

УДК: 821.111.09-31 Грин Г.
ИД: 188041228
Примљено: 17. септембра 2011.
Прихваћено: 25. новембра 2011.
Оригинални научни рад

ПРОФ. ДР МИРЈАНА Н. ЛОНЧАР-ВУЈНОВИЋ¹

Универзитет у Приштини са привременим седиштем у Косовској Митровици,
Филозофски факултет, Катедра за енглески језик и књижевност

GRAHAM GREENE'S NOVEL: THE PECULIAR EXPERIMENT IN MODERN FICTION²

Abstract: Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* could be understood as the specific and unique example in experimental modern and post modern fiction during the twentieth century. This novel could be accepted as the peculiar application of the experiment what makes it almost the exceptional case in modern fiction. Greene used some innovative and usual modern elements expressing them through the prism of completely unusual experimental aspect of form. In the novel, Greene made the combination of already known innovative and usual modern elements and traditional elements of form. Actually, he covered the experimental innovations with the common thematic structure, narrative form and partly with the specific psychoanalytical presentation of character's minds, observing and expressing them all at the same time.

Key words: peculiarity, experimentation, faith, honour, consciousness.

The novel was the most memorable literary form which told the stories of the Second World War during the second half of the twentieth century. Of course,

¹ loncar.mirjana@gmail.com

² Овај је рад написан у оквиру пројекта МНТР РС 178019.

many of the writers who wrote about the war had already begun their careers before the war.

Greene manages to contain a lot of observations and meaning. After the war, Greene went on to write several novels, which are almost entirely written in dialogue form. Graham Greene wrote some of his most important novels in the 1940s. *The Power and the Glory* has a Catholic theme, about a “whisky priest” in Mexico, and his faults as a man and a priest. *The Heart of the Matter* is set in West Africa, and again the hero has problems of faith and honor or the ordinary man. This sense of unhappiness and uncertainty is typical not only of Greene but of many other novelists of the second half of the twentieth century. *The Quiet American* is the peculiar example of modern experimental novel of 1950s, because the author expresses very unusual innovative presenting of modern experimentation in prose from the very beginning of the century to his period and after that. These innovations relate to all levels, so that a lot of elements could be observed from the aspects of theme, style, structure, characters and the first person narrative technique as the conscious experimentation of modern literary age.

The plot of *The Quiet American* is relatively straightforward, but the narrative art and detail are almost as complex as the situation in Vietnam itself at the time. The main struggle is between the French and the Vietminh but the various minority movements are simultaneously staging their own wars against the major forces and each other.

Alden Pyle arrives in Saigon, an earnest and idealistic young American influenced by the writings of a supposed authority on the Far East York Harding. Pyle is seen through the eyes of the narrator, Thomas Fowler, who records events from the personal viewpoint of having as his mistress the girl with whom Pyle falls in love.

Pyle believes in a Third Force, which will act as a counter balance to the extremes of Communism on the one hand and French colonialism on the other. He introduces plastic moulds capable of containing explosives and thus of being converted into bombs; Pyle makes contact with the leader of a minority group, General The, whom the reader never meets.

Fowler introduces Pyle to Phuong and to her sister, Miss Hei, who shrewdly recognizes Pyle as a man who may offer Phuong the security of marriage. This Fowler cannot do, since his wife steadfastly refuses to divorce him. Through a series of flashbacks (given here very briefly), the reader is given a resume of the period leading up to Pyle's murder. Fowler recalls Pyle's confession of his love for Phuong; his own ghastly experiences of war with a French patrol and later in a French aircraft; the first intimations of the bomb with the bicycle explosions; Phuong's desertion after Pyle has saved his life; his (Fowler's) discoveries from Mr Heng of Pyle's activities; and the second terrible explosion (Pyle having failed to

realize that a parade had been cancelled) in Saigon at the height of the shopping period.

The horrifying sights Fowler has witnessed in the square send him again to Mr Heng (who works for the Vietminh and is an important contact of Fowler's assistant Dominguez); he agrees to 'talk' to Pyle. In effect, for reasons of personal jealousy and because a pulse of commitment to humanity now beats in him, Fowler has betrayed Pyle. The latter comes to talk to him about Phuong and about the explosion, saying that he has remonstrated with General The. Pyle departs, having arranged to meet Fowler later for a meal at the Vieux Moulin: he does not, however, keep the appointment. The reader is now back at the beginning of the story having travelled full circle: it is the night of Pyle's murder and Fowler has returned home to find Phuong waiting in a doorway. Fowler and Phuong are taken to the Surete where they are interrogated by Vigot and eventually allowed to return home. A fortnight or so afterwards, Fowler is effectively cleared of suspicion of the murder of Pyle.

