

ASPECTS OF COMMITMENT IN GRAHAM GREENE'S  
**THE QUIET AMERICAN**

BY  
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Following the Second World War and its attendant unparalleled barbarity, it has become a virtual impossibility for the writer to remain uncommitted. Even a Catholic writer as reputedly aloof from the events and preoccupations of the world as Greene's namesake and fellow convert from Protestantism, Julien Green, could state in the sixties that such a stance was no longer possible, that the attractive ivory tower of former times must have disappeared during an air raid.<sup>1</sup>

Graham Greene's own personal commitment had already made itself apparent in a number of novels written before the Second World War. If the most notable example of his commitment to the Roman Church in this period is to be found in **The Power and the Glory**<sup>2</sup>, published in 1940, and in his documentary account of his 1938 Mexican journey, **The Lawless Roads** (1939), in which a faith however downtrodden and oppressed is seen to offer a degree of solace and hope to a beleaguered population, his social and political involvement-never narrowly tied to the doctrines of any one party - is clearly revealed in **It's A Battlefield** (1934). The latter work was widely regarded as revolutionary by reviewers at the time<sup>3</sup>. Although Samuel Hynes is right to assert that a revolutionary interpretation is not evident or clear<sup>4</sup>, as Roger Sharrock states, quoting the character Caroline Bury's left-wing sentiments: "Greene was certainly some sort of socialist when he wrote this"<sup>5</sup>. For Sharrock, however, Greene's first concern here is with alienation, "with the alienation of individuals and not directly with attempts to change society"<sup>6</sup>.

Referring to this period in his writing in conversation with Marie-Françoise Allain, Graham Greene corroborates what he views as coherence and consistency in his Left wing position opted for as a young man, emerging in the works of the 30s and being kept up in the works of the 80s:

I have always inclined to the Left, ever since my first books, and my sympathies have consolidated with age. There's a certain continuity between **It's A Battlefield**, **Brighton Rock** and **The Honorary Consul**: it's my concern with the possibility of social change.<sup>7</sup>

This "concern with the possibility of social change" does not necessarily imply aiming at actually changing society, as Greene specifies in the same series of conversations with Marie-Françoise Allain. The author claims that he expresses "a sense of injustice", his aim being "not to change things but to give them expression"<sup>8</sup>. At the same time, he allows that "writing is certainly a kind of action"<sup>9</sup>.

In the post-war years, this "action" reaches out particularly in spiritual and political directions. The fifties themselves encompass works that searchingly probe both political and spiritual conflicts and dilemmas. If the novel which appeared at the beginning of the decade (**The End of the Affair**, 1951) is explicitly religious - and more specifically Roman Catholic - in much of its content, the novel from the middle of this period (**The Quiet American** 1955), which we are going to discuss in some detail, although overtly concerned with political and ideological issues, does in fact transcend the merely secular.<sup>10</sup>

The years of publication of **The End of the Affair** and of **The Quiet American** were also years in which Greene produced essays of interest dealing with similar themes. In 1951 the spiritual preoccupation comes to the fore in "Simone Weil" and more especially in "The Paradox of A Pope",<sup>11</sup> where the author's intense admiration for Eugenio Pacelli is manifest. To the superficial reader of Graham Greene, such admiration from a progressive novelist for an apparently arch-conservative Pontiff may initially startle, seeming much more apt coming from the pen of an Evelyn Waugh or a Julien Green. Yet it is surely the mark of a writer who is truly free and impartial, unfettered by doctrinaire allegiance to party or faction. The man who perceives Pius XII as "the servant of the servants of God, and not impossibly one feels, a saint"<sup>12</sup> is equally able to write in the year of publication of **The Quiet American**, a glowing tribute to Ho Chi Minh and his achievements. Thanks to Ho Chi Minh and his comrades, "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 in teaching him. There is something in

Communism besides the politics" <sup>13</sup>. The sentiments expressed in the first two sentences of this quotation are to be found in **The Quiet American**, in Fowler's words to Pyle as they pursue their ideological debate in the Vietnamese watch tower, <sup>14</sup> while the final sentence is re-echoed in **The Comedians**, in a line from Dr. Magiot's letter to the narrator Brown: "But Communism, my friend, is more than Marxism..." <sup>15</sup>.

The continuity and the consistency of thought are clear, a number of Greene's progressive ideas and sentiments aired in passages of the **Collected Essays** being expressed and espoused by protagonists in his fiction, as here by Fowler and Magiot. The actual probing of political and spiritual conflict will reach a climax in the seventies, in **The Honorary Consul**, a favourite novel of Greene's because it combines his religious interest with his political interest <sup>16</sup>.

As it stands, Graham Greene's "committed" novel of the fifties, **The Quiet American**, would appear on the surface to be essentially secular. Ideological and political questions are of course to the fore in this work; it is a story set in, and about, a war with all its attendant horrors, in particular pain and death, death which dominates the novel, as J.P. Kulshrestha has underlined, aptly reminding readers that Conor Cruise O'Brien has called death "the fourth character in the story" <sup>17</sup>. This concern with suffering and death is a means of lifting the novel out of the realm of the merely secular and placing it in a broader framework with at least implications of the transcendental. Fowler's remorse over Pyle's death at the end of the novel, his wish that "there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry" <sup>18</sup> could quite conceivably be interpreted as a yearning for God, or as Roger Sharrock puts it, "the narrator might be interpreted as approaching the threshold of belief merely through need" <sup>19</sup>.

