays at Lime's feet long before we see his face. This musical element tells the audience that Lime is not dead as clearly as any spoken dialogue. The novel is musical in its own way. Lime has a tune that he whistles. Martins mentions this to Calloway in the café scene (29). When Martins is

trying to win Anna's love in an uninvited, late-night appearance after drinking too much, he even whistles Lime's tune in Anna's presence. After Martins learns that Lime is alive, he asks Dr. Winkler to set up a meeting with Lime at the Prater Wheel. Before Martins sees his friend approach, he hears him. "Somewhere behind the cake stall a man was whistling, and Martins knew the tune" (134). Print cannot be as effective as film for conveying sound, but Greene includes it as best as he can in the book.

I have mentioned already what a skilled writer Greene is and how suspenseful his *The Third Man* is. Harry Lime's unexpected appearance at the end of chapter eleven on page 117 of a 157-page novel certainly is the most suspenseful moment in the text. A close second is the racket that Lime controls. Early on, Calloway calls him "about the worst racketeer who ever made a dirty living in this city" (30). There are several other brief mentions of Lime and rackets, but it is not until two-thirds of the way through the novel that we learn exactly what racket Lime runs. Still without mentioning what racket it is, Calloway says about it that there is "none more vile than this one" (105). The tension builds as readers wait to learn that Lime paid workers in military hospitals to steal penicillin. Lime then sold it at a great profit. Wanting to make even more profit from the limited supply, Lime began diluting liquid penicillin with water and penicillin dust with sand. Calloway describes the horrific effects of the corrupted medicine:

Men have lost their legs and arms that way—and their lives. But perhaps what horrified me most was visiting the children's hospital here. They had bought some of this penicillin for use against meningitis. A number of children simply died, and a number went off their heads. You can see them now in the mental ward. (107).

Martins does not want to believe that his childhood friend could be capable of such monstrously vile behavior. Despite Calloway's dossier of information, Martins is not convinced that his friend really was a no-good racketeer of the worst sort. He still clings to his hero-worship of Lime.

Martins: "They murdered him in case he talked when he was arrested."

Calloway: "It's not impossible."

Martins: "I'm glad they did [...] I wouldn't have liked to hear Harry squeal."(110)<sup>11</sup>

Calloway is certain that his police forces will capture the third man who supposedly killed Lime. Martins eagerly awaits his capture. "I'd like to hear him squeal," he said. "The bastard. The bloody bastard" (110). What neither Martins nor Calloway—not even the audience knows—is that Lime is the third man who will whimper rather than squeal when shot in the subterranean sewers.

After hearing that Lime was a racketeer, Martins seeks solace with Anna. She still clings to her love for Lime rather than turning to Martins's willing arms. "For God's sake stop making people in *your* image. Harry was real. He wasn't just your hero and my lover. He was Harry. He was in a racket. He did bad things. What about it? He was the man we knew" (114-115, author's italics). Martins is shocked that Anna still loves Lime. "But you still love him. You love a cheat, a murderer" (115). Anna remains firm. "I loved a man," she said. "I told you—a man doesn't alter because you find out more about him. He's still the same man" (115).

Anna's loyalty to Harry symbolizes the moral stability of mankind. She refuses to harm Harry in

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<sup>11</sup> These lines come from the book version, not the screenplay, as part of an exchange of dialogue. I have included the speakers' names only for readability.

any possible way even after he betrays her to the Russians. After this failed attempt to win Anna's love, Martins heads back to his hotel only to see that Harry is alive.

When we do first see Harry Lime from out of the shadows, he has a round, boyish face with a big smile. Orson Welles makes Calloway's vile racketeer appear playful and innocent here. Even Lime's police photos in Calloway's dossier show him smiling as if nothing were wrong. In playing Lime, "Welles radiates a clever charm and sinister fascination" that can be quite compelling (Phillips 71). When Martins and Lime meet the next day at the Prater Wheel, Lime approaches Martins with a big smile. The camera shows Lime coming from a distance in a long shot. He takes off his glove and extends his hand to his friend. Martins refuses to take it. Lime has yet to say anything about his involvement in the penicillin racket; Calloway has talked about it. Thus, Welles's youthful exuberance makes it difficult for a viewer to immediately think him guilty. When Lime delivers his statement about the Borgias and the Renaissance paired with Swiss peace and the cuckoo clock—which Welles himself added to Greene's script—he does so with a humorous chuckle. His speech that precedes it about people as insignificant "dots" and income tax free profits certainly do not go along with his boyish manners. Nevertheless, Welles's acting is so convincing that it is hard to hate Harry Lime at this point. This particular "lime" is not a green fruit popular with British sailors to ward off scurvy. "Lime" also means the mineral calcium oxide used in the decomposition of bodies. This latter definition is much more appropriate for the amoral Lime whose adulterated penicillin disfigures and kills many. Pauline Kael argues that Lime has "more life in him than a movie 'good' man ever has" (11). In the traditional detective story, readers prefer the detective to the criminal because the former represents and brings order to the chaos that the latter causes. The detective rises in our esteem and the criminal falls (Diemert 94). Because of Welles's brilliant acting, Lime comes across as

much smarter and certainly more dashing than Martins. Greene does not write for an old fashioned audience. Instead, he writes for a modern, post-war world all too familiar with uncertainty and ambiguity.

So many suffer from “depressing post-war disorientations” (Chace 164). But not Harry Lime. He dominates above ground and underground. In this latter case, underground is meant literally and figuratively. Lime knows his way through the sewers, and he is also an underworld crime leader, like an American mob boss. Lime is an out-and-out capitalist who believes in the laws of supply and demand. He has a supply of a product in great demand and maximizes his profits by diluting the supply. Lime does not care if he kills people as long as he earns a profit for himself and his business partners. Harry is “ambitious, clever, educated, warped, and completely unscrupulous” (Kunkel 77). Lime is all of these things and more. Calloway describes Lime as more than just “a smooth scoundrel;” he has “a belly that has known too much good food too long, on his face a look of cheerful rascality, a geniality, a recognition that his happiness will make the world’s day” (134). While he appears only in the last third of the novel, Greene drew Lime as a realistic, interesting, and dynamic character.

Having seen the supposedly dead Lime, Martins chases after his friend, but he cannot catch Lime:

He came to one of those newspaper kiosks and for a moment moved out of sight. I ran after him. It only took ten seconds to reach the kiosk, and he must have heard me running, but the strange thing was he never appeared again. I reached the kiosk. There wasn’t anybody there. The street was empty. (118-119)

Calloway does not believe the story of Lime’s appearance and then disappearance. Calloway orders that the body that is supposedly Lime’s be exhumed. He then goes with Martins to retrace

his steps in pursuit of Lime. When he sees the kiosk, Calloway realizes that it is an entrance down into the sewers. Both items lead to more praise of the amateur detective. “Martins was right! I had made a complete fool of myself” (126). The unearthed body turns out to be Harbin, the undercover police agent who was supposed to provide information on the penicillin racket. Lime and his crew murdered Harbin and made it look like it was Lime who had died. At this point we as readers know that the third man is not some unknown murderer or racketeer but Harry Lime himself. Thus, neither Cooler/Popescu nor Kurtz testified at the police inquest that a third man was present when Harry was “killed.”

Martins has a hard time believing Calloway who says that his friend Harry Lime could have been involved in the penicillin racket. Martins starts as rather simple and naïve, and in the course of the story undergoes a lot of growth psychologically; he is “constantly torn between his friendship with Lime, his love for Anna, and his moral sense of duty”(Man 174). In the end, Martins is appalled by Lime’s vile cruelty and selfishness. Lime, however, has his ever-cynical response:

Victims?...Don’t be melodramatic, Rollo...Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving—forever? If I said you can have twenty thousand pounds for every dot that stops, would you really, old man, tell me to keep my money—without hesitation? Or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spare? Free of income tax, old man. Free of income tax. (136-137)

From a mischievous school friend, Lime has grown into this monstrous murderer. He represents the scum of history who profit off the misfortunes of others. People like Lime have existed for centuries. In times of turmoil, they see a way to capitalize on a chaotic economy, even if it is

morally wrong. Lime represents laissez-faire capitalism at its worst without social benevolence or government control.

Many critics discuss Lime's acceptance of his criminal activity and his lack of remorse for his actions. Gavin Lambert calls Vienna a "sad, decaying no-man's-land" in his contemporary film review (159). Glen Man calls Harry Lime's Vienna a "wasteland" (171). Ulrike Schwab also dwells on "the outer wasteland and inner wasteland" of Vienna and compares the city to a marsh (5). A wasteland is a barren, desolate place, or a place or era that is spiritually or culturally barren. The downfall of the social systems echoes the moral degradation of the characters. The boundaries of ethical behavior are vague, and chaos leads to corruption and crime. *The Third Man's* ethical questions come to a head in the character of Harry Lime, the mastermind behind the penicillin racket in *The Third Man*. This shows his genius at plotting and profiting from crime. His egocentrism and capitalism, ignoring ethical principles on any level, is most obviously expressed in this line: "In these days nobody thinks in terms of human beings. Governments don't, so why should we?" (139).

Greene provides no answer letting the question stand. Greene challenges the personal responsibility of an individual in a decaying, hopeless society with fallen values where even governments do not care about their people. It seems to be acceptable to continue the further destruction of the society from within if governments do not cut the roots of demoralization. The government in war-stricken Vienna is not able to protect legally or to provide for the needs of its citizens, and it both creates and destroys criminals. Paul Rea discusses three tendencies in the modern world. The first is moral breakdown. The second tendency is technology dehumanizing individual members of society. Abstraction and impersonality form the third tendency (161). These three tendencies exist in the modern historical world. The broken-down Vienna of *The*



*Third Man* is a vacuum filled by the likes of Harry Lime. Technology and abstraction allow Harry Lime to adulterate penicillin without any thought of guilt. The people who die because of his racket are not victims, but nameless, faceless dots to him. They are numbers—not numbers of people but numbers on dollar bills and pound notes.

Another very interesting speech by Lime during the Prater Wheel scene goes strangely unexamined by critics, and it demonstrates how tightly conceived Graham Greene's story is. Lime's crew has encouraged him to dispose of Martins, but the latter realizes that he is physically stronger. To this, Lime replies:

“But I've got the gun. You don't think that a bullet wound would show when you hit *that* ground?” Again the car began to move, sailing slowly down, until the flies were midgets, were recognizable human beings. “What fools we are, Rollo, talking like this, as if I'd do that to you—or you to me.” (139, author's italics).

I am amazed that Lime would hold at gunpoint a man he calls a friend. More importantly, note the irony in Lime's last line. Lime will shoot at Martins with intent to kill in the sewer chase, and Martins will eventually kill Lime. Thus, a thought that might be foolish turns into reality less than twenty pages later in the novel. Nevertheless, Gavin Lambert, in his review of the book for the London publication *The New Statesman*, is not so favourable. Despite the intrigue and the philosophical/moral discussion, he describes the Prater Wheel scene as “mechanical” and grafted onto the story. He also complains that the characters are “thin” and lack “human material” (282). This assertion proves untrue for Lime and Martins.

Martins does not yet hate Harry Lime after the Prater Wheel scene. He becomes certain that his friend is a vile racketeer only when Calloway takes him to the children's hospital to show him the effects of the diluted penicillin on meningitis patients. Reed preserves the drama

of the situation by never actually showing any children in the hospital ward. Several nurses minister to patients lying in beds or behind curtains. Instead, the camera focuses on Martins and his reaction to the horrible suffering that he sees. The closest the camera gets to a child is when a nurse drops a teddy bear face down into a box. The visual message that a child has died and that this toy is no longer needed tells the viewer much more strongly than a verbal message would. Gene Phillips rightly calls this moment “poetic cinema at its best” (72). At this point in the film, Martins finally becomes convinced that his former friend deserves to be captured and punished.