On the surface, all ends happily. Fowler's wife writes to say that she has thought things over and will agree to a divorce. Phuong, realizing her sister will be delighted, at this unexpected opportunity of marriage for Phuong, hurries off to see her. Fowler, however, has no one to whom he can make amends for the betrayal: he is aware that in a strange way he cared for Pyle, despite the younger man's dangerous activities and the conventional attitudes which concealed them.

The themes of the novel are obvious: a hatred of war, of intrigue, an acknowledgement of temptation and jealousy, and the analysis of the battle in a man's consciousness between mere reportage of what is horrible and identification with the human suffering buried beneath the horror. Here the Catholic Greene is in low-key, though Fowler's talks to the priest in Tanyin and his discussions with Pyle and with Vigot all have Catholic elements.

The dilemma of right and wrong is evident: play God, like Pyle, and one must be stopped whatever the cost to the betrayer. Intrigue and deception, whether at press conferences or at higher levels, give place to the overwhelming sense of the degradation of war, with the bodies in the canal and the dying and mutilated in the square living in our memories long after the book is closed.

Thomas Fowler, "...a man of middle age, with eyes a little bloodshot, beginning to put on weight, ungraceful in love, less noisy than Granger perhaps but more cynical, less innocent

'I'm not involved', I repeated. 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 ... I wrote what I saw: I took no action - even an opinion is a kind of action.'" (Greene 1956:20)

The two quotations given above outline the appearance of Fowler and what he believes to be his character. The first-person narrator is conscious of his age (he stresses always that Pyle is younger and stronger) and conscious too that his job is to report objectively the events he sees and the situations in which he finds himself. But just as in life he has separated from his wife and left a previous mistress called Anne, so Fowler departs in himself from his own conception of what he is. Yet throughout he plays dangerously for the visit to Phat Diem signals the beginning of his involvement and the later explosion in the square at Saigon confirms it. It causes him to betray Pyle to Mr Heng, though he nearly has second thoughts on this. Fowler is a wanderer on the face of the earth, dreading the ties of home though experiencing considerable nostalgia for them.

The fear of being emotionally involved dogs him, yet the thought of losing Phuong to Pyle brings out a savage side to his character, seen in the violence of his love-making and his determined devaluation of everything American. Ironically, Phuong has really made few demands on him, and the imagery Fowler uses of her is light and ephemeral, like the passage of a bird or butterfly. This confirms to the reader that her role opium-mixer and personless yielder to the 'formula' of love-making - is a role undertaken on his terms, for Phuong has given up the respectability her sister so wants for her in order to live with Fowler. The latter is, however, vulnerable, as the arrival of Pyle shows; he is moved to jealousy and to cynicism when Pyle declares his love for Phuong, but he behaves – initially at least reasonably in Phat Diem when Pyle comes to tell him of that love.

And here we note an important facet of Fowler's character, for he reacts to the horrific aspects of war as we should expect any humanitarian to react: far from Phuong in Phat Diem, he can talk rationally with Pyle to cover the inward wound made by his experiences in the body-tilled canal. The action of Fowler's consciousness as narrator is to move backwards into the past. Thus his reportage to us the readers is the record of Fowler in interaction with Phuong, with Pyle, with Granger, or talking Pascal and manoeuvring with Vigot, weighing the significance of what Heng shows him, and reasoning with Trouin about the seemingly casual shooting up of the sampan. Fowler has moments of acute failure and humiliation, for example his inability to make love to the metisse, and his dependence on Pyle after the bazooka attack on the watch tower. Fowler is a lonely man, driven in upon himself by his past and the fear of being hurt attendant on commitment. But he is nothing less than human, even lying to Pyle about his wife's intention to divorce him.

