



The Rule of the Three, the “third force”, and *The Quiet American*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the three reception phases of the story *The Quiet American* – the 1955 novel by Graham Greene, its first film adaptation by Joseph L. Mankiewicz in 1958 starring Michael Redgrave, Audie Murphy, and Giorgia Moll, and the later adaptation from 2002, directed by Phillip Noyce and starring Michael Caine, Brendan Fraser, and Do Thi Hai Yen. In this sense, it aims to understand the reactions, appropriations, and the chronological depictions associated with each of the three works, and to present the story of the “third force” in the context of the Rule of the Three (*omne trium perfectum*). As such, the principle of the Rule of the Three presents the three main characters, coming from three contrasting countries with diverging foreign policy aims, in three complex dimensions (historical, cinematographic/ artistic, and political/ individual). The findings suggest that the time of release, the cast, as well as the individual spin of specific historical events have granted each of the three works very distinct results. Ultimately, their legacies witnessed disproportionate peaks of success, with some being categorised as persistent rather than particular. Without being mutually exclusive, both the novel and the two respective movies have succeeded in informing, educating, and entertaining the public about the socio-political quagmire that marked the 1950s turmoil in Việt Nam.

Keywords: Việt Nam, third force, rule of the three, quagmire, United States of America



Introduction

Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* from 1955 caught three times the interest of filmmakers and the public. Joseph Mankiewicz directed the first film adaptation in 1958, while Philip Noyce remade it a half century later. This gave room to a presentation of radically different perspectives, which nevertheless prove the versatility of events, creative spirit, and originality of Greene's novel. Thereby, some critics suggest that the three main characters in *The Quiet American* are seen as metaphors for the nations they come from, with Fowler personifying Britain, Pyle the United States, and Phuong, Việt Nam. Yet, Graham Greene seems too skilful as a novelist to showcase them as mere allegorical figures. These characters come into view as real people, with individual personalities, and intriguing interests. They are exceedingly complex and difficult to characterize with clear, morally defining labels. Thomas Fowler, for instance, is a journalist who uses a policy of detachment until finally subjected to enough moral tension to be provoked to act. He consistently sees himself as a mere reporter, emphasizing the distance he places between his persona and the events about which he writes. Still, how successful is he at maintaining the aesthetic distance? And, how different is the character's acquiescence in the novel, compared to the movie versions portrayed by Michael Redgrave, or Michael Caine?

As the narration is homodiegetic (written in the first person), Thomas Fowler makes a case for an interesting analysis, as he is the one introducing the audience to the other characters, as well as to the context of war. To a certain extent, the experience of war and the encounter with Pyle have affected his character, making him a subject of a gradually inverted bildungsroman. This decline is portrayed in one way in the novel, and in another in each of the two movies. This is mainly because the characters behave very different in the movies in comparison to how the book describes them (both in essence and in appearance). Greene's view is that sexism, racism, and realpolitik, are all underscored by a common nefarious triad: manipulation, deception, and the threat of violence. However, this view is individualistically challenged by the directorial polishing of both Mankiewicz and Noyce.

Pyle, for example, is believed to be an American secret agent: innocent in looks, but obscure in thinking, speech, and action (to a certain extent, comparable to a young Ronald Reagan). In attempting to persuade the native woman Phuong takes her away from her long-time lover, Pyle uses this triad to create a “third force” between the French

and the Vietnamese. The result is, in every sense, particular. Each work consists of the holy trinity (political thriller, romance, and the detective story), without losing sight of the principles that enable fact and fiction to merge. In their own way, the movies showcase the spark of genius and originality, the inaccuracies, as well as the individual moral decay in Greene's characters and vision of war.

The Novel

The storyline was mostly inspired by the author's experiences as a war correspondent in French Indochina in the early 1950s; and specifically, by the conversations he had with an American aid worker, Lee Hochstetter, while returning in Saigon from the province of Bến Tre in October 1951. During the journey, Hochstetter, who served as public affairs director for the US Economic Aid Mission, told Greene about the need for a "third force" in the French-controlled Vietnam, one that would be independent from both the French colonialists and the communist -backed guerrilla forces from Ho Chi Min (Hadar, 2013).

Despite Greene's denying its chronological relevance, this historical authenticity was carried on. The book, written in the first person, makes a direct reportage of the political tumult in Việt Nam, to which it adds a subtle blending of fact and fiction. Greene was nevertheless a fiction writer and, at the same time, a chronicler and interpreter of history, using a purveyor warning style to signal presages that were frequently ignored. He refused to accept that Fowler was a vector of his own character, but the evidence from his journalistic work and personal letters from 1951-1952 support this linkage, nonetheless. He underplayed the audience's thirst to transform fiction into fact and make it deliver history, and thus, his work recorded great success, both in writing, as well as with the two respective films (Ruane, 2012).

The plot commences with the author's remark that the text is a mere story and not a piece of history. The first chapter starts with the encounter between Thomas Fowler (*Fowlair* to Vigot) and Alden Pyle on rue Catinat in Saigon. From thereon, the entire plot develops based on Fowler's memory and his ability to recollect past events, making the narration a homodiegetic one (the narrator being a character in the story), and at times, even an autodiegetic one (the narrator sharing his own thoughts and inner feelings) (Greene, 2010).