The reason that penicillin historically became such a hot commodity on the black market begins with the shortage of doctors in Austria. Lacking experienced doctors, hospitals employed “guest doctors” at very low salaries or even without pay. These newly trained, minimally qualified doctors needed experience having just graduated from medical school, and the hospitals needed them (Hiscocks 159). Since the “guest doctors” received so little money, it should not be surprising that some would steal penicillin and sell it on the black market. Harry Lime or other black market entrepreneurs would be happy to provide these men with food, fuel, or hard currency in exchange for penicillin.

In *Ways of Escape*, Graham Greene notes a lack of realism in many English detective stories of his own day because “the criminal never belonged to what used to be called the criminal class” (98). Harry Lime fakes his own death, either personally kills or orders the killing of the undercover police informant Harbin, knows how to move through the sewers undetected, and directs the horrible penicillin racket. He is such a believable villain because he certainly belongs to the criminal class as these actions demonstrate. Nevertheless, Paul Dinnage’s contemporary review notes the “bland villainy” of Welles’s character (158). Another

contemporary reviewer disagrees praising Welles's technique at portraying the range of Lime's behavior "from smug bravado to desperate fear, with unerring reality" (Clem 11).

While Lime dominates the last third of *The Third Man*, it is the story of Martins and his search for the truth about Lime. Several verbal and visual parallels occur linking Martins and Lime. In the film, Anna twice calls Martins Harry instead of Holly. Martins comes to her apartment and suggests that they go out for a drink. Anna says that Harry would have said the same thing about this time of day. When Martins sees a man in the shadows who turns out to be Lime, Martins tries to cross the street to confront the man. Out of nowhere, a car comes roaring past nearly hitting Martins. It was Lime who was reportedly killed while trying to cross the street to see his friend. Martins runs up a circular staircase after the literary lecture to avoid the police, while Lime runs down one into the sewers to avoid them. Joseph Gomez goes so far as to argue that Martins begins the film in the right side of the frame. He then occupies the left side of the frame when he is with Anna because that side of the frame is normally occupied by Lime. We see Lime screen left and Martins screen right in the Prater Wheel scenes. Martins goes back to his screen right position with Anna and remains there as she walks past him at the funeral ("The Theme of the Double" 12). Gomez may be taking the on-screen blocking a little too far, but there certainly are parallels between Martins and Lime.

Having alluded to the sewer chase scene briefly, let us examine the penultimate scene of *The Third Man*. While the ruins symbolize the destroyed traditional beat of a once vibrant, living, beautiful city, the elaborate underground labyrinth of sewers remains untouched by the war. Greene creates a "cavernous land of waterfalls and rushing rivers where tides ebb and flow as in the world above" (148-149) as a perfect hiding place for the criminal elements to perform their evil deeds. The Vienna we see is "a complex web of impressive beauty and utter ruin, and

its sinister, labyrinthine qualities provide a perfect backdrop” (Gomez “*The Third Man*” 335). Vienna does not produce any fruit except Harry Lime, a bitter, sour fruit indeed. Martins is supposed to meet Lime in a café where Calloway’s police will capture the no-longer dead racketeer. Martins allows Lime to escape because, as Calloway says, “it was not, I suppose, Lime the penicillin racketeer who was escaping down the street; it was Harry” (148). Thus, Lime escapes through a kiosk down into the sewers. Martins, Calloway, and the other policemen follow Lime below ground. With so much area to cover, the pursuers break up into smaller groups each with a flashlight. In the book, Martins goes off with a policeman named Bates, and Lime shoots at them causing Bates to drop his flashlight. Martins takes the lead saying, “Let me come in front. I don’t think he’ll shoot at me” (151). He emphasizes his belief telling Bates, “Get flat against the wall. He won’t shoot at me” (151). Martins’s trust goes unrewarded as Lime shoots at him even though Martins is clearly in the lead. The bullet ricochets off the wall, past Martins, and into Bates fatally wounding him. Martins shoots at Lime in return, wounding him gravely. Martins then follows Lime into a side passage. The two are alone when Martins delivers the fatal blow.

This viewer’s appreciation of Paine’s character makes the shoot-out in the sewers so much more poignant. Unlike the Martins-Bates pair in the book, the film script simplifies the number of characters and has Paine accompany Martins. In the film, Lime shoots Paine who boldly walks through the sewer in front of Martins. Paine dies quite undeservedly for simply doing his duty. Lynette Carpenter goes so far as to call Paine the real hero of the film because of his compassionate nature and “the quiet heroism of the ordinary, undistinguished human life” (62). Calloway shoots Lime and then cares for his fallen subordinate. Martins takes Paine’s gun

and goes after Martins. Not only has Lime betrayed Martins, he has also killed the biggest fan and devoted reader that Martins had in all of Vienna.

As Martins recounts the incident to Calloway in the book, Martins says that he found Lime because he whistles what I have called the Harry Lime theme. The final exchange between Lime and Martins has been given much attention. Martins tells Calloway:

He [Harry] was trying to speak, and I bent down to listen. “Bloody fool,” he said—that was all. I don’t know whether he meant that for himself—some sort of act of contrition, however inadequate (he was a Catholic)—or it was for me—with my thousand a year taxed and my imaginary cattle rustlers who couldn’t even shoot a rabbit clean? Then he began to whimper again. I couldn’t bear it any more and I put a bullet through him. (155)

The ambiguity of Harry Lime’s final words merely echo the vast number of ambiguities and uncertainties within *The Third Man*. Is Martins a bloody fool for shooting his friend? Is he a bloody fool for not joining the racket? Is he a bloody fool for bringing the police after Lime? Is Lime a bloody fool for having trusted his friend not to shoot him? Is Lime a bloody fool for having gotten involved in the racket in the first place? The answer can be yes, to all of the questions. All answers are within the realm of possibility, and we as readers are able to interpret the answer as we want. Renato Puentevella, a Jesuit, argues for “bloody fool” being interpreted as Lime’s “failed attempt at contrition” (36). His is not the most convincing argument, however. While Greene included three mentions of Lime as a Catholic in the book (23, 139, and 155), no mention of “bloody fool” occurs in the Act of Contrition in the Catholic Catechism. Regardless of what conclusion we provide, the incontrovertible fact is that Harry Lime is finally, certainly

dead. Martins began as a naïve character. By journey's end, Martins appears as a completely changed, mature, insightful man, who knows right from wrong.

In the film, Lime does not whistle; he simply nods at Martins as if to say that it is o.k. to kill him. Welles does not act as if he is trying to have Lime ask or even beg Martins to shoot him. His nod comes across more as acceptance of his fate than anything else. It also gives a sympathetic viewer one more reason to like Harry Lime and perhaps even feel sorry for him. Maybe one even wanted him to get away until he killed Paine. Greene does not include in the film the ambiguous “bloody fool” line from the book for the audience to interpret it in a myriad of ways.

The final scene of *The Third Man* mirrors the opening—Harry Lime's funeral. Calloway, Anna, and Martins attend as they did the first funeral, but Lime's fellow racketeers are not present at the final funeral. In the first funeral, Martins arrived in a taxi, and Calloway left with him. In a reversal of roles, Martins leaves with the policeman after the second funeral. In the café scene, Martins promised Calloway “I'm going to make you look the biggest bloody fool in Vienna” (32). Calloway reminds him of his promise saying, “You win, you've proved me a bloody fool” (156). Martins replies, “I haven't won [...] I've lost” (157). Neither he nor Calloway explains what Martins has lost, but it is clear that Martins has lost his friend Lime and Anna. Martins and Anna may walk out of the cemetery “side by side” (157), but they are not arm-in-arm. There is nothing in the book—and the film makes it even clearer—to indicate that Anna and Martins are together. As Calloway watches them walk away, he comments, “it was like the end of a story” (157). This touch of meta-literature, of literature about literature reminds us as readers that we are in a fictional world, but Greene's fiction has been so vivid, lifelike, and captivantly entertaining that this reader is entranced by the book *The Third Man*.

Greene's film treatment has a much darker ending. Anna walks away from the grave alone while Martins and Calloway drive off. Martins begs Calloway to let him out of the car so he can talk with Anna. Calloway does so and drives off. The camera holds on a long shot with Martins off to the side in the left foreground as Anna approaches him in the center of the frame. She walks past him without saying a word or even looking in his direction. Her body language conveys the message that Martins is not even there. She continues past the camera and out of sight. It should come as no surprise to the viewer that Anna wants nothing to do with Martins. She remains loyal to Lime even when he is dead. Martins acted as the decoy for the police so they could trap Lime, and he even killed Lime in the end (Raskin "Closure in *The Third Man*" np). The final image of the film is of Martins lighting a cigarette and disgustedly throwing away the match. This conclusion shows the "fragmentation and ambiguity" of the modern world rather than a romantic Hollywood ending where the good guy gets the girl (Man 174). Thus ends one of the best examples of film noir, one of Orson Welles's finest pieces of acting, and the best of the three collaborations between director Carol Reed and Graham Greene as screenwriter. Gene Phillips rightly praises the film saying, "*The Third Man* is a masterpiece: that happy coming together of a fine story and script, realized by a sympathetic director, who has caught the flavour of the story and inspired his cast to generate the kind of dramatic experiment that fascinates an audience" (76).

Bosley Crowther writes in his *New York Times* review of the film after its American release, "*The Third Man*, for all the awesome hoopla it has received, is essentially a first rate contrivance in the way of melodrama—and that's all" (29). Some fifty plus years later, we still watch and read *The Third Man*, and Bosley Crowther's influence has decreased. Having

examined the many features of the book and film versions, we can see that *The Third Man* is much more than contrived melodrama.

In conclusion, *The Third Man* is such an important book and film because it shows this turbulent time in all its darkly thrilling complexity. Its title “has become part of the language of espionage,” and the film’s atmosphere has become a “distinctive mark of Cold War fiction” (Miller 104). Other novels, like John Le Carré’s *The Spy who Came in from the Cold*, portray a walled-off Berlin at the height of the Cold War in the 1950s. The four powers have partitioned Graham Greene’s post-war Vienna, but they still peacefully co-exist and even cooperate in the subterranean search for Harry Lime. One of Graham Greene’s goals was to represent the historical authenticity of the time. Vienna in 1948 had horrible inflation, a black market, and criminals. It also had poorly paid doctors willing to steal and sell penicillin. A political expert, journalist, and former British intelligence officer, Greene researched the real-life situation in the Austrian capital in 1948, and later combined the results of his research with pre-existing literary expectations of a “thriller.” Historical criticism of *The Third Man* highlights the engaging reality of Greene’s book and Carol Reed’s film.



## CHAPTER 3

### *THE QUIET AMERICAN: AN EXERCISE IN AMBIGUITY*

Reporter and intelligence officer Graham Greene researched the real-life situation in Vietnam in early 1950s. Stephen Whitfield chronicles Greene's journalism for the *Sunday Times* of London and the French paper *Le Figaro* during the winters of 1951-1955 in order to further his argument using historical criticism. Greene himself discusses his time in Vietnam in *Ways of Escape* (160ff) and acknowledges that he used his own reporting in the novel (172). He later combined the results of his research with pre-existing literary expectations of a "thriller." *The Quiet American* is so much more than an ordinary thriller, however. Robert Pendleton discusses the mixed genre of the novel: "In narratives which blend the psychological processes of a protagonist with a more formulaic plot involving conspiracy, pursuit, and rescue, the emphasis upon action is paralleled by a depiction of interiority" (83). *The Quiet American* is of a mixed genre because Greene blends the techniques of these earlier novels to produce a work of political narrative, full of action, with psychological introspection, that has an historical background and Catholic sensibility in its confessional narration. Thus, structural, psychological, social, and historical criticism together with close textual analysis all inform a reading of *The Quiet American*. I shall analyze *The Quiet American*, the complex story of Fowler and Pyle, using these varying critical perspectives. In order to accomplish these objectives, I shall provide specific references to the novel as well as recent criticism on Graham Greene's life and work. I shall also examine the two film versions of *The Quiet American*: Joseph Mankiewicz's 1957 film with Audie Murphy and Michael Redgrave as the American and Englishman, respectively, and Phillip Noyce's 2002 version with Michael Caine as Fowler and Brendan Fraser as Alden Pyle.

