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European Duplicity and an Occidental Passion:  
Graham Greene and the Limits of Cultural Translation

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A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award  
of the degree of Master of Arts in English Language, Literature and Modernity.

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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## **European Duplicity and an Occidental Passion:**

### **Graham Greene and the Limits of Cultural Translation**

#### Abstract

Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* has most frequently been read in terms of its political prescience, the ethical conundrums it stages, and as a turn away from the author's "Catholic" novels. I suggest an exploration of the text that pulls aspects of the novel that have previously been unaddressed into focus. With an eye to the historical situation in which the novel is set, and into which it emerges, I examine the text's negotiation of the problems of communication and communicability across different languages and cultures. I suggest Greene as, in this sense, occupied with many of the same concerns about the limits of representation of personal experience as are found in the "Modernist" movement. This reading of the text also takes into account an historically contextualised overview of the various colonial interests the novel presents – those of the "old colonial peoples" of Europe as opposed to the new American empire. In this light, I am interested in the text's depiction of the meeting of characters of different cultural origins – specifically the encounter of the European and the American, and the "Westerner" and the "Oriental" – in order to investigate the pitfalls of communication in different Englishes, and altogether different languages. This entails a particular focus on questions of translation. How much can figures in the fiction who must translate themselves from disparate cultural origins grant each other, and how is this complicated by the inadequacy of language to communicate effectively, and particular problems incumbent on those who attempt communication in a language other than their mother tongue? After assessing the potential of an Orientalist critique of the novel, I posit a reading of the "Oriental"'s silence in the text as empowering, and perhaps as a valuable alternative to language, which in turn permits Greene's novel to negotiate some of the problems it presents vis-à-vis cross-cultural communication and communicability.

## Introduction

### Situating Greene's Literature

A story has no beginning or end; arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead. (*The End of the Affair*, 1951)

Graham Greene is hardly a writer whom one associates with the high Modernism of Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster, unless in order to illustrate a disjuncture, a definition in terms of what each is not. Yet some scholars have posited him as a late Modernist both thematically, and, to some extent, in style.<sup>1</sup> Though critics vary widely on the precise dates that constitute the highly contestable period of “Modernism,” ranging from Peter Faulkner’s 1910 – 30, or Bradbury and MacFarlane’s 1890 – 1930, the most generous do not place it any later than 1946.<sup>2</sup> As such, even Greene’s earliest writing – his first novel *The Man Within* was published in 1929, though this was by no means his first writing endeavour – is only just contemporary with the movement, though he was certainly conscious of its proponents and primary concerns. Greene himself “rejected the Modernism of his fellow British novelists.”<sup>3</sup> In *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays* he writes, “Of course I should be interested to hear that a new novel by Mr E.M. Forster was going to appear this spring, but I could never compare that mild expectation of civilised pleasure with the missed heartbeat...[elicited] by Rider Haggard;”<sup>4</sup> in 1967 he writes in a letter to his long-term lover Catherine Walston of Joyce’s *Ulysses* as “a big bore...one of the most overrated classics;”<sup>5</sup> and in a 1980 letter to John Michael Gibson, co-author of *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle*, he says of Doyle, “I can reread him as I find myself unable to reread Virginia Woolf and Forster, but then I am not a literary man.”<sup>6</sup> He indicates a valorising of that “missed heartbeat” over the muted “civilised pleasure” that will become apparent in his own creative choices. Yet Greene is nevertheless, as I will argue in this dissertation, occupied with many of the anxieties on

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<sup>1</sup> Such as K.M. Radell, *Affirmation in a Moral Wasteland: A Comparison of Ford Maddox Ford and Graham Greene*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1987) and W.A. Kort, *Place and Space in Modern Fiction*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> P. Williams, “‘Simultaneous Uncontemporaneities’: Theorising Modernism and Empire”, (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>3</sup> R. Creese, “Objects in Novels and the Fringe of Cultures: Graham Greene and Alain Robbe-Grillet”, *Comparative Literature*, (39:1, Winter 1997), 58.

<sup>4</sup> G. Greene, *The Lost Childhood & Other Essays*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1951), 13.

<sup>5</sup> R. Greene, (ed.), *Graham Greene: A Life in Letters*, (London: Abacus, 2008), 288.

<sup>6</sup> Greene, *A Life in Letters*, 369

which Modernism pivots. As Brian Diemert suggests, “[j]ust as novels by Woolf, Lawrence, Joyce, and others express the modernists’ despair and cynicism regarding religion, philosophy, Empire, and other issues, so does popular fiction of the sort Greene wrote – with the added twist that Greene’s fiction also challenges modernist elitism.”<sup>7</sup> Particularly, I am here concerned with the intersection of these “Modernist” anxieties with an historically- and postcolonially-situated investigation into the limits of communication and cultural translatability in Greene’s 1955 novel *The Quiet American*.

*The Quiet American* with its crisp, journalistic style offers scant similarity to the “emphasis on form and formal innovation and modification”<sup>8</sup> characteristic of Modernism, and sits much more comfortably alongside the re-emergence of realism that accompanied the rise of cinema from the 1930s; as Skerrett notes “the intense visuality of the Greene prose style owes something to the movies.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Greene himself claimed that *The Quiet American* contained “more direct reportage than any other novel [he had] written.”<sup>10</sup> Modernism has in the past often been criticised for its ostensibly apolitical nature and an assumed complicity with Empire; yet revisionist critics of the movement such as Fredric Jameson, Michael Moses and Patrick Williams point to the complex and interlaced relationship of Modernism and the imperial project and see the movement as “functioning not as a sign of imperial power or confidence, but as a sign of the *loss* of that confidence.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Modernism seems to signal a loss of confidence in a great many things whose power and permanence had previously seemed unassailable; offering a “critical voice whose dissonant strains within European culture are unified by a deep suspicion of precisely those same projected narratives of Western superiority, rationalism, and progress.”<sup>12</sup> For Radell, Greene’s fiction likewise signals a real awareness of the “isolation, the corruption, an acutely realized sense of the evil, and ugliness of modern life,”<sup>13</sup> which allows him to inhabit that “same moral topography that

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<sup>7</sup> As put by L.J. Favor, “Thrillers in the Canon: Diemert on Graham Greene and Modernism”, *Papers on Language and Literature*, (34:4, Fall 1998), 438.

<sup>8</sup> F. Jameson, “Modernism and Imperialism” in *The Modernist Papers*, (London & New York: Verso, 2007), 153.

<sup>9</sup> J.T. Skerrett Jr., “Graham Greene at the Movies: A Novelist’s Experience with the Film”, *Literature Film Quarterly*, (2:4, Fall 1974), 294.

<sup>10</sup> G. Greene, *Ways of Escape*, (London: Bodley Head, 1980), 164f.

<sup>11</sup> Williams, “Simultaneous Uncontemporaneities”, 17.

<sup>12</sup> J. Esty, “Virginia Woolf’s Colony and the Adolescence of Modern Fiction”, in R. Begam & M.V. Moses (eds.), *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899 – 1939*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007). 70

<sup>13</sup> Radell, *Affirmation in a Moral Wasteland*, 135.

we find in T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland*."<sup>14</sup> Greene's *The Quiet American* similarly indicates a "deep suspicion," perhaps most clearly crystallised in the stony cynicism of its narrator Fowler. More than that, as I will argue, it reveals a profound uncertainty, primarily in its content rather than exclusively in its style, about the communicability of personal experience; an uncertainty that permeates Modernist stylistic experimentation. As, for instance, takes centre stage in E.M. Forster's *Howard's End* (1910): Forster entreats his readers, and perhaps his characters, again and again: "only connect."<sup>15</sup> In his last and perhaps most well-known novel *A Passage to India*, published some fourteen years later in 1924, this appeal seems to have shifted, transplanted into the colonial domain, and the novel rather offers a tentative: can we connect? This is the question which, I would posit, lies at the heart of Forster's novel; and it is one which can be used to cast Greene's problematics of communicability in *The Quiet American* into the light.

Rather than the ornate stylings of stream of consciousness writing characteristic of the larger portion of Modernist undertakings, however, Greene offers something more like George Orwell's "prose like a window pane;"<sup>16</sup> opting, in Roger Sharrock's words, for a kind of "documentation of real life in fiction...[which is] partly a matter of the relationship between journalism and fiction."<sup>17</sup> So while Greene's tackling of the problems of modern existence does not necessarily take the form of the overt stylistic innovation of Forster and Joyce, a concern for the "inability for human constructions to contain or to account for human experience"<sup>18</sup> is nevertheless a key element in his narratives. For Kort, these "human constructions" are constituted by institutions such as the Catholic Church, and Greene in his fiction is occupied with exploring how these prove inadequate to the task of "accounting for human experience." Yet it can also be read as suggesting in concrete terms the problems of form that occupied Modernists, namely the inadequacy of human linguistic constructions to communicate individual experience. Moreover, Kehinde posits that Greene's novels in fact "reflect a constant search for new novelistic modes of expression capable of visualizing the

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<sup>14</sup> Radell, *Affirmation in a Moral Wasteland*, 211.

<sup>15</sup> E.M. Forster, *Howards End*, (Harmondsworth, Middelsex: Allen Lane Penguin Books, 1941).

<sup>16</sup> G. Orwell, "Why I Write" in *Facing Unpleasant Facts: Narrative Essays*, (Orlando: Harcourt, 2008), 231.

<sup>17</sup> R. Sharrock, *Saints, Sinners and Comedians: The Novels of Graham Greene*, (Kent: Burns & Oates, 1984), 198.

<sup>18</sup> Kort, *Place and Space*, 90.

disillusionment and malaise of the modern world;”<sup>19</sup> while Emilie C. Murray has suggested that there is perhaps more in Greene of formal innovation than is immediately obvious, as “even while practicing the traditional forms of the novel, Greene is slowly destroying the romantic ideal of the hero from within.”<sup>20</sup> In *The Quiet American*, furthermore, Greene explicitly displays a loss of faith in the righteousness of Empire, offering his own “dissonant strain” to the illusion of progress and civilisation classically espoused by colonial powers, and here in the new guise of the American empire.

Greene explores this without any of the elitism associated with Modernism, and crafts a literature that is profoundly readable. This is valuable because it allows his writing to be accessible, and thus accessed by an enormous readership. In an interview with Anthony Burgess Greene states, “I started off with the desire to use language experimentally. Then I saw that the right way was the way of simplicity. Straight sentences, no involutions, no ambiguities.”<sup>21</sup> Though it might go too far to suggest a complete lack of ambiguity in his fiction, the desire for plain truthfulness unmarred by overwritten literariness, which he also expresses in *Why Do I Write?*, is clear. Greene wants his reader to understand him, wants to convey his version of a truth, and this takes precedence over any elite, high literary aspirations. In *The Ministry of Fear* (1943), as noted by Rau, he writes with characteristic flippancy of the “‘Mothers of the Free Nations, a charitable organisation that serves as a cover-up for a group of fifth columnists, chiefly made up of artists and intellectuals’ – Greene’s jibe at Bloomsbury elitism.”<sup>22</sup>

His refusal of elitism is further underpinned by his own separation of his work into “novels” and “entertainments.” Alley points out that “the latter was a critically disastrous label, for the ultimate effect of the word “entertainment” has been a widespread posture of critical unconcern,”<sup>23</sup> though it seems likely that Greene would not have lost much sleep over it. It

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<sup>19</sup> A.Kehinde, “The Modern World through the Luminous Path of Prose Fiction: Reading Graham Greene’s *A Burnt-out Case* and *The Confidential Agent* as Dystopian Novels”, *Nebula*, (6:2, June 2009), 82.

<sup>20</sup> In Radell, *Affirmation in a Moral Wasteland*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Creese, “Objects in Novels”, 65.

<sup>22</sup> P. Rau, “The Common Frontier: Fictions of Alterity in Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day* and Graham Greene’s *The Ministry of Fear*”, *Literature and History*, (3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 14:1, 2005), 40.

<sup>23</sup> K.D. Alley, “*A Gun for Sale*: Graham Greene’s Reflection of Moral Chaos”, *Essays in Literature*, (5:2, Fall 1978), 175.

seems as though Greene might in fact have been playing with his readers in such distinction, clearly addressing “serious” concerns in his entertainments as well as his novels. In Steigman’s reading of the introductory letter of *The Quiet American* which encourages the reader to take the novel lightly and assume nothing drawn from life, the “allegory of reading *The Quiet American* is itself complicated by an author, famous for his serious fiction and for his ‘entertainments,’ who urges that this novel – one that critics insist is so clearly political – be read strictly for pleasure.”<sup>24</sup> Greene is arguably always muddying the waters of literary distinction, and in 1973 W.H. Auden even “credited [him] with inventing a ‘distinctive form,’ the allegorical thriller,”<sup>25</sup> which in turn grafts onto Greene’s reputation something of the legitimization of a high literature which he partially seems to have been at pains to resist. Finally, as Zadie Smith puts it, Greene’s idea of a writer “was of a working man with a pen. An unpretentious man, in and of the world, who wrote for readers and not critics, and produced as many words per day as a journalist.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> K. Steigman, “The Literal American: Rereading Graham Greene in an Age of Security”, *College Literature*, (39:1, Winter 2012), 14.

<sup>25</sup> Steigman, “The Literal American,” 9.

<sup>26</sup> Z. Smith, “Shades of Greene”, *The Guardian* 18 September 2004.  
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/sep/18/classics.grahamgreene>>

The Man Himself: Graham Greene in Context

Biographical information about Graham Greene ranges from the overly involved and hyper-sympathetic three-volume treatise by Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, to the wildly critical and ungenerous *Graham Greene: The Man Within* by Michael Sheldon, who begins, “[t]he young Graham Greene acquired a diverse experience of sin. He drank to excess, chased prostitutes, flirted with suicide, investigated whipping establishments, [and] volunteered to spy against his own country.”<sup>27</sup> Even more, perhaps, than is the case with most other writers, scholarship on Greene’s oeuvre is plagued by critics who find it necessary to draw simplistic and conclusive parallels between his life and his work. This is perhaps because, as Gordon Leah points out, “Greene’s life offers enormous scope for biographical detail – his manic-depressive temperament, his many love affairs, his conversion and adherence to Catholicism, his incessant travel to dangerous parts of the world and his secret service work.”<sup>28</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, however, a highly sceptical stance will be adopted vis-à-vis such reductive parallels, and focus will rather be placed on that which is evidenced in his writing (both fiction and non-fiction) in terms of literary inheritance and representational development. As, when discussing a writer, it is worth keeping in mind what has come before: to whom does Greene owe his understanding and appreciation of what the writer does or should do; how is this revealed in his literature, and how are these influences developed in his own voice?

Henry Graham Greene was born in 1904 in Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire near London and died at 86 in 1991 in Vevey, Switzerland. From an early age, he showed signs of what would later be diagnosed as manic depression, resulting in several suicide attempts. When he was sixteen, his parents sent him to undergo psychoanalytic treatment for his depression with Kenneth Richmond. During these six months in London, he was introduced to several writers, amongst them Walter de la Mare, and encouraged in his own writing. In 1922, he attended Balliol College, Oxford, where he read history and, in his own words to friend Evelyn Waugh, “lived in a general haze of drink.”<sup>29</sup> He married Vivienne (later Vivien) Dayrell-Browning in 1927, but their marriage effectively ended in 1939, Greene having engaged in

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<sup>27</sup> M. Sheldon, *Graham Greene: The Man Within*, (London: Heinemann, 1994), 1.

<sup>28</sup> G. Leah, “A Study in Greene: Graham Greene and the Art of the Novel. By Bernard Bergonzi”, *Heythrop Journal*, (51:1, January 2010), 160.

<sup>29</sup> Greene, *A Life in Letters*, 270.

multiple extramarital affairs. He did not enjoy immediate and easy success in his early career as an author, and he “wrote the first of his mature novels, *Stamboul Train*, with bankruptcy looming. When the book appeared at the end of 1932, it was a bestseller and established him as a bankable author.”<sup>30</sup> Throughout his career, he would work variously as editor, journalist, film critic and foreign correspondent. The coming of the war signaled the beginning of a serious affair with Dorothy Glover, a stage designer, but it was in 1946 when Greene met Catherine Walston, the American wife of Labour politician Harry Walston that the most tumultuous period of Greene’s romantic life began. It is this relationship which many critics have regarded as the inspiration for his 1951 novel *The End of the Affair*, which is dedicated “To C.” It eventually became clear that no happy ending could be hoped for with Catherine, and in 1959 Greene became involved with Yvonne Cloetta with whom he lived, for all intents and purposes, as husband and wife for the next thirty-two years. To a certain extent, Greene’s life reads like a novel he might have written. Ever adventurous of spirit, he did a great deal of travelling: in 1936 he went to Mexico; in 1941 his sister Elisabeth recruited him for MI6 and he was sent to Sierra Leone as an agent, in 1950 he visited Malaya, in the early 1950s he made several trips to Vietnam, in 1953 he reported on the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, in 1954 he visited Haiti for the first time, in early 1959 he journeyed to the Congo; not to mention his involvement in various political movements in Latin America and his time in the Soviet Union. In 1966 he moved to Antibes and spent much of the rest of his life in France. Toward the end of 1989 he was diagnosed with leukaemia, and the following summer he bought a flat in Vevey, where he lived out the rest of his days.<sup>31</sup>

After a first brief sojourn in Vietnam in January 1951 to visit his old friend Trevor Wilson, then British Consul in Hanoi, Greene was asked by *Life* to write a piece on the situation there. He would return for the next three winters, reporting variously for *The Sunday Times*, *Life* and *Paris Match*, and from these trips would emerge *The Quiet American*.<sup>32</sup> In a letter of February 1951 recording his first impressions of Indo-China, Greene calls it “a fascinating and interesting country,”<sup>33</sup> far warmer praise than he gives Malaya, which he had visited immediately before. Later, in the sort-of memoir of his later life, *Ways of Escape* (1980), he

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<sup>30</sup> Greene, *A Life in Letters*, xxii.

<sup>31</sup> See Greene, *A Life in Letters*.