Upon his first encounter with Pyle, Fowler notices “coming across the square towards the bar of the Continental: an unmistakably young and unused face that flung at us like a dart. With his gangly legs and his crew-cut and his wide campus gaze he seemed incapable of harm” (Greene, 2010, p. 11). From thereon, as their relationship progresses, the two discover that they hold widely different views on the means of struggle for the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese, all while being in direct competition over Phuong. Pyle wants to reform and transform her into a typical middle-class American spouse. At the same time, Fowler accepts her inability to formulate her own political ideals and wants her for her youthful company while promising her no real future and objecting to Pyle’s plea to change her. In the end, driven by jealousy, influenced by the civilian attacks and the sporadic pieces of information the others manipulate him with, Thomas Fowler renounces his policy of detachment and plots the murder of Pyle. Despite succeeding and getting Phuong back, ultimately, he confesses by saying that he “wished there existed someone to whom” he could have sincerely said that he was sorry to (Greene, 2010, p. 180).

For this reason, Bushnell (2006) sees Thomas Fowler as a washed-up reporter, pitting his fatalistic experiences against the youthful American innocence in holding on to Phuong. In the book, he claims Pyle is too innocent to live, as he is too ignorant and silly, and always gets involved without understanding the world affairs. Yet, Fowler never believed in permanence despite always longing for it. In the context of war, his policy of detachment helps him discern between interests and power, and between needs and capabilities, all without losing sight of his role or position. While expecting Phuong to eventually leave him, the sudden appearance of the young, virile American, brings to surface his deepest and most humane flaws (Greene, 2010).

Pyle, working as the economic attaché in Việt Nam, is the polite, modest, and boyish antagonist. He is the antihero in Fowler’s narration, disturbing not just his way of life, but also attempting to change the world stage with his ideals of the so-called “third force”. His looks are deceiving, suggesting he might be a CIA agent with hidden purposes. The agency might also send him to conjure up an indigenous democratic alternative to the persisting French colonialism. He is the agent of this “third force”, thinking that all he needs to do is to find an appropriate leader and to keep him in a position of power (Bacevich, 2009). This is precisely why Pyle’s callous idealism is just as dangerous, if not evil, as Fowler’s opiate detachment. As Bacevich (2009) rightly points out, the American is the epitome of his nation’s political meddling, going as far to reach his objective as backing the terrorist General Thé against the French ruling.

Throughout the book, there is a back and forth process between the investigation of Pyle's death and the encounters between the characters. In fact, Vigot is the first to name Alden "a Quiet American", insisting on his obscure and apparent innocence, epitaphs which would describe Pyle throughout the novel and movies. Because of this, the American embodies all that both Fowler and Greene hate about Americans: having too much money and confidence, and not enough self-awareness. As revealed throughout the chapters, the encapsulation of Pyle would later become the perfect combination of American naïveté and arrogance that results in the so-called quagmire of Việt Nam (Bacevich, 2009). Nonchelating cruising through the streets of Saigon, working in air-conditioned spaces, passing out cigarettes as if they represented an infinite supply, Pyle bottles up the image of an America that knows its purposes reflect God's will in the world. He initially targets Fowler for information, but promptly falls in love with Phuong. To win her over, he promises her precisely what the other cannot deliver, a marriage, and a ticket to the West. This is the very reason why his apparent innocence and idealist motivations are such a dangerous trait to showcase; by deliberating putting himself in contrast with Fowler and his style of living, Alden gifts himself his most honest and ultimately, most deadly frenemy.

Between the pragmatic realist (Fowler, and the image of post-colonial France) and the optimistically determined novice (Pyle, and the vision he carries on behalf of the United States), the vulnerable local (Phuong, and the people of Việt Nam) are trapped in a politico-military kaleidoscope (Ruane, 2012). Under the Rule of the Three (a principle which asserts that a trio of events or characters is far more compelling and effective in delivering a message than any other numbers), these characters reveal a difficult aspect of the prophetic realities that have implications even in the 21st century. The book's chillingly accurate depiction of chaos, and foreshadowing of history are of incredible exactness, and the movie adaptations honoured its message with grace. The 1958 film became an artefact of the Cold War ideology, while the 2002 version turned into a cautionary tale with a zealous aim for accuracy (Bushnell, 2006).

The Historical Context

Without straying away too far from the contrast of characters in *The Quiet American*, the overview of Greene's novel deserves its historical contention. In the aftermath of the Japanese retreat in 1945, Indochina suffered from a power-vacuum that both the Viet Minh and the French wanted to fill. Ho's fighters (the Viet Minh), represented a

communist and national movement, with their headquarters based in the north, in Hanoi. From there they were counterbalancing the French attempts to re-establish control over the country. The French efforts to defeat Ho’s troops, while denying the non-communist Vietnamese people their independence, were in vain (Hadar, 2013).

Although unnamed in the book, Ngô Đình Diệm was the hoped-for leader of the American “third force” goals. This is because all of his life he strove for Việt Nam’s independence from France while equally fighting the communists. Yet, on 6th of January 1946, the Việt Minh won the parliamentary elections leading to Việt Nam being an independent state within the French Union. Tensions continued with a protracted war with the Soviet Union and China supporting Ho Chi Minh, and the British and American, amongst others, supporting France and Bao Dai. In 1954, France and the Viet Minh declared armistice and divided the country along the 17th Parallel into the Democratic Republic of Việt Nam (North Việt Nam) and the Republic of Việt Nam (South Việt Nam). The French troops left in 1956, and the American foreign aid started to concentrate exclusively on South Việt Nam. As such, when Mankiewicz began filming in 1958, it was a volatile transition in the political arena. The ongoing violence made the shooting in Saigon all the more problematic, so Mankiewicz decided to change Pyle’s affiliation. He was still employed by the American Economic Aid, but there was no further innuendo on his CIA-affiliation (Lewis, 1998).