In any novel, the difficulty in analysing the first-person narrator is that one runs the risk of identifying the author with his creation, and there are clearly times when Greene is using his reporter/observer Fowler as a mouthpiece. In narration of this kind, however, we must look closely at what Fowler says in the context of his

relationship with Phuong and his attitudes towards the war he is reporting. He is nostalgic and cynical at the same time, as we have seen, but he sees through Pyle, or perhaps more correctly through the pretentiousness of York Harding. He speaks his mind after Pyle's death, knowing in his heart that he is at least partly responsible for that death. But Fowler blames it on the way the Americans handle their aid programmes, where a false ideology has been allowed to overcome rational appraisal:

“He had no more of a notion than any of you what the whole affair's about, and you gave him money and York Harding's books on the East and said 'Go ahead. Win the East for democracy.'” (Greene 1956:32)

Indeed, when we are considering Fowler, we should perhaps remember Greene's cautionary remark in the dedication of the novel to Rene and Phuong - 'This is a story and not a piece of history.' In the context of the story Fowler is central and crucial, for everything is seen through his eyes, felt through his senses, subjected to his judgement. From the very beginning of the novel, we sense Fowler's guilt over Pyle. 'I couldn't stay quiet any longer', but even here he recalls how much he has suffered from Pyle's opinionated behaviour. We see his weakness, his need to get away from a situation in part of his own making, when he inhales the pipe that Phuong has prepared.

Fowler is quite strong-willed though, refusing to let Vigot interrogate Phuong unless he too is present. He is also something of an actor, for although he half-suspects what has happened to Pyle, he sustains the idea in Vigot's mind that Pyle is going to marry Phuong. Fowler also knows himself, aware that when he leaves Saigon he will feel nostalgia for the sight of the girls walking through the streets. He realizes too the effect that the opium has on him: it makes him feel less guilty, and helps him to the reasonable assertion that Pyle always went his own way. When he learns of Pyle's death, Fowler is quick to explain that he got mixed up, but in effect he shows his own clear-sightedness of what Pyle should have done 'He belonged to the skyscraper and the express-elevator.'

Even before he gets to know Pyle, Fowler is strongly anti-American; he at first admires Pyle's loyalty to York Harding and willingly explains the situation in Indo-China to him. Fowler first realizes how potentially dangerous Pyle is when the 'Third Force' is mentioned: he immediately equates it with other similarly fanatic groups such as the Fifth Column and Seventh Day Adventists. When Vigot is searching through Pyle's belongings, Fowler is astute enough to take with him York Harding's *The Role of The West*, almost as if he is protecting the dead man-from the discovery of his own motives. Perhaps it is his way of showing that he cares for him. Fowler's conversation with the Economic Attache indicates that he has no time for hypocrisy and dissembling, for he despises the words 'died a soldier's death in cause of Democracy'.

Yet Fowler's reactions towards Pyle when he was alive were curiously mixed. Remember the way he protected him, for instance with Granger, getting him away from the latter in the House of the Five Hundred Girls. Fowler is a cynic with a razor edged sense of humour, see his wry definition of American aid as 'electrical sewing machines for starving seamstresses' to the literal Miss Hei. He enjoys teasing Pyle and, of course, shocking him too, but Fowler is a good reporter, who goes north to the really unpleasant action because that is what his duty demands. He is observant, courageous (though perhaps not in his own mind) and impartial insofar as he can be; however, the canal experience and the sight of the dead child erode his determination about his own distance from it all. Fowler is committed now because of his feelings 'I hate war', though at this stage he does not realize the movement within himself.

Fowler is strangely tolerant when Pyle arrives unexpectedly to announce his love for Phuong, and obviously the recent experiences in Phat Diem have helped to make him so. He realizes, only too clearly, the advantages of youth, respectability and marriageability which Pyle possesses in the coming battle for Phuong. He is irritated enough to be crudely honest - 'You can have her interests. I only want her body. I want her in bed with me.' Fowler's reaction to the news of his promotion is equally predictable; it elevates his feelings for the rue Catinat, creates a nostalgia for the present, so that he cannot think of England as 'Home'. Just as he has given himself up to a kind of inverted nostalgia for the London of far away, so now he feels only contempt for the night-editor and 'his semi-detached villa at Streatham'.

