

グレアム・グリーン著『おとなしいアメリカ人』

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## THE QUIET AMERICAN

Richard Logan

Graham Greene wrote The Quiet American in 1955. The book is a novel based on Greene's experiences traveling and reporting on the war which the Vietminh were waging against the French colonial army in Vietnam in the early 1950's. The main character, Thomas Fowler, a British newspaper correspondent, narrates the story of his involvement with an American named Alden Pyle, who works for an American government economic aid mission. Pyle, a quiet, serious young man interferes in local politics with idealistic zeal which results in adding to the bloodshed of the ongoing war. Fowler finds that he must get involved in an effort to stop Pyle's irresponsible actions, and this leads to Pyle's death at the hands of the communist underground.

### GREENE IN VIETNAM

Graham Greene first came to Vietnam in 1951, after having spent time in Malaya, reporting on the communist insurgency there which was eventually suppressed by the British colonial government. Greene

met Trevor Wilson, the British Consul in Hanoi and was shown the areas where the Vietnamese nationalist forces under the command of the Vietminh were fighting the troops of the French colonial government of Indochina. On this first visit, he stayed only a couple of weeks but was able, with the help of the French commander General Le Latre, to see many areas of the country. In Saigon he made the first of many visits to a religious sect called the Cao Dai, "whose saints include Victor Hugo, Christ, Buddha and Sun Yat-sen".<sup>1</sup>

Greene would make two more trips to Vietnam, from December of 1953 to February of 1954 and again in the spring of 1955. Greene was especially interested in the religious groups, like the Cao Dai, and also the Catholic bishops who had their own private armies. These various armed groups were ostensibly fighting the communist-controlled Vietminh, but did not take orders from the French colonial army, which did the bulk of the fighting against the Vietminh. Greene soon realized that the French could not win, and in fact reported on the battle of Dien Bien Phu, where the French were decisively defeated and thereafter gave up control of Vietnam.

In 1953, Greene was commissioned to write an article for Life Magazine, but the submitted article was rejected.

As Greene pointed out : "I suspect my ambivalent attitude to the war was already perceptible—my admiration for the French army, my admiration for their enemies, and my doubt of any final value in the war."<sup>2</sup>

Greene began to consider writing a novel about Vietnam. He found the country an enchanting place :

The spell was first cast, I think, by the tall elegant girls in white silk trousers, by the pewter evening light on flat paddy fields, where the water-buffaloes trudged fetlock-deep with a slow primeval gait, by the French perfumeries in the Rue Catina, the Chinese gambling houses in Cholon, above all by that feeling of exhilaration which a measure of danger brings to the visitor with a return ticket : the restaurants wired against grenades, the watch-towers striding along the roads of the southern delta ....<sup>3</sup>

Greene began to outline the plot of his new novel when he spent an evening with an American representing the United States in Vietnam :

I shared a room that night with an American attached to an economic aid mission — the members were assumed by the French, probably correctly, to belong to the CIA. My companion bore no resemblance at all to Pyle, the quiet American of my story — he was a man of greater intelligence and of less innocence, but he lectured me all the long drive back to Saigon on the necessity of finding a ‘third force in Vietnam’.<sup>4</sup>

This third force, not the Vietminh nor the French, would have to be a nationalist group who were not communist. The armies of the religious groups seemed to fit the bill. General The of the Cao Dai was

willing to lead this third force, with covert assistance from the United States government. Greene speculated that The's group was responsible for the many terrorist bombs which were blowing up in public places, and used this in the novel.

### ATTITUDE TOWARDS AMERICA

When The Quiet American was published it aroused a firestorm of anger and controversy among Americans because it was accusing Americans and the American government of supporting terrorism. Greene was criticized for being anti-American. Greene replied that he was not against the American people but against the dangerous policies of the American government. However, Greene did often attack "the eternal adolescence of the American mind".<sup>5</sup>

Greene found the American response to the Cold War as irresponsible as that of the Soviets. In 1952, Greene had told Time magazine that he had joined the Communist party for all of four weeks as a student at Oxford in the early 1920's. For this admission, the American government applied the McCarran Act against him, the provisions of which restrict "communists" from entering the United States. Thereafter, Greene would continue to have troubles with the U.S. government during his travels.