From tacit to explicit, *The Quiet American* became the United States’ analogy of patriotism blended with naïveté, with no other character having better reasons to provoke disaster and instability than Alden Pyle. Pyle’s courage and idealism mirrored the one of Bush, where the ignoble disdain of lesser men was in the Democrats, and the crusade was to free Việt Nam and Iraq (China Hand, 2007). Bacevich (2009) even calls the novel prophetic as it became a must-read for those wanting to understand the American interference in Việt Nam, and later on, in Iraq, and Afghanistan. Although normally supporting France, the US was actually positioning itself to supplant its ally as the region’s dominant power. When the French needed aid, Truman and Eisenhower provided it, but on their own terms. This made the US a visibly unenthusiastic and suspicious partner. Truman mostly focused on anti-communism, and after him, Roosevelt on self-determination; this led to a corrosive distrust between France and the US which is logically documented in the book. The problem, then, was not that Greene was wrong about the nature of the American interference, but predictively right about the twenty years of the nightmare that continued afterwards.

Upon publication, the book infuriated the American public, while the Vietnamese officials appreciated it so much, they made it available all across the country. The divided reactions were further increased with the releasing of the two movies. As a result, the war in Việt Nam continued to be redesigned by each director. The films ended up being so diverging precisely because of the novel's attractive adaptation possibilities. For Mankiewicz, it became a cheap melodrama, with Pyle being the foolish villain, whereas Noyce treated the movie with the full awareness of America's pending interference, scrapping Pyle of any trace of honest naïveté (Bushnell, 2006). What is more, the *omne trium perfectum* (in which facts, fiction, and intrigue blended) was distinctively treated in the novel, as compared to each of the two movies, making *The Quiet American* a great example for a powerful narrative-inside-a-narrative. Foreshadowing the collapse of the French influence in Indochina and the destructive American involvement in Việt Nam, Greene's story presents the tragedy of using military power to overcome popular political force. By examining the historical context of the book, one sees an illuminating picture of the American creeping intervention, and the French struggle to regain control of a lost cause (Hadar, 2013).

The Isolated Dissident

Despite the novelist never directly admitting it, the character of Thomas Fowler and himself share many similarities. After all, Thomas was crafted by Greene's own experiences and views while being in Indochina. The burnt-out British journalist detested Việt Nam, but even more the idea of returning to England. When he writes his letter to Helen, he mentions "England is the scene of my failures" (Green, 2010, p. 76). He fled the West in the wake of a failed love that wrecked his marriage, steadfastly refusing to take sides, constantly employing his policy of detachment when exposed to the harsh truths of reality. If he is capable of love, it is difficult to say. He needs Phuong for sex, and more importantly, for companionship, to prepare his opium pipes and to drive away the loneliness. In return, she seeks security, and implicit, marriage (Bacevich, 2009). Still, Fowler cannot deliver marriage, as his wife is a Catholic whose religious conscience does not permit to dissolve their union. Helen knows perfectly well how to hurt him. In their letter exchanges, she mentions other lovers Thomas left her for, without keeping up any promises to them. She also puts herself in the position of Phuong. In her view, while the marriage might prevent Thomas from leaving Phuong (and not the other way around), Helen foresees the struggles of bringing such a stranger to England. She makes him weary of his pride and need of possession; to her, his truth is always temporary, much like his needs.

Like Helen, Vigot too knows Fowler's character well. The inspector plays into his sarcastic cynicism and portions out all of his comments throughout the investigation. With Vigot, Fowler can engage in a vigorous humour, saying things like "I never like giving information to the police. It serves them trouble" (Greene, 2010, p. 133). Vigot knows very well how things in Hanoi are cut and mined. On the whole, the French fight a losing battle. In the novel, De Lattre gives them two years of grace, and as professionals, the French soldiers keep on fighting until the politicians tell them to stop (agreeing to a peace they could have had from the beginning). These truths are effortlessly confessed to Fowler in the novel, but completely scrapped in the two movies. Captain Trouin even decides to take the Briton on a vertical raid, knowing that he would not write about it. He admits how the napalm bombings burn people alive and predictively tells Thomas that one day, he too will get involved in Vietnam's quagmire (Greene, 2010).

On this account, Fowler fulfils a double-hatted role. His interactions with other characters provide insight into the course of events, yet at the same time, these events are filtered by his own perception of reality. This perception seems clear at first but falls short once he becomes emotionally triggered. In the novel, he spends his days consuming opium and enjoying the company of his young mistress. As such, Phuong is nothing than physical comfort to him until the introduction of Pyle (Lewis, 1998). Nevertheless, the Briton must also introduce the audience to the context of war. When analysing his surroundings, he is pedantically objective. He understands the subtleness of war and, as a European, enjoys not being suspected of being the enemy agent. Each day, the French control the main roads leading to Saigon until 7 pm, then spread in watchtowers and in the surrounding cities until the next dawn. Fowler sees the ongoing competition to recapture territories as chaos fuelled by arrogance. This leads to a power-vacuum that gives birth to private armies selling their capabilities for money and revenge (the Hòa Hảo, Bình Xuyên). He grasps the ugliness of war, with all its fears and misery, in a very dynamic fatality. He also has a great eye for detail, understanding that the Western press is only allowed to share the victories of the French (the incident of Phat Diem), while external agencies such as the US Economic Aid try to install their own markets to make a profit (Greene, 2010).

