

# Graham Greene and Bridges across Cultures

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Perhaps no modern English-speaking novelist has explored the bridges across—or better yet, the chasms between—cultures with the persistence and moral seriousness of Graham Greene. In book after book: *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), *Our Man in Havana* (1958), and *The Honorary Consul* (1973) for example, he has addressed the understandings and misunderstandings with perception, elegance, and wit. This essay focuses on three of his best-known novels, all turned into movies, where the topic is explicit and takes center stage: *The Quiet American* (1955), *The Comedians* (1966), and *The Third Man* (1949).

Addicted to the recklessly exotic—he traveled to Liberia, Mexico, Malaya, the Congo, Cuba, and Vietnam long before they became tourist destinations—Greene was “not an ordinary man, not a comfortable man, not a reliable man—but an adventurer, with all the vices and virtues of an adventurer.”<sup>1</sup> In his books,

set in that “baffling landscape, at once harrowing and seedy [known as] Greenland,”<sup>2</sup> he occupies a sometimes awkward duality as a skeptical outsider, deeply sympathetic to the suffering, often exploited local populations.

All three of Greene’s novels, each set in locales whose decadence and corruption is magnified in lurid close-ups, point to a failure of moral courage in a time of stress that permits civilized behavior to erode nearly to Hobbesian standards. It may superficially appear that these are political novels, but instead they are moral studies in redemption and betrayal that are merely played out in political terms, as the cultures collide.

## *The Quiet American*

*The Quiet American*<sup>3</sup> focuses on the relation of West to East, as well as British to American. The story, related in the first person by a British journalist named Thomas Fowler, is set in Vietnam in the last days of French domination with “the colonial encounter as an adversarial confrontation between two competing nationalisms.”<sup>4</sup> Decolonization and the Cold War have conspired to anoint Southeast Asia as a site of a major Great Powers conflict. Greene, as a foreign correspondent, had covered the war for the London *Times* and Paris’s *Le Figaro* from 1951-1954,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Mockler, *Graham Greene: Three Lives* (Arbroath, Scotland: Hunter Mackay, 1994), 208.

<sup>2</sup> R. W. B. Lewis, “The Fiction of Graham Greene: Between the Horror and the Glory,” *Kenyon Review* 19 (1957), 57.

<sup>3</sup> The title *The Quiet American* “came from [Kim] Philby, who described the CIA’s leading agent in Iran, Kermit Roosevelt ... as ‘the quiet American.’” Stephen J. Whitfield, “Limited Engagement,” *Journal of American Studies*, (30, 1996), 69. Philby, a close friend of Greene’s, was a top official in the British Secret Service

and the most notorious of the British Soviet spies. See Philip Knightly, *The Master Spy: The Story of Kim Philby*, (New York: Vintage, 1988) 120-21. Greene contributed the foreword to Philby’s autobiography. Kim Philby, *My Silent War: The Autobiography of a Spy*, (New York: Viking Press, 1969) xvii.

<sup>4</sup> Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 122.

<sup>5</sup> Graham Greene, *Ways of Escape* (London: Penguin, 1980), 162-66.

so his descriptions, especially of the expatriate community, ring true.<sup>6</sup> Fowler, deeply cynical, is covering the war between the French and Vietminh Communist guerillas, when he encounters Alden Pyle, an American CIA agent<sup>7</sup> with a “young and unused face[that] seemed incapable of harm.”<sup>8</sup> Pyle is taken with an idea he found in books by a prominent academic to the effect that Southeast Asia’s future lies not with Communism or colonialism, but instead with a combination of traditions called the Third Force.<sup>9</sup> Fowler dismisses the idea, adding, “I was tired of the whole pack of them,”<sup>10</sup> speaking of Americans.

Fowler, unhappily married with a wife in England, lives with Phoung, twenty and beautiful, a former dance hall girl, and in his words, “wonderfully ignorant”<sup>11</sup> of the world. Decades younger, she is perhaps his last real love—or at least an object of desire. Jaded and passive, he describes himself as a “man of middle age, with eyes a little bloodshot, beginning to put on weight, ungraceful in love.”<sup>12</sup> Pyle meets Phoung and is immediately smitten (though his French is so poor that Fowler is enlisted as interpreter), telling the older man that he is in love with her and wants to marry her. “Saving the country and saving a woman would be the same thing to a man like that,” Fowler observes. Phoung chooses

Fowler over Pyle, but when Pyle tells her that Fowler’s wife refuses to grant him a divorce, she switches her attention to Pyle, who offers marriage and a secure, comfortable life in the United States.

At this point, a bomb in a busy Saigon square leaves a horrendous scene of death and gore that sparks a decision in Fowler, who believes (accurately) that Pyle had imported a plastic used in the explosive and that the Vietnamese general responsible for the massacre represents Pyle’s Third Force. “A woman sat on the ground with what was left of a baby on her lap,” Fowler says. “Go home to Phuong and tell her about your heroic dead,” he tells Pyle; “there are a few dozen less of her people to worry about.”<sup>13</sup> Pyle explains, lamely, that the bombing was supposed to target a military parade, which was cancelled, hence the unexpected presence of civilians who were killed, but offers no sympathy for the victims. To Fowler, Pyle is a dupe of a general, who is “only a bandit,”<sup>14</sup> so naïve that he cannot even see that he was duped. Later, over drinks, Pyle tells Fowler: “It was a pity, but you can’t always hit your target. Anyway they died for the right cause. ... In a way you could say they died for democracy.”<sup>15</sup> Pyle’s absence of outrage outrages Fowler. For him, the war seems an exercise in killing women and children.

<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, former CIA officers have alleged that when in Saigon, Greene spent most of his time drinking with French colonials bitter at what they took to be America’s abandonment of their cause (Phillips and Wilkoe 2009, 101).

<sup>7</sup> Graham himself had worked for the Secret Intelligence Service, as had his sister; his uncle helped to found Naval Intelligence; his brother worked for Japanese intelligence. Thus, he and much of his family were steeped in intelligence.

<sup>8</sup> Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (London: Penguin, 1955/1973), 17.

<sup>9</sup> While in Indochina, Greene found himself in a car with a member of an American economic mission, who lectured him on the necessity of a Third Force (Greene 1980, 163).

<sup>10</sup> Greene, *The Quiet American*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

The war also provides an opportunity to eliminate his rival for Phoung, as he becomes involved in a plot to assassinate Pyle, telling himself that the death will save innocent lives. By this time Fowler has written off Pyle as believing that some ideas are worth killing for—“before he died he had been responsible for at least fifty deaths”—on the bogus theory that the end justifies the means. In this, Fowler overlooks that his own involvement in Pyle’s assassination is justified by his belief in self-determination, the ends justifying the means, a belief that evidently survives the promise of Communist dictatorship.

Fowler escapes punishment for political reasons, reunites with Phoung, and is informed by his wife that she has finally agreed to a divorce. The book ends with Fowler thinking, guiltily: “Everything had gone right with me since [Pyle] had died, but how I wished there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry.”<sup>16</sup> (In the 1958 movie, which Greene detested, Phoung simply returns to her life in a dance hall, leaving a despondent Fowler alone.)