<sup>32</sup> Greene, *A Life in Letters*, xxviii.

<sup>33</sup> Greene, *A Life in Letters*, 185.

says of the country, “It was quite by chance that I fell in love with Indo-China.”<sup>34</sup> A deep and abiding tenderness for the place is perhaps a sense that filters into his narrative about Vietnam more clearly and simply than other realities; a tenderness absent toward Mexico in *The Power and the Glory*, but perhaps complicatedly present toward Sierra Leone in *The Heart of the Matter*. In this regard, I would suggest that *The Quiet American* bears a certain resemblance to George Orwell’s early novel *Burmese Days* which offers a complex dynamic between person and place. Orwell’s mitigated affection for his setting filters through and into his protagonist Flory, and into a reader’s sense of the place generally, in a manner that resonates with the nuanced relationship between Greene, Fowler, Vietnam, and, to a certain extent, Phuong as an emanation of Vietnam. This is a comparison which will be addressed in greater detail later.

Greene is perhaps most renowned as a “Catholic writer,” his most well-known novels such as *The Power and the Glory* and *The Heart of the Matter* turning on his characters’ complex relationship to Catholicism, though this is a label he did not enjoy. He was also known for his frank treatment of sex and sexual themes, which sometimes caused him trouble. His biography of Lord Rochester was denied publication in the early 1930s because it was deemed too raunchy,<sup>35</sup> and in 1938 he was sued for libel by Shirley Temple and Twentieth Century Fox for a review he wrote about the film *Wee Willie Winkie* in which he accused the studio of “procuring” Temple “for immoral purposes” and suggested a “certain adroit coquetry which appealed to middle-aged men”<sup>36</sup> in the then ten-year-old Temple. But Greene is also regarded as one of the “most gifted and acclaimed novelists of the War/post-War era in Britain.”<sup>37</sup> For Rau, indeed, Greene is to be “primarily remembered for [his] evocative representation of the Blitz,”<sup>38</sup> such as in *The End of the Affair* where the turning point of the narrative comes as a result of an air raid. Greene appears in many ways to have spoken with great poignancy and effect to the problems of modern existence in time of war, as well as in its aftermath. *A Burnt Out Case*, for instance, for Kehinde “lends itself to modernist critical probing because it foregrounds confusion, disillusionment and despair. The novel is Greene’s

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<sup>34</sup> G. Greene, *Ways of Escape*, (London: Bodley Head, 1980), 154.

<sup>35</sup> Sheldon, *The Man Within*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Greene, *Ways of Escape*, 60.

<sup>37</sup> Kehinde, “The Modern World”, 82.

<sup>38</sup> Rau, “The Common Frontier”, 32.

stocktaking of the problems of the post-world war era;”<sup>39</sup> while Zadie Smith notes that “his characters radiate the ethical uncertainty and confusion that comes from living a war-without-end.”<sup>40</sup> His fiction is often steeped in a sense of political realities that allowed his writing to seem both accessible and relevant to a large readership. In Silverstein’s words, “[r]ather than offering a world of fantasy distinct from the reader’s everyday world, his works are set in a nightmare world where distinction between the probable and the improbable, the actual and the fantastical, and the expected and the absurd, become blurred and finally vanish – a world, in short, which reflects and runs parallel to ours.”<sup>41</sup> An awareness of the social and political conditions into which his writing was entering seems moreover to have percolated into his stylistic choices as he notes in *Reflections*, “the popular writer in war-time – or any period of social convulsion...knows how to speak to people who are not interested in aesthetic problems.”<sup>42</sup> Seen in this light then, a refusal of the elitist formal experimentation of Modernism is also, in Greene, a consciousness of what is wanted and appropriate in a “period of social convulsion” such as wartime.

Greene is frequently regarded as the literary heir to Henry James, about whom he wrote a fair amount of deeply admiring criticism, lauding his ability to convey a “sense of evil religious in its intensity”<sup>43</sup> and his “passionate distrust in human nature;”<sup>44</sup> and further signalling his influence and admiration in entitling a piece on James “The Lesson of the Master.” A number of critics suggest that that which Greene applauds in James can well be said of Greene himself, and certainly *The Quiet American* seems to reveal a “passionate distrust in human nature.” Indeed, these were even the grounds on which he founded some of his criticism of high Modernists, as Wendorf explicates,

...endorsing Mauriac and James because of their ‘religious sense’ and criticizing others like Woolf, E.M. Forster, and Somerset Maugham for their lack of it...His essays on James are particularly striking because they provide as much a window on Greene’s own aesthetic and moral preoccupations as they do on James’s...Greene’s

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<sup>39</sup> Kehinde, “The Modern World”, 92.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, “Shades of Greene”.

<sup>41</sup> M. Silverstein, “After the Fall: The World of Graham Greene’s Thrillers”, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, (22:1, Fall 1988), 27.

<sup>42</sup> G. Greene, *Reflections*, (London: Reinhardt in association with Viking, 1990), 94f.

<sup>43</sup> Greene, *Lost Childhood*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Greene, *Lost Childhood*, 21.

early critical essays foreground his coincident moral and aesthetic emphasis on human evil as the more compelling sign of mystery in fiction as well as life.<sup>45</sup>

For Radell, Greene's "depiction of evil takes on the intensity of James' depiction...in the brutal honesty of his realism,"<sup>46</sup> an observation that finds its embodiment in characters such as *Brighton Rock*'s Pinkie. Zadie Smith finds in Greene "a calibrated moral system, and this reminds us of the careful, judicious James of *The Europeans*, but what a different job it is to place your people in a battlefield instead of a drawing room!"<sup>47</sup> Here is an indication of Greene's treading in the footsteps of James, and yet also striking out on his own – a sense that will be developed in close analysis of *The Quiet American*. In the preface he wrote for *The Portrait of a Lady*, Greene says of James, "[i]t is true the innocent figure is nearly always American,...but the corrupted characters – the vehicles for a sense of evil unsurpassed by the theological novelists of our day... – are also American."<sup>48</sup> Though many of the similarities drawn between James and Greene ring true, close reading of *The Quiet American* will show that the representation of cultural stereotypes, and of Americans and Europeans specifically, constitute one facet in which the relationship between James and Greene is more complicated.

Another key antecedent was Joseph Conrad, whom Greene deliberately stopped reading for some years for fear that his influence would be too strong.<sup>49</sup> The powerful effect of Conrad on his writing is attested to by Greene in the autobiography of his early life *A Sort of Life* (1971). For Skerrett, in discussion of his first published novel *The Man Within*, the "explicit vividness of the descriptive details and the quality of the dialog bring Conrad to mind."<sup>50</sup> Smyer similarly points to this debt in Greene's writing on Africa, such as *Journey Without Maps* and *The Ministry of Fear*.<sup>51</sup> For Silverstein moreover, like "Conrad's *The Secret Agent* before them, Greene's thrillers represent a serious attempt to establish the spy novel as an

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<sup>45</sup> T.A. Wendorf, "Allegory in Postmodernity: Graham Greene's *The Captain and the Enemy*", *Christianity & Literature*, (50:4, Summer 2001), 660.

<sup>46</sup> Radell, *Affirmation in a Moral Wasteland*, 217.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, "Shades of Greene".

<sup>48</sup> Greene, *Lost Childhood*, 43.

<sup>49</sup> Wherein one might hear an echo of Wallace Stevens: "[I] have purposefully held off from reading highly mannered people like Eliot and Pound so that I should not absorb anything." In H. Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2011) 7.

<sup>50</sup> Skerrett, "Greene at the Movies", 295.

<sup>51</sup> R.I. Smyer, "The Tenth Man: Graham Greene's French Connection", *Essays in Literature*, (15:2, Fall 1988), 198.

appropriate vehicle for exploring the tensions, ambiguities, darkness and sense of alienation which characterize the experience of modernity in the twentieth century.”<sup>52</sup> The channels of influence here are thus both in terms of content and style. Even more interestingly, perhaps, Edward Said notes that, “*Nostronomo* offers a profoundly unforgiving view, and it has quite literally enabled the equally severe view of Western imperialist illusions in Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*.”<sup>53</sup> Yet when it comes to Conrad’s representation of the “other,” I will argue that Greene has moved, at least partially, in his own direction from this early influence, or as Harold Bloom might have it, has “misread” him successfully to “clear imaginative space”<sup>54</sup> for his own voice. How this is so will become clear in closer analysis of *The Quiet American*.

Close links have also been asserted between Greene and Ford Madox Ford,<sup>55</sup> of whom Greene also writes with sincere admiration in *The Lost Childhood* claiming that some of his works “stand as high as any fiction written since the death of James.”<sup>56</sup> Radell views both Greene and Ford as the “spiritual heirs”<sup>57</sup> to James, both offering some kind of affirmation in the moral wasteland of modern times, and both “deeply rooted in the modernist tradition of Eliot, Pound, Joyce, etc.”<sup>58</sup> When, in his later career, Greene began to use first person narration more frequently – a step he took with some trepidation,<sup>59</sup> perhaps because “the Master” Henry James had dubbed it “a form foredoomed to looseness”<sup>60</sup> – such as in *The End of the Affair*, *The Quiet American* and *The Captain and the Enemy*, Steigman moreover suggests this as “in keeping with Ford’s and Conrad’s famously unreliable or disengaged narrators.”<sup>61</sup> Just how unreliable Green’s narrator in *The Quiet American* is, will also be addressed more closely later.

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<sup>52</sup> Silverstein, “After the Fall”, 24.

<sup>53</sup> E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), xxi.

<sup>54</sup> Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence*, 5.

<sup>55</sup> See R.H. Miller, “Graham Greene’s ‘Saddest Story’”, *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature*, (51:2, December 1999).

<sup>56</sup> Greene, *Lost Childhood*, 90.

<sup>57</sup> Radell, *Affirmation in a Moral Wasteland*, 212.

<sup>58</sup> Radell, *Affirmation in a Moral Wasteland*, 216.

<sup>59</sup> Greene: “Many a time I regretted pursuing ‘I’ along this dismal road and contemplated beginning *The End of the Affair* all over again with Bendrix seen from the outside in the third person.” – In Miller, “Graham Greene’s ‘Saddest Story’”.

<sup>60</sup> In J. Mullan, *How Novels Work*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 41.

<sup>61</sup> Steigman, “The Literal American”, 7.

*The Quiet American: As it Exists in the World*

*The Quiet American*, set in 1952 in the dying days of the French occupation of Indo-China and before the full-scale involvement of the United States, has been lauded by many as a frighteningly prophetic statement on American foreign policy in Vietnam. For Sheldon, for instance, it “is a devastatingly precise prediction of the way that self-righteous American champions of democracy would create havoc in Vietnam.”<sup>62</sup> At the time of its publication in 1955 in the United Kingdom and 1956 in the U.S., reviews seem primarily to have focused on the question of Greene’s anti-Americanism.<sup>63</sup> In his polemic review of the novel in *The New Yorker*, journalist A.J. Liebling criticised Greene severely, and on several counts; “far from granting that Pyle was an American, his view was that Pyle was a perfect specimen of a Frenchman’s idea of an Englishman;”<sup>64</sup> moreover suggesting that “Greene apparently resented passing on world leadership to the Americans.”<sup>65</sup> American writer and Foreign Service officer Howard Simpson furthermore claimed that “Greene made no secret of his basic anti-American feeling and obviously viewed increased US presence in Indochina with misgiving.”<sup>66</sup> In short, the novel has predominantly been read as “a particularly prescient and trenchant anti-American allegory of US security policy in East Asia.”<sup>67</sup> While there is certainly some truth in this, I will argue that Greene’s sentiments toward America and Americans are not necessarily so simply biased, and that, even if some evidence exists of his apparent anti-Americanism, it cannot be unproblematically claimed that this translates directly into Fowler’s attitude in the novel. Rather, the relationship between Fowler and Pyle reveals a complex dynamic of cultural difference and age disparity that is not altogether unsympathetic to the eponymous quiet American. And furthermore, the narrative games facilitated for Greene through his ambiguously unreliable narrator present another degree of separation which must be taken into account.

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<sup>62</sup> Sheldon, *The Man Within*, 40.

<sup>63</sup> Sharrock, *Saints*, 207.

<sup>64</sup> In N. Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene Vol. 2*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 413 & A.J. Liebling, “A Talkative Something-or-Other” in J.C. Pratt (ed.), *The Quiet American: Text and Criticism*, (New York: Penguin, 1996) 248.

<sup>65</sup> In Sherry *Life of Greene Vol. 2*, 420. This review has been critiqued by Lisa Vargo (1984), as “an indulgence of the whimsy and conceit that characterize Liebling’s style...[in which] wit merely masks prejudice.” – L. Vargo, “*The Quiet American* and ‘A Mr. Liebermann’” in J.C. Pratt (ed.), *The Quiet American: Text and Criticism*, (New York: Penguin, 1996), 358. Greene himself responded to it in the introduction he wrote for the 1973 Collected Edition by referring to his reviewer as “a Mr. Liebermann.” – in Vargo, “A Mr. Liebermann”, 363.

<sup>66</sup> In Sheldon, *The Man Within*, 386.

<sup>67</sup> Steigman, “The Literal American”, 5.

In testament to its continued relevance, the novel is periodically taken up for different political and rhetorical purposes. In the introduction she wrote for a new centenary edition of *The Quiet American* in 2004, Zadie Smith asserts that Greene’s “dissection of political naïveté in the person of Pyle seems to gain in resonance with each year that has passed since publication.”<sup>68</sup> Slavoj Žižek, writing in 2004 and 2005 “has deemed the novel ‘more relevant than ever;’”<sup>69</sup> as has William Spanos in 2006, citing its “uncanny relevance to the contemporary American occasion.”<sup>70</sup> In a speech given in August 2007, George W. Bush, in a magnificently ironic turn, invoked what he termed “the Graham Greene Argument” in order to validate American actions in Iraq by suggesting that, just as the true disaster of Vietnam was the withdrawal of the Americans, so would the situation in Iraq be exacerbated should they now leave too hastily. The official White House transcript of the speech claims *The Quiet American* “was set in Saigon, and the main character was a young government agent named Alden Pyle. He was a symbol of American purpose and patriotism – and dangerous naïveté. Another character describes Alden this way: ‘I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused.’”<sup>71</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising that this reading should place the American as the “main character,” and moreover dub him so familiarly (just plain) “Alden.” As Kevin Buckley points out, more disturbingly, Bush seems to regard the description of Pyle he quotes as a compliment.<sup>72</sup> Not only is Pyle’s “dangerous naïveté” dismissed as quickly as it is mentioned, it is celebrated, and coupled to “American purpose and patriotism” in what an unbiased reader must regard as a wilful, or profoundly disturbing, misreading of the fraught ambiguities in fact delineated by Greene. As Buckley asserts, if anything, the “Graham Greene Argument evidently constitutes the opposite of what might be called the ‘Alden Pyle Argument.’”<sup>73</sup>

Many critics have speculated on the notion that the character of Pyle might have been drawn from life, amongst them his biographers Norman Sherry and Michael Sheldon, but Buckley suggests, more interestingly, the inverse relationship. The Californian advertising executive

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<sup>68</sup> Smith, “Shades of Greene”.

<sup>69</sup> Steigman, “The Literal American,” 22.

<sup>70</sup> Steigman, “The Literal American,” 15.

<sup>71</sup> Cited in K. Buckley, “‘The Graham Greene Argument’: A Vietnam Parallel that Escaped George W. Bush”, *World Policy Journal* (MIT Press), (24:3, Fall 2007), 89.

<sup>72</sup> Buckley, “Graham Greene Argument”, 90.

<sup>73</sup> Buckley, “Graham Greene Argument”, 91.

Edward G. Lansdale was, according to a great deal of Saigon gossip, a most likely candidate as the inspiration for Pyle, but for Buckley, “[I]t’s much more plausible, I think, to view the fictional Pyle as a blueprint, or a prophecy, of Lansdale.”<sup>74</sup> This is noteworthy, calling as it does for a recognition of the existence of Pyle’s ideological heirs in real life. The disquiet figured in the novel about modern warfare generally and, more significantly perhaps, American foreign policy specifically, seems to continue to speak to the current global situation in many ways.

A persistent relevance is also evidenced in the different film adaptations that have been made of the novel; for Bushnell, these different reworkings of the novel in film “show how the Vietnam War continues to be revisited and reshaped.”<sup>75</sup> The first version was made in 1958 by Joseph Mankiewicz who sought to counter an original text which he viewed as “a cheap melodrama in which the American was the most idiotic kind of villain,”<sup>76</sup> deliberately rewriting it to present an anti-communist and pro-American bent by moving the blame for the bombing in the square – which constitutes the novel’s tipping point for Fowler’s determination to remain *déjà* – from General Thé with American backing, to a communist terrorist group. Rhetorical strategies were even at play in the casting of the film, the role of Pyle originally intended for screen heartthrob Montgomery Clift but eventually going to Audie Murphy, decorated soldier turned action movie star, who, as Mankiewicz would assert outright in an article in *The New York Times* in 1956, was “the perfect symbol of what [he] want[ed] to say.”<sup>77</sup> Australian director Phillip Noyce’s version, though finished in 2001 would be “shelved by Miramax for a year after the 9/11 attacks”<sup>78</sup> – yet another signal of the story’s continued political power and relevance – finally appearing in September 2002. This would take a less deterministically political stance, opting rather for a focus on character development and the romantic intrigue. In it, as in the original text, Pyle (acting on American interests in the region) is responsible for the bombing, but he is also rendered not-quite-so innocent when it emerges that he speaks fluent Vietnamese. This gives him a linguistic upper hand – and a conscientiousness – altogether absent in the novel. This will be discussed in greater detail later.

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<sup>74</sup> Buckley, “Graham Greene Argument”, 91.

<sup>75</sup> W.S. Bushnell, “Paying for the Damage: *The Quiet American* Revisited”, *Film and History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*, (36:2, 2006), 38.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Bushnell, “Paying for the Damage”, 38.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Bushnell, “Paying for the Damage”, 39.

<sup>78</sup> Bushnell “Paying for the Damage”, 40.