Before dealing with such metaphysical considerations, however, there is the specific concern with the here and now, with the reality of the day-to-day horror of war. Greene's first person narrator, Thomas Fowler <sup>20</sup>, believes himself to be an impersonal reporter of atrocity, able to stand indefinitely on the sidelines as an impartial observer. "I'm not involved" is his watchword:

It had been an article of my creed. The human condition being what it was, let them fight, let them love, let them murder, I would not be involved. (Q.A.,27).

We are able to observe Fowler "in the field" comparatively early in the novel as he goes about the grisly business of amassing material concerning the state of the war in the north. Joining a French patrol on reconnaissance, he is rapidly able to perceive some of the concrete effects of hostilities in this battle zone. A canal they come upon is "full of bodies: I am reminded now of an Irish stew containing too much meat. The bodies overlapped: one head, seal-grey, and anonymous as a convict with a shaven scalp, stuck up out of the water like a buoy. There was no blood..." (Q.A., 50-51). The horror of war is directly conveyed to the reader by the use of vivid, graphic, highly unpleasant images that elicit revulsion. In this spectacle of mass carnage, the bodies are bloodless, just objects to be negotiated as Fowler and some of the soldiers make their way across the canal in a punt: "... but we ran on a shoal of bodies and stuck. He (a soldier) pushed away with his pole, sinking it into this human clay, and one body was released and floated up all its length beside the boat like a bather lying in the sun". (Q.A., 51). The 'clay' may be termed 'human', but it is treated in the most callous, inhuman way, the narrator here adding to the horror of the situation by the use of a simile which is particularly striking and macabre in its audacity.

What rapidly becomes apparent in lines such as the above is the dehumanizing effect of war, of carnage taken for granted.<sup>21</sup> For combatants the sight of violent death is merely part of the routine. Close to the canal with its overlapping bodies, the soldiers go about what is for them ordinary business:

There was an odd comradeship about all their movements, as though they were equals engaged on a task they had performed together times out of mind. (Q.A., 51).

It should be noted that Fowler, for his part, is momentarily part of this unit: albeit an observer, unlike most of his fellow journalists he is knowingly in the firing line and exposed to the same risks as the army regulars about him.

In this sense Fowler is involved, and despite his own disparaging comments on the fear he experiences (e.g. pp. 51, 90, 106) he displays considerable courage in difficult and dangerous situations. Indeed, Fowler regards it as a war correspondent's duty to be involved in the fighting at first hand, for "if one writes about war, self-respect demands that occasionally one share the risks" (p. 146). It is this

authentic involvement with the war situation that differentiates him from Bill Granger, the brash American journalist, who flies north to the battle zone with his cronies at approved times when it is safe to do so (e.g. pp. 32, 34), though to be fair to Granger he has no illusions about the authenticity of his reporting or his commitment to truth.

If Granger's reporting is shown to be counterfeit, so too is his relationship with the Vietnamese, largely confined to "knocking the girls" in the local brothels (p. 35). The contrast with Fowler is again revealing, the Englishman being committed to his Vietnamese mistress, Phuong, in spite of his cynicism in general and concerning love in particular. For Fowler, Phuong is certainly important as a sexual being, but she is far more than this: "she was the hiss of steam, the clink of a cup, she was a certain hour of the night and the promise of rest (p. 10). She is the great comforter, the bringer of solace to Fowler, and the woman he will seek to marry, as soon as he is able to secure a divorce from his first High Anglican wife.

Fowler's ideological adversary and his rival for Phuong's affections, the young American, Alden Pyle, is presented at the outset of the novel as possessing a naive and unbreakable commitment to his country and its American values:

Pyle was very earnest and I had suffered from his lectures on the Far East, which he had known for as many months as I had years. Democracy was another subject of his, and he had pronounced and aggravating views on what the United States was doing for the world (p. 10)

In Greene's anti-American first-person narrator, for whom Pyle sums up most of the United States's defects, many readers have assumed they have a mirror image of the author himself. Graham Greene has not been particularly helpful in this respect with his somewhat cryptic "I'm not entirely Fowler" in conversation with Marie-Françoise Allain<sup>22</sup>, though Philip Stratford is surely correct when he writes that "it is fair to expect the total novel to carry Greene's viewpoint, but fatal to equate Fowler and Greene, the narrator and the author"<sup>23</sup>. And to this caveat the critic rightly adds that "Fowler's inert non-commitment is no more compatible to him (Greene) than Pyle's high-principled meddling"<sup>24</sup>.