Graham Greene spent time in Vienna in order to write *The Third Man*, as I discussed earlier. He also spent time in Southeast Asia covering the Malayan war. Greene learned that as long as the natives had the jungle, they could not be easily defeated (*Ways of Escape* 159). The same would prove true in Vietnam for both the French and American forces when they fought the Communists. Greene also interviewed General Tré who led a splinter group in Indo-China. Fowler reports on a General Thé and his reporting leads to an attempt on his life on the road back to Saigon when his car conveniently runs out of gas. Greene had the same experience in real life (162-163), and Phillip Noyce the director of the most recent film emphasizes this in his version of *The Quiet American*.

Greene also interacted with American members of an economic aid mission in Indo-China. He recalls one individual who lectured him “all the long drive back to Saigon on the necessity of finding a ‘third force in Vietnam’” (170). The bombing that Phillip Noyce captures in such a moving and powerful fashion in his film occurred in history. Greene has the Americans directly involved in the bombing in the novel, and Noyce conveys this by having an American photographer present at the scene of carnage in the film. Greene also notes that a photographer from *Life Magazine* was present “who was so well placed that he was able to take an astonishing and horrifying photograph which showed the body of a trishaw driver still upright after his legs had been blown off” (171). When the photograph was published, the caption read “The work of Ho Chi Minh” even though General Tré proudly claimed to be responsible for the bombing. Given the historical reality of the situation, it is no wonder that Greene came down so hard on Pyle. His research certainly pays off in *The Quiet American*.

Before examining *The Quiet American*, let us take a look at contemporary criticism of the novel in newspapers and popular magazines of the day. Greene was both a best-selling author

and a figure worthy of serious literary study in his own day. He first published *The Quiet American* in England in December of 1955, but the book did not receive American printing until March of 1956. A marked difference exists between the British and American reviews of the novel, as can be expected. By and large, American reviewers of the novel hate it because they see Pyle as caricature and detest what they perceive as Greene's virulent anti-American feelings. Interestingly enough, British reviews do not jump on the fact that Fowler's personality leaves much to be desired, nor do they see a negative British character as a statement of anti-British feelings. I shall discuss Fowler's less-than-sterling features more fully later.

Three of the earliest British reviews come from the period of 3-9 December 1955. Christopher Sykes calls *The Quiet American* Graham Greene's best book, even though he is not completely happy with Fowler's "over-vivid style of *reportage*" (551, author's italics). In Greene's defense, he acknowledges this point in *Ways of Escape* when he recounts his experiences in Indo-China on patrol outside Phat Diem or flying with French dive bombers (172). Sykes gives particular praise to the character of Phuong whom he sees as an intriguing character. She goes back and forth between Pyle and Fowler because she "accepts life as a process in which there is havoc" (550). Few critics give Phuong this much credit for rational thought. Writing for *The Observer*, Philip Toynbee praises Greene's technique: "There is no English writer who knows better how to organise and deploy his material, how to lead his reader irresistibly onward" (115). Nevertheless, this reviewer does not approve of Pyle, but not for anti-American sentiments. Instead, Toynbee argues that because Pyle is an American, he would never have engaged in terrorism: "His blunders would have taken a different and far more high-minded shape—with results perhaps no less calamitous" (115). An unsigned review in the *Times Literary Supplement* takes great delight in the build up of tension within the novel. It also notes

the dichotomy between Pyle and Fowler, describing the latter character as “cynical and disillusioned, but only to the point of accepting things and people as they are without hope of improvement” (737). None of these three British book reviews condemns Greene for anti-American sentiments because of his depiction of Pyle.

Things change in March of 1956 as reviews of *The Quiet American* begin appearing regularly in American newspapers and popular magazines. Harold Gardiner condemns the novel in a 10 March review for *America* calling *The Quiet American* a “disappointing novel” and describes its tone as “needlessly and depressingly unwholesome” (639).<sup>12</sup> This later comment springs out of Phuong as Fowler’s live-in mistress and Pyle as little more than a caricature.<sup>13</sup> Gardiner presents precious little literary analysis to justify his opinions. The very next day another review appeared, this time in *The New York Times Book Review*. Robert Gorham Davis reads the novel in terms of politics with the characters as “representatives of their nations or political factions” (1). Because the novel is about America as “a crassly materialistic and ‘innocent’ nation with no understanding of other peoples” (1), Davis dislikes *The Quiet American*. He argues that Greene’s novel is anti-American and not strongly enough anti-communist. Thus, it is a bad novel. John Lehmann’s 12 March review for *The New Republic* contains a more balanced reading. He quickly praises the cunning construction of the novel and the brilliant writing in the war scenes. Nevertheless, he calls *The Quiet American* “one of the most icily anti-American books I have ever read” (26). He also notes that Pyle is a two-dimensional caricature “with little or no reality outside his function in the novel” (26).

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<sup>12</sup> J.P. Kulshrestha disagrees strongly twenty-one years later writing that *The Quiet American* is not a novel “of sordidness but of violence and suffering” (143).

<sup>13</sup> The first American review of *The Quiet American* is in the 2 January 1956 issue of *Newsweek*. The unsigned review begins with the headline “This Man’s Caricature of the American Abroad” (58).

One of the most scathing contemporary reviews of *The Quiet American* appears in *The New Yorker*. A.J. Liebling dislikes the novel because it is anti-American, but he never really explains why this makes it a bad novel. Given the literary reputation of *The New Yorker*, one would expect serious comment in a six-page review. Liebling seems much more concerned with speculating that Greene really grew up in America or only knows about America from what he reads in French books than he is concerned with literary criticism. His review is much more about himself as a person and his writing ability than it is about Greene and his writing. The closest Liebling gets to analysis is when he writes that Fowler is a Hemingway hero, albeit a bad Hemingway hero (148). Later in the month of April, Walter Allen provides the best American review of *The Quiet American*. He praises Graham Greene for what he calls his “awareness of evil” (344). Allen is quick to acknowledge that the novel will have its detractors in America:

It would be idle to pretend that *The Quiet American* is going to be palatable to a majority of readers in this country. In his novel of the war in Indo-China, Greene expresses a criticism of America and especially of American behavior in foreign affairs that is widely held, if not openly stated, by a great many people outside the United States. (344)

What none of these American critics have demonstrated, however, is that Greene’s criticism of America and American behaviors is incorrect, inappropriate, or unjustified. These reviews seem to subscribe to the “my country--right or wrong” school of criticism.

Continuing in chronological order, the next review comes from a Canadian publication titled *Saturday Night*. In the 12 May issue, an unsigned review acknowledges that American readers will be stung by the bitter comments of the novel. The review ends thusly: “Certainly this is a bitter and trouble-making book, but as Canadians (and therefore by definition fence-

straddlers) we can afford to see the truth in it, and to enjoy it without taking sides” (18). Since there are no Canadian characters, Canadian readers cannot be offended by *The Quiet American*. They are as uninvolved in the novel as Fowler claims to be. Thus, they can appreciate the novel as an excellent study of ambiguity in the modern world.

Philip Rahv reviews the novel in the May issue of *Commentary*. While *The Quiet American* was a bestseller in England, Rahv argues that it will not do so well in America “for obvious reasons” (488). The most obvious reason that Rahv provides is “the insinuation that Pyle is the representative American” (489). Rahv’s review certainly contains a negative opinion of *The Quiet American*, but he acknowledges that Greene is a good writer and that his other novels have merit. Philip Rahv and Diana Trilling provide more opinions on the novel in dialogue with one another in *Commentary* from the July 1956 issue. The latter detests the novel calling it “an affront to America” (67). The former seems to have paid attention in his Literary Criticism 101 class because he is quick to note that the author of a piece of literature is not the same as a character within the work no matter how similar they might appear.<sup>14</sup> Rahv reads Fowler as “a nihilist so shrunken in his capacity to believe in public causes and ideals as to be willing to settle for his girl and opium pipe without asking anything more in life” (69). Given Fowler’s nihilism and his position as a limited, biased first-person narrator, we as readers cannot trust everything that he says. Rahv also responds to political criticism stressing the fact that “anti-Americanism is not necessarily the equivalent of pro-Communism” (70). What a refreshing idea for the mid-1950s in America with McCarthyism and the Red Scare.

Later in 1956, discussion of *The Quiet American* continues in American newspapers and magazines. *The New York Times Book Review* published another opinion of Graham Greene’s novel. Granville Hicks wrote in response to Davis’s earlier piece in the same publication. Hicks

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<sup>14</sup> Phillip Stratford must have been in the same class because he makes the exact same point in his 1964 book (312).

points out that a reviewer must “relate his judgment of the politics to judgments of a more literary sort” (5). He must also, “not let his concern with immediate issues blind him to qualities that may keep the book alive when the issues are dead” (5). Nevertheless, Hicks surprisingly defends Davis’s choice of a purely political review that greatly lacks literary analysis.

Two more unsigned editorials appear in the month of October. The first comes from *Newsweek*, and it attacks “Greene’s embarrassingly inept portrait of the American official abroad” (96). A glaring weakness of the review is that this opinion goes unexplained. What about Pyle’s portrayal is inept? The review never says. Sadly, it disparages Greene as being both a Communist and a Catholic. Since Russian publications praised Greene’s works, *Newsweek* asks, “Why the Red shouting over the work of a Roman Catholic novelist?” (96). None of the reviews of works by Protestant writers in this publication mentions the fact that the author is a Protestant, so mentioning that Greene is a Catholic should set off alarm signals to modern readers. Let us not forget the anti-Catholic feelings that have existed in America and came to a head during John Fitzgerald Kennedy’s campaign for the presidency. Again, because a character in the novel may be anti-American does not prove that the writer is pro-Communist. Nor does a writer being pro-Communist prevent him or her from writing an excellent novel worthy of critical examination.

Less than a week later that icon of all-American ideals *The Saturday Evening Post*, the same magazine that published so many Norman Rockwell paintings, prints an unsigned review of *The Quiet American* with the headline “To Get Rave Reviews, Write an Anti-U.S.A. Novel!” The review calls the novel “an obvious piece of Hate-America propaganda” and a “bitter tirade” (10). It also supplies such gems of literary criticism as “Graham Greene is an opium smoker” (10) without ever commenting on how that is valid in terms of the literary work produced. We

then get two more mentions of opium. “Fowler is an opium smoker. When not hitting the pipe...” and “In the end, the opium-smoking Fowler...” (10).<sup>15</sup> One wonders what *The Saturday Evening Post* would say about Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*. We learn nothing about the novel from a review such as this. Instead, we learn much more about the reviewer(s) and his/her/their political background. Indeed, Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American* has a political side to it, but the novel is much more than opium smoking or anti-American rhetoric. One actually needs to read the novel in order to discover this, however.

The year 1956 sees several reviews of *The Quiet American* in serious literary journals. Reviewing literature published in 1955, Frederick Wood in *English Studies* writes the following:

The year under review has long been one of the most barren that have been experienced for a very long time so far as original creative literature is concerned. No new play of any note has been produced, and in the field of the novel one looks in vain for any work that is likely to be long remembered. Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American* with its scene set in Indo-China at the beginning of the war between France and the Vietminh, is disappointing. (186).

Wood never really explains what is disappointing about the novel other than commenting that the plot and characters are unconvincing. He never explains how or why they are unconvincing.

Wood’s review is similar to Bosley Crowther’s review of *The Third Man*. Both works by Greene have long outlived their bad reviewers.

Two other serious, scholarly reviews provide much better criticism of *The Quiet American*. Russian critic Anna Elistratova praises the “profound psychological insight” of the novel (153). A.J. Liebling compared Fowler to a Hemingway hero, but only with scorn.