Coerced by Pyle's dominant presence, he writes to his wife in a plea for a divorce so he could marry Phuong (gesture similar to Greene's request to his wife, Vivien). In this sense, Fowler indeed embodies the twilight of the British Empire in general, and the one of colonialism in Indochina, in particular. His role in Saigon is to report on

revolutionary changes, but he sees these changes with disinterest. He is too tired, disappointed, and consumed by his own past to get involved in the present or the future. Like Rick Blaine from *Casablanca*, he applies a policy of detachment until he is finally provoked to act. However, Thomas is anything but romantic. While Rick puts Ilsa on the plane with Victor Laszlo, Thomas works with the Communists to plot Pyle's murder. In Greene's world, there does not seem to be any real way to be good, only a myriad of avenues to be less bad (Miller, 2004). Same goes for the plot in *The Third Man*. Just like Fowler, in Krasker's typical film noir style, Holly Martins learns about his friend's involvement in harming thousands of people and feels compelled to act. Although in love with Anna, he agrees to cooperate with the authorities to ambush Harry Lime. Like him, Thomas too makes a deal with the Communists to ambush Pyle and stop the American-fuelled bombings (Lewis, 1998). Still, in his case, there is no high moral ground. In the novel, as much as in Mankiewicz's film, it is Fowler's infatuation with Phuong that pushes him to betray the American. Fowler is weary and sardonic, patronising everything American via a one-dimensional angle; yet, through his attitude, he also reveals the dark side of his own character. He is threatened by the vitality and determination of Pyle, always returning to Captain Trouin's words, that "sooner or later, Mr. Fowler, one has to take sides, if one is to remain human" (Quotes, 2020).

As such, it can be observed that both Greene and Mankiewicz got preoccupied with existential philosophy and felt compelled to create characters who were trapped emotionally in challenging environments. In their hands, the three protagonists became mere chess pieces, moving along the board in strategic positions. Greene's characters turned into a potent distillation of his experiences, while Mankiewicz made Pyle a hero, Phuong an independent woman, and Fowler, a fool and an underdog. In choosing Michael Redgrave, the director hoped for the public to also embrace Audie Murphy. However, he focused too much on him. Redgrave would, later on, describe his co-star as someone with vast experience and zero technique, complaining it was one thing to get a performance out of an amateur, and another to give a performance with one. Michael was the only one to enjoy great reviews from the critics, while Murphy received only poor considerations (mostly due to the lack of physical presence and sophistication) (Lewis, 1998). What made Redgrave stand out was his sentimental touch. He showed that Fowler was imperfect, weak-willed, and flawed, but he was nevertheless real. His humanity and jealousy justified his actions in a convincing way, and his perspicacity persuaded the viewer to trust his judgement. This is particularly evoking during the nocturnal watchtower attack, where the Briton delivers a harsh but much-needed truth

about the quagmire in Vietnam (Lewis, 1998). More than a reflection of his country, Fowler explains that the peasants in the field only care about securing enough rice to live another day.

They don't want communism; They want enough rice; They don't want to be shot at. They want one day to be much the same as another. They don't want our white skins around telling them what they want. (Greene, 2010, p. 120)

To this, Pyle replies that they want more, they actually want to think for themselves. Thought is nevertheless a luxury, the same as the idea of God, freedom, and democracy. Pyle then changes strategies and claims a few peasants do not represent the whole population of Vietnam, inquiring about the intellectuals. Still, the intellectuals, as Redgrave puts it, are brought up in the Western ideas, hence they are already corrupt. While he never believed he could make a difference as an individual, Fowler fears Pyle's sole determination to invest "a third force" in Vietnam. This attribute makes him wise and compassionate, yet deeply sentimental. He tells Pyle never to trust a man when there is a woman involved, subtly admitting his European duplicity "we have to make up for our lack of supplies" (Greene, 2010, p. 128). This scene is particularly revealing of Fowler's symbolic role, assuming the role of an observer as well as preacher of universal truths. Tired of the European wars in which he identified as both the peasant and the conqueror or liberator, the Briton tries to put forward the scenarios of the aftereffects of the war, where the meaningless slaughter goes on even when no tangible enemy presents itself.

In the iconic scene at the watchtower, the public witnesses a sincere dialogue of raw emotions between the two. In the novel, Fowler admits that what he feared most was the loss of control (of status, pride, and lifestyle). Pyle, however, claims Việt Nam does not want communism. Like an inner voice of conscience, he tries to convince Fowler to embrace York's "third force", and to stand against the colonialists. Nevertheless, Fowler represses his words. He says the local people do not want their white skins around telling them what they need or desire. He refuses to engage any further, stating he does not care about winners, but about the two boys sitting in the dark across from them (the imminent future, rather than the long-term scheme of things). In the book, the description of the night in the tower is exceedingly long; Fowler seems almost alone at times, submerged in his own line of thought. In the 1958 version, it is Redgrave's most superb and honest performance, and in the 2002 adaptation, the first red flag of Fraser's hidden agenda (Lewis, 1998).