However, whereas Pyle's "high-principled meddling" is an unchanging feature of

his activity right up to his violent death, the "inert non-commitment" of Fowler is far from being a static characteristic. Indeed, the narrator's outlook on involvement will undergo quite considerable modification in the course of the novel. The watch-tower scene - to which we alluded a little earlier - and its aftermath is significant in this respect, in that it first presents the reader with a seemingly totally uncommitted Fowler during the discussion with Pyle rapidly revealing himself to be a man of compassion personally involved in, and concerned about, what is happening. The cynical, hard-headed journalist for whom politics are supposedly without interest- "... I'm a reporter. I'm not **engagé**" (p. 95) - gives himself up following the Vietminh destruction of the watch-tower to feelings of guilt and responsibility for the Vietnamese victims, the two watch-tower guards, one of whom has not been killed outright by the enemy fire (p. 112). And the injured Fowler's wish is vainly to join the young Vietnamese soldier, "to share his pain". Suffering brings about a solidarity amongst men, brotherhood is created in pain. In the feelings of responsibility he experiences for the soldier, Fowler admits to a degree of involvement and concern that his subsequent attempt to play down is unable to diminish. "I know the depth of my selfishness. I cannot be at ease... if someone else is in pain" writes the narrator. "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." (p. 113). In such a passage, Fowler's endeavour to undervalue his eminently humane response to suffering serves only to emphasize this very response and its positive nature. If Fowler is right in his disparaging analysis of his feelings and reactions in such a case, then in a wider sense the logical inference could well be that many humanitarian actions in the face of pain are in fact prompted by selfishness on account of an inability to be at ease knowing that somebody else is suffering. If an element of egoism does enter into Fowler's, and other men's reactions, in such circumstances, at the same time surely more altruistic motivations are involved. Do Fowler's priest and commissar act out of selfishness in trying to reduce the tribulations of Vietnamese peasants so that they (priest and commissar) can attain a peace of mind in which only thoughts of self need engage their attention? The doubting Fowler would be the last to accept this, his admiration for both Catholic priest (p. 94) and Communist commissar (pp. 95-96) being conveyed as genuine and unequivocal. Fowler's censure is reserved for himself and for the American characters in the

novel, the French colonialists themselves often receiving quite fulsome praise. <sup>25</sup>

It is in this watch-tower sequence, then, that Fowler's own ivory tower of detachment is seen to crumble. Whether intentional or not there is considerable irony in Greene's use of the tower image: here the tower, far from providing "ways of escape" or protection from a harsh and unrelenting reality, is a symbol of the precarious nature, of the constant vulnerability, of the post World War II nuclear age poised on the brink of destruction. Fowler attempts to blot out the hideous reality - in this specific case the Vietnamese war machine in the midst of which the journalist finds himself enmeshed and sandwiched - by thinking back to a world of hope and blue skies before Hitler and the holocaust (p. 99).

This bout of nostalgia is, however, short-lived; the real world of suffering of Fowler's maturity is omnipresent, oppressive. The pain of war naturally, but also the pain of personal and private conflict which clearly emerges in the long conversation with Alden Pyle. (see, for example, p. 103). If Fowler has broken his commitment to his High Anglican wife, he has replaced it - as we have seen above - in his relationship with Phuong, and all his attempts to denigrate or deny any elevated sentiments on his part in this relationship - "I only want her body" (p. 58) - cannot disguise this involvement which goes far beyond what he will admit to Pyle. Were the Annamite just "a body", it is hardly conceivable that Fowler's jealousy over Pyle's involvement with Phuong should reach such a pitch, that he should break down into tears in the American Legation after her departure from his room in the rue Catinat (p. 146).

Thomas Fowler's commitment to the Vietnamese and to Vietnam is certainly deeper than he imagines. He is shown by Greene to be far closer to the Vietnamese reality than the great majority of other foreigners in the country. He knows the discomfort and hardship at first-hand, not just on account of his various sallies into the battle zones, but also through his own life-style and union with Phuong lived out in the bareness of his 'flat', just a room with no refrigerator (p. 165) and the 'urinoir' outside on the landing (p. 114).

The stages in Fowler's coming to a position of active personal involvement in the Vietnamese struggle have been traced by Philip Stratford. Apart from the crucial watch-tower scene which we have just commented upon, Stratford refers to other incidents of pain and suffering in this war which have awakened Fowler's compassion and sympathy, such as the sight of the dead Vietnamese woman and her small

boy (p. 52) and the French bomber's strafing of the sampan (p. 148)<sup>26</sup>.

Examination of the sampan episode sheds a certain amount of light on the heart of our subject. Fowler has gone north following Phuong's desertion, and thanks to his connections in the Squadron Gascogne he is invited to join a French pilot on a vertical bombing raid over territory that has recently passed into Vietminh hands (p. 146). Initially, Fowler's taking part in a potentially hazardous mission can be viewed as a wish to blot out the misfortune that has befallen his private life, a will to remove thoughts of his rival, Pyle, from his mind. Indeed, as the plane descends to release its bombs, physical sensation has taken over Fowler's organism and being, to the extent that "for forty seconds Pyle had not existed: even loneliness hadn't existed" (p. 148). To the physical discomfort of the raid, there is added the realization of danger, that a single machine-gun on the ground could readily bring about the plane's destruction. Despite this, however, and the seemingly interminable length of the mission, "it had been free from the discomfort of personal thought" (p. 148).

At this point, Fowler expresses no criticism of the raid itself, as an act of war; he has referred to the possible danger to which Trouin, the pilot, and he himself were exposed, and would doubtless go along with the Frenchman's reasoning on that part of the operation: "Over the village they could have shot us down. Our risk was as great as theirs" (p. 149). It is the incident which follows this bombing raid that dismays Greene's protagonist, that is the strafing of the sampan. When Trouin opens fire on the small defenceless river boat, the thoughts of the supposedly impassive and hardened war correspondent are filled with indignation and revulsion:

I thought again as I had thought when I saw the dead child at Phat Diem, 'I hate war.' There had been something so shocking in our sudden fortuitous choice of a prey. (p. 148).