As the United States eventually took a greater role in the Vietnam war, Greene would continue to criticize the U. S. As Greene admitted years later : "I would go to almost any length to put my feeble twig

in the spokes of American foreign policy.”<sup>6</sup> Greene opposed American policy as a humanist and a catholic. In this new age of total war, Greene felt he had to speak up :

Catholics today cannot remain quite untouched by the general heresy of our time, the unimportance of the individual. Today the human is regarded as expendable material, something to be eliminated wholesale by the atomic bomb, a kind of anonymous carrion. After the First World War crosses marked the places where the dead lay, Allied and enemy : lights burned continually in the capitals of Europe over the graves of the unknown warriors. But no crosses today mark the common graves into which the dead of London and Berlin were shoveled, and Hiroshima’s memorial is the outline of a body photographed by the heat flash on asphalt.<sup>7</sup>

#### INTERVIEW WITH HO CHI MINH

In 1955, after the French had pulled out of Vietnam, Greene conducted an interview with the communist leader, Ho Chi Minh, While not entirely impressed with the communist leader, Greene realized that Ho Chi Minh sincerely wanted to help the Vietnamese people. Greene doubted whether the French or the American government had as sincere a feeling towards the Vietnamese. Greene wondered if the Vietnamese peasants weren’t happier under communism : “We talk so glibly of the threat to the individual, but the anonymous peasant has never been treated so like an individual

before. Unless a priest, no one before the Commissar has approached him, has troubled to ask him questions or spent time teaching him. There is something in Communism besides politics.”<sup>8</sup>

Looking back on the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, Greene saw the battle as more than just a defeat for the French : “It marked virtually the end of any hope the Western Powers might have entertained that they could dominate the East... That young Americans continue to die in the southern delta of Saigon only shows that it takes time for the echoes even of a total defeat to encircle the globe.”<sup>9</sup> Greene hated the smug conviction of the American government that it could succeed in Vietnam where the French had failed. Greene felt that this smugness resulted from the naivety and idealism of American culture.

#### PYLE, THE QUIET AMERICAN

In the novel, Greene’s narrator, Fowler compares Alden Pyle with the other Americans in Saigon who spend their leisure hours in the bar of the Continental Hotel : “He’s a good chap in his way. Serious. Not one of those noisy bastards at the Continental. A quiet American.”<sup>10</sup> Fowler emphasizes Pyle’s youth — gangly legs, a crew cut, a serious expression on his face. Pyle’s idealism is noted as well :

Perhaps only ten days ago he had been walking back across the Common in Boston, his arms full of the books he had been reading in advance on the Far East and the problems of China. He didn’t

even hear what I said : he was absorbed already in the dilemmas of Democracy and the responsibilities of the West ; he was determined — I learnt that very soon — to do good, not to any individual person but to a country, a continent, a world. Well, he was in his element now with the whole universe to improve.<sup>11</sup>

Fowler can't resist poking fun at the American educational system, which is more oriented towards practical studies than the British system : "Pyle had taken a good degree in — well, one of those subjects Americans can take degrees in : perhaps public relations or theatre-craft, perhaps even Far Eastern Studies (he had read a lot of books)."<sup>12</sup>

#### PHUONG, THE MISTRESS

Fowler becomes more involved with Pyle than he would wish, because Pyle decides he has fallen in love with Fowler's mistress, Phuong. Pyle's old-fashioned notions of gentlemanliness convince him that he must tell Fowler how he feels and that he must get Fowler's understanding if not permission to take Phuong away. Pyle insists that he would marry Phuong and this would be much better for Phuong than being Fowler's mistress. Fowler is understandably irritated with Pyle :

"Why don't you just go away, Pyle, without causing trouble?"

"It wouldn't be fair to her, Thomas," he said quite seriously. I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused.<sup>13</sup>

Fowler's attitude towards Pyle is complicated because Pyle saves Fowler's life when they are ambushed by Vietminh guerrillas. Also Pyle is so naive and earnest that Fowler cannot hate Pyle. On the contrary, Fowler, who is an older man, begins to feel an almost fatherly sense of responsibility to protect Pyle: "That was my first instinct — to protect him. It never occurred to me that there was greater need to protect myself. Innocence always calls mutely for protection when we would be so much wiser to guard ourselves against it : innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm."<sup>14</sup>

#### PLYE'S NAIVETY

Pyle brings with him his naive view of politics and tries to convert everyone he meets. He tells people that Asians have no confidence in the colonial powers like France and England. America could come in with clean hands. America would support a new group: "There was always a Third Force to be found free from Communism and the taint of colonialism — national democracy he called it; you only had to find a leader and keep him safe from the old colonial powers."<sup>15</sup>