In his turn, Michael Caine truly tests the cover of Alden Pyle. Fowler does not want to bring Pyle back to the reality of war; he wants him to expose himself and assume responsibility. Slowly but surely, his determined neutrality turns from bliss to a subconscious need to pick a side. While still putting the pieces of the puzzle together, Caine's narration paints the picture of the American foreign policy using terrorist activities to sponsor alternative political candidates in destabilising the government (whether or not legitimate). Much like in the novel, all of his conversations with Fraser take a grotesque direction (there is nothing noble, nor ideal in their debate). In the first movie, Redgrave asks for a cigarette, getting mad about being offered "the whole" American Economic Aid. He is visibly upset with Pyle being the hero and closes up inside even further. Fowler describes him as someone who "belonged to the sky-scrapers and the express elevator, the ice-cream, and the dry Martinis" (Greene, 2010, p. 14). In the second movie, however, just like the novel, Caine appreciates Pyle's help and confesses to him his fear of loneliness. Ironic as always, Fowler admits that he came to the East to die, yet Pyle has to be the impertinent one and disturb his activity. The friendship between the two becomes real, which makes the scenes all the more compelling. In the watchtower, Pyle admits he never had a girl, while Fowler confesses his fantasies of a woman in a red dress, long before Phuong, for which he left his wife for, and then left her too. He then says how afraid he is of losing Phuong because she only loves him in exchange of his kindness and security (Greene, 2010).

The two also bond in the first battle scene near the canals, when Pyle seeks Fowler to tell him that he is in love with Phuong. There, they are both reminded of how little they count as human beings. In those moments, Thomas remembers his role as a reporter and the fact that nothing, not even God, is as certain as death. He narrates that platoons never report the casualties, and much like in Orwell's *1984*, the news is designed to depict only the winnings and the recapturing of territories (without anyone ever knowing when and how they were lost in the first place) (Greene, 2010).

Then comes the bombing scene at the Hotel Continental, a crucial moment that is distinctively portrayed in each of the three works. In the novel, Greene steadily builds up the plot until it finally explodes with the moral question, one which becomes a matter of the heart. Fowler sits at the Pavillon bar, avoiding Phuong. There, he sees himself envying two American women for their "sterilized world", which is not an option for him (Greene, 2010, p. 162-163). Mankiewicz, yet, focuses more on how Fowler rushes to find Phuong and is stopped by Vigot and the Vietnamese police. Fully ignoring

Redgrave, Murphy rides into the epicentre, bestriding in a vehicle marked as the “United States Operations Mission”. Fowler is trying to connect the dots, but Pyle is shattering his moment by condemning him for not helping the victims. The blood on his shoes is immediately gone, and his innocence shifts from naïveté to guiltlessness in a matter of moments (Bushnell, 2006). This creates then a huge impact, as the public needs to get upset by what it sees to change its allegiance. It has to identify with Fowler’s decision to act as a judge, jury, and later on executioner of his rival. In this sense, Đặng Nhật Minh, acting as a second director to Philip Noyce, gave precisely these details to the public. Antinomic to the melodramatic sight provided by Mankiewicz, Noyce restaged the whole scene into a documentary format with echoing allusions (Tang, 2003). A child, the ultimate symbol of innocence, dies in the arms of his mother, yet Pyle seems to be more concerned about cleaning the gore off his shoes rather than showing any signs of emotion. He feels no guilt nor moral implication in the events directly occurring around him, even when facing the carnage forefront.

The Apparent Innocent

If Michael Redgrave’s legacy of detachment and professional intuition is inheritably observed in Michael Caine’s performance, Brendan Fraser is nothing like Audie Murphy. He is not armoured by good intentions and ignorance, but rather he is suspicious and even sinister. Noyce flinches Greene’s ethical and political considerations and pushes for the idea that the American involvement was so dangerously naïve, it required murder. Fraser is neither innocent nor ignorant but myopically driven by his idealism and short-term scope. To Fowler, he seems to speak Vietnamese like a native during the bombings at the Hotel Continental, ordering journalists to take photos of the victims, and bullying the local police (Lewis, 1998). And, all while he does so, he callously wipes the blood off his pants and shoes with a casually painful indifference. The scene is a perfect tipping point for how each of the directors viewed the importance of the moment, in contrast to Greene’s narrative. From here on, each work continues on its own path. In the novel, shortly after the bombings, Fowler remembers the words of Mr. Heng and Captain Trouin that sooner or later, one has to take sides. In the 1958 adaptation, Redgrave is hopeless. As a result, he becomes the real villain due to his lack of any moral fibre or capacity to react in a crisis.

These constant moral decays are repeated with such a delicate subtleness throughout the rest of the 1958 film, that it comes almost naturally for Fowler’s character to

deteriorate. In this sense, the classic *bildungsroman* (in literary criticism, being the formative years or psychological and moral growth of the protagonist), becomes inverted. The more Fowler knows and understands, the more corrupt and dishonest he becomes (Boes, 2006). From the bombing scene onwards, Mankiewicz alters the narrative completely. He invests enormously in the contrasting details between Redgrave and Murphy. By consulting with Edward Lansdale for technical assistance with regards to the events at the Continental Hotel, Mankiewicz changes the scene in the pre-production, suggesting the Communists were actually the ones behind the attack. Mankiewicz pushes then the audience to focus on the freedom-fighting martyrdom, instead of the American foreign meddling leitmotif. In his version, the Americans only want to create new economic markets and provide aid, and thus cannot be guilty of terrorism. By doing so, he mythologises *The Quiet American* and makes him a martyr (Lewis, 1998). Mankiewicz also decides to alter the conspiracy scene with Fowler reading a book at the window. By replacing Clough's poem with lines from Othello, he feeds more into the jealousy of Thomas rather than to his need to take a stance against a possible coup d'état. Because of it, Pyle dies a wrongful death out of jealousy (Bushnell, 2006). In the 2002 version, much like in the novel, Fraser actually finishes Fowler's poem, making him of equal intelligence. His youthful, yet determined figure dominates the scene. When accused that the staff at the Legation as well as General Thé, all take orders from him, Pyle concludes that today's bombings would save tomorrow's people. He then bursts at Fowler for never taking him seriously; yet that was precisely the moment when Fowler did it the most, when he decided to eliminate Fraser.