This is an example of the gratuitous act of war that amounts to crime, to which Fowler can only respond with the humanitarian's sense of outrage and revolt.

During their session at the local opium-house following the mission, the seemingly innocuous and casual question Fowler puts to Captain Trouin - "That sampan - this evening - was it doing any harm?" (p. 149) - obviously betrays an uneasy conscience. And here the outlooks and attitudes of the two men are clearly differentiated:



for the professional man of war the conscience is untroubled, the strafing was justified: "In those reaches of the river we have orders to shoot up anything in sight". (p. 149) Yet, at the same time, Trouin does protest at certain aspects of the war he is waging, confessing to his hatred at having to drop napalm bombs, releasing innumerable flames of death and destruction from the safety of 3000 feet: "You see the forest catching fire... The poor devils are burnt alive, the flames go over them like water. They are wet through with fire" (p. 149). The simple, graphic terms of Trouin's description underscore the horror of the situation, as the pilot proceeds to outline the nature of his own commitment, which is not, he considers, to the pursuit of a colonial war but to the defence of European civilization (pp. 149, 150). Yet as Molly Mahood puts it, "the simple, traditional French patriotism of the bomber pilot Trouin is betrayed when he is dispatched on napalm raids"<sup>27</sup>. This betrayal marks an irreversible change in the nature of colonialism in Vietnam, the napalm bombing being symptomatic of the pervasive corruption that has crept into the whole undertaking. Trouin has explicitly stated that he is not fighting a colonial war, making clear to Fowler what he feels about the **colons**: "Do you think I'd do these things for the planters of Terre Rouge? I'd rather be court-martialled". (p. 149) A distinction is made between the egotism and grasping nature of many of the settlers and the disinterestedness and integrity of men like Trouin who continue to fight for their noble if out-of-date ideal. The latter are men for whom Graham Greene has a manifest sympathy, men whose ideal is to be treated with respect. Drawing a parallel with Joseph Conrad, Molly Mahood interestingly refers to "suggestions" in **The Quiet American** that "colonial conquest and rule had once had a cultural dynamism akin to Marlow's 'real idea'"<sup>28</sup>. This particular "cultural dynamism" has now irrevocably vanished, and the mantle has been taken on by the Communists.

For the French, time is strictly limited, and Trouin has no illusions about this inescapable fact. Any idea of a French victory is out of the question (p. 151). If the armed forces' mission is a futile one, however, it remains a mission that demands the highest notions of duty and self-sacrifice, and we are close here to De Gaulle's concept of the army as the purest part of the nation<sup>29</sup>.

Albeit weakened when he is compelled to drop napalm, Trouin's sense of purpose and involvement is basically intact, and he is unimpressed by Fowler's own protestations of non-involvement. For the Frenchman, Fowler will inevitably be forced into

a position of commitment. "One day something will happen. You will take a side... We all get involved in a moment of emotion and then we cannot get out' ". (p.150) Indeed, Fowler's own "moment of emotion" which will jolt him willy-nilly into taking decisive action against Pyle and what he stands for is close at hand, though ironically it follows a scene of reconciliation between the two men in which Fowler appears to come to terms with his loss of Phuong.

Lucidly, the Englishman analyzes his reactions to Pyle, for once able to perceive the positive aspects of his personality: "All the time that his innocence had angered me, some judge within myself had summed up in his favour, had compared his idealism, his half-baked ideas founded on the works of York Harding, with my cynicism". (p. 155) This indulgence is far removed from the earlier attitude of the jealous rival; there is present too an element of the protective, as Fowler puts Pyle on his guard concerning his involvement with the Third Force inspired by his reading of the aforementioned theoretician, York Harding (p. 156) <sup>30</sup>.

The warning is, however, quite ineffectual; the American has already thrown in his hand with the war-lord Thé, and limited as his experience is he is nonetheless convinced of the validity of his actions and of his government's policies. Earlier, Fowler's Indian assistant, Dominguez, ever a fund of accurate information, had informed Fowler of the briefing Pyle had given to a group of visiting Congressmen:

'He was talking about the old colonial powers - England and France, and how you two couldn't expect to win the confidence of the Asiatics. That was where America came in now **with clean hands** ... 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.' (p. 123 Our emphasis)

Particularly striking here is the naive trust and faith in the purity of American intentions, in the integrity of the young superpower, which is seen to stand in stark and simple contrast with the corruption of old colonial France, like Britain in other areas of the globe, too discredited to have any chance of taking positive action in favour of oppressed and vulnerable peoples.