Pyle and Fowler, an American and an Englishman, each bring to Vietnam values, opinions, and beliefs from their home country. The American, optimistic, full of his country’s renowned can-do spirit, is “determined ... to do good, not to any individual person but to a country, a continent, the world.”<sup>17</sup> In Fowler’s eyes, Pyle’s

enthusiasm for democracy gives him a moralistic self-importance that is unmoored to everyday reality, a license to try anything. Later, he says to Pyle, “I hope to God you know what you’re doing here. Oh, I know your motives are good, they always are ... I wish sometimes you had a few bad motives, you might understand a little more about human beings. And that applies to your country, too, Pyle.”<sup>18</sup> Fowler’s British identity, though flawed by condescension and self-pity, was sufficiently open to Vietnamese society to permit some modest degree of cultural amalgamation. Pyle on the other hand, was resistant to intercultural influence, though he imagined himself an ally of the Vietnamese. He is not a bad man who wishes to bring destruction to Vietnam, but in his ignorance, self-righteousness, and arrogance, the result is the same.

Fowler concedes that he “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. ... Nothing that America could do was right. I became a bore on the subject of America.”<sup>19</sup> In this, Pyle reflects Greene’s well-known antipathy to everything American.<sup>20</sup>

It is here that Fowler condemns Pyle for his commitment to the Third Force, a bookish theory cut off from “the fury and the mire of human veins,” and his

teaching “perhaps public relations or theatre craft, perhaps even Far Eastern studies” (Greene 1955/1973, 31, 23). There is nothing inherently bad or absurd about storing Coke, being big, or taking courses in theatre craft, and portable hospitals probably accomplish much good. However, connecting them with America evidently is enough in Greene’s eyes to make them and Americans ridiculous.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>20</sup> *The Quiet American* is chock full of lists of things Fowler (or Greene) hates about America, like “their private stores of Coca-Cola and their portable hospitals, their too-wide cars and their not quite the latest guns,” their journalists “big, noisy, boyish, and middle aged,” or their colleges

indifference to its consequences. “I laugh at anyone who spends much time writing about what doesn’t exist,” Fowler says, “mental concepts ... isms and ocracies. Give me the facts.”<sup>21</sup> Yet readers wonder, would Fowler have nations conduct foreign policies without overarching theories? Would it really be preferable to rely simply on humane impulses and hunches, unencumbered by strategic concerns? We suspect that Fowler’s problem is not that Pyle’s theory is inadequate, but that it extends to *all* theories. “He never saw anything he hadn’t heard in a lecture hall” he says of Pyle, “and his writers and lecturers made a fool of him.”<sup>22</sup> Of course, theories can do no more than imperfectly explain the world, and some theories can lead to very bad results. But to write off all theories and the academia that produced them with a blanket denial of their utility, may be indistinguishable from praising ignorance. As the reader never learns much about the Third Force or what Pyle actually does—there are mentions of medical work—we are left with his damning commitment to academic abstractions, perhaps a variation on the famous British preference for intelligent amateurs over expert specialists. Adhering to theories, like other good intentions, paves a road to hell. Except, apparently, for the Communists, who draw from their own sacred texts, some generations old and written by men who never heard of Vietnam, and never earn Greene’s ire.

In Fowler we hear the experienced, world weary European, appalled and disappointed by an America cursed by the defects of youth: naïveté, shallowness, self-absorption, and above all, innocence. “Innocence” Fowler observes, “is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm. You can’t blame the innocent; they are always guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate them.”<sup>23</sup> “I never knew a man” Fowler says of Pyle, “who had better motives for all the trouble he caused.”<sup>24</sup> In its treatment of Pyle, the novel is a variant of the American innocents abroad theme, addressed earlier by such writers as Henry James (“Daisy Miller”) and Mark Twain (*Innocents Abroad*), now “seen from a particularly sour European viewpoint.”<sup>25</sup> With its relentless assault on innocence, it is no wonder that *The Quiet American* became “a standard text for the anti-war movement, which embraced it as a prophetic masterpiece about the perils of blind idealism run amok.”<sup>26</sup> Greene repeatedly makes the point that innocence is not goodness, though it is often mistaken for it, yet he appears immune to its notorious appeal of purity.

Is America’s blundering innocence a warrant for the Communists to eliminate the innocent, as Fowler helps them eliminate Pyle? Fowler does not make the connection. He deplores the killing of civilians, as at the Saigon square, and expects the Communists to prevail, but he does not pause to consider the massacres and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 94, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>25</sup> R.W.B. Lewis, “The Fiction of Graham Greene: Between the Horror and the Glory,” *Kenyon Review*, 19 (1957), 58.

<sup>26</sup> Kevin Ruane, Graham Greene in Love and War: French Indochina and the Making of *The Quiet American*, *Graham Greene Studies* 1, (2017), 2.

imprisonments this will entail. Indeed, the Communists are portrayed as the only political force that genuinely cares about the peasant, whom they would treat “like a man, like someone of value.”<sup>27</sup> Against this view, Greene offers only Pyle’s foolish anti-communism, a straw man. The baton of world leadership is passed to a callow America unprepared for its responsibilities. The cliché in the end is too pat.<sup>28</sup>

Fowler, for his part, insists on a neutrality that he considers essential for journalists. “I’m just a reporter,” he says. “I offer no point of view, I take no action, I don’t get involved. ... The human condition being what it was, let them fight, let them love, let them murder. I could not be involved.”<sup>29</sup> It seems never to occur to Fowler that under Communism, neutral reporting would be impossible. In the end, when he colludes in Pyle’s death, the pretense of neutrality is exposed.

The cynicism also seems a cover for Fowler’s profound sadness. An atheist who “envied those who could believe in God,”<sup>30</sup> he is spiritually empty, and his preoccupation with relationships bespeaks merely a dread of being alone. With an earlier mistress he “was afraid of losing love. Now I’m only afraid of losing Phuong.”<sup>31</sup> Watching Pyle and

Phuong dance, Fowler reflects, “Always I was afraid of losing happiness,”<sup>32</sup> yet never do we see him happy; he exists in a cocoon of anxiety.

As Pyle’s lack of experience poisoned his good intentions, so Fowler’s excess of experience leaves him without good intentions at all. Indeed, he is capable of a treachery that brings down Pyle, a treachery that Pyle could hardly imagine let alone perform. Is this an act of vengeance on the part of the Old World against the New, punishment for the audacity of being new? As Pyle’s blinkered morality leads to carnage, Fowler’s leads to Pyle’s murder. But where Pyle could not predict the consequences of his actions, Fowler understood his perfectly well. Yet when we recall (as Greene does not) that the Americans in Vietnam were protecting French interests, using techniques borrowed from the British suppression of counterinsurgency in Malaya, the distinction between Old and New Worlds begins to break down.

None of the three main characters could properly be called good. Fowler is revealed as selfish and cowardly; Pyle is innocent in ways that unintentionally menace innocent bystanders; Phuong, thinly sketched, is callow, vain, and given to drinking milk shakes and

<sup>27</sup> Greene, *The Quiet American*, 97.