### The American and the European

“There were tears in his voice, and he looked younger than he ever had done.  
“Couldn’t you have won without lying?”  
“No. This is European duplicity, Pyle.” (*The Quiet American*, 131)

While most scholars have read *The Quiet American* primarily in terms of its political statements and the ethical conundrums it stages, I am interested in the subtler question of Greene’s representation of the relationships that occupy centre stage in the novel. The meeting of different cultures is key in this narrative, and, I would argue, where a great deal of the novel’s conflict arises. Alden Pyle and Thomas Fowler, as the major catalysts of the story’s movement and momentum, present the question of the meeting of American and English, or European, culture in revealing ways. As discussed above, this novel came under fire from many critics who read it as a mere vehicle for Greene’s anti-Americanism. Discussion of the author’s allegedly anti-American sentiment abounds: Skerrett notes that “Greene hated the view of life presented in the American cinema. American innocence infuriated him; it was false to his concept of adulthood... Thus Greene found Americans as unreal, morally immature, emotionally untrustworthy as he found their films;”<sup>79</sup> Benz asserts, “[i]n his early works, Greene expressed a general dislike for American values as he perceived them... he was particularly hard on the superficial values promoted by Hollywood... America stood for a world of false values, a symbol of facile and dangerous ingenuousness;”<sup>80</sup> and Richard Greene tells us “[t]he anti-American habit of mind was deeply ingrained and can be detected in his writings from the 1930s, when his knowledge of the country came chiefly from books and films. Indeed, several of his literary heroes – James, Pound and Eliot – had abandoned their supposedly uncultured homeland for Europe.”<sup>81</sup> Christopher Hitchens, a self-proclaimed admirer of Greene, even asserts, “however frenziedly inconsistent he was on everything else, Greene was unwaveringly hostile to the United States.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Skerrett, “Greene at the Movies”, 300.

<sup>80</sup> S. Benz, “Taking Sides: Graham Greene and Latin America”, *Journal of Modern Literature*, (26:2, Winter 2003), 121.

<sup>81</sup> Greene, *A Life in Letters*, Xxviii f.

<sup>82</sup> C. Hitchens, “I’ll be Damned: Graham Greene’s Most Fervent Loyalty was to Betrayal”, *Atlantic Magazine*, (March 2005). <<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/03/i-apos-ll-be-damned/3741/>>

Greene certainly did not shy away from cultural stereotyping in his non-fiction writing, most particularly evidenced in a great deal of his film criticism of the 1930s. Of the French, he suggests a “superb Gallic complacency,”<sup>83</sup> and speaks of the “model Frenchman, royal, revolutionary, bourgeois and perpetually amorous;”<sup>84</sup> while Germans are “congenitally unfitted for irrational behaviour.”<sup>85</sup> And indeed he does write about Americans in very unflattering terms, at times with a sentiment almost bordering on disgust. He speaks with distaste of that “awful ocean of American vulgarity and good taste ([which] they think is the same thing)”<sup>86</sup> and even points directly to an inferior, or less developed sense of morality, which is perhaps crystallised in Pyle’s confused code of ethics, when he writes of a film, “popular in America, but to us in our old tribal continent the morality seems a little crude.”<sup>87</sup> In his 1937 review of *The Road Back*, he says, “It might be funny if it wasn’t horrifying. This is America seeing the world in its own image...what it really emphasizes is the eternal adolescence of the American mind, to which literature means the poetry of Longfellow, and morality means keeping Mother’s Day and looking after the kid sister’s purity,”<sup>88</sup> and goes on to give a very ungenerous physical account of the American Legionaries in London, “the same adolescent features, plump, smug, sentimental, ready for the easy tear and the hearty laugh and the fraternity yell.”<sup>89</sup> While this seems to signal an almost visceral dislike for Americans, it is worth keeping in mind Greene’s consistently tongue-in-cheek journalistic style; he is a writer very much aware of the ability of an exaggeratedly unflattering description that taps into known cultural stereotypes to elicit a wry smile in the (English) reader, and it is not necessarily the case that he uncritically endorses them.

The meeting of the new world American with the old world European is a familiar theme in Greene’s great influence Henry James, as well as in Ford Madox Ford. Greene himself discusses James as “a social novelist, primarily concerned with the international scene, with the impact of the Old World on the new.”<sup>90</sup> However, in James, the wide-eyed American’s encounter with the sophistication of the European takes an entirely different tone. As DeVitis

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<sup>83</sup> G. Greene, *The Pleasure Dome: The Collected Film Criticism 1935 – 40 of Graham Greene*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), 175.

<sup>84</sup> Greene, *Pleasure Dome*, 259.

<sup>85</sup> Greene, *Pleasure Dome*, 186.

<sup>86</sup> Greene, *Pleasure Dome*, 187.

<sup>87</sup> Greene, *Pleasure Dome*, 268.

<sup>88</sup> Greene, *Pleasure Dome*, 171.

<sup>89</sup> Greene, *Pleasure Dome*, 172.

<sup>90</sup> Greene, *Lost Childhood*, 43.

notes, in *The Quiet American*, Pyle is the “[symbolic] opposite of Henry James’s innocent, the American sent to a decadent Europe to re-establish the importance of the human act... Pyle’s innocence is inadequate in a world corrupted by the experience of evil.”<sup>91</sup> Moreover, in Greene’s novel, the experience of evil is brought about precisely because of an innocence, an inexperience in the good intentions that lead to disaster. While when writing about James, Greene is appreciative of his Americans, of “Isabel Archer and Milly Theale: the courage, the generosity, the confidence, the inexperience,”<sup>92</sup> in Greene’s own writing we see a movement from a concern for this “inexperience” as it encounters a dangerous world, to a troubled stocktaking of what such inexperience – writ large as the foreign policy of a world power – can have on the rest of the globe. This may have arisen from pressing global political realities, such as identified by Benz: “After Hiroshima and the start of the Cold War, Greene recognized that American innocence was more harmful.”<sup>93</sup>

Consequently, representation in *The Quiet American* is more complex in a number of ways. First, it is a fiction, and though it seems, in Sharrock’s words a “documentary fiction,”<sup>94</sup> which causes the reader, and seemingly, many critics to be “impelled to seek identity between the narrator Fowler and the author,”<sup>95</sup> it is worth remembering that it is a construction, into which Greene’s true sentiments – whatever they may be – cannot be simply assumed to have entered wholesale. It is worth enquiring at this juncture, if Fowler is the lens through which the reader is focalised, what kind of lens he is. As a first person narrator with a stake in the story he tells, he can be assumed to be subject to some necessary bias, perhaps making of him one of Conrad or Ford’s unreliable narrators – as in Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, the narrator of which is constantly undermining his own accounts and contradicting himself, asserting his own uncertainty and ignorance. As John Mullan points out, “[w]riters like Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Ford Madox Ford make their fiction out of uncertainty about their characters’ motivations.”<sup>96</sup> However, Greene does this his own way. As James Wood claims, “[e]ven the apparently unreliable narrator is more often than not reliably unreliable... We know that the narrator is being unreliable because the author is alerting us, through reliable manipulation, to that narrator’s unreliability. A process of authorial flagging is going on; the

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<sup>91</sup> A.A. DeVitis, *Graham Greene*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), 118.

<sup>92</sup> Greene, *Lost Childhood*, 41.

<sup>93</sup> Benz, “Taking Sides”, 121.

<sup>94</sup> Sharrock, *Saints*, 200.

<sup>95</sup> Sharrock, *Saints*, 201.

<sup>96</sup> J. Mullan, *How Novels Work*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67.

novel teaches us how to read its narrator.”<sup>97</sup> *The Quiet American* certainly teaches us how to read its narrator, and he is surely the most reliable of unreliable narrators – he is a reporter, not a “leader writer”: “I had no technique for telling her slowly and gently. I was a correspondent: I thought in headlines.”<sup>98</sup> And though his determination to remain so, to resist becoming engagé, must falter in the end, there is nevertheless a consistent sense of Fowler’s real attempt to be even-handed at all times, even to his rival.

As much as Fowler’s narration is thus made to resemble reportage, there is often a distance between what he says and what he means. This is the space in which irony plays, but the novel is perhaps ambiguous on whether this irony belongs to Fowler or an authorial voice. As DeVitis notes, “*The Quiet American* is misunderstood because of and in spite of Greene’s ironic commentary.”<sup>99</sup> This might, however, be read as a generative ambiguity that occurs “when the gap between an author’s voice and a character’s voice seems to collapse altogether.”<sup>100</sup> Skerret notes that “one of the most often noted elements of Greene’s style is his reduction of authorial comment;”<sup>101</sup> and Erdinast-Vulcan indicates that “Fowler’s psychological and spiritual isolation is matched by the complete withdrawal of the implied author... The only narrating voice is that of the protagonist.”<sup>102</sup> The drawing together of these ideas is not to suggest a conflation of Fowler the narrator and Greene the author, but rather to indicate that the authorial voice gives itself over almost entirely to Fowler, and offers a heavily ironic engagement with a great deal of its subject matter which permits Fowler (and through him, the authorial voice) to play with certain stereotypes:

It wouldn’t have done to cable the details of his [Pyle’s] true career, that before he died he had been responsible for at least fifty deaths, for it would have damaged Anglo-American relations, the minister would have been upset. The minister had a great respect for Pyle – Pyle had taken a good degree in – well, one of those subjects Americans can take degrees in: perhaps public relations or theatrecraft, perhaps even Far Eastern studies.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> J. Wood, *How Fiction Works*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), 7.

<sup>98</sup> G. Greene, *The Quiet American*, (New York; Penguin, 1996), 20.

<sup>99</sup> DeVitis, *Greene*, 118.

<sup>100</sup> Wood, *How Fiction Works*, 19.

<sup>101</sup> Skerret, “Greene at the Movies”, 296.

<sup>102</sup> D. Erdinast-Vulcan, *Graham Greene’s Childless Fathers*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), 8.

<sup>103</sup> Greene, *QA*, 21.

This is where the differences between Greene's supposed anti-Americanism in his non-fiction and his fiction can be teased out. There may be an inclination to attribute such anti-American sentiments as find voice in the novel to Greene himself, which arises from the apparent disappearance of a higher authorial authority than Fowler, and a consequent assumption of the sameness of the author and the narrator. But it is necessary to be conscious of how Fowler (with Greene pulling the strings) invokes these cultural stereotypes. Sometimes he might appear to be endorsing them; sometimes he merely uses them. There is in the passage above an acute sense of absurdity – an American absurdity. But it is one invoked to convey a profound sadness over the death of the one American whom Fowler, against all the odds, cared for and almost begrudgingly respected. Laden with irony as the text is, it is worth considering carefully the strategic narrative ironies at play in the development of Fowler as a narrator. This sustained use of irony, which must force the questioning of the narrator's genuine stance, is one way in which the novel calls into doubt the simple communicability of personal experience.

Moreover, the figuring of Pyle, and his relationship with Fowler, are not so simply cast into an anti-American, pro-European dichotomy. Far from being the caricatures some critics of the novel have identified, these two are individuals, whose perceptions of each other, and, resultantly, representation to the reader, are coloured by particular motivations and interests. In Pyle the “American liberal idealist and Fowler the cynical, worldly-wise European...the ideological types of the American and the European are not without personal colouring.”<sup>104</sup> More than this, I would say, they are not without affection for each other; as Fowler asks himself after Pyle's death, “Am I the only one who really cared for Pyle?”<sup>105</sup> Erdinast-Vulcan goes so far as to suggest that “the same love/hate relationship exists between Maurice Bendrix and Henry Miles in *The End of the Affair*, and between Fowler and Pyle in *The Quiet American*.”<sup>106</sup> Far from suggesting Pyle as the generic American, Fowler (and Greene) are at pains to distinguish him from the acknowledged stereotype: “He's a good chap in his way. Serious. Not one of those noisy bastards at the Continental. A quiet American.”<sup>107</sup> However, the stereotype is also to be found in the novel. The insufferable Granger is the novel's loud American; drunk, rude, licentious. He is also the only character Greene admitted to drawing

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<sup>104</sup> Sharrock, *Saints*, 200.

<sup>105</sup> Greene, *QA*, 22.

<sup>106</sup> Erdinast-Vulcan, *Childless Fathers*, 74.

<sup>107</sup> Greene, *QA*, 17.

from real life.<sup>108</sup> Yet even he is granted some redeeming moments, as Erdinast-Vulcan puts it, even he, the “most obnoxious American ‘type’ in the novel turns out to be deserving of sympathy.”<sup>109</sup> Fowler at his most ungenerous says of him, “[h]e was like an emblematic statue of all I thought I hated in America – as ill-designed as the Statue of Liberty and as meaningless.”<sup>110</sup> But even here, as there always is, there is something of the determination to be even-handed, to “report” the truth in Fowler: “all *I thought* I hated in America;” and moments later, upon learning of Granger’s polio-stricken child, “I don’t dislike you, Granger,”<sup>111</sup> and a sincere desire to be kind. Though Fowler is profoundly disturbed by Pyle’s involvement in the bombing in the square, and, perhaps even more so, his failure to show any moral understanding for what he has facilitated, he similarly always shows Pyle this inclination to even-handedness; as he asks of himself, “Oh I was right about the facts, but wasn’t he right too to be young and mistaken.”<sup>112</sup>

So while superficial reading of the novel can result in assuming an anti-American stance in the author, this is by no means simplistically the case. Fowler indeed has his anti-American moments, as when he encounters the Economic Attaché Joe after Pyle’s death, “Suddenly I was angry; I was tired of the whole pack of them with their private stores of Coca-Cola and their portable hospitals and their too wide cars and their not quite latest guns;”<sup>113</sup> and in the weeks after losing Phuong:

I began, almost unconsciously, to run down everything that was American. My conversation was full of the poverty of American literature, the scandals of American politics, the beastliness of American children. It was as though she were being taken away from me by a nation rather than by a man. Nothing that America could do was right. I became a bore on the subject of America, even with my French friends who were ready enough to share my antipathies. It was as if I had been betrayed, but one is not betrayed by an enemy.<sup>114</sup>

However, the first comes in a moment of pique as a result of Fowler’s feelings about Pyle’s death; he is angered by the uselessness of it, and his ill will is not so much directed at any

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<sup>108</sup> See Greene, *Ways of Escape*.

<sup>109</sup> Erdinast-Vulcan, *Childless Fathers*, 55.

<sup>110</sup> Greene, *QA*, 184.

<sup>111</sup> Greene, *QA*, 185.

<sup>112</sup> Greene, *QA*, 156.

<sup>113</sup> Greene, *QA*, 31.

<sup>114</sup> Greene, *QA*, 140.

Americans, as at a political situation that “killed [Pyle] because he was too innocent to live;”<sup>115</sup> he is angry because of the affection he feels for Pyle. In the second excerpt quoted above, it is made even more overt that Fowler is aware of misdirecting his anger. When he says, “It was as though she were being taken away from me by a nation rather than by a man,” he is making fun of himself; pointing to his own absurdity. Fowler’s anti-American sentiment is deliberately, and ironically, staged, revealing an awareness of his own foolishness, and consequently the puerility of such a stance. The extract foregrounds the manner in which the novel holds this culture of anti-Americanism up for scrutiny and, to some extent, ridicule. The true nature of Fowler’s relationship with Pyle is finally signalled when he says, “It was as if I had been betrayed, but one is not betrayed by an enemy.” By whom, then, is one betrayed? It seems that even when the gap between them is at its widest, Fowler going to lengths to stress what makes Pyle so different to him, he must acknowledge that there was a closeness, that they were friends, of a sort. The problems by which their friendship is marred are consequently not those of two ideologically opposite caricatures, but are rather a result of the problematics that reveal the limits of communication and cultural translatability between them.

For Miriam Allott, “Pyle and Fowler represent “the New and the Old worlds, sometimes appear[ing] to stand for conflicting systems of value which cut across the artificial boundaries of nationality and race.”<sup>116</sup> Erdinast-Vulcan continues in this line of thought when he suggests that “Pyle represents the dangerous innocence of the new world, whereas Fowler, in his mistrust of sweeping abstractions and formulas, in his open-eyed intelligence and sensitivity, represents the “old world,”<sup>117</sup> and goes on to say of Pyle that there is a “suggestion of mental virginity in [his] adolescent attitude towards the flesh, an immaturity which is reflected in other things as well as in a refusal to accept the complexity of human relationships and feelings.”<sup>118</sup> Consistently, the American is indicted for his innocence, his perpetual “adolescence.” In his film reviewing days, Greene suggested that “innocence is a tricky subject: its appeal is not always quite so clean as a whistle,”<sup>119</sup> and this is clearly an idea that he gives a principal role in the novel. But “innocence” and “adolescence” are “tricky

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<sup>115</sup> Greene, *QA*, 31.

<sup>116</sup> M. Allott, “The Moral Situation in *The Quiet American*”, in R.O. Evans (ed.), *Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations*, (Kentucky: Kentucky University Press, 1963), 191.

<sup>117</sup> Erdinast-Vulcan, *Childless Fathers*, 55.

<sup>118</sup> Erdinast-Vulcan, *Childless Fathers*, 58.

<sup>119</sup> Greene, *Pleasure Dome*, 211.

subjects” indeed. It seems the American’s greatest flaw is his youth, his naïveté, his idealism. Greene seems to be about showing his reader how such innocuous-seeming characteristics can become fatally dangerous, the “unmistakably young and unused face flung at us like a dart.”<sup>120</sup> But Pyle’s youth and youthful determination are also just what Fowler most envies him; as Fowler thinks to himself when Pyle confesses his intentions for Phuong, “‘He has youth too.’ How sad it was to envy Pyle.”<sup>121</sup> Something of his idealism and the certainty that comes with a lack of experience seem to be what make Fowler begrudgingly admire Pyle at times: “All the time that his innocence had angered me, some judge within myself had summed up in his favour.”<sup>122</sup> For Sharrock, the “conflict between innocence and experience is the true theme...the anti-Americanism [is] more a vehicle for expressing the nature of the conflict between Fowler and Pyle.”<sup>123</sup> This, in turn, speaks to a sustained blurring of the political and personal; the geo-political conflict represented in the microcosm of the love triangle, the personal conflict between the two men and the Vietnamese woman. This takes into account the clash between the two not only because their desires are in conflict, but because their modes of expression are unreadable to each other. The problem that the American and the European want different things for – or perceive their roles in – Indo-China differently, is exacerbated by the fact that, coming from different cultural backgrounds, they understand things differently, and hence have trouble communicating. In the same way, Pyle and Fowler understand their relationship with and duties to Phuong differently, and are unable to resolve the clash because each man remains a mystery to the other. On this reading, Phuong might be read as representing Vietnam, and the men’s interest in her speaks to the colonial interests of a predominantly masculine, penetrative imperial project in a passive, feminised landscape. However, such an Orientalist reading of Phuong will be problematised later.