If there is truth in Pyle's reading of the situation as far as the old colonial powers are concerned, his simplistic conviction of the United States's ability to conjure up an untainted 'Third Force' inspired by American liberal ideas and capable of regenerating Indo-China is manifestly wide of the mark. Pyle's theoretical, text book solution ignores the Vietnamese reality; in Roger Sharrock's words, "he can never come to terms with the real world which is not black and white but grey"<sup>31</sup>. It is this inability to perceive or take note of intermediate shades and nuances which will make Pyle an accomplice in the killing and maiming of a number of innocent Vietnamese civilians. Pyle's commitment to his image of the United States, his white and pure America with its "clean hands", is total; this coupled with his lack of any deep personal experience of the Indochinese reality causes him to be hoodwinked into an alliance with the unscrupulous Thé who callously exploits his new and strengthened position by perpetrating a civilian massacre. (pp. 159-163). Pyle's blinkered outlook has not allowed him to see beyond his view of the Communist resistance as a negative and evil organization, utterly opposed to the Western concept of the freedom of the individual - "They (the Vietnamese)'ll " <sup>11</sup>be forced to believe what they are told, they won't be allowed to think for themselves" (p. 93) - a freedom for which one has to fight: "You have to fight for liberty". (p. 95)

An illustration of what happens when Pyle's theories are given practical application is provided in the scene of the civilian massacre referred to above. In Saigon's Place Garnier where the bomb has exploded, Fowler comes across the American, whose complicity in and responsibility for the explosion rapidly become apparent. The scene is crucial for revealing to the narrator precisely what Pyle's enthusiasm for liberty is capable of producing and for leading directly to Fowler's decision to become directly involved in the Vietnamese political situation.

Although Fowler is appalled by what Pyle has done-he has given General Thé and his men the means of creating the explosion - he will continue to refer to Pyle's innocence: "he'll always be innocent, you can't blame the innocent, they are always guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity". (p. 162) This insistence on the American's innocence or blamelessness certainly appears paradoxical in the light of what has occurred.

It is true that Pyle is deeply shocked by the carnage around him, incredulous at the idea of his Third Force being responsible for this horror: "Thé wouldn't have done this. I'm sure he wouldn't. Somebody deceived him. The Communists..." (p. 162). It

takes him time to come to terms with the reality of what has happened, with the concrete consequences of war; previously this specific reality has eluded him. Now his shoes are bespattered with the blood of others, with the blood of the innocent: "He was seeing a real war for the first time: he had punted down into Phat Diem in a kind of schoolboy dream, and anyway in his eyes soldiers didn't count" (p.161). Soldiers were meant to be the victims of the blast, but the military parade which was Pyle's target and which should have taken place at that time had been cancelled unknown to the American (pp. 161-162). This is hardly an excuse for Pyle, however, since evidence of his uncertainty and fear about what could occur has been furnished by his warning to Phuong to keep away from her favourite milk-bar on the square. It is Pyle who calmly informs a distraught Fowler that Phuong has not incurred any risk of hurt: "I warned her not to go'... the word 'warn' reached my consciousness. I took Pyle by the arm... 'What do you mean "warn"?' 'I told her to keep away this morning'" (p. 160). The American has protected his Vietnamese beloved but, as the narrator bluntly tells his "friend", dozens of her country people are tragically beyond concern (p. 162). And the picture of horror which Pyle's involvement has brought about is evoked by Greene in a couple of simple but telling sentences: "A woman sat on the ground with what was left of her baby in her lap... The legless torso at the edge of the garden still twitched, like a chicken which has lost its head" (p. 161).

The scene is an unanswerable indictment of Pyle and what he stands for, and David Pryce-Jones is surely correct in writing that "in many ways Pyle's innocence is really ignorance. Since it acts on other people - for Pyle is no longer a child - it is unforgivable".<sup>32</sup> And whatever Fowler's own reservations about Pyle's personal guilt, he has come to a clear realization that the American must at all costs be neutralized. The narrator's resolve is such that he immediately proceeds to a meeting with his Communist contact, Heng, obsessed by the image of the woman covering up the remains of her baby (p. 172). Fowler will commit himself, then, as Captain Trouin had prophesied, following a moment of intense emotional agitation, in which the basic humanitarian impulse is very much to the fore, and it is this impulse which Heng exploits in his exhortations to Fowler: "Sooner or later... one has to take sides. If one is to remain human" (p. 172). And although Fowler may be seen to hesitate at the prospect of consigning Pyle to the attentions of Heng and his fellow Communists, certainly aware of what these attentions will entail as well as being conscious of the fact that his "friend" had saved his life after the attack on the watch-

tower, in his final conversation with Pyle such is the American's lack of human feeling for the individuals struck down in the Place Garnier bomb attack that Fowler has little difficulty in giving the go-ahead to Heng's men. For Pyle, the bomb victims "were only war casualties... It was a pity, but you can't always hit your target. Anyway they died in the right cause... In a way you could say they died for Democracy," he said" (p. 177).

The retreat behind words, behind grand but empty concepts, serves only to increase the narrator's annoyance and impatience with Pyle: "I was suddenly very tired. I wanted him to go away quickly and die. Then I could start life again - at the point before he came in" (p. 178). If outrage and a sense of legitimate moral indignation are strongly present in Fowler's decision to help neutralize Pyle and thus take sides in the Vietnamese conflict, the personal motivation to remove the rival responsible for taking away his mistress is also strong. The desire to begin life anew is clearly expressed in the above quotation, "at the point before he (Pyle) came in", that is with Phuong sharing his life. For Roger Sharrock, the personal motivation due to sexual jealousy is every bit as important as commitment to a side in the Vietnamese conflict: "Fowler is, after all, a jealous rival who wants Phuong back quite as much as he is a man who has at last chosen to support a distinct political cause"<sup>33</sup>. Be that as it may, the narrator is clearly ill at ease with himself after his decision.