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<sup>15</sup> The morals of 1956 seemed to have carried over to D.S. Savage’s inconsequential 1978 article. Savage twice refers negatively to Fowler’s recreational use of opium by overstating the situation saying, “He is a drug addict” (221) and referring to “his own junkie person” (223).



Elistratova makes the comparison in earnest praising Fowler as “considerably battered by life and tired in spirit” (153). Such a similarity is appropriate, I think, though we should not take it too far. Fowler is not nearly as heroic as Santiago, the fisherman of *The Old Man and the Sea*, but both are certainly world weary. While the editors of *The Saturday Evening Post* might argue that a Russian critic would like an anti-American novel, I agree with Elistratova’s reading. Another example of favorable criticism comes from Ralph Freedman. He argues that *The Quiet American* is anti-everything: “If *The Quiet American* is passionately anti-American, it is equally anti-Protestant, anti-European, anti-Communist, anti-non-commitment” (77). Neither Fowler nor Pyle, nor even any of the other characters in the novel, is heroic or even the slightest example of a good role model. Instead, the novel is a “vigorous exposé of human failure” and “a high-pitched indictment of our time” (77). Freedman’s comments are arguably the best of the contemporary reviews discussed so far because he recognizes the novel as a piece of literature, a work of art that is multi-dimensional. It has many layers of meaning and supports many possible interpretations and readings by critics. Greene may be anti-American as so many American reviews of the novel accused him, but neither the novel nor Fowler is pro-French, pro-Vietnamese, or pro-anything. Greene’s novel provides variations on a theme of ambiguity, ambiguity in everything.

Two final examples of closely contemporary criticism come from 1957. The additional passage of time seems to have helped Robert Evans’s analysis of the novel. He praises the existentialism of the book and the psychology of the characters.<sup>16</sup> He also notes the possible reading of “quiet” in the title to mean insidious (243), and Pyle certainly is subtle, deceitful, treacherous, and wily. R.W.B. Lewis did not gain any critical distance, however. He calls *The*

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<sup>16</sup> S.H. Majid continues the existential reading of *The Quiet American* in “The Existential Concern in Graham Greene.”

*Quiet American* a decline in Greene's style (56) and argues that the novel "does not engage us on any serious level" (59). Evans and Lewis seem to be reading two very different novels. I must side with Evans and against Lewis because Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* is arguably his most engaging novel even if Fowler tries to remain *dégagé*.

By 1959 R.E. Hughes feels confident enough to write, "perhaps now the furor over Graham Greene's novel, *The Quiet American*, has died down to the point that analysis on a non-political basis can proceed" (41). Hughes is correct in his assertion. With the book available for several years and Mankiewicz's film available for two, much of the controversy died down and good, serious literary criticism could begin. Pyle received much of the early critical commentary, but as the years pass, Fowler becomes the critical focus of study. Given the fact that he narrates the story, such interest in Fowler is certainly appropriate. Hughes rightly notes that Fowler is "pitifully sterile in a sterile situation" (41). He wants to remain separate from the action around him and prides himself on the fact that he does not have opinions. Fowler lacks the idealism and passion that motivates Pyle, and thusly he remains in "a sort of mental stupor" (Majid 75). Finally, a human emotion, pity, dissolves Fowler's inaction and prods him into action. Seeing the innocent women and children cruelly blown apart in the city square and the dead in the canal at Phat Diem forces Fowler to think of others and not just himself. The latter certainly troubles him, but the former prompts him into action (Allott 197). While we might not like Fowler, he does rejoin the human race with his action, with his engagement.<sup>17</sup>

Having discussed reviews of *The Quiet American*, I shall examine the novel itself to see whether the reviewers' opinions are justified. I shall focus on two characters—Pyle, the quiet American and an undercover agent, and Fowler, the unquiet Englishman and a reporter. Phuong,

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<sup>17</sup> A.A. DeVitis argues that engagement leads not only to action but to death as well (111). This seems to go against the idea that engagement is good. No other critic praises Fowler's inaction. Fowler's engagement brings death only to Pyle and saves potentially thousands of others.

the mistress they share, and Vigot, the prefect of police who talks to Fowler as part of his investigation into Pyle's death, only operate in conjunction with the other two characters.

Greene begins *The Quiet American* with Pyle already dead, and the major portion of the novel recounts Fowler's remembrances presented as a flashback while being questioned by Vigot.

*The Quiet American*, like *the Third Man*, gets better and better with each reading. On the second, third, and subsequent times through the book, readers pick up on small details that reveal Greene's genius as a writer. One factor in such a pronouncement involves Fowler and his interaction with Phuong in the opening pages of the novel. She waits for Pyle to return. Fowler tells her on the very first page of the novel, "He will be coming soon," but the English journalist knows that Pyle is dead having set it up for Communists to kill Pyle (11). As readers, we do not learn about Fowler's culpability until the end of the novel. Nevertheless, Greene sets us up for a fall if we fully trust his narrator. Fowler knows that if he can get Phuong back into his apartment, he has a better chance of regaining his former mistress. In his own mind, Fowler says, "Pyle had diminished" (13), and Pyle certainly has both literally and figuratively. With his physical death, Pyle will play a greatly reduced role in political affairs in Indo-China and will not be able to interfere in Fowler's relationship with Phuong.

When Phuong does accompany Fowler upstairs, he only thinks about her in terms of what she can do for him. Fowler's intentions are different; he wants her in his bed, not in his life. Phuong is like a bird twittering and singing on his pillow (12). He later says, "I wondered whether she would consent to sleep with me that night if Pyle never came, but I knew that when I had smoked four pipes I would no longer want her. Of course it would be agreeable to feel her thigh beside me in bed" (14). Fowler likes Phuong because she prepares his opium pipes, and he likes to feel her body next to him rather than sleep alone. Neither of these functions has anything

to do with Phuong as an individual. Both roles could easily be fulfilled by a prostitute. Thus, we are only a handful of pages into the book, and we can already see that our British narrator is not the nicest of men, to say the very least. None of the critics have condemned the novel as being anti-British even with such a negative character, but I shall say more about that below.

When the French Inspector Vigot questions Fowler soon after this scene at the police station, Fowler continues to avoid admitting his role. Vigot tells Fowler that Pyle is dead. Fowler responds quickly. “‘Not guilty,’ I said. I told myself that was true. Didn’t Pyle always go his own way? I looked for any feeling in myself, even resentment at a policeman’s suspicion, but I could find none. No one but Pyle was responsible” (18). Fowler tries two methods of evasion here. He blames Pyle for his own death. The logic is that if Pyle had not been involved in the bombing, the Communists would not have wanted to kill him. Thus, it is Pyle’s own fault he was murdered. The other method Fowler employs is repeating to himself that he is not guilty as if saying it enough times will make it true. Fowler knows he is guilty, or at the very least, he will come to realize it by the end of the novel. In another place, Fowler will even blame York Harding for Pyle’s death because Harding’s books inspired Pyle to come to the East (167-168).

The first chapter ends with Fowler returning home from the police station. He explains to Phuong that Pyle has been assassinated and tells her that she ought to stay the night with him. She agrees and begins preparing Fowler another opium pipe. In the final paragraph of the chapter, Fowler falls asleep with his hand between Phuong’s legs. The opium has rendered him sexually impotent. He wakes and sadly or even angrily asks himself the question, “Am I the only one who really cared for Pyle?” (22). The answer to Fowler’s selfish mind is yes, but we as readers come to learn that Phuong cared for Pyle as well and we can assume that Pyle’s family and friends also loved him. Fowler’s egotism prevents him from thinking of anyone other than

himself. Greene presents us with an ambiguous narrator; Fowler is no hero and certainly seems closer to being a villain even though he is the main character of the novel. Given the uncertainty that surrounded the characters in *The Third Man*, readers should be prepared for similar difficulties in interpreting Greene's characters and their actions. *The Quiet American* is another exercise in ambiguity.

When Fowler thinks back on his earliest impression of Pyle, he says that Pyle "seemed incapable of harm" (17). The operative word is "seemed," for only after we learn of Pyle's dealing with plastic explosives do we come to realize the difference between appearance and reality. In a similar moment of retrospect, Fowler says, "Perhaps I should have seen that fanatic gleam, the quick response to a phrase" when Pyle's eyes light up when the American talks about York Harding and a Third Force (25). Only now, after the bombing, can Fowler say for certain that Pyle was a fanatic. When Pyle tells Fowler why he has come to Saigon, the latter comments on the foolish naiveté of the youth saying that Pyle was determined "to do good, not to any individual person but to a country, a continent, a world" (18). Pyle definitely sees Phuong as representative of Indo-China, and she becomes a metonymy for the entire country. Phuong chooses to leave Fowler for Pyle, a choice that Fowler reduces to "youth and hope and seriousness" over "age and despair" (19). With Pyle dead, she can return to Fowler, to age and despair. Even this, however, is too simplistic a reduction to the equation. We only realize this by the end of the novel. Pyle's bombing kills innocent women and children. The Vietnamese people do not embrace Pyle's Third Force or Western-style democracy. By returning to Fowler, Phuong, and Vietnam by extension, does not choose imperialism or colonialism as represented by the French or English. Phuong survives the best way she can, and many of her countrymen will do the same thing by siding with Vietminh communists rather than foreigners. With all of

these multiple layers of meaning, Graham Greene challenges his audience and holds their interest throughout *The Quiet American*.

Inspector Vigot will speak with Fowler again in the novel. To say that Vigot “questions” or even “interrogates” Fowler would be overstating things. Vigot knows that Fowler has information about Pyle’s death and that he even played a tangential role in his murder, but Vigot hopes that Fowler’s conscience will lead him to reveal what he knows about Pyle’s death. The policeman tells Fowler that he must speak with him in order to fill out his report. Fowler reveals his guilty mind in his response, a response that shows the nature of Fowler’s character:

“You can rule me out,” I said. “I’m not involved. Not involved,” I repeated. It had been an article of my creed. The human condition being what it was, let them fight, let them love, let them murder, I would not be involved. My fellow journalists called themselves correspondents; I preferred the title of reporter. I wrote what I saw. I took no action—even an opinion is a kind of action. (28).

Fowler wants to be ruled out as a suspect in Pyle’s murder even though Vigot has not said that he is a suspect. Fowler takes great pride in his non-involvement, his *dégagé* mindset. It sounds like a good rule by which to live. Nevertheless, Fowler will eventually take sides and be involved in Pyle’s murder. Fowler is so passive that he will not even have or express an opinion on the problems in Indo-China. He exemplifies the attributes of detachment and control.

Pyle’s role in Indo-China supposedly deals with American Economic aid, but Graham Greene does not provide any clear description of what Pyle really does. Instead, he has Pyle discuss medical teams and trachoma, an eye ailment. Greene never gives us a picture of Pyle at work with any aid group. Phillip Noyce tries to clear up the ambiguity by showing Pyle at work with American medical teams sponsored by the American government providing eyeglasses

made from plastic frames to Vietnamese. Joseph Mankiewicz has Pyle work for the private foundation “Friends for Free Asia,” a group completely separate from the American government. Following Pyle’s death, the American Economic Attaché talks with Fowler about Pyle’s death.<sup>18</sup> He tells the reporter about the telegram that will be sent to Pyle’s family. The text is, “Grieved to report your son died a soldier’s death in cause of Democracy” (31). When questioned further about Pyle’s role in Saigon, the attaché says, “Pyle had special duties,” and Fowler as narrator comments that this was said “in a low voice, tense with ambiguity” (31). The ambiguity lies in the fact that Pyle works for the CIA. Greene’s scorn for American espionage comes out loud and clear because Pyle did not die a soldier’s death. He was stabbed and thrown face down in the river to drown. In the name of “Democracy,” Pyle--with the support of the CIA and the American government--slaughtered innocent women and children.