Pyle had absorbed his views from a writer named York Harding. Fowler describes Harding as a dilettante: "He's a superior sort of journalist — they call them diplomatic correspondents. He gets hold of an idea and then alters every situation to fit the idea. Pyle came out here full of York Harding's idea. Harding had been here once for a week on his way from Bangkok to Tokyo. Pyle made the mistake of putting



his idea into practice".<sup>16</sup>

### PYLE'S ABSTRACT IDEALISM

Pyle gives covert support to a military group who start setting off bombs around Saigon. One large bomb goes off in a crowded central square killing many women and children. When Fowler finds out that Pyle supplied the plastic explosives for the bomb, he confronts Pyle. Pyle is stunned and cannot believe what has happened. Pyle looks at the blood on his shoes and notes that he must get them cleaned. Before long, Pyle has pushed the reality of the carnage out of his mind so that he can think in generalities :

'They were only war casualties,' he said.

'It was a pity, but you can't always hit your target. Anyway they died in the right cause.'

'Would you have said the same if it had been your old nurse with her blueberry pie?'

He ignored my facile point. 'In a way you could say they died for democracy,' he said.<sup>17</sup>

Pyle and Fowler constantly argue about the war. Pyle says the people do not want communism, but Fowler points out that the people do not care about politics at all. They just want a peaceful life. In any case the communists take more interest in the individual Vietnamese than the French or the Americans ever do. Fowler gets angry about Pyle and the Americans : "He was young and ignorant and silly and he got

involved. He had no more of a notion than any of you what the whole affair's about, and you gave him money and York Harding's books on the East and said, 'Go ahead. Win the East for Democracy.' He never saw anything he hadn't heard in a lecture-hall, and his writers and his lecturers made a fool of him. When he saw a dead body he couldn't even see the wounds."<sup>18</sup>

### FOWLER'S NON-INVOLVEMENT

Fowler tries to take a position of non-involvement. Over and over again he says that he is not involved. He is a newspaper reporter and he reports what he sees and nothing more. His desire to remain uninvolved with what is going on around him is not based on his political views but rather on his cynicism about mankind: "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? Perhaps that's why men have invented God — a being capable of understanding."<sup>19</sup>

We learn over time that Fowler has had a painful separation from his wife and perhaps other experiences which cause him to want to remain detached from others. His relationship with his mistress, Phuong shows his desire for detachment:

His predilection for opium and even his relationship with Phuong reflect and indeed underline his need for detachment, a preference for the distant and impersonal viewpoint. Phuong is

the ideal mistress for Fowler : making no serious demands on him, she prepares his opium pipe and seems otherwise passive and unobtrusive, without any real needs of her own.<sup>20</sup>

### FOWLER BECOMES INVOLVED

Fowler finds that he is increasingly drawn into involvement, however. First, Pyle takes Phuong away from Fowler and then Fowler becomes increasingly upset about the needless suffering of the innocent and helpless women and children who are being killed in the war. Finally, Fowler is drawn into involvement when Pyle shows no remorse for the innocent people who are killed in the central square bombing. Fowler agrees to lead Pyle into a trap so that the communist underground can kill Pyle in the street. Fowler finds that he must agree with the communist leader who says that one must take sides, if one is to remain human. Pyle must be eliminated before more innocent people are killed.

Fowler acts from a sense of morality. Although he asserts that he is neutral and uninvolved, he finds that he cannot ignore suffering. He feels pity for the innocent victims of the war, but he also feels sorry for Pyle. Even though Pyle has taken away Fowler's mistress, Fowler cannot bring himself to hate Pyle. Even Fowler's betrayal of Pyle to the communist underground is done more in sorrow and pity than in anger and hatred. Perhaps Fowler sees a younger version of himself in Pyle. Fowler now understands that uninformed action can create more pain and suffering than just doing nothing. Fowler realizes this

himself after writing to his wife in England, asking for a divorce. Only after he receives her reply, does he realize that his letter had caused her more pain and anguish.