Allott’s recognition of Pyle and Fowler’s rapport as a meeting of the old and new worlds also points to the significant difference in their ages. Indeed, frequently, it seems the problems in their communication arise from the differences between an older man’s world weariness and a younger man’s impatience and lack of experience. More than this, however, the text suggests that these differences are ingrained in each character as a result of some kind of

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<sup>120</sup> Greene, *QA*, 17.

<sup>121</sup> Greene, *QA*, 58.

<sup>122</sup> Greene, *QA*, 156.

<sup>123</sup> Sharrock, *Saints*, 216.

fundamental difference in culture and provenance. When Fowler ruminates on Pyle's confidence of winning Phuong, he muses,

Is confidence based on a rate of exchange? We used to speak of sterling qualities. Have we got to talk now about a dollar love? A dollar love, of course, would include marriage and Junior and Mother's Day, even though later it might include Reno or the Virgin Islands or wherever they go nowadays for their divorces. A dollar love had good intentions, a clear conscience, and to Hell with everybody. But my love had no intentions: it knew the future.<sup>124</sup>

The differences between the two men are given form in the ways they love, but the way they love is coupled to a currency. This is both testament to Fowler's characteristic cynicism, and also situates their sentiments as coming from distinct locales, different places, where the acrobatics of "love" are performed in different ways. His diction, which includes talk of "Mother's day," "good intentions," and "clear conscience" is clearly reminiscent of how Greene has spoken of America previously, and frequently does in the novel. The difference between the kinds of love the two men offer is the difference between their cultural Weltanschauungen – the difference between an American and a European world view, between a dollar and a sterling love – writ small.

This chasm between the two men is an absence which pervades their meetings. Pyle seems, ostensibly, to be grasping for an intimacy when he wishes the two to call each other by their Christian names. But it is an intimacy that Fowler rejects at every turn: "I shall ask her to marry me, Tom.' 'I'd rather you called me Thomas';"<sup>125</sup> "I wish you'd call me Alden, Thomas.' 'I'd rather not. Pyle has got – associations';"<sup>126</sup> "[a]t the foot of the ladder I called up to Pyle, 'It's me – Fowler.' (Even then I couldn't bring myself to use my Christian name to him.)"<sup>127</sup> There is perhaps something distinctly English in Fowler's persistence in maintaining a cool distance between the two; and something distinctly American in Pyle's repeated attempts to push for an intimacy regardless. Finally, the two do not approach even their own relationship in the same way.

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<sup>124</sup> Greene, *QA*, 63.

<sup>125</sup> Greene, *QA*, 58.

<sup>126</sup> Greene, *QA*, 75.

<sup>127</sup> Greene, *QA*, 99.

The problem preventing a closeness based on mutual understanding between the two is finally one of communication. Neither makes particular sense to the other, and they are unable to explain themselves to each other in order to move beyond that incomprehension. This comes to the fore in the scene when Pyle confesses his love for Phuong: Fowler says, “He looked at me in a puzzled way. If his conduct seemed crazy to me, mine was obviously inexplicable to him.”<sup>128</sup> As Wendorf suggests of *The Captain and the Enemy*, Greene shows himself to be, “registering, then, both a modernist desire to make meaning and a postmodern sense of language’s unstable referentiality.”<sup>129</sup> This “desire to make meaning” is thwarted, or at least problematised by the characteristic Modernist concern of whether language is up to the task; whether personal experience can be adequately communicated. The reason it cannot, in Greene’s novel, is largely due, I would argue, to Fowler’s “European duplicity.”<sup>130</sup> This is the phrase he uses to describe his own conduct when confronted by Pyle’s accusation of dishonesty in the contest for Phuong, and it is what their attempt at closeness comes up against again and again: Pyle’s believing earnestness and Fowler’s sardonic guile, which, in this phrase, Greene seems to be suggesting, ride in tandem with their provenance. Their cultural origins leak into their exchanges, into the way they deal with each other. This is also at play when Fowler muses on, “Pyle’s innocent question: ‘Are you playing straight?’ It belonged to a psychological world of great simplicity, where you talked of Democracy and Honor without the *u*.”<sup>131</sup> As Steigman suggests, “Pyle’s serious sense of ‘playing straight’ belongs precisely to the world of Democracy-and-Honor-without-the-u.”<sup>132</sup> Just as Fowler’s “duplicity” is European, Pyle’s “Honor” has a distinctly American flavour. It emerges clearly at Phat Diem that Fowler speaks a language of irony and cynicism that Pyle simply does not understand. Upon being told that Pyle has fallen in love with Phuong, the woman he himself loves and, by his own testimony cannot live without, while Pyle danced with her, Fowler quips, “I didn’t think you ever got close enough.”<sup>133</sup>

In the wildly awkward scene where Fowler must translate Pyle’s declaration of love to Phuong because he does not speak French well enough, Fowler reveals his “European

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<sup>128</sup> Greene, *QA*, 57.

<sup>129</sup> Wendorf, “Allegory in Postmodernity”, 658.

<sup>130</sup> Greene, *QA*, 131.

<sup>131</sup> Greene, *QA*, 90.

<sup>132</sup> Steigman, “The Literal American”, 12.

<sup>133</sup> Greene, *QA*, 57.

duplicity” once more. “I translated for him with meticulous care – it sounded worse that way.”<sup>134</sup> Fowler is always hiding behind language, his true meaning or his true feeling. Here he is even able to turn Pyle’s own language against him, by duplicitously opting for truthful translation. This entire exchange seems to entail Fowler playing a game that Pyle does not understand the rules to, which accounts for a great deal of the scene’s bizarreness: says Pyle to the man whose lover he is trying to steal while using his translation services:

‘After all you are my best friend.’

‘It’s kind of you to say so...’

‘Well, what do I say to her next. That you can’t live without her?’

‘No that’s too emotional. It’s not quite true either.’<sup>135</sup>

Fowler alone understands the wiliness that language can make possible. Pyle, who due to his linguistic inability in one language must make his declaration at second-hand, is not even master enough of his own language and the guile it is capable of to grasp that Fowler is making fun of him; is using irony to cope with the situation, and to run circles around his opponent, at a stratum of meaning well out of the young American’s grasp. Of course, the narrative will show that this duplicitous quality of Fowler’s receives no reward, because in the end it is Pyle’s “dollar love” that Phuong will choose.

This is not only a translation scene in the most obvious sense, but a scene steeped in the tacit problems of translation. George Steiner in his seminal *After Babel* posits that all human communication is finally a “never-ending, though often unconscious, act of internal translation;”<sup>136</sup> and consequently many of the problematics incumbent on translation are in fact problems for all kinds of communication. This is the first level on which something might be lost in translation between Fowler and Pyle in the scene discussed above; these problems exist in intralingual translation. I would suggest, however, that Fowler and Pyle do not speak the same language. Though English operates as the lingua franca in the novel’s Vietnam, the Englishes spoken by Fowler and Pyle are the different Englishes of America and Britain, of the new world and the old, lending credence to the aphorism cited by Lisa Vargo, “It has been said that England and America are nations divided by a common

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<sup>134</sup> Greene, *QA*, 76.

<sup>135</sup> Greene, *QA*, 77.

<sup>136</sup> G. Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language & Translation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 31.

language.”<sup>137</sup> This division between the nations, and the gap between their Englishes, are latent when the American Granger calls for Fowler’s attention, “I got to talk to you, Fowler. I don’t want to sit there with those Frogs tonight. I don’t like you, Fowler, but you talk English. A kind of English.”<sup>138</sup> Annie Brisset discusses the difficulties of translation when “historical time is factored in.”<sup>139</sup> This can be linked to the temporal quality Steiner assigns to translation: time leaves its marks on language in various ways; language is historically created in accordance with cultural needs and encounters. This temporal aspect is necessarily problematic in the interaction between an American and a British English; one so clearly older than the other, and configured in such different contexts with profoundly different cultural values. Not only is Pyle the younger man, he speaks the younger English.

This reading is underpinned by Fowler’s drawing out of Pyle’s world where “you talked of Democracy and Honor without the *u* as it’s spelt on old tombstones, and you meant what your father meant by the same words.”<sup>140</sup> This is a world in which Democracy and Honor are spelt with capital letters and constitute glorified concepts by which to live; a much younger world. “Honor” may sound just like “honour” as it was used “on old tombstones,” but it is a different thing, used and understood differently by the American and Briton. Steiner’s observation of the necessity of an “informed, avid awareness of the history of the relevant language, of the transforming energies of feeling which make of syntax a record of social being”<sup>141</sup> as required in order for effective translation to be attempted, can be used to indicate that language cannot be separated from the social and cultural contexts which create it. Clearly the cultural context that created “Honor” is very different from the one that understands “honour,” and this is the foundational reason why Fowler and Pyle’s meanings can never be received as they are intended. This is the second level on which a chasm between Fowler and Pyle exists.

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<sup>137</sup> Vargo, “A Mr. Liebermann”, 357.

<sup>138</sup> Greene, *QA*, 184.

<sup>139</sup> A. Brisset, “The Search for a Native Language: Translation and Cultural Identity”, in L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 344.

<sup>140</sup> Greene, *QA*, 90.

<sup>141</sup> Steiner, *After Babel*, 26.

Antoine Berman identifies translation as “establish[ing] a relationship between the Self-Same (*Propre*) and the Foreign;”<sup>142</sup> translation forms and informs the relationship between the self, the same, and the foreign, the other. There is a capacity then in which translation implicitly acknowledges a binary of “us and them-ness,” ostensibly seeking to make them comprehensible to each other but finally, I would argue, impeded by a language/languages constructed out of the very cultural differences that created an us and them in the first place. The translation scene between Fowler and Pyle thus serves to a greater degree to *assert* the differences between one English and another, one culture and another, one person’s inhabiting of a language and another’s to the extent that it reveals an essential incommunicability of meaning between them. This is the third way in which the two are kept at a distance from each other.

I would suggest that this fraught scene could moreover aptly be read as what Emily Apter has termed a “translation zone;” a reading that is illuminating both in terms of the power play within the novel, and the novel’s continued political relevance. Apter suggests the translation zone as a kind of war zone; and that translation itself might be wielded as a type of weapon of war.<sup>143</sup> For her, in an increasingly globalised world that sees the dissolution of borders as meaningful divisions, “multilingualism asserts its importance at the bargaining table, raising stakes in what is already a lethal game of diplomatic and cultural one-upmanship. The politics, for example, of laying claim to linguistic superiority, is paramount.”<sup>144</sup> This seems as astute an observation for the Vietnam of 1952 where the larger population is Vietnamese-speaking, yet this is a language that receives almost no screen time in the novel, and no major characters (with the exception of Phuong) speak it. French and English, as representative of old and new colonial interests, play a key role in delineating the power dynamics of secrecy and exclusion in this politically tense context.

The allotment of power in the translation scene between Fowler and Pyle is thus cast into the light. The two are indeed at war, and Fowler uses language as one of the weapons with which

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<sup>142</sup> A. Berman, “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign”, in L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 284.

<sup>143</sup> E. Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 16.

<sup>144</sup> Apter, *Translation Zone*, 130.

he wages it. I would suggest that he is able to assert “linguistic superiority” in two ways. In the first, in the way indicated above, in that the Englishman is able to use language – the English ostensibly native to both him and Pyle – in ways that Pyle does not understand; and in the second, he is multilingual, permitting him access to the French which is the only available means of communication with Phuong (in the absence of any rivals who speak her native tongue). This allows him not only the upper hand in the given exchange, but underpins his authority as a narrator, who is able to speak, and understand (?) things that others are not. In her discussion of Ismail Kadare’s *The Three-Arched Bridge*, Apter points to the deliberate mistranslation offered by the translator figure in that novel: “Intentionally performing a shoddy job, the translator puts ‘the worst possible construction of the old man’s exalted phrases.’”<sup>145</sup> This is noteworthy for indicating a translator with an agenda, and the possible political implications of a translator with a stake in what he translates. Contrary to Kadare’s translator, Fowler translates with deliberate accuracy, but does so for similarly self-serving motivations. The power of translation is in both cases the power of manipulation; the power over language constituting the power to adjust meaning to serve the translator’s purpose. For Apter, “[w]ar is, in other words, a condition of nontranslatability or translation failure at its most violent peak,”<sup>146</sup> yet Fowler seems to wage war in just the opposite manner, by meticulously correct translation. But this is the case only in the most superficial sense of translation. I would suggest that, in keeping with the argument delineated above, the relationship between Fowler and Pyle nevertheless constitutes “a condition of nontranslatability or translation failure,” for Fowler still does not understand Pyle as he “translates” him to Phuong. Only the words are delivered with accuracy; what they mean to each is different, and obscured from the other. This points interestingly to the notion that Apter’s “‘terror’ of mistranslation”<sup>147</sup> might sit alongside the different kind of terror of absolutely accurate translation, and furthermore asks the question of what kind of transformative development, then, valid translation might require.

Apter moreover points out that these dynamics have been made specifically relevant post 9/11: “translation and global diplomacy seemed never to have been so mutually implicated. As America’s monolingualism was publicly criticized...translation moved to the fore as an

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<sup>145</sup> Apter, *Translation Zone*, 133.

<sup>146</sup> Apter, *Translation Zone*, 16.

<sup>147</sup> Apter, *Translation Zone*, 12.

issue of major political and cultural significance...translation took on special relevance as a matter of war and peace.”<sup>148</sup> This is pertinent to the situation in *The Quiet American* in both the sense of the war which constitutes the background – and a great deal of the antagonism – of the narrative, and the war between the two men who can be read as representative of different positions in the larger global conflict. The playing out of the geo-political conflict of the old and new worlds on the level of the psycho-social conflict between Fowler and Pyle identified by Allott and Sharrock is thus reiterated. Apter asserts, “suddenly transparent was the extent to which monolingualism, as a strut of unilateralism and monocultural U.S. foreign policy, infuriated the rest of the world.”<sup>149</sup> Fowler, the translator, is diplomatic to the point of irony in the scene under discussion;<sup>150</sup> seeing more and understanding more than his American counterpart. Pyle’s monolingualism, by contrast, can easily be read as evidencing that “monocultural U.S. foreign policy, [which] infuriate[s] the rest of the world,”<sup>151</sup> and it is possibly in the “linguistic arrogance”<sup>152</sup> that this seems tacitly to signal, that the argument for Greene’s alleged anti-Americanism might find new material, for different though Pyle may be to his countrymen like Granger, he is also just another boorish American who has not bothered to learn the language of the people in whose politics he is meddling; or the woman he purports to love and presumes to steal. It seems, furthermore, that the novel lends credence to Apter’s claim about that monolingualism that so irks the rest of the world as confidently assumed American foreign policy. In this sense, the novel is proleptic of such concerns as would emerge again some fifty years later in international politics, and is relevant anew in light of these global tensions.

The meeting of the old world and the new, of Fowler and Pyle, also operates on the level of colonial interests. In the Mankiewicz film, as Sheldon notes, “Fowler represents the corrupt old world of British and French colonialism.”<sup>153</sup> And perhaps to Pyle, there is an element of this in him. When they argue about politics, Pyle asserts, “You shouldn’t be against York, you should be against the French. Their colonialism;”<sup>154</sup> but Fowler is more measured, “We

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<sup>148</sup> Apter, *Translation Zone*, 3.

<sup>149</sup> Apter, *Translation Zone*, 12.

<sup>150</sup> Interestingly, Apter points to “diplomacy” as “the expression ‘by other means’ of weaponized language and misfired guns.” - Apter, *Translation Zone*, 17.

<sup>151</sup> This is interestingly contested in the 2001 film adaptation of the novel in which Pyle is portrayed as able to speak Vietnamese.

<sup>152</sup> Apter, *Translation Zone*, 15.

<sup>153</sup> Sheldon, *The Man Within*, 403.

<sup>154</sup> Greene, *QA*, 95.

are the old colonial peoples, Pyle, but we've learnt a bit of reality, we've learnt not to play with matches."<sup>155</sup> Again, Fowler and Pyle seem to be made of different stuff, and remain unable to communicate effectively with each other as a result of it. Greene wrote on the subject of Empire in his non-fiction work, revealing the attitude which seems latent in Pyle and Fowler's exchanges on the subject: "the US is exaggeratedly distrustful of empires, but we Europeans retain the memory...there are many Vietnamese who will regret the loss of the language which put them in contact with the art and faith of the West."<sup>156</sup> Though Greene was well aware of the economic motivations in fact underlying the ostensibly noble aspirations of the "white man's burden," as is evidenced when he writes, "[l]ike the British Empire, he has retired from competition with a full purse,"<sup>157</sup> he has a distinct affection for the French, and a certain patience with their lingering colonial presence in Indo-China. Rau says of Greene that, "[a]lthough [he] clearly belonged to an age of Empire and show[s] a marked dislike for totalitarian regimes, [he] felt decidedly ambivalent about [his] own country."<sup>158</sup>

In this sense, the novel is perhaps reminiscent of Orwell's sentiment in his 1936 essay "Shooting an Elephant," when he asserts, "I did not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it."<sup>159</sup> Greene, while critically conscious of the facts of old colonialism, cannot dismiss it completely, and is perhaps indicating a better-the-devil-you-know attitude when confronted by the new beast of the American empire. The fact that he positions himself as of this older colonialism is signalled when he writes in a film review, "But we, of course, who have borne the white man's burden..."<sup>160</sup> He writes of his fellow old world colonists: "the French continued to fight ferociously, tenaciously, without illusions;"<sup>161</sup> they are a "stubborn and heroic army."<sup>162</sup> Judith Adamson suggests that Greene's "admiration for the French army...admiration for their enemies"<sup>163</sup> is evident in Fowler's attitude to them and,

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<sup>155</sup> Greene, *QA*, 157.