Both Greene as author and Fowler as narrator detest such empty rhetoric on the part of the American attaché. The latter asks Fowler if he knows who killed Pyle and why. Fowler responds to the questions thinking to himself, “Suddenly I was angry” (31). He is angry at the attaché and also with himself because he knows exactly who killed Pyle and why they did it. Instead of saying this out loud, Fowler replies, “Yes. They killed him because he was too innocent to live. He was young and ignorant and silly and he got involved” (31). Involvement kills, but if Fowler had maintained his non-involvement, Pyle would have set off more bombs killing more people. The irony of Fowler’s action is that by getting involved he can save lives but only by taking the life of Pyle. Not an easy decision to make, but Greene forces his audience to ponder the ambiguities of moral subjectivity.

Innocence occurs as a theme again in the novel. While having a few drinks in a bar, Fowler and Phuong meet Pyle and another American named Granger. Granger is drunk and

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<sup>18</sup> Greene uses only the name “Joe” for the attaché. Noyce calls him Joe Tunney, and Mankiewicz uses Joe Morton.

wants to go to a brothel, while the other three characters want to go to dinner. Granger stumbles out of the bar, and Pyle follows to make sure that Granger is safe. Fowler and Phuong go to the restaurant. When Pyle does not join them there later, Fowler goes in search of the quiet American:

That was my first instinct—to protect him. It never occurred to me that there was greater need to protect myself. Innocence always calls mutely for protection when we would be so much wiser to guard ourselves against it: innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm. (37)

Only after the bombings does Fowler realize his own need for protection. Pyle's foolishly naïve innocence allows him to think that he is doing the right thing in the long term by working with General Thé to establish a democratic option for Vietnam. Pyle and the CIA think that they can tame Thé to their own ends because they are supplying his revolution. Their belief is like the leper—it destroys all those with whom it comes in contact.

Fowler sometimes sees himself through Pyle's eyes: "A man of middle age, with eyes a little bloodshot, beginning to put on weight, ungraceful in love, less noisy than Granger perhaps but more cynical, less innocent" (40).<sup>19</sup> Pyle, a Bostonian, is an innocent, respectful, and sincere young man who "believes in being involved" (18). Fowler is an experienced but detached journalist. He has a jaded attitude and is comfortable with his Vietnamese mistress. Pyle, on the other hand, has little practical experience. He is so naïve and inadequate that he lives his life from books. Pyle studied about the East before coming to Vietnam. His closest involvement with a woman is dancing with Phuong. Therefore, to supplement his meagre knowledge, Pyle then reads about sex from *The Physiology of Marriage*. Fowler would have simply gone out and

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<sup>19</sup> This and all quotations from *The Quiet American* come from the Penguin edition of the novel.



found a woman.

Another difference between Fowler and Pyle concerns belief. Pyle cannot imagine life without God, while Fowler says that life does not make sense with God. Fowler's ultimate God is death that takes away all pain and fear. Fowler mentions God quite often, but he is not a believer. "I had never desired faith. The job of a reporter is to expose and record" (88). Fowler envies those who believe in God like his wife and Pyle, but he thinks that people "invented God—a being capable of understanding" because they do not understand each other (60). Not only does Fowler not believe in God, he also has no faith in permanence: "I had never believed in permanence, and yet I had longed for it. Always I was afraid of losing happiness" (44). There is no source of stability in Fowler's life.

Fowler continues with his remembrance of unstable events from the past. At dinner that evening with Pyle and Phuong, Fowler watches them dance together. Pyle behaves with dignity, respect, and impeccable manners always treating Phuong like a lady and looking out for her best interests. Pyle eventually falls in love with Phuong and reveals his feeling to Fowler. Needless to say, Fowler becomes disturbed by the American's intervention. Pyle can marry Phuong, but Fowler cannot because his wife will not grant him a divorce. Thus, Pyle argues that he has Phuong's best interests in mind by offering her a respectable marriage and the opportunity to have children. Fowler responds angrily but truthfully: "I don't care that for her interests. You can have her interests. I only want her body. I want her in bed with me. I'd rather ruin her and sleep with her than, than...look after her damned interests" (59). Again, Fowler's self interests reveal themselves. With comments like this, it seems impossible for readers to like the British narrator of the book when presented with such a likeable character as Alden Pyle, the quiet American.

We see more of the likeable Pyle when he and Fowler spend the night in a Vietnamese watchtower along the road to Saigon. Both have been north of the city and drive back together when Fowler's car runs out of gas. Two Vietnamese guards grudgingly let them stay in the tower. During the evening, Fowler and Pyle talk about love. Fowler says that Phuong, like other Vietnamese women, would "love you in return for kindness, security, the presents you give" her (104). He realizes the impermanence of any relationship with a woman, but enjoys the company of one while it lasts. Fowler mentions that he was in love before but left the woman. He does not believe that he loves Phuong in the same fashion. "You see, the other one loved me. I was afraid of losing love. Now I'm only afraid of losing Phuong" (104). He continues along the same lines saying, "I've reached the age when sex isn't the problem so much as old age and death. I wake up with these in mind and not a woman's body. I just don't want to be alone in my last decade, that's all" (104-105). Fowler loves her physically, but he does not care for Phuong as an individual. He does not want to be alone so late in life. While Fowler might be honest with himself and Pyle, Fowler certainly does not win any sympathy with readers because of shallow, callous comments like these.

As poorly as Fowler looks, Pyle rises in esteem because of his actions. The watchtower comes under attack from the Communists. In trying to flee, Fowler severely injures his ankle. Pyle carries him to safety and goes in search of a French patrol after the Communists leave the area. Pyle returns with French aid and saves Fowler's life. Nevertheless, Fowler is anything but appreciative. He tells Pyle that he did not ask to be saved and would rather have died (110). Graham Greene skillfully manipulates the situation to make Pyle appealing yet again in this scene of heroism.

After Pyle saves Fowler's life, the two see little of each other. Fowler's wife writes to

him that she will not grant him a divorce, and Phuong leaves Fowler for Pyle who promises to take her to America and marry her. In order to ward off feelings of loneliness, Fowler buries himself in his war reporting. He hears rumors about Pyle, plastic explosives, bombs in bicycle pumps, and General Thé. As Fowler becomes more aware of Pyle's involvement in the "Third Force," his feelings towards him change. Now Pyle, the rival for Phuong, is in the background; Pyle, the slaughterer of innocents, is in the foreground. Slowly but steadily, through Fowler's remembrances of a dead woman and child in a ditch, we realize that Fowler is no longer *déagagé*. He feels "responsible for that voice crying in the dark" because "those wounds had been inflicted by me" (113). Fowler's cool, detached disposition is shattered. He can no longer conceal his loneliness without Phuong, his irritation and anger with Pyle, his disgust with the war and its atrocities. Even smoking opium no longer helps Fowler; he has to face the reality—his crushed personal life and realization of guilt for doing nothing to prevent the death of innocent people.

As the narrator, Fowler subtly tries to influence readers' opinions of Pyle negatively, but we cannot trust that he is not simply jealous about losing Phuong. One day while Fowler is having a beer, two American women are having an ice cream at the next table. They get up from their table with the cryptic comment, "Warren said we mustn't stay later than eleven twenty-five" (159). A few minutes later, a massive bomb rips through the city square causing horrific casualties. Fowler thinks of Phuong who is normally having a drink with her friends at this time and goes rushing across the square to see if she is still alive. He meets Pyle who assures him that Phuong is not there because, as he says, "I warned her not to go. [...] I told her to keep away this morning" (161). Thus, Greene unequivocally demonstrates that Pyle knew about the bombing both in terms of where and when it would go off. Phuong and the American women were all told to keep out of the square. When Pyle looks down at the blood of innocent women and children

killed in the square during the shopping hour, he does not recognise it for what it is. Fowler tells Pyle, “You’ve got the Third Force and National Democracy all over your right shoe. Go home to Phuong and tell her about your heroic dead—there are a few dozen less of her people to worry about” (162). Pyle’s ignorance comes to the forefront when he numbly tries to explain that there was supposed to be a military parade and that General Thé should have called off the bombing when the parade was cancelled. The episode ends with Fowler thinking about Pyle. “He’ll always be innocent, you can’t blame the innocent, they are always guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity” (163). By trusting that Thé really has the best interests of the Vietnamese people at heart, Pyle has been duped by the renegade general. Even when faced with the results of his naiveté, Pyle cannot believe that he has been lied to. He maintains his innocence, and Fowler, knowing that Pyle cannot be controlled, is led to thoughts of eliminating him.

Even with this in mind, Fowler still remains undecided about getting involved. When he meets Heng, a Communist organiser, Heng asks Fowler for help. The Communists want to talk to Pyle about the bombings and ask Fowler to arrange a dinner engagement with Pyle for later that evening. Fowler cannot give him a definite answer. Heng ends the meeting by saying, “Sooner or later [...] one has to take sides. If one is to remain human” (174). Unable to take a side, Fowler invites Pyle over for a drink to discuss the day’s events. Pyle remains unrepentant for his actions. He calls the dead in the city square “war casualties” and continues saying, “It was a pity, but you can’t always hit your target. Anyway they died in the right cause. [...] In a way you could say they died for democracy” (179). Outrage is the only word one can use to describe Fowler’s response to Pyle’s words. The novel began with Fowler looking awful and Pyle looking like a noble character. By the end, however, we see that Greene has reversed their

roles. Pyle appears to be a villain in spite of his good intentions, and while we might not agree with Fowler condemning Pyle to death, we can certainly understand quite clearly why the Englishman finally takes a side. Fowler becomes human, even if we do not like it.

From there, Greene moves into the present time, and the novel closes with Fowler and Phuong living together again. His wife has finally agreed to divorce, and Fowler and Phuong can now be married. Thus, we have a sort of happy ending to *The Quiet American*, but it is somewhat a happy ending deeply tempered with sadness and death. Real life in the modern world is a similar mélange of sorrow and joy, and Greene certainly is a modern novelist as we can see from both *The Third Man* and *The Quiet American*.

In examining *The Quiet American* in great detail, we can see that Pyle has negative qualities but also some excellent features. He is not some simple, one-dimensional figure. It is unfair to say, as several contemporary reviewers did, that the novel is anti-American simply because of Greene's depiction of Pyle. One character I have not discussed at great length is the American reporter Granger. He begins the novel as a loud mouth drunk in search of sex. Fowler comments on how different Pyle is. He's "not one of those noisy bastards at the Continental" like Granger and others (17). Nevertheless, as the novel continues, Granger gains in stature. He is an excellent journalist asking all of the difficult questions that the French reporters want to ask but cannot (Hazen 15-16). In his tear-filled conversation with Fowler, Granger reveals that his son has polio (184-186). Rather than get drunk, Granger thinks of how difficult it must be for his wife and son. Thus, we cannot say for certainty that Greene dislikes all Americans or that all his Americans are caricatures. While Granger is a minor character, he is an interesting character with more than one side to him, and he is a reporter after all, just like Greene.

This idea of caricature occurred in contemporary reviews. John Lehmann disliked Pyle as a caricature in a 1956 *New Republic* review, as I noted previously. In 1976, twenty years after the American publication of *The Quiet American*, the American weekly magazine *The New Republic* published a reconsideration of the novel. In it, Eric Larsen agrees that Pyle is a caricature, but he acknowledges, given the hindsight of twenty years, that Greene's caricature was true (41). Americans did not like to see themselves depicted as Pyle even if they were behaving like Pyle in 1955 and certainly would get involved in covert actions and commit atrocities in Vietnam through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Larsen's balanced approach works well because it admits the fault might lie with readers who do not like to see the truth in themselves.