<sup>28</sup> In a 1967 letter to the *London Times*, Greene wrote that if forced “to choose between life in the Soviet Union or life in the United States, I would certainly choose the Soviet Union” (Greene 1991, 136). By 1971, he reported that he was “in greater sympathy with communism than ever before, though less and less with the Russian version” (Greene 1971, 132). Greene had earlier declared that “As a Catholic, I must admit to being anti-totalitarian and anti-Communist (Greene 1953), though he later announced that “there is no reason why a Communist should renounce his Catholic faith” (qtd. In Duran 1994, 91). These expressions of support were made long after Communist idealism had been replaced by a

nasty, sclerotic authoritarian bureaucracy. As late as 1984, Greene confessed to “a lingering hope that in certain areas of the world, under certain conditions, there will be a kind of Communism which is acceptable.” Ignoring Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, and others, he found South American dictators more cruel and more violent (Kynch 1984, 4, 6), excepting his friends Omar Torrijos of Panama, Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, and Fidel Castro of Cuba. Populist dictators on the left aroused his admiration (Greene 1963, 1984).

<sup>29</sup> Greene, *The Quiet American*, 28.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

spending time with picture books of the British royal family. Each is also fundamentally rootless, culturally. Fowler and Pyle are literally far from home; Phuong is en route to trading her Vietnamese identity for that of an imagined pampered Western woman.

If the clash between the Englishness of Fowler and the Americanness of Pyle illustrates the chasm between two similar societies, their relation to Vietnam suggests a vastly wider divide. Each in his own way condescends to Vietnamese customs, and despite their feelings for Phuong, neither sees her as a full human being. She lies at Fowler's "feet like a dog on a crusader's tomb" and is "[i]ndigenous like a herb" or perhaps is like "a bird; they twitter and sing on your pillow."<sup>33</sup> Phuong, in short, is for him a lovely, exotic object of desire, an obedient, passive fantasy, and little more, though he later advises Pyle not to "think of her as—as an ornament."<sup>34</sup> "I just don't want to be alone in my last decade, that's all," Fowler says;<sup>35</sup> "To lose her will be, for me, the beginning of death."<sup>36</sup> He also tells Pyle that Phuong, as a typical Vietnamese woman, would "love you in return for kindness, security, the presents you give,"<sup>37</sup> suggesting a transactional relationship inappropriate for mature adults. The two men vie for her, and she is content to be their trophy. As for the Vietnamese, Pyle seems to regard them as children incapable of complex thoughts.<sup>38</sup> When

they are killed by the bomb, he sees them as sacrificed for democracy. Greene, well known for his fondness for radical, anti-colonialist movements, has the militants defending their actions, but despite the dialogue, they remain undeveloped stick figures. He seems more interested in the cultural conflict between a Brit and an American than with the far different Vietnamese.

### *The Comedians*

*The Comedians*, featuring Westerners in the Haiti of Papa Doc Duvalier, again reveals the confusion and suffering endemic to members of one culture incapable of grasping another. Haiti, in one of the earliest colonial strikes against a European power, evicted the French and Napoleon's army a century and a half earlier, a "turning point in history"<sup>39</sup> that was "unprecedented in its challenge to slavery and colonialism."<sup>40</sup> However, Haiti's subsequent history of elite rule, profound poverty, and pervasive corruption have contributed to a level of exploitation and indifference to local suffering and death that is not entirely unlike a very harsh colonialism. When Memmi pronounced that "the colonized lives for a long time before we see that really new man,"<sup>41</sup> its application to Haiti was an enormous understatement.

As with *The Quiet American*, Greene had spent a good deal of time on location,<sup>42</sup> which he called the

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 120, 14, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>39</sup> Ada Ferrer, *Talk about Haiti*, in *Tree of Liberty*, ed. Doris L. Garraway (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008) 21.

<sup>40</sup> David Brion Davis, "Impact of the French and Haitian Revolutions," *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution on the Atlantic World*, ed. David P. Geggus (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 4.

<sup>41</sup> Albert Memmi, *Dominated Man: Notes toward a Portrait* (London: Orion, 1968), 88.

<sup>42</sup> Bernard Diederich, *Seeds of Fiction* (London: Peter Owen, 2012), part 1.

“Nightmare Republic.”<sup>43</sup> The story, told by an Englishman named Brown, who owns a hotel in Port-au-Prince inherited from his mother, begins on a tramp steamer bound for Haiti. On board are Brown, Major Jones (an Englishman who regales passengers with tales of daring-do in Burma in World War II), and the Americans Mr. and Mrs. Smith (he ran for president on the vegetarian ticket in 1948). Brown, middle aged and without family, has scratched out a dishonest living with forged paintings before acquiring the hotel, which political violence has made a money loser. Jones, involved in a shady business scheme, runs into trouble with the authorities, is rescued by Brown, and joins youthful rebels who are taken with his stories of military exploits. The war stories, he admits to Brown, were just so much false bravado and tall tales, but he unexpectedly rises to the challenge and fights heroically with the rebels, leading to his death by the police. Ever the pragmatist and survivor, Brown flees to the Dominican Republic where he finds a job as assistant to a funeral director. The violence in Haiti makes it “a fine prosperous little business” for the undertaker.<sup>44</sup>

The innocents here are the Smiths. When introduced, they seem likely to play the fools, but later they save Brown from the fearsome Tonton Macoute security police and reveal decency, ingenuity, and courage. Still, Greene could not let their absurd and destructive American naïveté escape our notice. As they are about to leave the island, they are besieged by beggars, for whom Smith empties his wife’s handbag as an effort at generosity. “Men with two

legs kicked men with one,” Greene wrote, and “men with two arms grasped those who were armless by their torsos, and threw them to the ground.”<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, Brown, cynical, bored, incapable of optimism, seems the polar opposite. The only thing he appears to care about is his lust for a diplomat’s wife, an affair doomed by her refusal to leave her family, an affair that makes him miserable. “Everything was just as before,” he says: “After ten minutes we had made love, and after half an hour we had begun quarreling.” As Brown, “obstinate in my self-hatred,”<sup>46</sup> attributes base motives to others, so he also attributes them to himself even when they are inaccurate and unfair. For example, he insists to his lover that he is driving Jones to the rebels because he is jealous of her affection for him, when actually it is his distaste for the brutal Duvalier government that is his chief motive. For his mother, too, when he runs across a World War II resistance medal in her effects, he wonders: “My mother must have gone into the streets ... unless it was her lover who gave” it to her.<sup>47</sup> Notwithstanding the self-deprecation, Brown repeatedly does the right thing; for example, he rescues Jones, risking torture and death from the dreaded Macoute. Yet of the book’s main characters, only he—not the bogus hero or the silly vegetarian or the bumbling revolutionary—fails at redemption.

And what of Papa Doc’s Haiti? It is a failed state overseen by an entrenched oligarchy willing to do anything to maintain its privileges and position. The tiny elite, headed for life by a lunatic, sadistic president, has empowered a

<sup>43</sup> Graham Greene, “Nightmare Republic,” *Sunday Telegraph* (29 September 1963), 4-5.