<sup>156</sup> Greene, *Reflections*, 146.

<sup>157</sup> Greene, *Pleasure Dome*, 204.

<sup>158</sup> Rau, *The Common Frontier*, 38.

<sup>159</sup> G. Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant", in S. Orwell & I. Angus (eds.), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Vol. 1*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), 236.

<sup>160</sup> Greene, *Pleasure Dome*, 126.

<sup>161</sup> Greene, *Reflections*, 139.

<sup>162</sup> Greene, *Reflections*, 140.

<sup>163</sup> J. Adamson, *Graham Greene: The Dangerous Edge*, (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1990), 118.

consequently, the novel's representation of them. Pyle's idealism, "prompting him to 'do good' from a position of entrenched moral superiority,"<sup>164</sup> by contrast, is dangerous without understanding that it is, youthfully unaware of any of the actual weight of that "white man's burden."

In keeping with this, the novel seems to indicate a certain allegiance between the English and the French – the European – understanding of their position and role in Vietnam, as opposed to new-kid-on-the-block America. This is moreover crystallised in the relationship between Fowler and Vigot who, though they perhaps deliberately antagonise each other, seem to come much closer to understanding each other than Fowler and the young American. If the relationship between the Englishman and the American stands in for the political relations between Britain and America, this can perhaps be read as operative for the British and French too. For Erdinast-Vulcan, Vigot is a "recurrent figure in Greene's novels: the police-man-who-should-have-been-a-priest...his ability to understand the complexity of all human feelings and facts without being shocked gives him the stature of a priest...Vigot's intimacy with Fowler gives him authority to correct Fowler's narration."<sup>165</sup> Within the larger spectrum of Greene's oeuvre, the significance of Vigot is perhaps underpinned by his being one of the novel's few Catholics (apart from Fowler's estranged wife, whom we only encounter through letters, and the assistant Domingues) – a trait which, having occupied such a central role in so much of Greene, must set him apart. Vigot seems to see as much as – perhaps more than – Fowler at times. Fowler observes the situation when Vigot calls him in for questioning, aware of how Phuong must perceive it all: "While she sat there on the hard office chair, she was still waiting patiently for Pyle. I had at that moment given up waiting, and I could see Vigot taking these two facts in."<sup>166</sup>

Vigot is both a reminder of Fowler's potential as an unreliable narrator and a narrative device that allows more clarity on the events of the narrative and Fowler's position in and to them. Vigot, perhaps more than any other character, understands something of the subtlety of the relationship forged between Fowler and Pyle: "One doesn't take one's enemy's book as a

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<sup>164</sup> Sharrock, *Saints*, 207.

<sup>165</sup> Erdinast-Vulcan, *Childless Fathers*, 59.

<sup>166</sup> Greene, *QA*, 17.

souvenir.”<sup>167</sup> An implicit respect for the Frenchman is suggested when Fowler says, “It was a foolish policeman’s question, unworthy of the man who read Pascal, unworthy also of the man who so strangely loved his wife.”<sup>168</sup> Fowler has greater understanding for the Frenchman, as he does for the Pascal he reads, than he can muster for the American and his indomitable York Harding. Consequently, the Europeans are able to antagonise each other on equal footing, as suggested when Allott points to their “verbal fencing,”<sup>169</sup> their foils meet when they spar; in contrast to Fowler and Pyle, who seem to play different games, or at least by the different rules of “European duplicity” and “playing straight.” As Fowler says of the American, “we had spent what seemed a week of nights together, but he could no more understand me than he could understand French.”<sup>170</sup> These relationships seem to suggest a greater chasm between an American and a British English, than between the European languages; at least Fowler and Vigot speak each others’ languages. And perhaps this is because Fowler can say of them, “We are the old colonial peoples;”<sup>171</sup> in this context, there is greater cultural common ground.

However, it is worth noting that the closer allegiance between the British and the French suggested here arguably flies in the face of a tradition of an assumed commonality in the “Anglosphere” inhabited by Britain and America, as proposed by, amongst others, Christopher Hitchens. Hitchens shows a legacy of this in the way the British and American have understood their relationship to each other. Arthur Conan Doyle, when he published *The White Company* in 1891 dedicated it: “To the hope of the future, the reunion of the English-speaking races, this little chronicle of our common ancestry is inscribed.”<sup>172</sup> Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden,” similarly, in its attempt to urge the U.S. to take on the imperial project in the Philippines, sought to indicate some inherent commonality; a call on the “hope of Anglo-American solidarity against rising German power; and fear of a revival of the demagogic atmosphere of 1894 and 1895, in which America and Britain almost went to

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<sup>167</sup> Greene, *QA*, 167.

<sup>168</sup> Greene, *QA*, 18.

<sup>169</sup> Allott, “Moral Situation”, 202.

<sup>170</sup> Greene, *QA*, 112.

<sup>171</sup> Greene, *QA*, 157.

<sup>172</sup> C. Hitchens, “An Anglosphere Future”, *City Journal* (Autumn 2007).  
< [http://www.city-journal.org/html/17\\_4\\_anglosphere.html](http://www.city-journal.org/html/17_4_anglosphere.html) >

war after the U.S., citing the Monroe Doctrine, intervened in a border dispute between Britain and Venezuela.”<sup>173</sup> Post-colonial critic Aijaz Ahmad moreover points out that

Countries of Western Europe and North America have been deeply tied together over roughly the last two hundred years; capitalism itself is so much older in these countries; the cultural logic of late capitalism is so strongly operative in these metropolitan formations; the circulation of cultural products among them is so immediate, so extensive, so brisk, that one could sensibly speak of a certain cultural homogeneity among them.<sup>174</sup>

Greene’s representation of the conflict in the novel seems to indicate some disillusionment with the possibility of this “Anglo-American solidarity;” this “certain cultural homogeneity,” and rather more scepticism vis-à-vis the aspect taken on by the imperial project in American hands.

Edward Said performs this kind of coupling of the British and the French, rather than the British and American, in *Orientalism*, when he posits the Orientalist way of thinking as a largely British and French cultural project: “Unlike the Americans, the French and the British...have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling *Orientalism*,”<sup>175</sup> “To speak of Orientalism therefore is to speak mainly, although not exclusively, of a British and French cultural enterprise.”<sup>176</sup> These are indeed the “old colonial peoples.” In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said is perhaps more dubious about the new colonial people – the U.S.A:

Curiously, though, so influential has been the discourse insisting on American specialness, altruism, and opportunity that ‘imperialism’ as a word or ideology has turned up only rarely and recently in accounts of United States culture, politics, history. But the connection between imperial politics and culture is astonishingly direct...while apologists for overseas American interests have insisted on American innocence, doing good, fighting for freedom. Graham Greene’s character Pyle, in *The Quiet American*, embodies this cultural formation with merciless accuracy.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Hitchens, “An Anglosphere Future”.

<sup>174</sup> A. Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’”, *In Theory*, (London & New York: Verso, 1994), 104.

<sup>175</sup> E. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1.

<sup>176</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 4.

<sup>177</sup> E. Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 7f.

There is greater affiliation between the old world understandings of Empire than there is with the new American Empire; a political conflict that emerges on a personal scale in the relations between the representatives of these various colonial interests in the novel. Abdirahman A. Hussein further etches out the differences between these different understandings of the “Orient” and the imperialism with which such understandings are imbricated, in his reading of Said:

The differences he sees between European Orientalism and its American progeny...the distinction (again largely implicit) that he makes between, on the one hand, Orientalism as a highbrow, privileged activity – now and especially in the past – and, on the other, a vulgarized, popular version of it, especially in contemporary America.<sup>178</sup>

And while old world colonialism is certainly problematic in ways not given weight in Greene’s novel, *The Quiet American* primarily occupies itself with the dangers of the emergence of this new imperial power. This is, as suggested by the quote from Said, published in 1993, another sense in which the novel is proleptic of international political concerns, and, moreover, persistently contemporary. I will engage further with these colonial dynamics in relation to Vietnam, as well as possible problems of Orientalism, in my discussion of Phuong.

The conflict the novel stages between its quiet American and its surly Englishman is thus more complex than to be explained away by Greene’s ostensibly anti-American bent. Rather, the two can be read as representing not only the ideologically loaded meeting of the new and old worlds, of new and old colonialisms, but also the multi-faceted encounter of two individuals of different cultural and, consequently, as argued, linguistic origins far more disparate than initially obvious. It is in his engagement with these limits of cross-cultural communication that Greene reveals his occupation with many of the concerns vis-à-vis communicability on which Modernism turns.

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<sup>178</sup> A.A. Hussein, *Edward Said: Criticism and Society*, (London & New York: Verso, 2002), 231.

**Phuong: *Mon enfant, ma soeur***

The Orient Under Western Eyes

It was absurd to subject her to this passion for truth, an Occidental passion, like the passion for alcohol. (*The Quiet American*, 81)

Interpretations of the character of Phuong vary enormously, from Sheldon's characteristically uncharitable "Phuong is depicted as an attractive simpleton...[there is] no depth to her character, no sign that she is anything more than a plaything for foreign men"<sup>179</sup> to a number of readings which grant her more agency. Many critics suggest, furthermore, that Greene chooses as the backdrop for his narratives,<sup>180</sup> "[m]ore usually those portions of the earth which, from the western centre, appear remote, primitive, fantastic."<sup>181</sup> I would propose Phuong as an intricately wrought individual who suggests her own particular complications for the problem of communication in *The Quiet American*, and the Vietnam evoked by Greene as something more than merely "remote, primitive, fantastic." Yet readings of Phuong as objectified or one-dimensional are commonplace. Georg Gaston suggests that Fowler "believes that Phuong, as the myth about Oriental women goes, is a creature of loyalty instead of love."<sup>182</sup> Consequently, an investigation of the possibility of Greene's complicity in what Said has termed "Orientalism" is worthwhile – as, in a discussion of the West's construction of its encounter with the Orient, to omit a consideration of Said's *Orientalism* would perhaps almost be remiss.<sup>183</sup> As Pathak, Sengupta and Purkayastha suggest, the kind of colonial discourse analysis suggested by Said allows us "to deconstruct the text, to examine the process of its production, to identify the myths of imperialism structuring it, to show how the oppositions on which it rests are generated by political needs at a given moment in history."<sup>184</sup> I would suggest that this enables a reading of the novel that both is, and is not, an apt interpretation of *The Quiet American*, inasmuch as Greene's

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<sup>179</sup> Sheldon, *The Man Within*, 401.

<sup>180</sup> That is, primarily those who make use of the term "Greeneland" for his settings.

<sup>181</sup> R.W.B. Lewis, "The Fiction of Graham Greene: Between the Horror and the Glory", in J.C. Pratt (ed.), *The Quiet American: Text and Criticism*, (New York: Penguin, 1996), 368.

<sup>182</sup> G. Gaston "The Quiet American: A Secular Prospect", in J.C. Pratt (ed.), *The Quiet American: Text and Criticism*, (New York: Penguin, 1996), 381f.

<sup>183</sup> As Hampson notes, "Any work discussing the imperial archive cannot avoid the influence of Said's *Orientalism*." - R. Hampson, *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 25.

<sup>184</sup> Z. Pathak, S. Sengupta & S. Purkayastha, "The Prisonhouse of Orientalism", in J.C. Pratt (ed.), *The Quiet American: Text and Criticism*, (New York: Penguin, 1996), 408.

figuring of Vietnam and the Vietnamese to a large extent does seem to rest on certain tacit assumptions in the Orientalist tradition. However, it also portrays the particular character of Phuong in less determined ways. In this light, it might be possible – and useful – to place the novel in relation to antecedent novels set in the Eastern colonies.<sup>185</sup>

Phuong may be read then, as Steigman initially suggests, as “the exotic and silent colonial subject, Vietnam read under Western eyes.”<sup>186</sup> And this, to a certain extent, she is. In the most obvious sense, she is an Oriental woman figured by Graham Greene, a white Englishman, and a representative of old colonial power. But in a more interesting sense, she is created for the reader through the character of Fowler, similarly a white Englishman, and one with a sexual interest in her, yet also one who professes to love her. She exists then, by virtue of her figuring solely through Fowler, indeed as a kind of “Vietnam read under Western eyes.” Fowler gestures toward giving an account of her: “When she bent over the flame the poem of Baudelaire’s came into my mind: ‘*Mon enfant, ma soeur...*’”<sup>187</sup> This is Fowler attempting to grasp an understanding of her, and he does so by casting her as a figure of a literature foreign to her and this place. He thus tries to imagine her, but can only do so in Western terms.

For Said, “Conrad is the precursor of the Western views of the Third World which one finds in the work of novelists as different as Graham Greene, V. S. Naipaul, and Robert Stone.”<sup>188</sup> Robert Hampson, in his discussion of Conrad’s Malay Fiction, points to Conrad’s “fictional appropriation of Borneo”<sup>189</sup> in *Almayer’s Folly*. He moreover suggests that the shape taken by reviews of this novel upon its publication in 1895 indicates that, for these reviewers, “fiction was clearly a form of knowledge aligned with the imperialist project of occupation and exploitation.”<sup>190</sup> Nevertheless, Conrad was criticized by book reviewer Hugh Clifford in September 1898 in the *Singapore Free Press* for displaying a “complete ignorance of Malays

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<sup>185</sup> It is, of course, worth noting that Said has been critiqued extensively, and by many scholars (see, for example, Ahmad, Porter & Windschuttle) for “[a] whole range of problems that are at once methodological and conceptual as well as political.” – A. Ahmad, “*Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said*”, *In Theory*, (London & New York: Verso, 1994), 168.

<sup>186</sup> Steigman, “The Literal American”, 10.

<sup>187</sup> Greene, *QA*, 14.

<sup>188</sup> Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, xix.

<sup>189</sup> Hampson, *Conrad’s Malay Fiction*, 1.

<sup>190</sup> Hampson, *Conrad’s Malay Fiction*, 2f.

and their habits and customs.”<sup>191</sup> If this is the case, it might be accounted for, as suggested by Norman Sherry, by the nature of Conrad’s contact with the “East”. As a seaman, he had little opportunity for direct and intimate interaction with the local people of Malay(si)a; a fact that he lamented, he “deplored the lack of opportunities for intimate observation that a sailor’s life had offered him.”<sup>192</sup> For Hampson, in “Youth” we see the “encounter of the experiencing, verbalizing European and the impassive Malay...[which] foregrounds the imperial gaze and the homogenized “East” as spectacle.”<sup>193</sup> The racialised and gendered other is, moreover, figured as unknown (and unknowable?) and consequently frightening: in these early works,

what emerges is a male fear of ‘passion and desire’: sexual feelings are feared as loss of control, and the representation of sexual passion as male enslavement elides into sexual passion as demonic possession...This fear of the ‘unknown’, which is at least as much inside himself as outside, is expressed through the inter-racial, cross-cultural encounter, an encounter in which gender and racial issues are intertwined.<sup>194</sup>

It is thus perhaps possible to see both overlap and divergence with Greene’s figuring of the East. Though *The Quiet American* might offer an instance of “fictional appropriation” of Vietnam, it is difficult to suggest a text so overtly occupied with a critique of (American) imperialism as “aligned with the imperialist project of occupation and exploitation.” Yet it is also tacitly complicit in this, strangely forgiving as it is of French colonialism. Though Fowler offers an instance of “the experiencing, verbalizing European,” I would argue that Phuong is not quite “the impassive Malay.” Rather, Greene’s figuring of this Oriental woman moves in a different direction to the anxiety shaped by Conrad around the meeting with the racialised, gendered other. Pathak et al go so far as to suggest that in Greene’s novel, “[i]nterracial sex is removed from the pornographic and sensational space it occupied in the literature of empire.”<sup>195</sup> Though the relationship of both Conrad and Greene to Saidian Orientalism can certainly be problematised, a reading of *The Quiet American* which draws out those strains of colonial discourse identified by Said will here be deployed in order to indicate why such a reading of Phuong does not offer the most nuanced account of her possible.

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<sup>191</sup> In Hampson, *Conrad’s Malay Fiction*, 5.

<sup>192</sup> In N. Sherry, *Conrad’s Eastern World*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 3.

<sup>193</sup> Hampson, *Conrad’s Malay Fiction*, 7.

<sup>194</sup> Hampson, *Conrad’s Malay Fiction*, 117f.

<sup>195</sup> Pathak et al, “The Prisonhouse of Orientalism”, 417.

A reading in the vein suggested by *Orientalism* is, in many ways perhaps, logical. The link between the penetrative, masculinist colonial project into a feminized, colonized landscape to the relationship of colonizing men to colonized women is easily made. This connection is perhaps rather more sympathetically evoked when Zadie Smith suggests that for Greene, “love of a foreign country and love of its women are honestly expressed as related phenomena (when Greene was asked why he came to Vietnam he answered: ‘It was partly the beauty of the women - it was extraordinary.’)”<sup>196</sup> David Spurr, in a not unrelated vein, calls on

...Foucault’s notion of a rhetorically constructed body for that strain of discourse which represents the colonized world as the feminine and which assigns to subject nations those qualities conventionally assigned to the female body. What I shall call the eroticization of the colonized refers to a set of rhetorical instances...in which the traditions of colonialist and phallogocentric discourses coincide.<sup>197</sup>

Premised on this, then, the reading of Phuong as “the exotic and silent colonial subject, Vietnam read under Western eyes” seems plausible. This “eroticization of the colonized” offers an account of Phuong as the sexual object to which she is sometimes reduced, as is embarrassingly the case when Granger and “Mick” arrive drunk at the Continental:

[Granger] noticed Phuong. ‘Why,’ he said, ‘you old so-and-so, Joe. Where did you find her? Didn’t know you had a whistle in you.’...  
‘Whose the dame?...  
‘Where’d he find her? You got to be careful in this town.’ He added gloomily, ‘Thank God for penicillin.’<sup>198</sup>

While this is almost certainly a caricature, as Fowler’s ironic commentary - “Rough soldierly manners”<sup>199</sup> – and the heavy-handed obnoxiousness of Granger in this scene, make clear, it nevertheless casts Phuong as a sexualized object. And this is a sense that is revisited when Fowler loses his temper with Pyle:

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<sup>196</sup> Smith, “Shades of Greene”.