Not every more recent critical interpretation bears fruit. One single-minded, unsuccessful critical reading is Roland Pierloot's "The 'Laius Motif' in the Work of Graham Greene." Laius was the father of Oedipus. Following the oracular predictions that the son would kill the father and marry the mother, Laius wanted to kill his son in order to prevent the prophecies from coming true. He ordered that Oedipus be exposed on a hillside and staked to the ground. Laius thought that this would allow him to keep his kingship and his wife safe from his son's usurpation of both roles. Thus, any father-son relationship or older male-younger male relationship that forms a triangle with the addition of a woman can be thought of as part of the Laius motif. Greene's *The Quiet American* certainly fits this pattern, but one should not over-emphasize this point as Pierloot does. "The father-figure, the narrator protagonist Fowler, beginning his story after the death of the son-figure Pyle and retroactively structuring the precedents, offers the opportunity of introducing a large justifying context before the crude fact of his part in the murder is rendered" (139). Seeing the entire novel as a justification for killing

Pyle because of the Lais motif ignores so many other aspects of *The Quiet American*. Fowler never thought that Pyle would take his job away or his place in the world. While Pyle did take Phuong away from Fowler, Fowler betrays Pyle because he killed innocent civilians who haunt his memories, not because of Phuong. There is so much more to *The Quiet American* than a simple revenge-for-lost-love story. Psychological criticism in general and a psychological approach to Greene's novels can certainly bear fruit, but they should be blended with other critical approaches in order to see the complete interwoven tapestry of *The Quiet American*.

Much more balanced readings come from A.F. Cassis and Niels Bugge Hansen. The former praises the fact that *The Quiet American* lacks the priests and sinners of the "Catholic" novels. Nevertheless, Cassis analyzes moral problems as "guilt and innocence, loyalty, betrayal, and confusion are cleverly and dramatically played out" (*Graham Greene: Life, Work and Criticism* 23). One can be spiritual and moral without being religious. While Fowler does mention Catholicism, God, and belief, if Greene were not a Catholic, no critic would mention these points in relation to *The Quiet American*. Hansen's reading is even sharper and more informative; he acknowledges the Catholic element in the novel (201) and the political element as well (188). He also investigates both aspects fully but argues that the most important features of the novel come out through close literary analysis of the text. By focusing on the characters as revealed by Greene's skillful prose, Hansen clearly dissects the parts of the novel and produces persuasive, thought-provoking analysis of the whole using various critical stances.

As one scrutinises R.A. Wobbe's or A.F. Cassis's bibliographies of Greene, one observes the plethora of scholarship that focuses on Greene as a "Catholic novelist" or "Catholic" readings of his work. Many of these articles appear in the journal *Renascence* published by Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI. This should come as no surprise since Marquette is a Catholic

institution founded in 1881 and named after Father Jacques Marquette (1637-75), a French Jesuit missionary-explorer of the Upper Midwest. G.M. Gaston's "The Structure of Salvation in *The Quiet American*" is one such Catholic interpretation. While Gaston does allow for the multi-dimensional appeal of the novel, he argues that war and politics "serve to poise the ultimate concern of personal salvation, the theme which intersects and compounds all of Greene's novels" (93). This interpretation is too narrow a reduction of *The Quiet American*. While Fowler does end his narrative by saying, "how I wished there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry" (189) and there the novel certainly smacks of the confessional, we should not limit the boundaries of the novel to one easy reading.

In the previous paragraph, I briefly alluded to Fowler's last line in the novel. Let us examine it much more fully. "Everything had gone right with me since he had died, but how I wished there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry" (189). Several critics argue that this someone is God. Given the Catholic nature of Greene's earlier novels, including *God in The Quiet American* certainly seems in character for the novelist. David Pryce-Jones asserts that Fowler wants to say "I am sorry" to God (93). This argument seems plausible. Sanford Sternlicht takes things too far in his analysis, however. He argues that Fowler feels sorry because he "helped to slay innocence by participating in the destruction of a man positively if naively committed to life" (69). Pyle does begin the novel as a figure of innocence and naiveté, but by the end of the novel we cannot call him a character committed to life or even innocent since he quite literally has the blood of true innocents on his shoes. *The Quiet American* is such a complex novel that it prohibits easy readings. Fowler is sorry that he is involved in Pyle's murder, but that is very different from wishing that he had not done it. However, Russian critic N. Eishiskina notes that "Pyle's amoral political ideology knocked Fowler off his neutral



position” (163) and Fowler had to choose sides. Two wrongs do not make a right, but killing a murderer of women and children is different from killing an innocent man. Fowler is morally and ethically justified in his actions of killing one man if that killing saves the lives of countless more. In ultimate terms of Christian theology, all murder is wrong, but Greene shows his genius by crafting an ambiguous modern novel in a complex world where things are not black and white. Instead, he creates a world of black and shades of grey. Pity and sorrow are two human emotions, and both are redeeming qualities on the part of Fowler.

Not every critic sees it this way, however. Terry Eagleton argues that “the climax of the novel is Fowler’s submission to temptation” (127). I disagree with the final phrase “submission to temptation” because submission implies giving in or yielding to a stronger power and temptation implies evil. Fowler does not yield when he acts, nor is his action simply and clearly evil. Given the many moral layers to *The Quiet American*, such a reading fails. Eagleton might as well argue that Robin Hood is evil because the Ten Commandments forbid stealing of any sort. What parents teach their children that Robin Hood is the bad guy for stealing from the rich and giving to the poor? Fowler is not the villain or even a fallen hero in *The Quiet American*. If anything, he is a reluctant hero. Like other fans of Greene’s Catholic novels such as *The Power and the Glory*, *The Heart of the Matter*, and *The End of the Affair*, Grahame Smith dislikes the lack of a strong religious focus in *The Quiet American*. Thus, he deems the novel “one of Greene’s failures, a tired novel” (131) and later describes it as “tired and lackluster” (137). I disagree. The lack of *deus ex machina* in *The Quiet American* gives it the richness and texture that it has. It is a study in ambiguity and the complexities of the modern world. Since it captures the wasteland that Eliot invented so well, *The Quiet American* seems to me to be one of Greene’s greatest successes.

In a recent article, Stephen Whitfield praises *The Quiet American* as “a terse and indelible novel that blends morbid psychological insight, philosophical reflection on human fallibility, epigrammatic flair, concise reporting and political prescience, fortuitously swirling within the vortex of history” (86). It is interesting to find an article on a British novelist in the *Journal of American Studies*, but Whitfield focuses on how *The Quiet American* fits into the vortex of American history. He questions why the novel and film did not resonate with Americans as a warning against involvement in Southeast Asia while humorously noting that war would not have been avoided even if Americans had attended annual conferences of the Modern Language Association (66). Eric Larsen, like Whitfield, praises Greene for his prescience and is amazed that so few listened to his sage advice (40). Gloria Emerson concurs: “he had always understood what was going to happen there, and in that small and quiet novel, told us everything” (45).

Shortly after Greene’s death in 1991, Richard West praised *the Quiet American* as an “anti-imperialist masterpiece” and Greene as “a kind of Grand Old Man of the left” (49). Suzanne Kehde takes West to task in her article entitled “Engendering the Imperial Subject” because he “described a text so different from the one I remembered” (241). The first person pronoun is important to Kehde’s interpretation of Greene because she makes several speculations on the author’s intent. Her gendered, Marxist criticism is, at times, off-base. One example occurs when she argues that Greene, “a member of the ruling classes,” has “imperial attitudes embedded in a web of colonial and gender discourses” (241). Later, borrowing from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men*, Kehde claims, “the overt emphasis on homosocial order throughout Greene’s public school and Oxford education must have made its primacy seem natural” (247). Both judgments are dubious, indeed. There is nothing in the Greene biographies that would lead one to such conclusions. Greene was as much a member of the ruling classes as

any other citizen in a first world country who votes. Sedgwick's book uses eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature to discuss patterns of friendship between males. Greene is a man—not a literary character—in the twentieth century. Thus, Sedgwick's theories of male homosocial desire do not necessarily apply. Finally, there is nothing to suggest that Greene was an imperialist. He wrote against imperialism in both *The Quiet American* and *The Power and the Glory*. The latter novel tells of Catholic oppression in Mexico. The Whiskey Priest in that novel evokes such sympathy and the government officials who track him down such great scorn that it is impossible to support imperialistic readings of the work. I am not alone in my belief that Greene was anti-imperialist; West above and Whitfield (67) support me as well.

The novels of Joseph Conrad and Graham Greene certainly contain many similarities, and the British novelist learned much from his Polish predecessor. Robert Pendleton published an article in *Conradiana* that pursues this link. Pendleton compares Pyle to Conrad's character Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. This parallel is even stronger when one considers the Kurtz of Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Both Kurtz and Pyle rationalise the killing of innocent civilians in their own private, undeclared wars officially recognised by no governments. Both fail "to understand that concepts such as 'rebellion' or 'treachery' may have different meanings within other cultures" (92). In Russia, we called Chechen paramilitary forces terrorists, but they saw themselves as rebels. The American colonists saw themselves as patriots; whereas the British government saw them as treasonous traitors. The boxer Muhammad Ali thought he was a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War, but many white Americans saw him as a coward hiding behind his newly adopted Islam. The only difference in these cases is the perspective of the interpreter. Pendleton's comment was brilliant then, and it resonates even more so in America post-September 11<sup>th</sup>. This recent event affects Noyce's 2002 film, as we

shall see below.

Having examined Graham Greene's 1955 novel *The Quiet American*, let us turn to the 1957 film that Joseph Mankiewicz made from it. Mankiewicz claimed that he "wanted to do a picture about one of those ice-blooded intellectuals whose intellectualism is really just a mask for completely irrational passion" and Fowler "was such a character" (Knight 27). We can already see that Mankiewicz's Fowler differs greatly from Greene's presentation. In a study of films made from the literature of Graham Greene, Quentin Falk offers brief praise of the film:

Viewed in isolation, it has to be said that Mankiewicz's film is rather a fine one. It is exciting, intelligent and well acted. Audie Murphy's brand of earnest all-Americanism is rather well suited to portraying Pyle even if his lack of acting experience makes him come off second best particularly in his scenes with Redgrave, who is admirable as the cynical and disillusioned Fowler. (139)

The only problem with Falk's commentary is that the film does not exist in a vacuum, isolated from the rest of the world. While Mankiewicz's film is a separate piece of art, it is art in relation to Greene's novel. The film is not a cinematic *dégagé* element like Fowler, and the film takes incredible liberties with Greene's original.

Contemporary reviewers of Mankiewicz's film are not always as gracious as Quentin Falk. *Newsweek's* unsigned review with the headline "Loser on Points" from February of 1958 calls *The Quiet American* "a bitter disappointment as a film" because it changed Greene's "body blows at the American body politic into light jabs" (107). The review also comments that Pyle is "dully played by Audie Murphy" (107). *Time* concurs in its unsigned review arguing that Mankiewicz's changed ending of the film is a "letdown" that sugar coats a bitter pill for some Americans to swallow (103). This changed ending causes "a ridiculous plot switch," according

to Robert Hatch (216), and T. Lanina argues that the ending alters Greene's political agenda (192). Charlotte Bilkey Speicher much more boldly attacks Mankiewicz's film condemning it as "oversimplified" and "disappointing" (588).

However, not every contemporary review of Mankiewicz's film is negative. The Catholic magazine *Commonweal*'s reviewer Philip Hartung actually likes the film.<sup>20</sup> He praises Michael Redgrave's superb acting, commends Audie Murphy for radiating good will as Pyle, and calls Giorgia Moll lovely for her portrayal of Phuong. Hartung makes little mention of the film's changed ending other than to say that the director "lessened its bite" (542). Arthur Knight in the *Saturday Review* also appreciates the film for Mankiewicz's "pruning away" Greene's anti-American content (27).

Pauline Kael also has good words to say about the film. She acknowledges that it was both a commercial and artistic failure, "but its theme and principle characters are of such immediacy and interest that you may find it far more absorbing than successful movies with a more conventional subject matter" (336). Since the film's theme and its characters have their ultimate source in Graham Greene, this praise should go to him rather than Mankiewicz. Kael also notes the "offending compromises of the last reel" (336), meaning the complete reversal of Greene's original ending.