<sup>44</sup> Graham Greene, *The Comedians* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 342.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

brutal state security apparatus that preys on the opposition, real and imagined, and terrorizes the populace. After years of this, violence and corruption have come to permeate nearly every facet of life.<sup>48</sup> Greene does not indulge in social science analysis, but the point is made in other ways. Poverty and backwardness are conveyed with descriptions of electrical blackouts, voodoo rituals, beggars' twisted and missing limbs. Life for ordinary Haitians is an unending, Sisyphean struggle. Presiding is the unseen but terrifying Papa Doc, with his pompous officials seeking bribes and, above all, the Macoute free to beat, rape, and kill to their hearts' delight. A youthful would-be revolutionary Brown encounters is a hopeless romantic, and a local black journalist is described, with racial undertones, as having "the quick movements of a monkey, and he seemed to swing from wall to wall on ropes of laughter."<sup>49</sup> Only a Communist doctor, dignified and brave, who is martyred by the Macoute, is wholly admirable. There is sympathy for the Haitians, but Greene's story is not theirs, and so his sympathy does not enable him to speak for them as an insider. In the end, there is no way to bridge the gap between the cultures.

Brown, like Fowler, lives a life of more or less constant anxiety. It is partly a function of the circumstances in which they find themselves: Fowler, situated in the midst of a burgeoning civil war, fears his mistress will leave him; Brown, at the mercy of corrupt officials and

predatory Macoute, is also rootless. He has been elsewhere and could be anywhere. In some sense, this is liberating; but it also breeds a bottomless insecurity. Brown's flimsy ties to his hotel and his lover, in their inadequacy, only highlight his rootlessness. As with Fowler, for Brown "tradition and convention offer no moral solace."<sup>50</sup> Both are cynical, alienated from the larger society, given to self-medication by alcohol. Of course, anxiety and alienation were buzz words among mid-century intellectuals, but Greene seems to be saying that, at least for certain people, the phenomena are not merely the spiritual debris of modern life but inhere in the human condition.

And yet ultimately, Brown and Fowler do try to break through the defeatist bonds that encase them—Brown by helping Jones join the revolution and then leaving the country and Fowler by plotting against Pyle and committing to Phuong. Both characters, in this sense, understand that even in their circumscribed situations they are free to act in a wide range of ways and actually do act. What they do is not conventional nor, given their temperaments and personalities, predictable, and yet in the final analysis, it is in character.

In *The Comedians* the characters, like actors on a stage set in a jungle, are more than a little ludicrous. Jones plays a war hero, Mr. Smith a presidential candidate, the young revolutionary a Baudelairean poet. Is there something

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<sup>48</sup> Following the appearance of *The Comedians*, Duvalier ordered the publication of an attack on Greene as an opium addict, racist, pervert, swindler, and torturer. (Haiti, Department des Affaires Etrangeres 1968). Bernard Diederich believes Duvalier was more infuriated by the movie, for which Greene wrote the script, than

the book. (Diederich 2017, 145). The movie drew mixed reviews and generated only \$5.2 million at the box office.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>50</sup> Paula M. Salvan, *The Language of Ethics and Community in Graham Greene's Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 14.

inauthentic about their role playing? Perhaps. But as they discard the roles and exhibit genuine bravery and kindness, the question loses its bite. Even Brown, wrapped in the role of the cynical spectator, ultimately becomes involved and does the right thing. Yet if Haitians in the form of Papa Doc and his fearsome Macoute are the authors of much of the characters' misery, the United States also comes into its share of blame, for America supports Duvalier as a bulwark against Communism. As the murdered doctor explains to the Smiths, "we live under the shadow of your great and prosperous country. Much courage and patience is needed to keep one's head."<sup>51</sup> For Greene, no friend of America, the bridges across cultures are sorely in need of repair.

### ***The Third Man***

According to Greene, *The Third Man*, which began as a film and ended as a book, "was really the treatment which I did before writing the script,"<sup>52</sup> and "was never written to be read but only to be seen."<sup>53</sup> As with *The Quiet American* and *The Comedians*, *The Third Man* is a first-person narrative, this time by the head of the British military police in Vienna, a character named Colonel Galloway (in the film he was Major Calloway; a real-life Major Galloway had helped Greene in Vienna).<sup>54</sup> Rollo Martins (in the film, he was named Holly Martins), a hack writer of pulp Westerns and down on his luck, comes to "the smashed dreary city" of

postwar Vienna,<sup>55</sup> a "sad, decaying no-man's land"<sup>56</sup> divided into British, French, American, and Soviet zones with the center under joint control. It is winter, and there are serious shortages of everything: food, fuel, medicine, all feeding an insatiable black market. This is not the Vienna of Mozart or *sachertorte mit schlag*.

Martins is invited to Vienna by his old friend, Harry Lime (modeled partially on Greene's old friend Philby), who promises him a writing job with a medical charity, only to go to his apartment and be told by a porter that Lime is dead, "run over by a car."<sup>57</sup> Galloway tells him that Lime was "about the worst racketeer who ever made a dirty living in this city,"<sup>58</sup> but Martins remembers Lime from school days—"he was the best friend I ever had"<sup>59</sup>—and almost strikes Galloway in anger.

Martins could have flown home, ending the tale, but inconsistencies in the accounts of Lime's death plus implausible coincidences whet his curiosity, especially his inability to identify a mysterious third man at the accident scene. He gets in touch with Lime's girlfriend, Anna Schmidt, an attractive, small-time Hungarian actress, who adds to his suspicions by admitting that she also wondered if the death had really been caused by an accident.

After another suspicious murder, Galloway decides that he can trust Martins and tells him that Lime had organized the theft of penicillin from

<sup>51</sup> Greene, *The Comedians*, 218.

<sup>52</sup> Graham Greene, *Conversations with Graham Greene*, ed. Henry J. Donaghy (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1992), 76.

<sup>53</sup> Graham Greene, *The Third Man* (London: Penguin, 1963, 1977), 9.

<sup>54</sup> Oddly, Galloway repeatedly describes in detail events where he was not present.

<sup>55</sup> Greene, *The Third Man*, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Gavin Lambert, "Review of *The Third Man*," *Monthly Film Bulletin* (16 September 1949), 150.

<sup>57</sup> Greene, *The Third Man*, 19.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

military hospitals, diluted it, and sold it on the black market. As a result, many people, including many children, had died or gone mad. Martins concludes that Lime had staged his own death to avoid prosecution and was actually the unidentified third man at the accident scene. With Greene's brilliantly executed plot twist, "What happened to Lime?" becomes "Where is Lime?"

Martins meets Lime at an old amusement park in the Soviet zone,<sup>60</sup> and Lime offers him a job, but Martins finds that he detests his corrupt old friend and tips off Galloway. They decide to talk Lime into leaving the Soviet zone so he can be arrested, but Lime surmises that the police are involved and makes for the sewage system. Martins follows him; Lime shoots a policeman; Martins takes the policeman's gun and wounds Lime seriously, and then kills him to put him out of his misery. His last words—"Bloody fool"<sup>61</sup>—are ambiguous. Is he referring to Martins or himself? Lime is buried again, this time for real, and Martins and Anna walk out of sight, hand in hand. (In the movie Martins watches sadly as Anna walks away.)