Ostensibly waiting for Pyle at the Vieux Moulin though knowing full well that the odds on his reaching the restaurant are less than negligible- "did I - I of all people - hope for some kind of miracle: a method of discussion arranged by Mr. Heng which wasn't simply death?" (p. 181) - so disturbed and guilty does Fowler feel that he would even be prepared to accept not just a browbeating but actual blows from the fists of the brash American journalist, Granger, a man the narrator normally deems unbearable (p. 182). Then, in the face of suffering again, a degree of solidarity and sympathy is established between the two journalists, as Granger tells Fowler of the gravity of his son's illness. Once more the narrator's cynical mask slips away and the humanitarian impulse takes over, a token of what can be interpreted as Fowler's increasing commitment to individuals and concern for their suffering. It is as though the scales are falling away from Fowler's eyes enabling him to see and understand with fresh and deepened perception: "I don't dislike you, Granger. I've been blind

to a lot of things..." (p. 184). The commitment to a political cause has already been recognized by Fowler- "I had become as engaged as Pyle" (pp. 181-182) - but at this juncture notions of political involvement are overshadowed by more metaphysical considerations.

Early on in this article we referred to the closing lines of the novel which express the narrator's regret at what has happened coupled with his wish to have "someone" to apologize to. Whether Fowler is here seen to be "approaching the threshold of belief", whether this "someone" is in fact God, cannot obviously be conclusively proved, though a degree of aspiration to the transcendent can clearly be discerned. For the creator of **The Quiet American**, the composition of which was begun such a short space of time after the publication of his intensely Catholic **The End of the Affair**,<sup>34</sup> the continuing presence of Christian inspiration, if not explicit Christian content, would seem in the nature of things. If John Atkins is correct in his pronouncement that 1952 and 1953 "probably constituted the peak period of Greene's religious enthusiasm"<sup>35</sup> - and in support of Atkins's statement 1951 had already seen the composition of the essay "The Paradox of a Pope", while in 1953 **The Living Room** appeared together with the French version of his essay devoted to the Virgin Mary, "Notre Dame et son Assomption" - then it would seem legitimate and instructive to seek out elements in **The Quiet American** which testify to this strong Catholic commitment.

For Philip Stratford, there is no doubt regarding the importance of Christianity in this novel. "Not less than in the Catholic novels," writes Stratford "though not so explicitly stated, the central attitude in **The Quiet American** is a Christian one. It is not embodied in Pyle or Fowler but does briefly appear in two minor characters in the novel, in Captain Trouin, the French pilot, and in Vigot, the French officer at the Sûreté"<sup>36</sup>. In Trouin's case, although as we have seen above the pilot clearly possesses an ideal and an integrity in his aspiration to defend the values of European civilization, it is less clear whether these qualities may be termed specifically Christian except in the most nominal and traditional sense of the term, to the extent that defence of Europe can be understood as defence of Western Christian civilization, of *fides historica*.

In his presentation of Vigot, Greene deliberately encourages speculation about the influence and place of religion in the police officer's life and actions by introduc-

ing him with a volume of Pascal on his desk: "His eyes were on a page of **Les Pensées** as though he were still absorbed in those sad arguments" (p. 14). Much later in the novel Vigot will quote Pascal's Wager at Fowler (p. 136). The grave Vigot's association with Pascal, with his "property", recalls the association of other Greeneian characters with their particular properties. In **The Comedians**, for example, the less serious Ambassador Pineda is always associated with his cigars.<sup>37</sup>

In the case of Vigot, Greene continues to emphasize certain Christian attributes in the police-officer, having his narrator refer more than once to the man's priest-like qualities. As he questions him following Pyle's murder, Fowler cannot resist commenting to the policeman who reads and quotes Pascal: "perhaps you ought to have been a priest' ... I thought after he had turned and gone that he had looked at me with compassion" (pp. 137-138). Later, when Vigot calls on Fowler in his room to continue his questioning (pp. 165-169), the police officer obviously has a shrewd idea of what has happened, he knows that Fowler has left the sidelines and become involved. He questions and elicits responses with understanding and sympathy, prompting the narrator to make a remark which does not just echo but reinforces his earlier comment: "You would have made a good priest, Vigot. What is it about you that would make it so easy to confess .... is it because like a priest it's your job not to be shocked, but to be sympathetic?" (p. 166). The narrator's homage to Vigot, his admiration for those qualities he associates with the "good priest", is taken a step further in the course of this interview when he speaks of having, in the police officer's presence, "the feeling of some force immobile and profound. For all I knew, he might have been praying" (p. 168). It is difficult not to interpret these words as Fowler's recognition of the influence of a higher presence, and as Greene's own acknowledgement of the workings of Grace in a man.