<sup>197</sup> D. Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, (Duke: Duke University Press, 1993), 170.

<sup>198</sup> Greene, *QA*, 34f.

<sup>199</sup> Greene, *QA*, 34.

‘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...If it’s only her interests you care about, for God’s sake leave Phuong alone. Like any other woman she’d rather have a good...’ The crash of thunder saved Boston ears from the Anglo-Saxon word.”<sup>200</sup>

Though it seems clear that Fowler does not mean what he says here (as he gives a great many reasons for thinking his interest in Phuong extends beyond the physical), the casting of Phuong in sexual terms certainly exists in the novel. This can be read as aligned with Said’s suggestion of the Orient as “a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe...in time “Oriental sex” was as standard a commodity as any other available in the mass culture.”<sup>201</sup> The commodification of this “Oriental sex” is most overtly suggested by *The House of the Five Hundred Girls*. This serves as a reminder that Phuong may still exist in that strange, socially grey area of the native concubine to the colonising man in the colony. This is an area that has been explicated in detail by Ann Laura Stoler, who indicates that the “Dutch East Indies Company enforced the sanction against female migration by selecting bachelors as their European recruits and by promoting both extramarital relations and legal unions between low-ranking employees and imported slave women.”<sup>202</sup> Though this is by no means the case by the time Greene writes his novel, it is certainly an historical reality which must colour Phuong’s position in the society represented in the novel. Whether Greene’s text endorses such readings is questionable, but it is worth noting, at least, that there is a legacy of this which Greene is inheriting. This is an inheritance which is, for example, revealed in Orwell’s novel set in the Orient, *Burmese Days* (1934). The protagonist, Flory’s sexual involvement with the Burwoman Ma Hla May, and Mr. Lackersteen’s antics with local women, are initially regarded as quite “normal” and acceptable in the space of the colony, but these women are by no means to be regarded as equals, and it is tacitly understood that their role is purely sexual.

The inheritance of a reductive casting of the Oriental woman is perhaps evidenced in Greene’s film criticism, in comments such as, “[t]o a European the Oriental face doesn’t,

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<sup>200</sup> Greene, *QA*, 59.

<sup>201</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 190.

<sup>202</sup> A.L. Stoler, “Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race and Morality in Colonial Asia”, in R.N. Lancaster & M. di Leonardo (eds.), *The Gender/Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 16.

thank God, register emotions in the way we are used to;”<sup>203</sup> but is also undercut with characteristic irony when he says, “[the protagonist] falls in love with a Chinese girl (but she’s only Chinese by upbringing, so the tale is eugenically sound).”<sup>204</sup> The novel can be read as similarly ambivalent. Fowler says of Phuong: “she always told me what I wanted to hear, like a coolie answering questions.”<sup>205</sup> When asked whether Phuong loves him, Fowler offers, “Not like that. It isn’t in their nature. You’ll find that out. It’s a cliché to call them children – but there’s one thing which is childish. They love you in return for kindness, security, the presents you give them – they hate you for a blow or an injustice. They don’t know what it’s like – just walking into a room and loving a stranger.”<sup>206</sup> This account is more earnestly given, and is troubling for suggesting some mute and distinctly “other” race: the assumed “they” who do not feel like “us.” “Their” emotions are simplified, reduced, and though it is dubbed a “cliché to call them children,” this is just what he goes on to do. Fowler’s deeming it a cliché does not, moreover, constitute his denying its truthfulness. This childlike element to Phuong is echoed when Pyle and Fowler argue about her future and she “had gone through to the bedroom...she took one of her picture books from a shelf and sat on the bed as though she were quite unconcerned with our talk.”<sup>207</sup> This is more troubling because what is given here is not what Fowler thinks of her actions; her actions themselves constitute a childlike obliviousness and passivity which is a narrative choice made by Greene. While two white men with a sexual interest in her decide her fate, she looks at pictures of the Queen: silent and childlike, in the background. However, Fowler also casts this in less derogatory terms when he explains it to some degree, “one always spoke of her like that in the third person as though she were not there. Sometimes she seemed invisible like peace.”<sup>208</sup>

Said suggests that in Orientalist literature, the “Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal.’”<sup>209</sup> Phuong is by no means “depraved” – indeed she is far more “virtuous” than either of the Westerners. She is potentially the most rational of the three: as Fowler acknowledges, “I thought how realistic it was of her not to minimize the importance of money and not to make any great and

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<sup>203</sup> Greene, *Pleasure Dome*, 35.

<sup>204</sup> Greene, *Pleasure Dome*, 257.

<sup>205</sup> Greene, *QA*, 115.

<sup>206</sup> Greene, *QA*, 104.

<sup>207</sup> Greene, *QA*, 132.

<sup>208</sup> Greene, *QA*, 45.

<sup>209</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 40.

binding declarations of love. I wondered how Pyle over the years would stand that hard core, for Pyle was a romantic.”<sup>210</sup> It is the men who behave irrationally, emotionally. Phuong, it would seem, remains stoically aware of the realities that inform her relationships. There is, however, certainly something of the child in her. Sharrock posits her as the “first of a series of fragile child-women [in Greene] – women as simple and ignorant, sensual objects, who in passivity retain a childlike innocence – whose apparent unassertiveness may be put down, right or wrong, to the Vietnamese temperament.”<sup>211</sup> This points interestingly, again, to Phuong as occupying a position at the intersection of Oriental and woman. For Pathak, Sengupta and Purkayastha, she is “doubly Other: as woman and oriental.”<sup>212</sup> And it does seem that she suffers from inhabiting an identity at the intersection of these two signifiers to a certain degree. Granger thinks of her in sexual terms because she is both a woman and a native; the behaviour that makes this obvious is only acceptable because she is Oriental.

Orwell’s *Burmese Days* might be called on again here to suggest how such behaviour would have to change if a white woman were present: Flory’s relationship with Ma Hla May is acceptable until it comes up against the condemnation of the white woman, Elizabeth. As Stoler indicates, “[m]ale colonizers positioned European women as the bearers of a redefined colonial morality.”<sup>213</sup> Similarly, the white women of the Club of Forster’s Anglo-India in *A Passage to India* evidently regard themselves as bastions of decency. The absence of the white woman in *The Quiet American* makes it permissible to treat Phuong as she is treated. The fact that she is a native entitles her to less respect, even amongst her countrymen. This is made apparent when the Vietnamese policeman says to her “*Toi aussi*,” and Fowler must correct him “Say *vous* when you speak to a lady.”<sup>214</sup> However, I would suggest that in fact it is Phuong’s womanhood that makes her more of a cipher to Fowler – and consequently his reader – at times. In a discussion of Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter*, Miller suggests “an almost astonishing capacity to misjudge women generally”<sup>215</sup> and I would posit that a similar difficulty takes centre stage in *The End of the Affair*. Bendrix almost completely fails to grasp Sarah’s feelings for him, as he finally recognizes when it is too late: “I’ve been a bad lover,

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<sup>210</sup> Greene, *QA*, 120.

<sup>211</sup> Sharrock, *Saints*, 215.

<sup>212</sup> Pathak et al, “The Prisonhouse of Orientalism”, 413.

<sup>213</sup> Stoler, “Carnal Knowledge”, 20.

<sup>214</sup> Greene, *QA*, 15.

<sup>215</sup> Miller, “Greene’s ‘Saddest Story’”.

Sarah. It was the insecurity that did it. I didn't trust you. I didn't know enough about you."<sup>216</sup>  
The opacity of the female character's inner workings in Greene's oeuvre is by no means confined to the Oriental.

While this does little to ameliorate the possibility of communication between these characters in *The Quiet American*, it does serve to discredit the notion that Greene constructs Phuong in such way that she is always inscrutably "other;" an exoticized Oriental sexual object. In fact, where this is the case, it seems that it is done so explicitly that we may read it as staged. It serves to reveal overtly how opaque the character and motivations of Phuong (in Greene, of any woman) are to the narrating Fowler, and how she is construed by him and the other men around her: with difficulty, or inadequately, and *knowingly* so. This is perhaps most clearly manifested in the passage cited above: "I only want her body. I want her in bed with me. I'd rather ruin her and sleep with her...Like any other woman she'd rather have a good..." This is so overtly agonistic that it deploys this construction of Phuong rather than presenting it earnestly.

Alok Rai posits, in regard to the problematic relationship between the Englishman Flory and the Indian Dr. Veraswami in *Burmese Days* that "Orwell's failure to make a man of the good doctor, to suggest a basis on which such a subversive relationship of equality could rest, is also significant."<sup>217</sup> Similarly, a denial of personhood to Phuong might account for the at times strained communication between her and Fowler. I would suggest, however, that this is not quite the case in Greene's novel. Where Phuong is rendered in such an objectified, sexualised light, as is the commonplace trope in Western representations of Oriental women, this is done heavy-handedly enough to potentially put itself up for critique.

A critique of the novel aimed at identifying its complicity in colonial discourse and the assumptions on which it rests, is perhaps endorsed by readings such as Meyers's who claims that "[i]n Greene's novels...there is no struggle in the novels themselves to create political

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<sup>216</sup> G. Greene, *The End of the Affair*, (London: Heinemann, 1951), 155.

<sup>217</sup> A. Rai, *Orwell and the Politics of Despair: A Critical Study of the Writings of George Orwell*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 35.

ideas and attitudes about the subject peoples as in Forster, Conrad and Cary. Greene brings preconceived social and political opinions to his novels, so that fully developed native characters and cultural conflicts are absent;<sup>218</sup> and Sheldon who posits that “[c]olonial types are well-represented...but native Vietnamese are limited to minor parts,”<sup>219</sup> and that Greene “was anti-American, not pro-Vietnamese. The country was simply a place that appealed to his senses...the Vietnamese did not disgust him, but he generally regarded them as little more than colourful children.”<sup>220</sup> It seems likely, from his non-fiction as well as his figuring of it in the novel, that Greene indeed found in Vietnam a “place that appealed to his senses.” One might argue that his representation of it is in keeping with Said’s suggestion that, “[t]he Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.”<sup>221</sup> Vietnam is certainly these things in *The Quiet American*; a space of the imagination evoked with tenderness and detailed accuracy, the loving meticulousness of the Western mapper of the Empire. For Brian Thomas, Fowler “loves Vietnam, for example, in much the way that he loves Phuong...But even this kind of appreciation has an oddly aesthetic, distanced quality; it is a response to a certain exotic picturesqueness that tends to be conveyed in visually static terms.”<sup>222</sup> I would suggest, however, that Greene’s Vietnam is a place not quite to be captured by description, offered with an awareness of the human life that peopled it before the colonial presence:

...the gold of the rice fields under a flat late sun: the fisher’s fragile cranes hovering over the fields like mosquitoes: the cups of tea on an old abbot’s platform, with his bed and his commercial calendars, his buckets and broken cups and the junk of a lifetime washed up around his chair: the mollusc hats of the girls repairing the road where a mine had burst: the gold and the young green and the bright dresses of the south, and in the north the deep browns and the black clothes and the circle of enemy mountains and the drone of planes.<sup>223</sup>

An affection for the place is certainly evident here, though perhaps the people in it are somewhat undifferentiated. As Aijaz Ahmad suggests,

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<sup>218</sup> J. Meyers, *Fiction and the Colonial Experience*, (Ipswich: Boydell Press, 1973), 98.

<sup>219</sup> Sheldon, *The Man Within*, 401.

<sup>220</sup> Sheldon, *The Man Within*, 400f.

<sup>221</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1.

<sup>222</sup> B. Thomas, “*The Quiet American*”, in J.C. Pratt (ed.), *The Quiet American: Text and Criticism*, (New York: Penguin, 1996), 424.

<sup>223</sup> Greene, *QA*, 25.

‘Description’ has been central, for example, in the colonizing discourses. It was by assembling a monstrous machinery of descriptions – of our bodies, our speech acts, our habitats, our conflicts and desires, our politics, our socialities and sexualities, in fields as various as ethnology, fiction, photography, linguistics, political science – that those discourses were able to classify and ideologically master colonial subjects.<sup>224</sup>

Describing Vietnam in this way is thus at once also a way of appropriating it, rendering its geography a postcard backdrop, its people largely decorative. Yet a reading that emphasises this is undercut by the hard glint of the political reality of wartime that Greene does not allow his reader to forget surrounds this rural idyll: “the circle of enemy mountains and the drone of planes.” The “picturesque” setting becomes at once more than this. At other times Fowler moreover offers distinct observations of this enduring culture: “in five hundred years there may be no New York or London, but they’ll be growing paddy in these fields.”<sup>225</sup> There is a sense of acknowledging a civilisation that was here long before the arrival of the colonisers, and that will continue to be here long after they have gone.

This figuring of place is perhaps best cast into the light by juxtaposing it with sketches of the Orient that have come before it. Leonard Woolf’s portrayal, for instance, of the Oriental landscape and its people in *The Village in the Jungle*, first published in 1913, is infinitely less sympathetic: “All jungles are evil, but no jungle is more evil than that which lay about the village of Beddagama;”<sup>226</sup> and “[t]he spirit of the jungle is in the village, and in the people who live in it...They are very near to the animals which live in the jungle around them. They look at you with the melancholy and patient stupidity of the buffalo in their eyes, or the cunning of the jackal.”<sup>227</sup> Greene’s affection for his setting becomes more apparent alongside this sense of the malignancy of a strange place; as does his sympathy for his locals. But it is also more than mere affection for the place; it is a portrayal of it that grants the possibility of it having its own complex life, beyond the scope of what the narrating eye can see. *Burmese Days* and *A Passage to India* perhaps bear greater similarity to *The Quiet American* in this capacity. Orwell’s novel suggests the colonial Burma of the 1920s and 30s in which it is set, as both merely an exotic backdrop to the serious goings-on between the Anglo-Indians, but also a space with laws unto itself where the English do not belong. This is arguably

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<sup>224</sup> Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric”, 99.

<sup>225</sup> Greene, *QA*, 95.

<sup>226</sup> Woolf, *The Village in the Jungle*, (London: Eland, 2005), 10.

<sup>227</sup> L. Woolf, *The Village in the Jungle*, 14f.

accounted for partially by the fact that Orwell is said to have loved Burma as much as he hated it.<sup>228</sup> Orwell's Orientals, on the other hand, are evoked unsympathetically:

the High School Boys, with their young, yellow faces – faces smooth as gold coins, full of that maddening contempt that sits so naturally on the Mongolian face – sneered at them as they went past, sometimes hooted after them with hyena-like laughter.<sup>229</sup>

These “Orientals,” rather than acting as mere daubs of colour on a postcard setting, are imbued with malice, in a manner not dissimilar to Woolf's narrative's attributing of malevolence to the landscape it does not understand. *A Passage to India*, by contrast, acknowledges more of what it cannot grasp: “Nothing was explained, and yet there was no romance. Films of heat, radiated from the Kawa Dol precipices, increased the confusion. They came at irregular intervals and moved capriciously. A patch of field would jump as if it was being fried, and then lie quiet.”<sup>230</sup> Aziz and his friends, moreover, are given their own complex lives beyond the grasp of the Anglo-Indians to a far greater extent than in Greene's text,

they were discussing as to whether or no it is possible to be friends with an Englishman, Mahmoud Ali argued that it was not, Hamidullah disagreed, but with so many reservations that there was no friction between them. Delicious indeed to lie on the broad veranda with the moon rising in front and the servants preparing dinner behind, and no trouble happening.<sup>231</sup>

It is worth noting here, that though Greene might have been dismissive of the muted “civilised pleasure” of reading Forster, he is evidently concerned with many of the same problems of *not* knowing that *A Passage to India* reaches for. Both stage a Modernist doubt about how much of this experience, in particular the experience in the colony, can be communicated effectively.

It is difficult to suggest however, by contrast with Forster, that Greene offers his novel's Orientals (besides Phuong) much in the way of agency. Limited as they are indeed to “minor

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<sup>228</sup> T. Eagleton, “Orwell and the Lower-Middle-Class Novel”, in R. Williams (ed.), *George Orwell: A Collection of Critical Essays*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 17.

<sup>229</sup> G. Orwell, *Burmese Days*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1978), 34.

<sup>230</sup> E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), 139.

<sup>231</sup> Forster, *A Passage to India*, 31.

parts,” they constitute cutout characters or further (and less complicated) instances of cultural stereotyping. The two soldiers in the watchtower are hardly complex humans, but half-sketched figures, silent and afraid: “They didn’t answer, just lowered back at us behind the stumps of their cigarettes;”<sup>232</sup> “[t]hey picked up their pans and began to eat again, scraping with their chopsticks, eyes watching Pyle and me over the rim of the pan.”<sup>233</sup> They are denied language, and the power that would come with it. But Fowler, the verbalizing European, is able to assert dominance over them because he knows how to use language: “I used the kind of French obscenity I thought he would recognize,”<sup>234</sup> in order to take the gun from one of the guards; overtly foregrounding his access to power through language. When the Vietnamese are granted speech, their language is reduced to unintelligible sound, “I could hear the guards whispering to each other like crooners, in their language like a song.”<sup>235</sup> Fowler even goes so far as to say, “[y]ellow voices sing and black voices gargle, while ours just speak.”<sup>236</sup> This points directly to an assumed neutral “white” position, while other languages are tacked to race and othered. Chinua Achebe points critically to Conrad’s “bestowal of human expression to the one [the white colonist] and the withholding of it from the other [the African Other],”<sup>237</sup> and, in a sense, this is what Greene does here. The Vietnamese are also fragmented, reduced to “eyes watching,” as in the long tradition of the West portraying the Oriental as disjointed body parts. In describing them thus, “[t]he two men watched us – I write men, but I doubt whether they had accumulated forty years between them,”<sup>238</sup> Greene moreover underpins a juvenile element in the two guards.