This is an important leap forward in the development of his character. Pyle not only conspires to steal the girl but also to lay the groundwork for "the third force" in Việt Nam. By cleaning his shoes during the bombing scene, he assures Fowler precisely of the fact that people died for "his" democracy. That idea obviates any need to take responsibility. As such, once more, the public has to become a participant to the narrative. Fowler understands that General Thé is nothing but a bandit with a few thousand men; he does not reflect any national democracy. He then tells Pyle that "he has the third force and national democracy all over his right shoe, pondering over actually blaming the innocent, as they are always guiltless; all that one can do "is to control them or eliminate them" (Greene, 2010, p. 158).

The rich and expansive bombing scene then accelerates with a turbo engine that moves with blind trajectory and a sense of purpose. Pyle has infinitely more to offer to

Phuong than Fowler has ever done; but even when told to leave with her and forget about the "third force" in the midst of a crisis, something keeps him impassive. In much sense, Pyle is the tragic hero of a protracted epoch with unresolved conflicts; and to a certain extent, he is the mirror image of the United States. When changing Việt Nam to Syria or to Iraq, and France to America, the same leitmotif emerges. By not practising any realpolitik strategy, but only imposing his idea of capitalist, liberal democracy, Pyle becomes the fuel for the never-ending strive for the "third force" (Hadar, 2013). Is he indeed anything but unsuspecting; so, can his intentions of high scopes ever be sincere? In conjunction with the other two protagonists, he becomes a reflection of the country he serves. Both Greene's and Noyce's Pyle carry an omnipresent sin that anticipates a moral snare inherited to their power. Fealty and self-denial are not part of his image. His truth is universal and unconditional, and he carries it until his very end (Bacevich, 2009). If anything, Pyle is a face of no origin, no past, and no individualism. Because of it, he is also immune to any of the moral conundrums or problems related to the war, as opposed to Fowler, who becomes a cynic tired of conflict, of chaos, and of himself.

Many critics perceived Pyle as naïve, but his views of the "third force" were the actual US official standpoints at that time. The novel's first-hand reportage gathered four months of introspective material between 1951-1952. The general fear was of Indochina falling, leading then to the invasion of Siam within 24 hours. For Greene, America had become a symbol of hollow materialism and political infantility. The bitter experience showed Fowler that the world does not really change, and that Western beliefs in democracy do not necessarily correspond to how the world actually works (Logevall, 2012). The Ivy League-educated Pyle is ignorant of the world and full of zeal to make reforms, determined to do good not to one individual, but to a whole continent. He believes his version of American democracy gives him the right to be interventionist in the Việt Nam politics, and he reveals there are no limits to what he can achieve (like, to destroy a village in order to save it). If anything, it is his apparent innocence that makes him this dangerous. There seems to be no limit nor end to the depths of his idealism in giving room for a "third force", a force which ultimately must prevail.

Nonetheless, this innocence is completely diluted in the 1958 film. Joseph Mankiewicz is all about Pyle's idealism that empties Fowler of his political substance. It is because of the love affair, that Thomas gets involved, and not because of his high moral duty. Noyce, on the other hand, departs far from that narrative. In his work, Pyle is menacing and dual. He puts the self-reflective idea of intimacy as a pathos for Fowler. What

ultimately separates the two movies, thus, is the portrayal of Pyle. Mankiewicz bought the movie rights months after the novel was published in the United States, and although he claimed he was not pressured by United Artists to make a pro-American spin, his team and crew told a different story. As he would later admit, the book made him so mad; he decided to turn it into a picture. He relied on Edward Lansdale's inputs (staunch Diệm supporter) who knew a lot about the "third force" and played a pivotal role in making the film as a clear propaganda (Bushnell, 2006). As such, from a research and cinematographic perspective, Mankiewicz's approach is well supported, as he enjoyed both the fortune of having an insider's perspective over the purpose of the "third force", as well as the luxury to steer the movie in a direction complementary to his own personal compass, which blissfully coincided with the one of the existing world affairs.

For the role of Pyle, Montgomery Clift was the initial choice (with Laurence Olivier as Fowler). Yet, as he was still recuperating after his car accident, Mankiewicz turned then to Audie Murphy. He seemed the logical choice, as he was a decorated World War II soldier, with boyish looks and battlefield credentials (an American hero turned into actor). Because of his inability to conceal his accent, Pyle's background was switched from Boston to Texas, and his heroic attributions were strongly downplayed (Bushnell, 2006). Michael Redgrave, on the other hand, was already a well-known actor. In the scenes together, the two protagonists displayed an apprehensive mix of performances and styles, with Robert Krasker's drawing-room ensembles only deepening the professional potential of each (Lewis, 1998).