One theme Greene explores is how misleading appearances may be. Martins believes Lime, ever playful with "a look of cheerful rascality [and] geniality,"<sup>62</sup> is a good man, and then learns he is not; Martins believes Lime is a dead man, and then learns he is not. In Vienna, once renowned for high culture but now a broken-down den of thieves, things are not what they seem to be. Indeed, the city has a lawless quality

that reminds the reader of Martins's wild west. The traditions of the old empire are gone, replaced by an obsession on short term survival that involves taking advantage of every opportunity. Vienna has become "a city that has lost its *raison d'être*."<sup>63</sup>

A second theme in *The Third Man* is friendship and betrayal. Greene, particularly in his relationships with women, was a serial betrayer, often in cruel and humiliating ways, and his continuing relationship with Philby suggests that he did not always consider disloyalty a bad thing. In a Greene short story, "Under the Garden," a character declares: "If you have to earn a living, boy, and the price they make you pay is loyalty, be a double-agent and let neither of the two sides know your name."<sup>64</sup> Thus, it is hardly surprising that he raises the issue of betrayal with Fowler and Pyle in *The Quiet American*, and that in *The Third Man* misplaced loyalty is central. Martins and Lime have been friends since childhood; Martins had always looked up to Lime, whom he thought smarter and more charming. Perhaps this explains why Lime invited him to Vienna, to bask in the glow of hero worship. Martins's initial reaction on hearing bad things about Lime is to defend his friend's good name; when they finally meet, Lime offers him a well-paying job. But later Martins asks Anna: "Was he laughing at fools like us all the time?"<sup>65</sup> When forced to choose, Martins's considerations of friendship were trumped by considerations of humanity. Lime had acted unforgivably simply in the pursuit of money;

<sup>60</sup> Lime had earlier fled to the Soviet zone, presumably because the Soviets were deeply involved in Vienna's black market; see Karl R. Stadler, *Austria* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 263.

<sup>61</sup> Greene, *The Third Man*, 117.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Hiscocks, *The Rebirth of Austria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 2.

<sup>64</sup> Graham Greene, *Collected Short Stories* (London: Penguin, 1986), 202.

<sup>65</sup> Greene, *The Third Man*, 86.

friendship could not overlook acts so grave in their consequences. Martins is determined not merely to decline Lime's offer, but to destroy him. Does betrayal pay? In betraying Lime, as Fowler betrayed Pyle, Martins gets the girl. On the other hand, Lime, betrayed by Martins, is shot dead in a sewer, and many patients betrayed by Lime simply died. Each character feels betrayed by another, and the larger society is betrayed worst of all.

With the question of evil raised in the context of friendship, what ought the proper response be? As the political authorities have failed, pursuit of justice takes a personal turn. Self-destructive Anna does not exactly give Lime absolution, but she refuses to turn him in. "He was no good at all," Martins tells her. "We were both wrong. ... He was Harry," she replies. "He was in a racket. He did bad things. What about it? He was the man we both knew ... a man doesn't alter because you find out more about him,"<sup>66</sup> as if Lime had not hidden his crimes and she was to blame for not uncovering them. Martins replies that Lime had not simply been guilty of "occasional bad manners," but he cannot dislodge her stoic acceptance. Yet Lime had betrayed her by informing the Russians how to find her and return her to Hungary ("The price of living in this zone ... is service. I have to give them a little information now and then.") "She loves you," retorts Martins bitterly. "Well, I gave her a good time while it lasted," answers Lime.<sup>67</sup> For all his genial charm, he is cold to the core.

Where Anna seems embalmed in ennui, Martins eventually summons the courage to confront the evil that his friend embodies as the press of evidence

moves him from disbelief to a lethal anger. What is the source of this courage? Is it something he acquired from churning out cheap Westerns, which typically ended with good guy-bad guy confrontations? Is it simple decency provoked by outrageous evil? Greene leaves it to the reader to speculate.

All this is played out in a context of competing cultures facilitated by the setting in Vienna, the nexus of East and West in transition to who knows what. The amoral, opportunistic Lime views the suffering of war as a fortuitous opportunity to make money and damn the consequences. In the book's most famous scene at an amusement park, Lime and Martins ride a Ferris wheel that leaves them suspended high above the ground. Martins confronts Lime about the diluted penicillin. "Have you ever visited the children's hospital? Have you seen any of your victims?" "Don't be melodramatic," answers Lime. Looking down from the Ferris wheel at the tiny people below, he asks: "Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving—forever? If I said you could have twenty thousand pounds for every dot that stops, would you really, old man, tell me to keep my money—without hesitation? Or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spare?"<sup>68</sup> Lime here is echoing Stalin, who was said to have remarked that a single death is a tragedy, but a million deaths is a statistic. The conventionally ethical Martins is so appalled by the greed of his life-long friend that later he is literally ready to shoot him. Perhaps Martins was recalling the Nazis, who only a very few years earlier had also sought to dehumanize portions of the population

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 86, 87.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 104.

they intended to kill. For Martins, the dots do not cease being persons merely because their individuality cannot be discerned.

Lime, while repeatedly a topic of conversation, does not make his entrance until page 102, over three-quarters into the novel. The delay cannily creates an overwhelming sense of anticipation and foreboding, and Greene does not disappoint. For it highlights Lime's worldview as a kind of amoral relativism that permits certain acts in postwar Vienna that perhaps would not be allowed in more stable and prosperous circumstances. Beliefs cannot be validated, everything is in flux, and so individuals are free to follow the path that best fits their immediate goals or personalities; the breakdown in traditional authority, with the police and bureaucracy outmanned or corrupt, carries with it a breakdown of traditional ethical standards or perhaps any ethical standards. To Lime this response is obvious realism, as plain as the smile on his face, but to Martins this is simply rationalized sin. A breakdown in authority, far from permitting us to act as we will, makes adherence to traditional ethics even more imperative, for the institutions that customarily backstop our behavior may be too weak to have much impact. Greene does not have Martins reach this conclusion after abstract or theological contemplation. Rather, the experience of ordinary life evidently has set boundaries he is unwilling to cross. He is much more an everyman than a philosopher.

Martins's decency is also expressed in his capacity to love, as illustrated by his feelings for Anna. Lime, on the other

hand, merely uses her as if she were a disposable object. Yet Greene shrinks from the bromide that love is all, for Lime seems quite happy despite his inability to love while Anna (fatalistic like Phuong) finds that love brings only sadness. For him, happiness is related to greed, and so his successful penicillin operation left him happy enough.