Similar qualities to those observed in Vigot are discerned in Dominguez, the narrator's Goan assistant whom he believes to be a Roman Catholic (p. 121), and Philip Stratford has noted the humility that they have in common,<sup>38</sup> quoting Fowler's words emphasizing his "gentleness and humility" together with his "absolute love of truth" (p. 121). There is a stoicism, an asceticism, about Dominguez which is kept up even during sickness: "... you had less the impression of visiting a sick man than of being received by a rajah or a priest .... His landlady kept a jug of fresh lime by his

side, but I never saw him take a drink-perhaps that would have been to admit that it was his own thirst, and his own body which suffered" (p. 122). If we can talk of the Catholicism of Vigot and Dominguez in the same breath, despite their differences, there is nonetheless strongly present in the one as in the other a moral rigorism reminiscent of Jansenism coupled with a respect for life in all its manifestations that so marks the Hindu and Buddhist religions.<sup>39</sup>

As M. Mahood remarks, the Goan's Catholicism "has been grafted on to the good stock of Buddhist-Hindu civilization".<sup>40</sup> This is significant in that it is indicative of a commitment to Catholicism on Greene's part that is no longer Europe-centred, but open to the influences of the Third World. At the same time, it is a Catholicism that will become more and more coloured by progressive political considerations, culminating fictionally in **The Honorary Consul** with the highly personal liberation theology of León Rivas, where religion does in fact merge into politics.<sup>41</sup> For Rivas the Gospels no longer make any sense in a country like Paraguay (**H. C.**, p. 116) where the Church's official representatives socialize with the dictators, "when the Archbishop sits down to dinner with the General" (**H. C.**, p. 220).

In such contexts, the emphasis must be on cohesive political revolt, to the extent that it is the idealistic Communist, such as Dr. Magiot in **The Comedians**, who is invested by his creator with the qualities of hope and compassion we would earlier have expected to emanate from a man of the Church. And from Indochina, through the Caribbean, into Latin America, the essential enemy and threat to the development and progress of these downtrodden peoples is perceived as coming from one source.

The anti-Americanism that marks Greene's work of the period under discussion has been commented on at some length by John Atkins, who writes concerning **The Quiet American** that "the over-riding impression one gets from this novel is Greene's intense irritation with the Americans"<sup>42</sup>. Atkins traces the author's anti-Americanism back to the days of his film-reviewing in the mid and late thirties,<sup>43</sup> when he regularly inveighed against Hollywood and its glossy and titillating offerings.<sup>44</sup>

In **The Quiet American** the narrator's judgment is severe regarding every American character. Despite his modesty and shyness that stand in such contrast to the



brashness and vulgarity Greene so often associates with Americans, the main American protagonist Pyle is himself utterly beyond redemption in Fowler's eyes. After his death, the narrator ironically laments, musing on his first meeting with Pyle: "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" (pp. 16-17). And Pyle will be seen as tragically incapable of escaping the clutches of the watch-words and slogans to which, albeit a young man, he has too long been a prey.

As for the American journalists in Saigon, they are nothing but a loud-mouthed rabble, epitomized as we have observed in the irrepressible Granger (p. 22 and pp. 32-33). Yet the criticism extends beyond the assault on the more important official representatives of the United States to encompass the more ordinary, such as the American girls at the Pavillon coffee centre:

Two young American girls sat at the next table, neat and clean in the heat, scooping up ice-cream. They each had a bag slung on the left shoulder and the bags were identical, with brass eagle badges. Their legs were identical too, long and slender, and their noses, just a shade tilted .... It was impossible to conceive either of them a prey to untidy passion ... Did they take deodorants to bed with them? (pp. 158-159).

We are back in the world of **The Pleasure Dome**: the extrapolation is the same; whether it be Greene's emanating from a Grace Moore, or Fowler's from two American girls, it leads to a general indictment against a nation.

Over the years Greene made little attempt to tone down or moderate his hostile feelings towards American capitalism and imperialism. So dangerous is the United States that anti-Americanism becomes a necessary component in the author's own commitment. However simplistic it may seem, Greene tells us (in conversation with Marie-Françoise Allain): "I would go to almost any length to put my feeble twig in the spokes of American foreign policy"<sup>45</sup> And in the same paragraph we read Greene's

admission that the true object of his hatred is indeed American liberalism. The author considers that his animosity to the United States does not stem from his negative attitude to Hollywood, but rather originates from his first visit to the country in 1937-38, adding: "I have always felt very ill at ease in the States, except in San Francisco, a much more European city than New York. The terrifying weight of this consumer society oppresses me".<sup>46</sup>

It is not difficult to take Greene to task for such remarks, and the reader may well consider more oppressive "the terrifying weight" of Gulag society.<sup>47</sup> The fact is, however, that this strain of anti-Americanism remains a constant in the author's committed writing, although there was a switch to a more muted form of his irritation in the mid sixties with the publication of **The Comedians**.

## NOTES

Page references in the text without any accompanying title are to **The Quiet American** (Penguin edition).