The Chinese family of Mr. Chou does not suggest much more agency for Orientals. The family scene seems to unwind in an endlessly repeating carnival of the ordinary and absurd: “Mr. Chou cleared his throat, but it was only for an immense expectoration into a tin spittoon decorated with pink blooms. The baby rolled up and down among the tea-dregs and the cat leapt from a cardboard box on to a suitcase.”<sup>239</sup> They all remain conspicuously silent. Only the savvy Mr. Heng speaks. With his greater knowledge of Pyle’s actual work and his

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<sup>232</sup> Greene, *QA*, 95.

<sup>233</sup> Greene, *QA*, 97.

<sup>234</sup> Greene, *QA*, 93.

<sup>235</sup> Greene, *QA* 107.

<sup>236</sup> Greene, *QA* 96f.

<sup>237</sup> C. Achebe, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness’”, *Massachusetts Review*, (18, 1977). < <http://kirbyk.net/hod/image.of.africa.html>>

<sup>238</sup> Greene, *QA* 106.

<sup>239</sup> Greene, *QA* 128.

superior political Intelligence, Mr. Heng might have suggested something different. He is always ahead of Fowler, grasping the situation a moment earlier, and with a clear plan of how to proceed. Yet he is also, finally, relegated to the Oriental who is adept at “intrigue [and] cunning.”<sup>240</sup> His exact political motivations remain unclear, and if we are to feel any sympathy for Pyle (which Fowler’s attitude seems to suggest we are), as the man responsible for his death, he must, to some extent, be the novel’s villain. Of course it is more complex than this, but Heng remains the novel’s scheming Oriental, perhaps more innocuous than *The Heart of the Matter*’s Yusef and *Burmese Days*’ U Po Kyin, but fulfilling the same plot purposes.

Fowler’s Indian assistant, Domingues, is a man marked by sensitivity and “gentleness and humility and an absolute love of truth.”<sup>241</sup> He is also signaled as probably a Roman Catholic, which, in Greene, must always mark him out. Reduced as he is, however, to a faithful lackey, it seems difficult to make much more of him than the devoted native servant, much like the pathetically dutiful Dr. Veraswami of *Burmese Days*. In these ways, then, the novel does allow itself to be read as an inheritor of the legacies of Orientalist literature, though not in quite the same ways as its forerunners by Woolf and Orwell. I would suggest, moreover, that this is further complicated in its representation of Phuong.

First, however, it is worth investigating the tie between Phuong and Vietnam, and the reading of Phuong as representative of her beleaguered country.<sup>242</sup> Brian Thomas points to this as tacit in Fowler’s portrayal from the beginning: “His passion for Baudelaire in particular – ‘*Aimer à loisir, / Aimer et mourir / Au pays qui te ressemble*’ (18) – says much not only about his implicit identification of Phuong with her country.”<sup>243</sup> This reading is perhaps a logical extension of the suggestion of Greene’s tracing of a geo-political conflict on the level of the psycho-social. In this sense, as DeVitis has it, Phuong “represents the enigma of the East and the desire of the East for political status.”<sup>244</sup> Read in this way, the novel can be cast as an allegory in which the interpersonal conflict stands representative of the larger political

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<sup>240</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 38.

<sup>241</sup> Greene, *QA* 122.

<sup>242</sup> See Steigman, “The Literal American”, 6.

<sup>243</sup> Thomas, “*QA*,” 427.

<sup>244</sup> DeVitis, *Greene*, 118.

situation. In this sense, the text might be read as what Fredric Jameson calls a “third-world text”<sup>245</sup> which aligns itself with his suggestion that

[a]ll third-world texts are necessarily...allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories...Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.<sup>246</sup>

This is a proposition for which Jameson has been taken to task, perhaps most effectively by Aijaz Ahmad,<sup>247</sup> but it is a suggestion which can perhaps be used to open up the text to an allegorical reading, rather than to suggest it as exclusively any one thing. As Jameson posits in *The Political Unconscious*, “[a]llegory is here the opening up of the text to multiple meanings, to successive rewritings and overwritings which are generated as so many levels and as so many supplementary interpretations.”<sup>248</sup>

White asserts, “[a] reading of the love triangle as a metaphor for old and new colonial interests in Vietnam is allowable and even advisable, but Greene never forgets that his characters are real people.”<sup>249</sup> If Fowler’s refusal to give up Phuong to Pyle is taken in this light, it would offer an account for journalist A.J. Liebling’s criticism that “Greene apparently resented passing on world leadership to the Americans,”<sup>250</sup> and, on occasion, it does seem that Fowler’s frustration with Pyle stems from an irritation with his nouveau colonialist presumptuousness. The way the men fight over her – Fowler acknowledging his vested, selfish interest while Pyle assumes charge of her “interests” with blind good intentions – is reminiscent of the way they approach their discussion of politics; and possibly of Greene’s take on the political situation as represented in the novel. However, to read his characters *merely* in this way would elide a great deal of the complex interaction of individuals Greene

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<sup>245</sup> F. Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”, *Social Text*, (No. 15, Autumn, 1986), 69. – Though for Jameson this is more likely to be written by a “civilizational Other,” i.e. someone coming from the “third world.”

<sup>246</sup> Jameson, “Third-World Literature”, 69.

<sup>247</sup> Most damningly, perhaps, for his assumption “that the Third World is *constituted* by the ‘experience of colonialism and imperialism.’” – Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric”, 107.

<sup>248</sup> F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), 29f.

<sup>249</sup> C.D. White, “Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*”, *Explicator*, (67:1, 2008), 34.

<sup>250</sup> In Sherry, *Life of Greene*, 420.

portrays. This is where it is possible to etch out the difference between reading the novel as an allegory, and a more delicate understanding of the relationship between the individual and the larger socio-political context into which he is constructed, as well as the version of that reality refracted through the lens of the narrating individual. To read the novel as purely allegorical allows a reading that traces the larger arc of the political thrust of the narrative. In this sense, Fowler is merely a European, Pyle just an American, and Phuong no more than the colonised Orient – which might just as well be substituted with Burma, or British India, or Borneo. But to do so might offer a somewhat flattened understanding of the humans and the human relationships Greene represents. However, to shift the focus completely on to the personal, and how this allows the larger political events to be refracted into the human, is perhaps to underrepresent the larger political resonances of the text. Rather, perhaps, as Jameson suggests in his discussion of Benito Perez Galdos's *Fortunata y Jacinta*, “[w]hat is important to stress is not merely the wit of the analogy as Galdos uses it, but also its *optional nature*: we can use it to convert the entire situation of the novel into an allegorical commentary on the destiny of Spain, but we are also free to reverse its priorities and to read the political analogy as metaphorical decoration for the individual drama, and as a mere figural intensification of this last.”<sup>251</sup> This reading allows for Phuong both as a representation of Vietnam, and, arguably, as an individual constructed with a particular personality and independent motivations.

This is perhaps best put by Zadie Smith when she asserts,

In this emblematic love triangle Phuong is of course representing Vietnam to some extent, but she is still everywhere her idiosyncratic self. She is the girl in white dancing better than Pyle, she is curled up in bed reading about Princess Anne. She keeps her counsel. *One feels that where Greene did not know enough of her life, or could not imagine, he resolved not to describe.* As a result Phuong floats free of her symbolic weights; she has her own inviolate life in the rue Catinat - buying silk scarves, drinking milkshakes - outside the reach of Fowler's narrative eye, and thus denying the reader's base and natural request that she embody her entire country... We sense a real, breathing woman, not just the idea of a woman that Pyle is trying to steal from Fowler.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Jameson, “Third-World Literature”, 79 (my emphasis).

<sup>252</sup> Smith, “Shades of Greene” (my emphasis).

Phuong remains mysterious not because she is Oriental, or Other, but because she is a complex human over whom the novel's first person narrator cannot wield perpetual surveillance. To pretend to be able to do so would be dishonest. The novel, refracted through Fowler, can only offer as much of Phuong as he has access to. And so, I might extend Smith's proposition to claim that, not only where Greene did not know enough, but also where Fowler could not know enough of Phuong's life, or could not imagine, Greene resolved not to describe.

This reading may work in tandem with the Subaltern Studies approach of Pathak, Sengupta and Purkayastha who offer an interpretation of Phuong that endeavours to re-inscribe her with agency and power. For them, "Phuong's silences are a strategy to avoid commitment to any statement or programme which might compromise the future she is pursuing."<sup>253</sup> Phuong does indeed seem to utilise silence to her advantage, as when Fowler asks, "'If it had been bad news would you have left me, Phuong?' She rubbed her hands across my chest to reassure me, not realizing that it was words this time that I required, however untrue. 'Would you like a pipe? There *is* a letter for you. I think perhaps it is from her.'<sup>254</sup> The power here is all Phuong's, who knows that a letter from Fowler's wife has arrived, while Fowler is wracked with worry but too afraid to ask. She furthermore denies Fowler the security he so desperately craves. This is not because she appears not to understand him, but because she chooses not to answer him. On a similar note, though perhaps more powerfully, when Fowler tells her Pyle has been killed, "[s]he put the needle down and sat back on her heels, looking at me. There was no scene, no tears, just thought – the long private thought of somebody who has to alter a whole course of life."<sup>255</sup> There is little doubt that this is a real, whole human, with complex inner workings unreadable to the narrator. Fowler, grappling to understand her, muses "she didn't have the gift of expression, that was all. And I remembered that first tormenting year when I had begged her to tell me what she thought and had scared her with my unreasoning anger at her silences. Even my desire had been a weapon, as though when one plunged one's sword towards the victim's womb, she would lose control and speak."<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Pathak et al, "The Prisonhouse of Orientalism", 414.

<sup>254</sup> Greene, *QA*, 117.

<sup>255</sup> Greene, *QA*, 22.

<sup>256</sup> Greene, *QA*, 134.

The sexual dynamics of power and control between the two are again asserted here: Phuong is the sexualised object upon which Fowler attempts to assert his dominance, but to no avail. There is a reminder here that all the novel can offer of Phuong is Fowler's understanding of her. When he suggests that "she didn't have the gift of expression," the novel has taught us to read this as Fowler's answer to a problem he has struggled with for years – but it need not be the case. In fact, just before he offers this, he reasserts, "But even while I made my speech and watched her turn the page (a family group with Princess Anne), I knew I was inventing a character as much as Pyle was. One never knows another human being."<sup>257</sup> If, as Ashcroft and Ahluwalia assert, the "essence of Said's argument is that to know something is to have power over it, and conversely, to have power is to be able to know the world in your own terms,"<sup>258</sup> then this is an attempt that is constantly frustrated by Phuong's silences. As Smith points out, "Both men have their equally distorting, unavoidably colonial, story about Phuong."<sup>259</sup> Fowler, the characteristically even-handed, reliably unreliable narrator reminds himself, and his reader, that all he has is his understanding of Phuong. And this is an understanding that has repeatedly come up against the brick wall of her silence, which in all its blankness might signify all the sentiments he ascribes to her, or none. The point is that Fowler is at pains to make this overt. This resonates with Smith: "where Greene did not know enough of her life, or could not imagine, he resolved not to describe."<sup>260</sup> Smith's reading is moreover echoed by Steinglass who "argues for Phuong's singularity by noting that the book 'doesn't really show us Phuong, it shows us Fowler's idea of Phuong, and his frustration at his inability to grasp her.'"<sup>261</sup> This reading suggests the possibility of autonomy in the character of Phuong in the novel's figuring of her, which is quite at odds with cursory notions of Saidian Orientalism's disempowerment of the Oriental.

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<sup>257</sup> Greene, *QA*, 133f.

<sup>258</sup> B. Ashcroft & P. Ahluwalia, *Edward Said*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 83.

<sup>259</sup> Smith, "Shades of Greene".

<sup>260</sup> Smith, "Shades of Greene".

<sup>261</sup> Steigman, "The Literal American", 24.

English, French, and Silence: Phuong and Fowler

Perhaps more than the representation of Phuong through Fowler, the figuring of the relationship between the two in the novel is paramount to an investigation of the problematic of communication staged in *The Quiet American*. If Phuong were no more than an exoticised sex object, it would seem logical that Fowler's interest in her be limited to a sexual one – the kind of interest he expresses when he loses his temper with Pyle. Yet the novel problematises this frequently. For Allott, Fowler's "feelings for her "mingle tenderness, selfishness, compassion, pain, respect for human dignity, and a bitter sense of the limitations of human faith and love;"<sup>262</sup> while for Erdinast-Vulcan, Phuong is

very dear to him [Fowler], as a sister or a child would be...but the woman in the red dressing gown had been his greatest love...Fowler loves Phuong, but it is a defeated love, because he does not expect her to love him in return. He cannot bear the anxiety that is involved in a mature, intense relationship, and he prefers to love Phuong as one does a treasured object.<sup>263</sup>

Both take for granted that Fowler loves Phuong, but the nature of this love is what needs to be examined. When Erdinast-Vulcan suggests Fowler feels for Phuong "as a sister or a child," he is perhaps recalling Fowler's allusion to Baudelaire's, "*mon enfant, ma soeur*," and also tapping into the sense of Phuong's child-likeness addressed earlier. But given the distinctly adult, and sexual aspect that defines his interest in her, this seems slightly off the mark. Though her sexuality is not the only facet of her that interests Fowler, it certainly is a primary one. He is not so disingenuous as to suggest otherwise; but he is also nowhere near as clinical in his sexual interests as he tries to suggest to Pyle. The notion that he loves Phuong "as one does a treasured object" seems to be problematised by the entreaty on his part to Pyle: "She looks so small and breakable and unlike our women, but don't think of her as – as an ornament."<sup>264</sup>

Erdinast-Vulcan also asserts that "the woman in the red dressing gown had been his greatest love," but the truth of this seems to depend on an unworded definition of what would

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<sup>262</sup> Allott, "The Moral Situation", 196.

<sup>263</sup> Erdinast-Vulcan, *Childless Fathers*, 63.

<sup>264</sup> Greene, *QA*, 156.

constitute a “greatest love,” an unworkably vague concept; and suggests a valorising of this earlier love over Fowler’s feeling for Phuong. Fowler recalls this woman, whom the later letter from his wife names Anne, in answer to Pyle’s question about his “deepest sexual experience.”<sup>265</sup> Anne, too, then, is delivered from the first as a sexual being. In explanation of this relationship, Fowler offers

‘I left her, too... We are fools,’ I said, ‘when we love. I was terrified of losing her. I thought I saw her changing – I don’t know if she really was, but I couldn’t bear the uncertainty any longer. I ran to the finish just like a coward runs toward the enemy and wins a medal. I wanted to get death over.’

‘Death?’

‘It was a kind of death.’ ...

‘But you don’t find the same thing with Phuong?’

‘Not the same. You see, the other one loved me. I was afraid of losing love. Now I’m only afraid of losing Phuong.’<sup>266</sup>

The relationships this suggests are complex. There is something to the passage that recalls Bendrix and Sarah in *The End of the Affair*, and Bendrix’s perpetual fear of the “end of love.”<sup>267</sup> A certain similarity between Fowler and Bendrix (in their relationship to their rivals) has already been indicated: both are disillusioned writer figures who offer their stories in first-person narration permeated by self-doubt and cynicism. Both seem ready to do anything to keep the woman they love. But most tellingly, neither is able to understand their loved one. This is as much the case between Fowler and Phuong as it was between him and Anne. There seems to be an absence of reciprocity in the relationship with Phuong, however, which might signal the grounds on which Erdinast-Vulcan asserts that Anne was Fowler’s “greatest love.” And yet, at the time of that relationship, Fowler appears to have been beset by many of the same uncertainties about the way Anne felt for him as he now experiences with Phuong.

I would suggest that the difference in these relationships is to be ascribed to two reasons, neither of which is that Fowler loves Phuong less than the woman in the red dressing gown. In the first place, he is older now: “For an ageing man, Pyle, it’s very secure – she won’t run away from home so long as the home is happy.”<sup>268</sup> Fowler wants different things from love

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<sup>265</sup> Greene, *QA*, 103.

<sup>266</sup> Greene, *QA*, 103f.

<sup>267</sup> Greene, *End of the Affair*, 87.

<sup>268</sup> Greene, *QA*, 104.

now. He is less afraid of losing the abstract concept of some noble “love,” and more frightened by the prospect of losing the real human being, Phuong. Rather than it being the case that he “cannot bear the anxiety that is involved in a mature, intense relationship,” this might be a *more* mature kind of relationship; one desired by a man who is worried by such concerns as: “All, Pyle? Wait until you’re afraid of living ten years alone with no companion and a nursing home at the end of it.”<sup>269</sup> In the second place, and perhaps more significantly, if Fowler struggled to understand Anne, as Bendrix found himself unable to understand Sarah, the problem of communication must be greatly exacerbated for Fowler and Phuong. The earlier couples must contend with the inadequacies of communicating in one shared first language, as suggested earlier in relation to Steiner’s reading of human communication as a kind of translation. Fowler and Phuong confront these, as well as the particular problems incumbent on those who attempt communication in a language other than their mother tongue. As Steigman notes, “[t]he pairing of Fowler and Phuong poses another couple at linguistic odds with each other.”<sup>270</sup> Here it becomes apparent that the problem of communication across language and culture is at the heart of the relationship between the two.

Fowler and Phuong communicate in French. However, this is mostly silently translated for the reader to English. Consequently, it is perhaps worth noting when Fowler chooses to offer a communication in French, as it is often done to indicate dynamics of secrecy and in- or exclusion. Sandra Berman notes that language is not “a neutral element. Consciously or unconsciously, it performs deft feats of appropriation and exclusion, supported by a dialectic of otherness.”<sup>271</sup> For instance, after bemoaning the inadequacy of his style of language use – “I had no technique for telling her slowly and gently. I was a correspondent”<sup>272</sup> – Fowler is only able to muster the courage to tell Phuong that Pyle is dead in French. “*Il est mort, Phuong.*” She held the needle in her hand and looked up at me like a child trying to concentrate, frowning. ‘*Tu dis?*’ ‘*Pyle est mort. Assassiné.*’”<sup>273</sup> The words are inadequate to what they are to communicate to Phuong, who had chosen to build a life around this man who is now dead. And so perhaps differentiating these words so clearly, by delivering them in the

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<sup>269</sup> Greene, *QA*, 105.