Greene himself did not like Mankiewicz's film. The director attached a written prologue and conclusion filled with political propaganda in which he states that Vietnam "belongs" to the French and thanks the "chosen" South Vietnamese government and people for their gracious cooperation in making the film. Following the film's Washington, D.C. premier, which two Russian critics term "pompous" (Lanina 192 and Eishiskina 164), Greene supposedly

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<sup>20</sup> In an interesting reversal, Barry Hillenbrand does not embrace the 2002 film version in another *Commonweal* review because he finds it lacking in several areas. He does, however, praise Sir Michael Caine's acting ability (21-22).

commented publicly that “when I was writing *The Quiet American*, it did not occur to my mind that this could be a source of profit for one of the most dishonest governments in South-East Asia” (Lanina 192 and Eishiskina 164). The Russian critics claim that the proceeds from film premier were collected and sent to support the South Vietnamese government.<sup>21</sup>

Just as *The Third Man* opens and closes with Lime’s funeral, Mankiewicz’s film of *The Quiet American* has as its first and last scene the celebration of Chinese New Year in 1952. The camera follows a paper dragon’s head floating in the water. We hear the noise and festive celebrations of the holiday. The camera continues to follow the dragon’s head until we see the reaction of a young Vietnamese upon seeing Pyle’s dead body in the river. At this point, the soundtrack erupts in a raucous din calling attention to the shock of seeing the lifeless American. In this regard, the director successfully conveys his viewpoint in an easy to understand fashion. By contrast, Noyce’s new version begins in a much quieter, more sombre manner. Michael Caine as Fowler provides a soft voice over as the camera shows small boats on the water. When Noyce focuses on the body, there is almost no sound at all as if murder is an expected occurrence in Saigon. This, too, is an effective scene, but each director conveys a different tone with the combination of sight and sound.

Michael Redgrave in the earlier version and Michael Caine in the most recent version portray Fowler excellently. Redgrave plays Fowler as cynical and aggressive, prone to anger. He paces around in scenes and moves almost constantly. Just as Noyce’s opening is quieter than Mankiewicz’s, so too is Michael Caine’s portrayal of Fowler. In the recent film, Fowler sits more patiently and calmly during scenes as if he really is an innocent observer of action rather than a participant in it. The two actors also behave quite differently in their relationships with

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<sup>21</sup> Only the two above-mentioned Russian critics provide this information, but they do not document their original source. Greene did travel to Russia and may have made these statements that appeared in the Russian press, but so far no Western critic, British, American, or otherwise, has picked up on Greene’s statements.

Phuong. Mankiewicz has his Phuong drink milk shakes as an adolescent girl might. She does not understand concepts such as “the future” or “Third Force.” Thus, Redgrave as Fowler treats her in a condescending manner. Caine’s acting shows a much more affectionate side of Fowler even if Phuong is no equal in the more recent film either. Another difference lies in the responses each actor has to his character’s loss of Phuong. Noyce has his Fowler go to the American legation to confront Pyle. When Fowler cannot gain access to Pyle, he storms out of the office and into the lavatory. Caine does a marvelous job in this bathroom scene. His Fowler locks himself into a stall and weeps loudly. In a scene like this and others, Caine conveys the great sadness that Fowler battles over losing the woman he loves and needs very much in his life.

Giorgia Moll plays Phuong in the first film version of *The Quiet American*. Mankiewicz casts a European actress in the role of Fowler’s Vietnamese mistress. In today’s world, such a casting decision seems like racism, but it was not uncommon in American films of the 1950s for Westerners to play the roles of non-Westerners and speak heavily accented English. Moll’s Phuong behaves in a capricious fashion like a Western woman. Phillip Noyce casts Vietnamese newcomer Do Thi Hai Yen as Phuong. She had to learn English in order to play this role. Like so much of Noyce’s film, this casting decision works effectively because it agrees with Greene’s intentions in the novel. Yen even gets to put her skills in traditional Vietnamese dance to use in the film. She looks Vietnamese, sounds Vietnamese, and behaves submissively as is generally expected from an Asian woman. Thus, her acting provides more authenticity to Noyce’s work.

The role of Vigot also varies slightly in both films. Claude Dauphin plays the French police inspector in Mankiewicz’s version of the film. Like much of the American film version, this Vigot is also loud and blustery at times. He seems always to be around interrogating Fowler, pushing and prodding with question after question. Rade Sherbedgia’s 2002 portrayal is much

more subtle and charismatic. His Vigot seems tired and possibly even bored with the entire situation in Indo-China. He quietly observes the events. One brilliant example comes early in Noyce's film. Fowler, Pyle, and Phuong are having dinner in a restaurant. While Pyle and Phuong are dancing, Fowler gets a drink at the bar. Just over his shoulder, Vigot sits and watches. Thus, Sherbedgia's Vigot knows the possible motive of jealousy behind Fowler's involvement in Pyle's death. It is a subtle piece of acting and filmmaking, but an effective one, nonetheless.

One similarity with both films is the good manners displayed by Pyle, especially early in the story. Audie Murphy and Brendan Fraser play the quiet American in the 1957 and 2002 films, respectively. Both rise to their feet when Phuong enters a scene. They hold her chair for her and behave like proper young gentlemen. It would not be taking things too far to even describe their behavior as noble, courtly, or chivalric. Each actor portrays this aspect of Pyle's character clearly and convincingly. Murphy's character shows a greater deal of moral contempt and scorn for Fowler when the Englishman lies about a letter he has received from his wife. Fowler has asked for a divorce, and his wife initially refuses. Nevertheless, he tells Phuong that she has agreed. When the lie is revealed, Murphy's Pyle reproaches Fowler vigorously. This behavior fits in well with Mankiewicz's design to have Pyle be the good guy and Fowler play the role of villain.

The films have their greatest differences in the final third of the action. Mankiewicz rewrote the end of Graham Greene's novel, and the changes completely alter the ending of the film. The bombing scenes in the city square in front of the Continental Palace Hotel galvanize Fowler's dissatisfaction with the quiet American. Noyce does an excellent job in setting up the scene. Three times already in the Australian's film has the camera shown Fowler sitting on the



patio of the Continental watching the activities in the city square. The noise of people, cars, commerce, and the general hustle and bustle of the city have filled the soundtrack in the earlier scenes. In this fourth and final scene at the Continental, the city square is strangely quiet and subdued. It is at this point of placid stillness that a horrific explosion rips through the streets as a car bomb goes off.

Mankiewicz shows little of the bomb's destruction in terms of mangled bodies and bloodshed because censors would allow little of this in the 1950s. Pyle arrives on the scene with American medical teams to help the victims. On the contrary, Phillip Noyce's camera lingers on the gruesome horror of the deaths of innocent civilians, especially women and children. By doing so, he reveals to viewers the extent of the damage caused by plastic explosives in the hands of wrongdoers. Thus, Noyce argues convincingly that Pyle, who seemed to be such a nice, innocent young man, is really to blame for such unnecessary violence in the name of democracy. Mankiewicz's Pyle claims to have had no knowledge of the bombing or any involvement with General Thé. He claims to be completely innocent. Noyce's much more faithful adaptation handles the scene differently. Pyle appears as if on cue just after the bombing and directs an American photographer to take close-up pictures of the mangled, bloody bodies rather than helping anyone who has been wounded. This Pyle planned the bombing and knew exactly when and where it would occur; that is why he arrives on the scene so quickly. Noyce even adds something to the scene not originally in Greene's novel to accentuate unequivocally Pyle's involvement in the bombing. Pyle, who earlier said he did not speak Vietnamese at all, suddenly speaks forceful, convincing, complete sentences in Vietnamese to a policeman who tries to prevent the photographer from shooting the carnage. This small change removes any ambiguity about Pyle from Noyce's film and convinces the viewers of Pyle's deadly involvement.

Following the bombing, Fowler becomes convinced to help the Communists kill Pyle. Both directors handle this situation and its aftereffects differently. In Greene's novel, Fowler invites Pyle to his apartment to discuss the day's events. When confronted, Pyle reveals that he provided General Thé with the plastic explosive diolacton and the technology required to make the bombs. Pyle then reveals his displeasure with Thé and the death of innocents. Nevertheless, Pyle is willing to chalk them up to being victims in the fight for democracy. He is not horrified by their death because he claims that in the bigger picture freedom for Vietnam is more important than these individuals. Noyce's film follows the novel faithfully, but Mankiewicz completely changes it.

In all three versions, Communists approach Fowler and try to get his help in an attempt on Pyle's life. The Communists ask Fowler to signal his participation in the plot against Pyle by opening a book in front of the window. Greene emphasizes Fowler's pity, but Mankiewicz focuses instead on his jealousy. In the early film, Fowler reads *Othello* while standing in the window as a signal to the Communist agent. Mankiewicz's motivation for such a change lies in his dislike of Greene's original work. The American director cannot stand an American being the villain, so he changes the story to suit his own agenda. Greene had Fowler reading a poem by Arthur Clough that makes no reference to jealousy at all. Thus, Mankiewicz indicates that Fowler's jealousy about losing Phuong motivates his action. Such a simplification greatly reduces the complex situation to one of a much more basic nature. Instead of Fowler weighing the lives of dozens of innocent women and children and the potential for greater civilian deaths caused by Pyle's bombs, Mankiewicz's Fowler acts only because he has lost Phuong. This might be a small part of Fowler's motivation in the novel, but it is only in the back of Fowler's mind from what we know of human psychology and not something revealed openly by either

Fowler or Greene. We must read jealousy into Fowler's character in the book as opposed to having it revealed to us in the film. Noyce wisely keeps the poem by Arthur Clough.

Another ill-advised change that Mankiewicz makes occurs in the final scenes between Fowler and Vigot and between Fowler and Phuong. Mankiewicz's Vigot tells Fowler that he has been duped by the Communists into joining the plot to kill Pyle. This Vigot completely exonerates the American from any involvement in the bombing. When Fowler protests about the chemical diolacton, Vigot says that it is not a plastic explosive at all. Instead, the Communists have lied again to Fowler. The only problem with this huge change in the film is that in reality diolacton is indeed a milk-based plastic used in the production of plastic explosives. Mankiewicz seems to have ignored this fact in order to spearhead his pro-American agenda. Now that Pyle is dead, Mankiewicz's Phuong tells Fowler that she would rather be a dancing partner in a nightclub than be with the reporter. Like Anna in *The Third Man* who remained faithful to the dead Lime rather than go off with the living Martins, Phuong remains faithful to the dead Pyle's memory instead of returning to Fowler.

Phillip Noyce follows Graham Greene's original intent thereby producing a much more faithful and ultimately appealing work of cinema. Vigot in the more recent film understands Pyle's participation in the terrorist activity of General Thé. Thus, there is nothing about Fowler being duped in Noyce's film. Here Vigot quietly accepts the death of Pyle as if it were inevitable. Nor does Vigot openly condemn Fowler for his involvement in the affair. Diolacton remains an explosive used by Pyle's Third Force as supplied by the American government. Phuong returns to Fowler in the end of the novel and also in Noyce's film. Fowler's wife also agrees to a divorce clearing the way for Fowler and Phuong to be married. Thus, there is a happy ending of sorts. This ending is tempered, however, by Fowler's feelings of guilt as

revealed in the novel's last line: "Everything had gone right with me since he had died, but how I wished there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry" (189). Caine speaks something similar to Phuong in his role as Fowler. He tells her that he wants to apologize but never explains what for. She tells him that he need not say he is sorry to her. Unknowingly, she absolves him of any wrongdoing. This addition by Noyce rings of the Catholic sacrament of confession and repentance, and it certainly works given Greene's own Catholicism.