### FOWLER'S THOUGHTS ABOUT DEATH

Fowler often thinks about death and dying as he gets older. He worries about being left alone in old age, which is a kind of living death. Fowler discusses his feelings at length :

From childhood I had never believed in permanence, and yet I had longed for it. Always I was afraid of losing happiness. This month, this year, Phuong would leave me. If not next year, in three years. Death was the only absolute value in my world. Lose life and one would lose nothing again for ever. I envied those who could believe in a God and I distrusted them. I felt they were keeping their courage up with a fable of the changeless and the permanent. Death was far more certain than God, and with death there would be no longer the daily possibility of love dying. The nightmare of a future of boredom and indifference would lift.<sup>21</sup>

Fowler faces death when he is wounded in an attack on a guard tower. Pyle rescues him, but Fowler takes a peculiar attitude. Instead of thanking Pyle, Fowler complains that he didn't want to be saved. However, Fowler wants one of the wounded Vietnamese guards to be rescued :

I don't remember what Pyle later described to others: that I waved my hand in the wrong direction and told them there was a man in the tower and they had to see him. Anyway I couldn't have made the sentimental assumption that Pyle made. I know myself, and I know the depth of my selfishness. I cannot be at ease (and to be at ease is my chief wish) if someone else is in pain, visibly or audibly or tactually. Sometimes this is mistaken by the innocent for unselfishness, when all I am doing is sacrificing a small good — in this case postponement in attending to my hurt — for the sake of a far greater good, a peace of mind when I need think only of myself.<sup>22</sup>

Fowler's need to show that he is not a hero fits in with his cynical view of mankind. In his world view there are no heroes, and there cannot be any heroes. Apparently selfless actions must be shown to be at bottom selfish acts. Fowler seems to want to prove to himself that action and involvement are selfish and only lead to more pain and suffering in the world.

#### FOWLER'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS PHUONG

Fowler has a curiously limited understanding of his mistress and her emotional needs. For all his interest and attempts to understand Pyle, Fowler takes his mistress entirely for granted. When Pyle asks Phuong to dance he also asks Fowler whether he minds, and Fowler says no, noting to himself that they talked about Phuong in the third person as if she were invisible. Fowler shows his sexist or racist

attitude when he answers Pyle's question :

'But she loves you, doesn't she?'

'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>23</sup>

Fowler reveals himself to be as insensitive towards people as Pyle is. Fowler's sorrow for innocent people getting killed is as impersonal as Pyle's assertion that people are dying for democracy, whether they realize it or not. Fowler goes on to say that the Vietnamese don't suffer from the obsessions that Europeans and Americans do. Fowler denies that Phuong has or will ever have the emotional pain that he suffers :

She's no child. She's tougher than you'll ever be. Do you know the kind of polish that doesn't take scratches? That's Phuong. She can survive a dozen of us. She'll get old, that's all. She'll suffer from childbirth and hunger and cold and rheumatism, but she'll never suffer like we do from thoughts, obsessions — she won't scratch, she'll only decay.<sup>23</sup>

Fowler's attitude can be seen as a microcosm of Western colonial attitudes towards the Vietnamese and other non-white people.

American involvement in Vietnam was based on the idea that Americans felt they knew better than the Vietnamese what needed to be done. Although The Quiet American was written over thirty years ago, the attitudes that Greene delineates have certainly not changed. American government leaders continue to tell the people of other countries how to order their lives, and continue to commit American military might towards solving the many problems that beset the world. Greene's portrait of the quiet American is still perfectly current.

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Graham Greene, Ways of Escape (London : Penguin Books Ltd., 1981), p.121.
- 2 Ibid., p.123.
- 3 Ibid., p.121.
- 4 Ibid., p.127.
- 5 Graham Greene, 'The Films', Night and Day (7 October 1937), quoted in Judith Adamson, Graham Greene : The Dangerous Edge (London : MacMillan, 1990), p.94.
- 6 Marie-Francoise Allain, The Other Man (London : Bodley Head, 1969), quoted in Judith Adamson, p.132.
- 7 Graham Greene, 'The Assumption of Mary', Life (30 October 1950), quoted in Judith Adamson, p.101.
- 8 Graham Greene, 'The Man as Pure as Lucifer', The Sunday Times (8 May 1955), quoted in Judith Adamson, p.126.
- 9 Ways of Escape , pp.137-38.

- 10 Graham Greene, The Quiet American (London : Penguin Books Ltd., 1974), p.17.
- 11 Ibid., p.18.
- 12 Ibid., p.21.
- 13 Ibid., p.60.
- 14 Ibid., p.37.
- 15 Ibid., p.124.
- 16 Ibid., pp.167-68.
- 17 Ibid., p.179.
- 18 Ibid., pp.31-32.
- 19 Ibid., p.60.
- 20 Brian Thomas, An Underground Fate (Athens, Georgia : The University of Georgia Press, 1988), p.29.
- 21 The Quiet American, p.44.
- 22 Ibid., p.114.
- 23 Ibid., p.133.