Greene was appalled by the reinterpretation of his novel, openly criticizing it, and stating he was vain enough to believe the book would survive while the film would perish (Bushnell, 2006). Greene used great details to fight the good fight against the big, impersonal ideas of Pyle, but these endeavours escaped Mankiewicz's movie completely. In the book, Fowler acknowledged from the start the occult side of Pyle's profession, yet only in Noyce's picture, his journalistic instincts come to light. His instinct helps him piece together Pyle's melding on account of the climatic flashbacks after the bombings at Place Garnier.

By choosing to treat different themes from the novel, in the 1958 version offers a detective story with political intrigue, whereas the 2002 film is more about character development and introspection. Mostly shot in close-ups, it concentrated on the dialogue

and development of suspense; and the effect was astounding. The audience becomes an active listener, and a participant to the events (Bushnell, 2006). Fraser plays Pyle with a good-natured bonhomie; he is large and booming without being garish. Caine makes you weary of the weight of each of his word. The personal does not drive the political anymore, but vice versa. As such, the assassination of a deceitful spy for his zealotry grows more plausible than for an indefatigable crush over a youthful native (Zacharek, 2003).

In an interview from 2003, Michael Caine admitted to having given the performance of his life in the role of Thomas Fowler. The work satisfied him so much because, in the film, he does not exist at all; only Fowler exists. Knowing Graham Green personally, Caine understood the writer’s moral preoccupation with showing people’s deepest sense of themselves; and their integrity as they respond to the terrible pressures that political situations impose. The depth, breadth, and distance the Briton puts between himself and the surrounding world make him so atypical, and Caine wanted to showcase precisely such traits in Fowler’s character. Hence, he added a personal touch to the character, a deep sense of sadness. Because of this sadness, the audience can understand Fowler, instead of intensively disliking him (FilmKunst, 2019). The moment of true weakness happens when Fowler goes to the American Legation and makes a scene. Mankiewicz skipped the part altogether, but Noyce boldly reinvested it with Caine. Michael Caine does a splendid task displaying his character’s insecurities, both in public (when he evokes his anger), and alone, in the bathroom (when he bursts into tears), making Fowler human and fragile.

The Native Victim

The last important element in the “third force” triad is the character Phuong. Greene never insisted on particularising her out of fear of transforming the character into a three-dimensional one. Nevertheless, in the case of the 1958 film, this was precisely what happened to her. If the public got initially enraged with the superficial, cardboard-like character Pyle (who was never allowed to win a debate with Fowler, nor to convince anyone of his true intentions), in truth, the real cardboard figure turns out to be the beautiful Vietnamese girl (Lewis, 1998). A physical beauty who spends her time drinking milkshakes and reading gossips about British royals, she is stripped of any emotional or intellectual depth. Her sister pushes her in and out of relationships; she displays no special skill nor desire to learn anything on her own, and can only follow the needs and wants of others.

Same as in the case of Murphy, Mankiewicz missed a great opportunity when casting the German-Italian Georgia Moll for the role of Phuong. In his movie, the character is logical, introspective, silent, all qualities that could have been gracefully portrayed by an Asian actress. Even the meaning of her name, phoenix, is persistently accentuated by Pyle as a symbol of self-determination for Việt Nam; yet, she remains a mere emblem of what daily survival means in the 1950 Saigon (Lewis, 1998).

In his relationship with Phuong, the Briton is frequently condescending; he makes jokes his mistress cannot understand, uses irony to notify her about his need for opium, and quotes poems of Baudelaire for the simple truth that he likes hearing his own voice. This aspect is particular to the novel, as it provides much raw insight into the behaviour and characteristics of the protagonists (Greene, 2010). In Fowler's view, love is a western thing, used for sentimental reasons like obsessions. Yet, the Vietnamese people do not suffer from such obsessions. That is why he thinks Phuong is tougher than both him or Pyle, like "a polish that resists all scratches" - she does not suffer from thoughts and infatuations. His only concern is then her lack of expression (or perhaps, her ability to professionally lie). While completely missing in the first film, this concern is well captured by Đỗ Thị Hải Yến in Noyce's adaptation. Her Phuong is self-observing, enigmatic, and fierce. Her presence around Caine and Fraser ignites the love triangle and makes the possibility of a crime of passion plausible. Pyle sees her a mistress of a European man; in his mind, she also describes the situation of her country. For him, saving the country and saving the woman are one and the same thing (Greene, 2010, p. 130).

Her reasons are understandable too. Phuong needs to attach herself to youth and hope in a great period of despair. Under the Rule of the Three, she, too, gambles on her future with blunt naïveté, without asking Pyle for any proof of support or commitment (Bushnell, 2006). Nevertheless, Mankiewicz still makes some efforts to stay faithful to Greene's text. In terms of dialogue, he reproduces Fowler's misogynist lines when he says he does not care for her interest, just for her body. Noyce, on the other hand, scraps these lines completely. Mankiewicz also takes more interest in depicting the relationship between Pyle and Fowler, thus putting Phuong somewhere in the background. The gesture helps to keep her spirit intact and pure, but just like in the novel, it also diminishes her capacity to stir the intrigue to an elevated level. It stripes her away from the capacity to adjudicate on her own fate and judgement.