Martins, like Fowler and Brown, might be termed a failure. In the great social competition, they fall short: Martins is broke, Fowler an empty shell, Brown a drifter who alienates his lover and cannot undertake an important trip without his car breaking down. It is how these failures respond to opportunity that is Greene's preoccupation—opportunities presented by other cultures. Martins is offered money by the corrupt Lime; Fowler sees a chance to slow the progressing Third Force and cement his ties to Phuong; Brown can help the wounded Jones. In their responses they reveal their true character. Greene then, invites us to rethink the notion of success. Lime with his money or the Macoute with their power might at first glance appear winners, but as they worship false gods, their victories are only transitory; Lime is shot and the Duvalier regime is eventually overthrown. In the end, this allows a thin slash of light to penetrate the darkness and leave us with hope, a thing with feathers.

### Colonialism

*The Quiet American* and *The Comedians* explore colonialism, in the former during its incipient collapse and the latter in its apparent long run effects.<sup>69</sup> In both novels the Western

<sup>69</sup> The Haitian context suggests that "postcolonial" may be a misnomer; the term literally refers to a time after colonialism has ceased, while postcolonial theorists emphasize

that the influence of colonialism persists for a long period after the colonial power has formally withdrawn. As a leading postcolonial theorist put it, "the postcolonial remains; it lives on,

outsiders and the locals each construct misshapen identities of the other, as a distinguished Iranian postcolonial theorist put it, in a kind of “third space” community they share.<sup>70</sup> In “the mutual construction of their subjectivities,”<sup>71</sup> each set of characters is defined by its history in which opposition to the enemy is central. But it is not only the mixing of very different cultures that proves so inflammatory; it is also the radical differences in power and the emotional consequences of these differences. In *The Quiet American* there is an undercurrent of optimism; the uprising against the colonial exploiters holds the promise of a more just society, free of foreign domination. *The Comedians*, on the other hand, depicts the consequences of postcolonialism as catastrophic; instead of serving as a momentous historical turn toward justice, the defeat of the French merely lead to another, perhaps worse form of oppression.

An important undercurrent in Greene’s narratives is the deliberate perversion of language. Habermas tells us that ideally, communication will be mutually intelligible and non-coercive so that rational arguments will carry the day.<sup>72</sup> But for Greene’s people in charge, what language communicates is a

commitment to control. Hence, the purpose of official lies is less to persuade the audience than to illustrate the officials’ power; we lie; you know it; and there is nothing you can do about it. The more blatant the lie, the more powerfully it intimidates. Not only is there no incentive to be truthful; there is no incentive even to be subtle. Thus, when Haitian officials in *The Comedians* take Americans to visit Duvalierville, a vast area marked for a pricey development, the fact that it is merely ugly rubble demonstrates the power of the government. It can displace vast numbers of people, show no justification, and remain untouched by the consequences.

Do Greene’s novels fall beneath the postcolonial umbrella? Greene is plainly preoccupied with the legacy—cultural and otherwise—of colonial domination and exploitation, which he damns as dehumanizing and immoral. His sympathies lie with the subaltern excluded from power and suppressed by imperialism,<sup>73</sup> and he praises their efforts at resistance. The element of colonial desire<sup>74</sup> is also present in the sexualized relationships of Westerners with subaltern women, Fowler with Phoung and Brown with his favorite prostitutes. Greene does not subscribe

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ceaselessly transformed in the present into new social and political configurations” (Robert J. C. Young, “Postcolonial Remains,” *Reviewing Imperial Conflicts*, ed. Ana Cristina Mendes and Cristina Baptista [Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014]), 11. See also Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2 and Matthew G. Stanard, “The Colonial Past Is Never Dead. It’s Not Even Past,” *European History Handbook*, ed. Harriet Rudolph and Gregor G. Metzger (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, December 2016), 151-74. By this logic, the United States, which began as British

colonies, would be both postcolonial and colonial.

<sup>70</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 212-35.

<sup>71</sup> Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001), 118.

<sup>72</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981/1984).

<sup>73</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Laurence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), 271-313.

<sup>74</sup> Young, 181-82.

to the once popular notion that history is what took place in the West,<sup>75</sup> but his perspective and concerns, reflecting his own experiences, are unavoidably Eurocentric. In the end Greene's focus is not on the victims of colonization. Rather, they provide the context for the stories of the European protagonists. Postcolonialism however, is not merely a matter of sympathy for the oppressed.

*The Third Man*, set in cosmopolitan Vienna, which Greene calls "simply a city of undignified ruins,"<sup>76</sup> features dominant outsiders and often desperate locals who share a more or less common culture; indeed, the Viennese, who had greeted *Anschluss* euphorically, had themselves been dominant only a few years earlier. Yet the postwar asymmetrical power relationship with the victorious Allies echoes the colonial arrangement as the various players cooperate and conflict, driven by their own desires and the distorted identities they have each built of the other. Colonialism may have brought about a "universal psychic 'migrancy' and a sense of dislocation,"<sup>77</sup> but Greene teaches us that total war may carry with it its own psychic migrancy and dislocation.

What is the nature of the bridge between colonizers and the colonized? Colonialism, as a practical matter, focuses on managing heterogeneity, as the colonizers use carrots and sticks in an unceasing effort to maintain control.<sup>78</sup> Of course, only a tiny culture found on a remote island could claim monolithic purity; in the real-world individuals from different cultures

continually interact, incrementally altering their own cultures in the process. As Bhabha writes, "all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation."<sup>79</sup>

In Greene's novels, however, the hybridity that Bhabha postulates exists only at a surface level, and the principle of essentialism is honored. The Westerners develop a taste for the local cuisine and are able to carry on simple conversations in the local language; the locals, more vulnerable, absorb the Western etiquette and become relatively facile in the Western language. But neither substantially sheds its views of life, humanity, or fate. There are adjustments of convenience, but little more, and the opportunities for material profit or humanitarian hubris lend the sometimes-unacknowledged cultural conflicts a special edge. As Gandhi put it, "the entrenched discourse of cultural essentialism merely reiterates and gives legitimacy to the insidious racialization of thought which attends the violent logic of colonial rationality."<sup>80</sup> All this has implications for agency. Group identity, especially for the subaltern, heavily influences the thought and conduct of Greene's characters. At the same time, novels normally require characters making choices, sometimes bursting through identity shackles; Greene, a consummate moralist, makes these assertive choices central, but it is the Westerners' choices and not the subalterns' that count.

Yet there is something in the postcolonial narrative that may well

<sup>75</sup> See Amir Mufti, "Global Comparativism," *Critical Inquiry* 31 (2005), 472-89.

<sup>76</sup> Greene, *The Third Man*, 14.

<sup>77</sup> David Richards, "Framing Identities," *A Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature*,

ed. Shirley Chews and David Richards (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 21.

<sup>78</sup> John Comaroff, "Reflections on the Colonial State," *Social Identities* 4 (1981), 317.

<sup>79</sup> Bhabha, 37.