Phillip Noyce's 2002 version of *The Quiet American* received much more critical acclaim than Mankiewicz's 1957 film. Noyce filmed for ten weeks in 2001 and showed a test screening to an audience on 10 September 2001 with good response. The terrorist attacks of September 11 changed the political climate in America, and Miramax Pictures' President Harvey Weinstein shelved the film for a year because it did not seem to be the proper time to release a film that questions American foreign policy. Sir Michael Caine stars as Fowler and was convinced that the film would be a hit. He persuaded Weinstein to open the film at the end of 2002 so that it might be considered for that year's Academy Awards. Caine was certainly right as he garnered a Best Actor nomination. In a November interview in the *New York Times* just before the film's release, Caine tries to avoid political controversy that the film might be perceived as anti-American. He says that the film is not anti-American; instead it is "anti the Americans who got the country involved in the Vietnam War" (Lyman 5). In another interview, Caine says, "I wouldn't make an anti-American movie—I'm one of the most pro-American foreigners I know [...] I love America and Americans" (Weiner 6). This Englishman's words certainly range true with audiences and critics who praise his work in *The Quiet American*.

As good as Noyce's location shooting and Do Thi Hai Yen's acting, the success of the film rests with Michael Caine's genius as an actor, and contemporary film reviews recognize

this. Writing on 22 November 2002, the day of the film's American debut, Stephen Holden praises Caine's performance as Fowler in *The New York Times*. "Slipping into his skin with effortless grace, this great English actor gives a performance of astonishing understatement whose tone wavers delicately between irony and sadness" (E14). Holden, like many critics of the novel, recognizes that *The Quiet American* is not simply a political story. He calls the film "a superb job of evoking the psychological world of Graham Greene in which the truth of any situation tends to be hidden and riddled with ambiguities" (E14). Such commentary is right on target, as I have argued throughout this study. *The Quiet American* is an examination of ambiguity. Kenneth Turan's same day review in the *Los Angeles Times* demonstrates that reviewers on both the east and west coast agree that *The Quiet American* succeeds on the screen. He praises Noyce's work as "a graceful, contemplative film" (E8). Turan also compliments Brendan Fraser as Pyle and Do Thi Hai Yen as Phuong but recognizes that the film ultimately triumphs because of Caine, "who gives one of the great inescapable performances in a career filled with them," a performance he also calls "intricate without seeming to be, a nuanced marvel of the actor's craft" (E8).

Shortly thereafter, weekly and monthly publications praised the film. The review for the important film journal *Sight and Sound* takes great delight in Caine's portrayal of Fowler: "With an attitude of weary detachment etched on his face, Fowler remains throughout a conflicted, ambiguous figure—an impressively controlled study in moral greys by Caine" (58). Ambiguity and shades of grey are Graham Greene's hallmarks. Richard Corliss in *Time* recommends the film based on Caine's bold yet subtle acting ability (86). Jeremy Treglown also praises the film in his review for the *Times Literary Supplement* making the film's accolades international. He enjoys both Caine and Fraser in their roles and points out Noyce's directorial ability as well for

making “the best of a Greene story since Carol Reed’s *The Third Man* [...] and the best about Vietnam since *Apocalypse Now* (18). Some grand praise on both counts, indeed.

However, not every critic praises Noyce’s film. Two, in particular, strongly criticize the most recent cinematic version of *The Quiet American*. Pico Iyer prefers Greene’s book to the film, but such a judgment is in keeping with a review for *The New York Review of Books*. What is interesting is that Iyer faults the acting of Michael Caine whom other critics praise so highly. Iyer writes, “He seems too vulnerable and broken from the beginning [...] he looks lost and incongruous next to his twenty-year-old Vietnamese mistress Phuong” (19). While numerous Russian critics praise the novel, Olga Shumyatskaya calls the recent film “half-hearted and boring” in a review for *Moscow News* (11). She, too, prefers the book as having much more passion and irony than the film treatment.

Phillip Noyce does add things to Greene’s novel but often with excellent results. One example is the newspaper montage with which the film ends. Noyce presents viewers with newspaper reports about the escalation of American involvement in Vietnam through the 1950s and 1960s. As the war gets bigger, so does Fowler’s reputation and involvement. The articles begin with the by-line “by our correspondent” on pages in the middle of the *Times*, then become stories “by Thomas Fowler” still inside the cover, and finally conclude with front-page headlines and reports written by Fowler. The final newspaper shows a Fowler report accompanied by a picture of a wounded American soldier whose head is bandaged. Only one eye remains open-- Noyce’s comment on Americans’ growing disillusionment with the Vietnam War. Brian Johnson greatly appreciates Noyce’s work here referring to both U.S. involvement in Vietnam and in the recent Iraq War that has occurred since the film was released (45).

Not every change is terrific. Noyce simplifies some matters. Greene has three characters—Heng a Communist agent, Dominguez as Fowler’s assistant, and Mr. Chou a Chinese junk dealer and go-between for the two. Noyce combines them into one character Hinh who is both Fowler’s assistant and a Communist agent. Noyce has only the big bomb in the square whereas Greene and Mankiewicz have the first small bicycle pump bombing followed by the much larger bombing in the square. By having Pyle speak fluent Vietnamese after the bombing, Noyce again paints too clear a picture of what Greene only implies and suggests. If one has not read Greene’s novel, then Noyce’s alterations go smoothly. For those who see the film after reading the novel, these changes may seem jarring and reductive.

Having examined both *The Quiet American* and *The Third Man* we can see many similarities. Both have four principle characters—three in a love triangle and a detective. Anna Schmidt stands as a link between Martins and Lime, while Calloway is the police investigator. While Lime will gladly give up Anna for his own freedom, Fowler works actively to regain his former lover. Fowler and Pyle both want Phuong, and Vigot tries to unearth the facts about Pyle’s death. *The Quiet American* is also a detective story that expresses “the outrageous truth about the twentieth century, that it is a slide into savagery” (Gaston 96). The brilliant part of this detective story is that Fowler, the central character, plays the roles of narrator, detective, and criminal.<sup>22</sup> Vigot asks the questions, but Fowler tells the story, internally agonises over his role in it, and finds himself guilty of the crime. He discovers himself at the very center of this thrilling who-done-it (96). During this process, Fowler undergoes some serious psychological and spiritual introspection, but Gaston reverts to religion by arguing that the “someone” of Fowler’s last lines quoted above must be God (105-106).

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<sup>22</sup> Two excellent pieces of structural criticism that focus on the detective/spy story as a genre are Chace’s “Spies and God’s Spies” and Diemert’s *Graham Greene’s Thrillers and the 1930s*.

Greene was attacked for being anti-American in *The Quiet American*, but he was conscious enough of what could have been perceived as anti-Americanism in the film *The Third Man*. With an American Orson Welles as the villain Harry Lime, Greene changed his American accomplice Cooler into the Romanian Popescu in order not to offend audiences. As I have argued, Fowler can be interpreted as a negative caricature of an uninvolved British isolationist. The English of recent years have staunchly tried to preserve their individuality and cultural identity by opposing political decisions made by European Union members. Nevertheless, no British critic of the novel or films protests that any of their depictions of Fowler is anti-British. Only Americans complain.

Another commonality between *The Quiet American* and *The Third Man* involves the setting. Some critics have called the settings of Greene's works "Greenland." It is a strange, dark place that can be best described as seedy. Whether in urban Vienna or tropical Indo-China, the seediness of the setting demonstrates the "rot and squalor" of "our maladjustment and the deterioration of our civilization" (Gaston 94). Another interesting link between Rollo Martins of *The Third Man* and Thomas Fowler of *The Quiet American* comes out of this idea of involvement. Martins becomes involved very quickly and actively in the search for the truth about Harry Lime's death. He becomes hesitant, however, to trap his friend once he finds out that Lime still lives. Only after seeing the poor children suffering in the hospital does Martins become involved in the capture of Lime. The friendship that exists between the two of them delays Martins from betraying Lime. Nevertheless, the social and political evil of the penicillin racket and the deaths of women and children must be stopped (Wolfe 125). Martins, after killing Lime, says in *The Third Man*, "I never shall" forget it (155). The same is true for Fowler and Pyle. Fowler faces the greater complication knowing that Pyle has saved his life that night on



the road to Saigon. It would be ingratitude, to say the very least, to kill one's savior. Fowler wishes he could say he was sorry. Both men struggle with the guilt of their actions, but both realize that involvement and action are required in order to save civilization (McDonald 206).<sup>23</sup>

A final linkage between the two literary works is the dichotomy of the two main characters in each work. Lime and Martins form a pair as the previous chapter demonstrated. Fowler and Pyle are also flawed halves of a much more perfect whole. Both sets of men from each novel lack the strong religious qualities of Greene's Catholic novels. Lionel Stevenson sees the lack of spiritual perception on the part of Pyle and Fowler as a weakness (343). Nevertheless, Pyle's courage minus his ignorance would suit a person well. Fowler's moral sensibilities without his Hamlet-like indecisiveness would also be a good feature (Allot 206). A character with physical and moral strength is certainly needed in *The Quiet American* and in our own modern day. Greene will not allow a simple happy ending, however. Thus, he presents fractured, fragmented characters who muddle their way through life as best as they can. Neither individual is perfect or even close to it.

Just as Carol Reed shot *The Third Man* on location, both Joseph Mankiewicz and Phillip Noyce brought their film crews to Vietnam for *The Quiet American*. Seth Mydans praises Noyce's use of original locations. He filmed in the actual Rue Catinat and the rice fields of Ninh Binh where the nighttime battle scene on the road to Saigon actually occurred. Mydans also interviewed Vietnamese ballerina-turned-actress Do Thi Hai Yen who plays Phuong. Commenting on her character, Yen says, "I think she is stronger than the two men who are always by her side [...] As a character, Phuong is very reserved and quiet. But no matter what situation she meets, she always finds a way to regain stability and to succeed. In a way, all

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<sup>23</sup> J.P. Kulshrestha makes a similar argument for pity and involvement (208).

Vietnamese are like that and the country is like that” (55). With these words, Yen provides more insight and critical commentary than Greene or any scholar.

Good criticism is balanced criticism with a diverse approach, and Robert Pendleton certainly blends various critical theories smoothly in interpreting Greene’s novels in general, and *The Quiet American* in particular. Pendleton argues that this novel “marks the beginning of Greene’s mature phase, where politics, human interiority, and formulaic thriller plots are played against each other in more complex and integrated fictions” (87). In order to justify such an opinion, Pendleton investigates the formulaic detective story structure of the early entertainments, the religion of the Catholic novels, the psychologically real characters and the sociopolitical elements in both types of fiction. He even discusses the theme of faith and betrayal in several Greene works as well as the imperial setting of *The Quiet American* without charging Greene with imperialism. He sees Greene’s characters as having highly interior lives within political structures (90). Greene is such a dynamic and important novelist and *The Quiet American* is so good because it has a political theme and binds “together the two dissociated detours—towards the thriller and towards the interior Catholic narrative of faith and betrayal—which have occupied him during the earlier part of his narrative *opus*” (94). By resynthesising and reintegrating these disparate narrative elements, Greene produced a masterpiece. By synthesising and integrating disparate critical theories, one produces an excellent close literary reading of the masterpiece.

Of the three films, Carol Reed’s *The Third Man* is an accepted masterpiece. In fact, the film receives more critical commentary than the print version. Almost no critical discussion of *The Third Man* focuses only on the text; instead, critics use the text in conjunction with the film. Enough time has passed for us to call Mankiewicz’s film an artistic failure. While Noyce’s film

has been well received for many reasons, especially Michael Caine's performance, it is still too early to tell if it will stand the test of time as the novel has. My study is only a preliminary step in arguing for the film's greatness. This thesis is also the first lengthy treatment of *The Quiet American* and *The Third Man* both in print and on the screen and also fulfills the same role in analyzing the two films versions of *The Quiet American*.

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