The ending is the last significant scene showing the diverging instances of the three characters. In the novel, Thomas asks Phuong if she is happy, to which she replies "Of course. It's like it used to be", a lie which neither can further swallow (Greene, 2010, p. 179). In the 1958 version, Redgrave is publicly rejected (an aspect which shocked Greene), after his desperate plea to get her back. Labelled as a washed up, "middle-aged Caucasian who appeared suddenly on the dance floor, unshaven, unwashed, and unwanted" (Rollins and O'Connor, 2008), Redgrave reaches for the busy streets, encounters Vigot, and tells him he wished there existed someone to whom he could say he was sorry. Charismatic as always, the inspector suggests going to the church (the evangelical redemption), yet praying for the dead, to the dead, was never one of Fowler's hobbies (Bushnell, 2006). Conceding to his moral decay (inverted bildungsroman), he disappears in the masses without looking back. Finally, in the 2002 version, the hindsight is with Fowler wishing to say he was sorry, with Phuong to reply, not to her. In this instance, he actually benefits both personally and professionally from the outcome of his actions. In the novel, Fowler gets everything (divorce, the extension to stay in Việt Nam, and Phuong) but is deeply and existentially alone. In Mankiewicz's adaptation, the strong, independent Phuong stripes Redgrave of all of his pride, leaving him physically and emotionally hollow. In Noyce's film, Michael Caine poses a subtle expression of vanity and arrogance that makes the character, for the first time, dangerous and perverted.

Lastly, in all three works, the plot develops around the triad between the characters, without thoroughly analysing their perception or measurement of each other. In the novel, there is nothing strained or self-consciously literary. It exploits the pleasures of cynicism without cutting any slack to the genre, and organically blends fact with fiction. For Greene, Pyle has indeed a hidden agenda; Fowler has his reasons to doubt and betray him, and the young Phuong, the justifications for switching sides in the attempt of a better future. For Mankiewicz, the film's national self-determination theme had to be built on American values, which would then justify the fear of the domino effect on communism. This way, the American interference becomes the lesser evil, and Murphy, a national symbol of patriotism. Yet, Mankiewicz invests too much in the huge chunks of dialogue, rather than concentrating on Việt Nam and its politics. As for visual effects, Fowler, Phuong, and Pyle are oftentimes shown standing or sitting in drawing-room postures; this gives the movie an artificial unreality in the mise en scene. Despite Krasker's aim to invest in expressive black and white scenes, the visual dynamics are insufficient and unconvincing. The audience truly believes

the three are mirroring the contrasting countries they come from. Georgia might try to take her faith in her own hands, but ultimately, she is still the product of a chaotic system that allows no long-term survivors (Lewis, 1998). The war, thus, acts as the background noise for the trio's bourgeois feelings, with the people, guerrilla soldiers, and battle moments all being something to fill up the scenes. Noyce, however, refreshes the qualities of Fowler and Pyle. Phuong remains a mirroring icon of Việt Nam, but Caine and Fraser break free from the Rule of the Three damnation. They become real people with individual personalities and conflicting interests. In the end, the better experienced Fowler takes back control and asserts his way of life back into his household.

Conclusion

The Quiet American has had all the ingredients of success: an impeccable pedigree, intriguing moral dilemmas, and it bespoke of important testimonies on the emergence of communism in Việt Nam. In the novel, the storyline was clean and straightforward. The war, which is initiated with the intention of bringing about the best and the brightest, is however often fought by the politically uninformed farm boys like the two Vietnamese soldiers, or by Murphy, who created schisms he could not contain.

For Mankiewicz, the film had to become a propaganda work for the US foreign policy in Việt Nam. In that time, Redgrave had a great career throughout the English-speaking community. Simultaneously, Murphy, despite being a newcomer, was the most decorated soldier in American history, and winner of the Medal of Honour for his endeavours during World War II. Blending all of this together, and one could expect a potent potion for success (encompassing literature, cinema, theatre, and war). But the result was disappointing. The movie contained encircling half-truths, disproportionate quality acting, and a determined idealism coming from a member of a United States of amnesia. Notwithstanding, Mankiewicz did not have too much room for manoeuvre either. In its original format, the novel would have never been turned to a film, especially not by an American corporation during the Cold War period. Because of the tumultuous history and problematic heritage, the French would have never produced it either. The British, too, avoided political conflicts at that time, and wanted the Anglo-American relations to flourish. Ultimately, this made the film persistent rather than particular (Lewis, 1998).

Finally, Philip Noyce transformed once more the novel into a powerful colonial anecdote. Michael Caine gave yet another outstanding performance, and together with Brendan Fraser, brought a subtle intensity to the plot. Their framework was fully redesigned. Fowler and Pyle developed a different type of relationship, one of mentorship-friendship, that surprised and convinced the public. A detective story with great political intrigue, introspection, and rich textures, the film pushed the protagonists outside the Rule of the Three typology and made them authentic. Caine skilfully conveyed a myriad of moods for a man who wants to be left alone with the woman he loves but knows such a life is not possible. His performance is heart-breaking as he grasps how difficult it is to maintain a policy of detachment once the horrors of the real world start to encroach. Contrary to the vulnerably romantic Redgrave, his decisions are rooted in a humanitarian need to act in the dichotomies “war vs peace”, “truth vs deception”, and “personal vs political”.

All in all, the reactions, appropriations, and historical depictions associated with each of the three works reveal how the story of the “third force” has developed under the Rule of the Three. Because of the moment of release, the dexterity of the cast, as well as the visions of the two directors, in the end, each of the three works registered very distinct results. The novel informed the public about the breakdown of the French involvement and the rise of the American meddling in Việt Nam; the first movie outraged, and the latter, clarified upon the motor of needs and intention prescribed to the three main characters. Without being mutually exclusive, both the novel and the respective movies have succeeded in educating, cultivating, and captivating the attention of global audiences about the socio-political quagmire that marked Việt Nam in the 1960s.

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