<sup>270</sup> Steigman, “The Literal American”, 19.

<sup>271</sup> S. Berman, “Introduction”, in S. Berman & M. Wood (eds.), *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>272</sup> Greene, *QA*, 21.

<sup>273</sup> Greene, *QA*, 22.

French the narrative implies the two actually communicate in, and also by distinguishing them visually as italics, there is a kind of shared privacy achieved between the two; this brief exchange includes only the two of them, as they converse in concise, uncomplicated French. Taken in this light, Fowler's figuring of Phuong as "*mon enfant, ma soeur*" in French is perhaps another way to tap into this tacit intimacy; this is the only language he speaks which she might understand. Later in the novel, when Pyle and Phuong arrive at the flat at the same time, Fowler offers an aside to Phuong, "I said in French to Phuong, 'Where did you pick him up?'"<sup>274</sup> Here, Fowler is using the French that he and Phuong both speak, but which Pyle does not understand, in order to exclude Pyle from the conversation. In this deliberate move, Fowler's "linguistic superiority" (as suggested by Apter) is again asserted.

Though the gap between Phuong and Pyle is necessarily greater, as he does not speak French and she speaks barely any English, there is a very real divorce between Phuong and Fowler who must communicate in a French native to neither of them. Interestingly, this is the language in which Phuong is introduced from the first, in her own voice: "*Je sais. Je t'ai vu seul à la fenêtre.*" Here, the use of French places her at a linguistic distance from the rest of the narrative – from the language in which Fowler thinks, and tells his reader his story. The distance between them is made explicit when, a moment later, Fowler intimates, "I thought of several ironic and unpleasant jests I might make, but neither her English nor her French would have been good enough for her to understand the irony, and, strange to say, I had no desire to hurt her."<sup>275</sup> Here again is Fowler's typical even-handedness, but, more importantly, his awareness that she will not understand his meaning as he intends it. As Fowler's narration will go on to show itself heavily imbedded with "ironic and unpleasant jests," it is worth considering how plagued with communication difficulties a relationship with a woman he is certain will not understand these, must be. Yet, always, he is aware of her: "Phuong, I thought, had not caught his tone, melancholy and final, and her English was very bad."<sup>276</sup> It is worth contrasting this to his communication with Phuong's sister who, similarly, does not understand his irony. But Fowler does not care enough for her to foresee this, or to adjust his behaviour accordingly: Fowler explains Pyle's work, "He belongs to the American Economic Mission, You know the kind of thing – electrical sewing machines for starving

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<sup>274</sup> Greene, *QA*, 131.

<sup>275</sup> Greene, *QA*, 11.

<sup>276</sup> Greene, *QA*, 17.

seamstresses’...‘But they don’t use sewing machines. There wouldn’t be any electricity where they live.’ She was a very literal woman.”<sup>277</sup>

José Ortega y Gasset suggests that “language not only makes the expression of certain thoughts difficult, but it also impedes their reception by others.”<sup>278</sup> From the start, the novel indicates Fowler’s awareness that not only can he not express himself satisfactorily to Phuong; if he tries, she will not understand him as he intends. This incomprehension runs both ways; “Fowler cannot understand the secrets of Saigon to begin with.”<sup>279</sup> As they ascend the stairs to his flat, he must ask Phuong to translate the old women on the stairs: “When we reached the landing all the old women turned their heads, and as soon as we had passed their voices rose and fell as though they were singing together. ‘What are they talking about?’ ‘They think I have come home.’”<sup>280</sup> Phuong now occupies the same position of power that Fowler occupied in the exchange with Pyle discussed earlier; the linguistic superiority concomitant with the ability to translate. Always, it seems, in the interactions between Phuong and Fowler, it is Phuong who wields the silent power.

Fowler goes on to muse, “[t]o take an Annamite to bed with you is like taking a bird: they twitter and sing on your pillow. There had been a time when I thought none of their voices sang like Phuong’s. I put out my hand and touched her arm – their bones too were as fragile as a bird’s.”<sup>281</sup> Fowler is clearly “othering” Phuong, and Greene is perhaps in this particular sense indeed reminiscent of his predecessor Conrad who, through his narrator Marlow, calls the talk of the Africans he portrays “a violent babble of uncouth sounds,”<sup>282</sup> rather than granting it the status of language. The old women on the stairs sing incomprehensibly; Phuong twitters and sings like a bird. Fowler, by contrast, is steeped in language and words. Achebe’s critique of Conrad’s withholding of a “real” language from his natives, as discussed earlier, might again spring to mind.<sup>283</sup> For Achebe, this signals a refusal on Conrad’s part to

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<sup>277</sup> Greene, *QA*, 41.

<sup>278</sup> J. Ortega y Gasset, “The Misery and the Splendor of Translation”, in L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 56.

<sup>279</sup> Steigman, “The Literal American”, 13.

<sup>280</sup> Greene, *QA*, 11f.

<sup>281</sup> Greene, *QA*, 12f.

<sup>282</sup> J. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness & Other Tales*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 170.

<sup>283</sup> Achebe, “An Image of Africa”.

grant the African equal humanity, and one might consider whether such a criticism could likewise be leveled at Greene. However, I would suggest that Greene's handling of this in relation to Phuong differs in key ways. While, as Achebe reads Conrad, within the fiction, the "violent babble of uncouth noises" is clearly inferior to the civilization inherent in conversing in an "evolved language" like English, this need not be the case in Greene at all. As indicated earlier, his male protagonists have frequently revealed a sense of the women they love being altogether incomprehensible to them. Moreover, the tone these comparisons take is not derogatory; this singing seems to have an aesthetic value, while being beyond his understanding. It is by no means necessarily barbaric and lesser, but strange and different. Fowler's noting that "their bones too were fragile as a bird's" perhaps suggests a protective note with an air that might be construed as paternalistic or patronizing. But this, again, might well be evoked more because she is a woman than because she is an Oriental. Fowler – whose opinion the text teaches us to weigh more heavily than Pyle's – moreover deliberately accords her more agency in this regard than Pyle when the American claims to want to protect her: "I don't think she's in need of protection."<sup>284</sup> The passage, of course, remains problematic, but it is not simply and deterministically so.

Greene's text diverges from the inherited modes of representing "other" language in a more significant way though. Fowler desires deeply that he might speak Phuong's "language" – not necessarily Vietnamese, but what he construes as this "singing": "The old women gossiped as they had always done, squatting on the floor outside the urinoir, carrying Fate in the lines of their faces as others on the palm. They were silent as I passed and I wondered what they might have told me, if I had known their language."<sup>285</sup> Fowler is aware of their being the bearers of secrets – secrets to which he can have no means of gaining access. This is an inability of which he is even more acutely aware with Phuong, "...and just as in those early days I wanted her mind, now I wanted to read her thoughts, but they were hidden away in a language I couldn't speak."<sup>286</sup> Fowler is thus determined in terms of lack, for his inability to access this language. Phuong's withdrawal from language in the narrative is to a huge extent

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<sup>284</sup> Greene, *QA*, 58.

<sup>285</sup> Greene, *QA*, 115.

<sup>286</sup> Greene, *QA*, 140.

voluntary. She chooses not to speak. She chooses silence; “she keeps her counsel.”<sup>287</sup> This silence is the fountainhead from which a great deal of her power over Fowler springs.

Douglas Kerr offers a notion akin to this when he suggests that one “contrast the bookish Pyle, the confessional skepticism of Fowler’s writing and a woman who doesn’t read or write at all,”<sup>288</sup> highlighting the different relationship of each to language. I view this as interesting not only for the way it in fact allows Phuong’s agency to be asserted, but for the manner in which it suggests silence as a valuable alternative to language. Ortega y Gasset makes the suggestion: “Let us say, then, that Man, when he begins to speak, does so *because* he thinks that he is going to be able to say what he thinks. Well, this is illusory. Language doesn’t offer that much. It says, a little more or less...while it sets an insurmountable obstacle in place, blocking a transmission of the rest.”<sup>289</sup> So, as Ortega y Gasset would have it, despite a belief that language will allow us to say what we think, we find that language permits some transmission but ultimately functions more as a barrier than an effective conduit. Steeped in this misguided belief as we are, for Ortega y Gasset, we communicate under the assumption of being understood, of our meaning being received as it is intended, and “inevitably misunderstand each other much more than if we had remained silent and guessed.”<sup>290</sup> This is potentially evident when Fowler and Pyle attempt to communicate without realizing that the one’s sense of Honor and the other’s “European duplicity” are foreign to each other. Fowler and Phuong are at least aware of communicating in a language alien to both, while Pyle and Fowler perhaps operate under the assumption of speaking the same tongue. However, as has been shown, this is not necessarily the case. With Phuong, by contrast, Fowler is aware that “neither her English nor her French would have been good enough for her to understand the irony.” Consequently, they may approach their interaction with a greater awareness of the language between them as more of a barrier than an effective conduit, and as a result perhaps, in Ortega y Gasset’s phrasing, misunderstand each other less for having stayed silent.

It is in silence, finally, that intimacy seems far more likely in the novel, as it is outside of words that Fowler and Phuong seem to come closest to understanding each other. This is a

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<sup>287</sup> Smith, “Shades of Greene”.

<sup>288</sup> Cited in Steigman, “The Literal American”, 14f.

<sup>289</sup> Ortega y Gasset, “The Misery and Splendor”, 55.

<sup>290</sup> Ortega y Gasset, “The Misery and Splendor”, 55.

sentiment that finds voice in Greene's non-fiction also: "Then one longs most to be with the people one loves, the people with whom it is possible to be silent."<sup>291</sup> It is thus in silence that the two first encounter Pyle, "we sat in silence, content to be together."<sup>292</sup> Similarly, Fowler needs no words to note Phuong's arrival, "It was then I heard Phuong's step. I had hoped against hope that he would have gone before she returned. He heard it too and recognised it. He said, 'There she is,' although he had had only one evening to learn her footfall."<sup>293</sup> The fact that Pyle recognises it too is a problem for Fowler because it indicates an intrusion on their intimacy – an intimacy without language. But this intimacy exists also in ways that are more difficult to learn. As Pyle and Fowler sit waiting in the tower, Pyle says, "'I was wondering what she [Phuong] was doing.' 'I can tell you that. She'll have decided that I'm spending the night at Tanyin – it won't be the first time. She'll be lying on the bed with a joss stick burning to keep away the mosquitoes and she'll be looking at the pictures in an old *Paris-Match*...' He said wistfully, 'It must be wonderful to know exactly.'"<sup>294</sup> Knowing Phuong is also a matter of knowing her habits, her patterns; and this is again a closeness that does not require language.

Greene's figuring of Vietnam and the Vietnamese then arguably remains complicit in many of the inherited codes of the West's representation of the Orient. In the case of Phuong, however, the novel suggests a more complex working out of the problem of representing the gendered Other. Though "[c]ertainly Fowler feels the purported "strangeness" or otherness of Phuong,"<sup>295</sup> this is not to say that she is rendered in the absolute, determined "other" terms of, for instance, Orwell's Ma Hla May. Rather, she is mysterious because Fowler does not pretend to have access to a way of understanding her fully, and Greene does not pretend to be able to give it to him. Moreover, Phuong, through her deliberately chosen silences, offers a potentially empowered Oriental woman. This silence, furthermore, constitutes a valuable alternative to the fraught "English" communication between the American and European, and can be read as an attempt at working out some of the anxieties Greene shapes around the possibility of communication, especially across different cultures.

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<sup>291</sup> Greene, *Reflections*, 183.

<sup>292</sup> Greene, *QA*, 33.

<sup>293</sup> Greene, *QA*, 75.

<sup>294</sup> Greene, *QA*, 101.

<sup>295</sup> Steigman, "The Literal American", 21.

## Conclusion

### Greene and the Limits of Cultural Translation

And waking that morning months later with Phuong beside me, I thought, “And did you understand her either?...Wouldn’t we all do better not trying to understand, accepting the fact that no human being will ever understand another, not a wife a husband, a lover a mistress, nor a parent a child? (*The Quiet American*, 60)

In his depiction of relationships fraught with the problems of communication and communicability, Greene thus reveals himself to be concerned with many of the same anxieties grappled with by high Modernism. A concern for the limits of what can be communicated permeates the novel and is the cause for a great deal of the narrative’s conflict and troubled relationships. A close examination of *The Quiet American*’s engagement with the meeting of the European and the American can help to dispel simplistic readings of the novel as sheer anti-Americanism on the part of the author. It also allows the reassertion of the novel’s relevance in a post-9/11 world. Here issues of the United States’ foreign policy as they are interknitted with questions of translation can be teased out in the microcosm of the interpersonal conflict between Fowler and Pyle, and on the larger scale of their representing the meeting of the old world and its old colonialism, with the new world and its new American empire. My application of George Steiner’s and Emily Apter’s thinking in this sphere permits Greene’s text to be read in a new light, and can illuminate the question of communicability across different languages and cultures in the novel in fruitful ways. This reading of the novel has also allowed me to investigate the use and deployment of certain cultural stereotypes. These inform Greene’s representation of the potential for communication in his novel. Thus, this reading can also trace the development of certain ways of portraying and understanding the Briton and the American, and the Westerner and the “Oriental,” and their encounter, within Greene’s oeuvre, as well as in the work of some of his antecedents. This approach furthermore elucidates the interaction of two different Englishes, as they are tacked on to the different Weltanschauungen of an American and a British cultural history, as it suggests an understanding of the American empire’s relation to the rest of the world, and how this is imbricated with questions of language.

My exploration of the novel's "Orientals," as they sit alongside others in key texts set in the Orient by Conrad, Woolf, Forster and Orwell, has shown the ways in which Greene has worked, to some extent, within an inherited Orientalist tradition, but also cleared his own imaginative space in order to shape his own anxieties about the possibility of communication between the European and the "Oriental." While his depiction may offer some of the same problematics delineated by Said in terms of the Orient under Western eyes, I have shown that the figuring of Phuong offers something rather different. In this vein, my use of Zadie Smith, as well as Pathak, Sengupta and Purkayastha has allowed me to suggest an interpretation of Phuong as to some extent empowered in her silence and inscrutability, which sets her apart from other sexualized "Orientals" as they have often been represented in Western literature about the "Orient." I have indicated her silence as a deliberate choice, within the text, on her part, and in terms of the construction of the text, on Greene's part, which functions not as a means of silencing the non-verbalising Oriental, but as a strategic, enabling maneuver. Ortega y Gasset has moreover provided a way of reading this silence as a valuable and empowering alternative to language, which, I have suggested, allows the novel to negotiate some of the problems of achieving understanding and intimacy across the barriers of different cultures and languages.

A number of the translation theorists whose work is used here have traditionally been read as suggesting understandings of texts that are translated, or actual translations. My application of them *within* the text of *The Quiet American* can suggest what new insights might be gleaned from readings that take into account the problematics staged by translation within a narrative. This allows the problems of translation and the concomitant questions of the meeting of cultures to be brought to light within the microcosms of literary texts, and can permit investigations of how these concerns refract in fiction. This can, in turn, foster close reading of those "transforming energies of feeling which make of syntax a record of social being"<sup>296</sup> to which George Steiner points.

The kind of reading that I have suggested here can point toward fresh ways of approaching the central problem of communicability in Modernist texts, particularly with regard to the

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<sup>296</sup> Steiner, *After Babel*, 26.

problem of cross-cultural communication in texts set in the colonies. This type of reading may help to elucidate questions such as what it is that prevents *Burmese Days*' Flory and Dr. Veraswami from achieving a friendship of trust and loyalty; and how this differs from the problems encountered by Aziz and Fielding in *A Passage to India*. It pulls to the fore the central question posed in Forster's novel: can we connect? And asks further: if the answer is no; why? My reading calls for attention to be paid to how heavily we should weigh the geo-political as opposed to the psycho-social respectively, in negotiating answers to these questions. This can, in turn, suggest a corrective to approaches that lean too heavily on one, while underestimating the value of the other. It calls, rather, for a reading that keeps these different strains in dynamic motion, and draws out the shortcomings of readings that fail to do so. It stresses, rather, what Fredric Jameson calls the "optional nature" of different readings, so that we may "convert the entire situation of the novel into an allegorical commentary [on the geo-political], but we are also free to reverse its priorities and to read the political analogy as metaphorical decoration for the individual drama, and as a mere figural intensification of this last."<sup>297</sup> Thus, rather than approaching a novel like *The Quiet American* with blunted tools that are inadequate to the task of entering into the complexity of its narrative voicing, this reading hopes to point to how we might keep divergent strains in mind when engaging such a text; how we might usefully oscillate between these different approaches in order to facilitate a supple reading.

Such an investigation into the concerns that problematize understanding between characters of different cultural origins – be they European, American, or of the heterogeneous spaces subsumed variously under "Oriental," "the Third World," or "the Rest" – may consequently serve to illuminate a more dynamic way of reading the colonial contact zone, and suggest an alternative to the sometimes (over)determined mode in which post-colonial theory is wielded in approaching it. In the stead of sometimes predictable and staid approaches, we might rather look to the value of the conversational idiom of a critic like Zadie Smith, far as it is from the language traditionally associated with post-colonial theory. Smith's popular, public mode moreover seems particularly apt for a reading of Graham Greene, the anti-elitist Modernist. Finally, such a dynamic reading provides the best place from which to ask questions about how language, knitted to the culture that produces it and which is in turn formed by it, and

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<sup>297</sup> Jameson, "Third-World Literature", 79.

permeated by the power dynamics of its relationship to and in empire, effects or causes problems of cultural mistranslation or miscommunication – questions which seem ever more urgent.

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