1. Julien Green, **OEuvres complètes**, III, Bibl. de la Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1973, p. 1522.
2. "L'intéressante tour d'ivoire de jadis a dû disparaître au cours d'un bombardement."
3. The Holy Office's condemnation of the book on the grounds that it was "paradoxical" and "dealt with extraordinary circumstances" (**Ways of Escape**, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1981 (1982 reprint), P. 67) in no way diminishes its authentic spirituality.
4. See Samuel Hynes, **The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s**, Faber, London, 1976 (Faber Paperbacks 1979), p. 138.
5. **Ibid.**, p. 138.
6. Roger Sharrock, **Saints, Sinners and Comedians: The Novels of Graham Greene**, Burns and Oates, Tunbridge Wells, 1984, p. 69.
7. **Ibid.**, p. 70.
8. Marie-Françoise Allain, **The Other Man: Conversations With Graham Greene**, trans. Guido Waldman, The Bodley Head, London, 1983, p. 88.
9. **Ibid.**, p. 81.
10. **Ibid.**, p. 81.
11. The decade of course includes the less serious novels, the 'entertainments', **Loser Takes All** (1955) and **Our Man in Havana** (1958), the 1950 film script **The Third Man** and the three plays: **The Living Room** (1953), **The Potting Shed** (1957) and **The Complaisant Lover** (1959). To this list should be added **The Lost Childhood and Other Essays** (1951) and **Twenty-One Stories** (1954).
12. **Collected Essays**, Penguin edn. 1970, pp. 279-282 and pp. 284-298.
13. **Collected Essays** ("The Paradox of a Pope"), p. 297.
14. **Ibid.**, ("The Man as Pure as Lucifer"), p. 303.
15. **The Quiet American**, Penguin, 1962 (1973 reprint), pp. 95-96.
16. **The Comedians**, Penguin, 1967 (1968 reprint), p. 286.

16. **Author's Choice: Four Novels by Graham Greene**, Penguin, 1985, p. 7 (Introduction).
17. J. P. Kulshrestha, **Graham Greene: The Novelist**, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1977, p. 144. The novel was written in the wake of Greene's own periods of reporting in French Indochina.
18. **The Quiet American**, p. 187.
19. **Saints, Sinners and Comedians**, p. 218. For David Pryce-Jones "The someone .... can only be God". **Graham Greene**, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh and London, 1963, revised edition 1973, p. 93.
20. One feels it is not by chance that Fowler's Christian name should be that of the doubting apostle, it naturally being appropriate for the man who will not become involved. It is of interest to note that Greene himself chose the name of Thomas, "after St. Thomas the doubter", on being received into the Roman Catholic Church. See **A Sort of Life**, Penguin, 1972 (1975 reprint), p. 121.
21. On war and its brutalizing effect, Raymond Williams's first - hand testimony is noteworthy. See **Politics and Letters**, Verso, London, 1981, pp. 58-59.
22. **The Other Man**, p. 83.
23. Philip Stratford, **Faith and Fiction: Creative Process in Greene and Mauriac**, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1964 (paperback edition 1967), p. 312. And see Gwenn R. Boardman, **Graham Greene: The Aesthetics of Exploration**, University of Florida Press, Gainesville, 1971, p. 103.
24. **Faith and Fiction**, p. 312.
25. Fowler's attitudes to the Americans and to the French will be discussed later in this article.
26. **Faith and Fiction**, pp. 310-311
27. Molly Mahood, **The Colonial Encounter: A Reading of Six Novels**, Rex Collings, London, 1977, p. 122.
28. **Ibid.**, p. 122.
29. See, for example, **La France et son armée**. It is legitimate to assume that Trouin has been influenced by de Gaulle's work.
  
30. Harding's books - **The Advance of Red China**, **The Challenge to Democracy** and **The Role of the West** - occupy a prominent place on Pyle's bookshelves. See **Q. A.**, p. 28. On Harding's function in the novel, John Atkins writes:

“Greene’s target is the superior sort of journalist who sets up as an arbiter of the international scene: ‘he gets hold of an idea and then alters every situation to fit the idea’ ”. **Graham Greene**, Calder and Boyars, London, 1957, revised edition 1966, p. 230.

31. Sharrock, **Saints, Sinners and Comedians**, p. 207.
32. Pryce - Jones, **Graham Greene**, p. 91.
33. Sharrock, **Saints, Sinners and Comedians**, p. 218
34. **The End of the Affair** was published in 1951, while work on **The Quiet American** began in March 1952.
35. Atkins, **Graham Greene**, p. 204.
36. Stratford, **Faith and Fiction**, p. 313.
37. Cf. **The Comedians**, pp. 83, 106 and p. 134 where Señor Pineda sums up his “carpe diem” outlook on life thus: “ ‘Come on, cheer up, let us all be comedians together. Take one of my cigars. Help yourself at the bar....’ ”.
38. Stratford, **Faith and Fiction**, pp. 314-315.
39. See the narrator’s comment on Vigot’s reaction to the fly crawling over his hand: “A fly crawled over the back of his hand and he did not brush it away-any more than Dominguez would have done” (**Q.A.**, p. 168).
40. Mahood, **The Colonial Encounter**, p. 121.
41. See Greene’s epigraph - taken from Hardy - to the 1973 novel. ‘All things merge in one another - good into evil, generosity into justice, religion into politics...’
42. Atkins, **Graham Greene**, p. 231.
43. **Ibid.**, pp. 82-87.
44. Greene’s film reviews of the period are to be found in **The Pleasure Dome: The Collected Film Criticism 1935-40**, edited by John Russell Taylor, Secker and Warburg, London, 1972.
45. **The Other Man**, p. 93.
46. **Ibid.**, p. 94.
47. It is naturally tantalizing not to have Greene’s comments on the most recent developments in the former Soviet Union. It should be borne in mind, though, that he never hesitated to condemn Soviet aggression and injustice, as perusal of his letters to the press reveals. See **Graham Greene, Yours Etc.**, Penguin, 1991 (e. g. his defence of Daniel and Sinyavsky, pp. 135-137, and his expression of abhorrence over the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, p. 165).