<sup>80</sup> Gandhi, 123.

have appealed to the moralist Greene, for at the core of postcolonialism is a fable of worthy subalterns exploited by foreigners deficient in everything but technology and military might. It is a powerful narrative, no doubt, but it is not entirely convincing. It is certainly true that colonialism's defenders conceived it as "an effective and legitimate tool of moral and material progress,"<sup>81</sup> as it Christianized and civilized the heathen. And it is equally true that all colonial regimes were exploitative; that was their reason for being. However, it is an error to treat them alike; some were very much worse than others. The crimes of the British in India, for instance, pale beside the horrors of King Leopold's Belgian Congo;<sup>82</sup> indeed, the crimes of the British pale beside those of Greene's Papa Doc. Though some colonial regimes offered nothing to the subaltern but misery and death, others may have laid the groundwork for future progress by improving infrastructure, educating elites, valuing technology and innovation, introducing the concepts of political freedom and democracy, and so forth. Of course, these and other developments might be rejected as foreign imports, but to the extent that they contributed to longer and healthier lives with less drudgery and more comforts, many of those directly affected might consider them improvements.

The gains experienced by the local people were nearly always the byproduct of the colonists' self-interested behavior. Some postcolonial theorists regard this

as a fatal flaw: "The chief argument against globalization is that global culture and global economics did not spontaneously erupt but originated in and continue to be perpetuated from the centers of capitalist power."<sup>83</sup> But this is classic *ad hominem*, attacking not the argument but those who made it. If colonists built roads, their purpose was to get their goods to market or facilitate military control, not to knit societies together or enhance the opportunities of ordinary people. This does not, however, negate the positive impact the roads might have had. Nor is there much acknowledgement among postcolonial theorists of how global investment and supply chains have stimulated economic growth and raised living standards nor how foreign aid has improved health, education, and other areas of daily life.<sup>84</sup> None of this was born of altruism. But if only altruism deserves praise, we shall all wait in silence.

What, then, of precolonial societies? "They were democratic societies, always," answered a prominent postcolonial theorist, indulging a sentimental fantasy; "they were cooperative, fraternal societies."<sup>85</sup> In truth however, precolonial rulers, like rulers generally, were likely driven by self-interest, some being indigenous imperialists.<sup>86</sup> Glorifying the precolonial period, moreover, ignores the troublesome fact that its economic, psychological, and cultural traditions and the behaviors and institutions they supported were major obstacles to

<sup>81</sup> Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>82</sup> See Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

<sup>83</sup> Ashcroft, et al., 101.

<sup>84</sup> See Sankaran Krishna, *Globalization and Postcolonialism: Hegemony and Resistance in*

*the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), ch. 2.

<sup>85</sup> Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1955/1972), 23.

<sup>86</sup> Toyon Falola, *Economic Reforms and Modernization in Nigeria, 1945-1965* (Kent: Kent University Press, 2004), ch. 1.

modernization<sup>87</sup> that depressed living standards.<sup>88</sup> The arrival of colonists, in short, did not disrupt peaceful, prosperous utopias governed by platonic wise men and women. Then, as today, as Thucydides famously observed: “The strong do what they will, and the weak suffer as they must.” By failing to emphasize (or sometimes even to concede) that precolonial eras may have been times of terrible poverty and exploitation and that sometimes colonization helped to lead to modernization, much of postcolonialist thought simply looks in the wrong direction, contrasting the human costs of past colonialization with an imagined precolonial period of enlightenment and passing over colonization’s significant future benefits.

Greene, with his fondness for authoritarian populist rulers on the left, perhaps shared the Manichean view of noble revolutionaries and oppressive colonists. In *The Quiet Man*, for instance, the violence, terror, and economic incompetence of Communists is the gorilla in the room that Greene never seems to notice. Meanwhile, with Pyle the point is relentlessly made that for the West, even good motives lack exculpatory value. They are not simply inadequate; they are positively toxic. On the other hand, the good motives of the revolutionaries in *The Comedians*, particularly a Communist doctor, are sufficient to win praise; they may be naïve romantics, but their innate

goodness contrasts strikingly with Papa Doc’s brutish oppressors, perhaps the easiest political target then extant.

Greene wrote before the great flowering of academic postcolonial discourse, but an obvious problem bedeviling this discourse stems from its birth in literary studies. Mountains of scholarly research have established the value of literary studies beyond any need to demonstrate it here. But analyzing literature as a means of verifying postcolonial propositions recalls the story of the man who lost his keys in the ditch but searches for them under a streetlamp because that is where the light was. Consider the example of Edward Said, “commonly regarded as the catalyst and reference point for postcolonialism,”<sup>89</sup> who built his influential analysis of orientalism on his reading of Western novelists (Austen, Conrad, Flaubert), travel and anthropological writings (Burton, Renan), opera (Verdi), and the American media.<sup>90</sup> From these sources Said generated a number of provocative hypotheses. But the nature of his source material meant that none of the hypotheses was ever rigorously tested by empirical data despite the existence of these data; indeed, it is difficult to imagine Said even entertaining the idea. Said looked at comparative literature to validate his views because he was a specialist in comparative literature, but that was not where the answers to his questions were found. Postcolonial

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<sup>87</sup> See Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (New York: Free Press, 1958) and Myron Weiner (ed.), *The Dynamics of Growth*, (New York: Basic, 1966).

<sup>88</sup> This view is routinely dismissed as blaming the victim. However, blame and victimhood are different, unrelated categories. Sometimes, a victim, say, a drunken driver, is blameworthy; sometimes, a victim, say, a person injured by a

drunken driver, can blame another person; sometimes, a victim, say, a person struck by lightning, is simply unlucky and no one is to blame. The unfortunate is not necessarily unfair.

<sup>89</sup> See Ghandi, 64 and Tahrir Khalil Hamdi, “Edward Said and Recent Orientalist Critiques,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 35 (2013), 130.

<sup>90</sup> See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978).

studies is dominated by such specialists, for example, Bhaba and Spivak, but the problems of extrapolating from literary material come in crowds.

In the first place, absent the discipline imposed by empirical research, the key cultural concepts are so imprecise and squishy—for example, “national allegories”<sup>91</sup> or “catachresis”<sup>92</sup>—that they hamper rather than facilitate analysis. The meanings of concepts are illustrated anecdotally, but because they are not operationalized, we have no way of ascertaining their relationship, if any, with other concepts. The postcolonialist’s ideas may be potentially insightful and expressed eloquently, but to accept or reject them on this basis would be merely to decide after hearing an effort at marketing.

Second, the assumption that the celebrated intellectuals whom Said or others examine provide expert guidance connecting imperialism to culture is certainly problematical. Perhaps, had a different set of intellectuals been chosen, a different set of inferences might have resulted. Indeed perhaps, the focus on intellectuals is itself mistaken, for the intellectuals’ defining quality, after all, is how different they are from the ordinary people whose culture the theorists purport to explore. Arguably, a better source might be popular works, which represent a much wider base. Said, as is typical, points to his designated intellectuals to show that “colonial rule

was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact.”<sup>93</sup> But is this confusing what Marx called the superstructure for something much more fundamental?<sup>94</sup> If the novels had not been written, would the colonial story have been much different? It is hard to believe that the postcolonial theorists’ intellectuals shaped the colonial system more than the system shaped them. These intellectuals may propose explanatory ideas but can hardly validate them.

Third, the claim that colonialist discourse is Eurocentric and self-justifying seems stupefyingly obvious. We all tend to view the world from our own perspective, and so Europeans will naturally tend to be Eurocentric. And given humanity’s well-known tendency to dress self-interest in the common good, European discourse will often provide an altruistic rationale for conduct driven by baser motives. Who has read Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden” and not thought the same? Said, in his polemic, castigates Europeans for this moral failing. But is there any reason to think that this behavior is peculiar to them? Said himself is unable to free himself from the Arab point of view. Thus, he writes that the Middle East is “the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies,”<sup>95</sup> utterly ignoring the enormity and longevity of Spanish and Portuguese colonies in Latin America,

<sup>91</sup> See Fredric Jameson, “Third World Literature in the Era of Multi-National Capitalism,” *Social Text* 15 (1986), 65-88, but cf. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, (London: Verso, 1992).

<sup>92</sup> See Spivak, 70, but cf. Gyan Prakash, “Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography,” *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Dhohat

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 491-500.

<sup>93</sup> Said, 39.

<sup>94</sup> Marx famously wrote that “the mode of production in material life determines the social, political and intellectual life processes in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determine their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (Marx and Engels 1942, 356-57).

<sup>95</sup> Said, 1.

not to say the centuries-long Arab colonization of Spain. Even his Middle East is drawn to Arab outlines, excluding the Ottoman Turks, who played a major role for centuries, as well as the Persians.<sup>96</sup>

Oddly too, while postcolonialists decry poisonous Eurocentrism, they often make exceptions for certain European thinkers who provide “much of the theoretical foundations” for their scholarship.<sup>97</sup> Many are inspired by Marx, ignoring the colonialism practiced by nations governing in his name.<sup>98</sup> Others are influenced by Foucault’s insight that knowledge discourse may become an instrument of power and Gramsci’s observation that cultural hegemony may facilitate elite control over the masses.<sup>99</sup> Evidently, there is good Eurocentrism and bad Eurocentrism.<sup>100</sup>

What would Greene have made of postcolonialism? At a personal level, he does not seem to have been overflowing with the milk of human kindness. His cousin wrote that “his brain frightened

me. It was sharp and clear and cruel.” She said: “Apart from three or four people he was really fond of, I felt that the rest of humanity was to him like a heap of insects that he liked to examine as a scientist might examine his specimens.”<sup>101</sup> Anthony Powell wrote in his journal, “I think [Greene] was completely cynical, really only liking sex and money and his own particular form of publicity.”<sup>102</sup> Greene himself observed that “there is a splinter of ice in the heart of every writer.”<sup>103</sup> “I’ve betrayed so many people in my life,” he confessed,<sup>104</sup> a biographer noting that at one point Greene “was married to Vivien, living with Dorothy, purportedly involved with a possibly non-existent Claudette Monde and in love with Catherine Walton.”<sup>105</sup> Only sporadically was he interested in his children.<sup>106</sup> All this is to say that we may doubt his deep empathy for the subaltern.

Yet if his life did not conform to traditional Christian morality, Greene remained committed to its principles, at least in the abstract. Hence, his

<sup>96</sup> Said also effectively defines Europe as Britain and France, omitting Germany which does not fit his template, as it produced extensive Orientalist scholarship but was a very minor colonizer in the region that concerned him.

<sup>97</sup> Samrat Sengupta and Kaustav Bakshi, Introduction, *Anxieties, Influences and After: Critical Responses to Postcolonialism and Neocolonialism* (Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2009), 8.

<sup>98</sup> Marx also expressed the heretical notion that imperialism may be a necessary precursor to socialism (Brewer 1980, 52-60).

<sup>99</sup> The notion that truth is socially constructed did not deter Said from claiming as objective truth Arab oppression and exploitation. See Said, 3, 7.

<sup>100</sup> An obvious rejoinder to these criticisms is that postcolonialists are engaged in a struggle against oppression, poverty, and exploitation, and therefore should not be confused with conventional academics, who disdain moral engagement with the world, preferring an arid

and futile worship of neutrality and objectivity. These traditional scholarly icons are particularly inappropriate in this area of study, as they were devised in the West and serve Western colonial interests.

<sup>101</sup> Barbara Greene, qtd. in Paul Theroux, *Sunrise with Seamonsters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 293.

<sup>102</sup> Anthony Powell, *Journals, 1990-1992* (London: Penguin, 1997).

<sup>103</sup> Qtd. in John Banville, “Hearing Secret Harmonies,” *New Republic*, (October 17, 2018).

<sup>104</sup> Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume 3, 1955-1991* (New York: Viking, 2005), 282.

<sup>105</sup> Richard Greene, *The Unquiet Englishman*, (New York: Norton, 2020).

<sup>106</sup> “How I dislike children,” he wrote. Qtd. in Rosner 2020, 186. Greene did, however, write *The Little Train* (1946), *The Little Fire Engine* (1950), *The Little Horse Bus* (1952), and *The Little Steamroller* (1952), all children’s books.

sympathy for the colonized and his antipathy for the colonizers.<sup>107</sup> Plainly, he would agree with one postcolonial theorist that “colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies.”<sup>108</sup> In the end, despite his presumed contempt for its impenetrable jargon and endless scholarly bickering, he might have found the general drift of the postcolonial argument irresistibly persuasive.

### Conclusions

The unbridgeable gaps between cultures are for Greene an obvious, indelible, and consequential fact of life, although one often camouflaged by platitudes and ignorance. Martins and Lime, Fowler and Pyle, Brown and the young Haitian revolutionary seem at first to inhabit different planets and to speak different languages. We each, like Greene’s characters, have different opinions, beliefs, and notions about how the world works. But Greene’s interest lies less with individual characters than with the cultural types they represent; in this perhaps presaging Samuel Huntington’s famous “clash of civilizations.”<sup>109</sup>

In each novel the cultural gap exists at two levels: between two prototypical Westerners, and between the Westerners and their rather exotic environments. *The Quiet American* pits the culture of the naïve, ambitious American against that of the seen-it-all, cynical Brit, with each misunderstanding that of inscrutable Vietnam. *The Comedians* features two Brits representing different cultures, one world weary and the other a bogus-

blowhard-turned-hero; they also are set off from corrupt and idealistic Haiti, writhing under the brutal and lawless rule of Papa Doc. Finally, *The Third Man* posits a conflict between two Westerners, one embodying amoral greed and the other common decency; the setting, Vienna, like a magnificent creature beset by predators, provides opportunities for both good and evil. Each pair of protagonists in the three novels, though superficially friendly (at least at first), represents clashing cultures that inhibit mutual understanding and empathy. When we encounter them, they do not truly understand each other, nor do they even grasp the need for this understanding. Eventually, after a great deal of suffering—nearly all by third parties—they begin to understand this as the beliefs and opinions that barricaded them against reality and gave them a sense of intellectual security crumble before the onslaught of events.

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<sup>107</sup> Like Said, Greene spoke of truth telling as his first obligation, while fabricating important facts about his own life. To establish his bona fides, Said wrote of his childhood in Jerusalem, when he actually grew up in Cairo, and Greene spun tales about youthful games of Russian roulette.

<sup>108</sup> Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6.

<sup>109</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, (1993), 22.