This mood is succeeded by one of Pyle-baiting; this he pushes to the utmost in Phuong's presence, so that Pyle asks her to go away with him. Her 'No' brings an enormous relief to Fowler, and sets him off on the quest for freedom from his wife back at 'home'. The visit to Tanyin finds Fowler reflective, enigmatically so, pondering on religion and the force of his memories. It is this mood which perhaps makes him only half-aware of Pyle and the commandant and the fact that nothing has apparently been done to Pyle's car. It also makes him forget to check his own car. When they arrive at the watch tower Fowler experiences a moment of fear; this is followed by a further discussion with Pyle, where Fowler's intuition that Pyle is misguided, causes him to engage in some cynical repartee despite the seriousness of the issues at stake 'A lot of energy with your people seems to go into whistling' and 'It's not in the Kinsey report.' This flippancy conceals his concern over Pyle's possible success with Phuong, and there is a distinct pathos as he considers his own coming 'old age and death. I wake up with these in mind and not a woman's body. I just don't want to be alone in my last decade.' Even when he is wounded Fowler thinks of one of the guards in the watch tower as 'like a child who is frightened of the dark and yet afraid to scream'. This image haunts him through his pain

until he is given an injection of morphium, for 'I was responsible for that voice crying in the dark.'

When Fowler's wife sends her first reply to his letter he learns 'how open the sexual wounds remain over the years'. We sense that Fowler has gone, over a period of time, from woman to woman, but he is deeply moved and hurt by his wife's pain and, one supposes, by his own sense of guilt. This does not prevent him, insecure and vulnerable as he is, from writing the lie to Pyle. Fowler is persistent, following through Dominguez's hints about Pyle until he finds what he wants - the implication that Pyle is not merely a passive idealist but a wrongly committed one as well. This presents something of a dilemma for Fowler; Pyle has saved his life yet Fowler knows that Pyle is wrongly committed and that he is capable of inflicting suffering on others. Fowler's reference to Pyle as 'my savior' is therefore tinged with irony, the wry recognition of the dual attitude he has towards the quiet American.

Fowler is also something of an intellectual, able to quote Pascal in a kind of mental *Quatre Cent Vingt-et-un* with Vigot 'But he who chooses heads and he who chooses tails are equally at fault.' However, perhaps the most poignant moments in Fowler's life are when he is alone, and uncertain about Phuong's intentions; these moments are crystallized when he wakes and finds the pillow indented and Phuong gone. Later, after the visit to Pyle, Fowler breaks down, capable, as we see, of emotion in his private life yet able to resist emotional involvement vis-a-vis his fellow beings in the theatre of war. His conscience, however, pushes him on into these wider affairs, and he is made bitterer by the shooting of the sampan. It strengthens his feelings of compassion and he is later kinder to Pyle than he thought was possible. But reaction to the explosion forces his hand. Fowler sees Pyle as 'impregably armoured by his good intentions' and concludes that 'Innocence is a kind of insanity.' He betrays him, almost reneges on the betrayal, and escapes again with Phuong, knowing he to be guilty yet having no one to whom he can confess his remorse.

Fowler, in essence, is each and all of us, capable of error but capable too of a compassion for the mass of humanity which tells him that the demagogue who uses the materials of war is culpable and evil. He conceals from Vigot the fact that he did see Pyle the night he died, but perhaps more important than this is his response to Granger, whom he initially disliked. Fowler is sympathetic about his son, and even offers to do his story for him. Perhaps this private manifestation of his capacity for love is pathetic too, for even with Phuong back he is a lonely man, an 'isolationist too' as he once confessed to Pyle. Alden Pyle is "an unmistakeably young and unused face 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 1956:32)

There is an element of surprise when the reader learns that Alden Pyle is thirty two years old. Despite his reading, the knowledge he has gained through York Harding and his earnestness, Pyle seems younger, perhaps one of life's permanent innocents. The extract above however contains the innuendo of his deception: 'Look like the innocent flower/But be the serpent under it' counsels Lady Macbeth of her husband -and this is Pyle's stance, though without the self-awareness of wrong-doing which Lord and Lady Macbeth possess and which brings them both to death through murder and madness. The last two words have been chosen deliberately because this is what the ignorance (and innocence) of Pyle brings about. Pyle is a dangerous man, imbued with the idea of the Third Force, acting in the name of democracy against his twin hates of colonialism (here the French) and Communism. As a result, Pyle intrigues with General The, and imports moulds (for bicycle pumps) into the country as these make effective containers for explosives. But the name of the game is war and suffering, and Pyle does not face up to these harsh realities until he stands in the square with the blood soaking his shoes. Even here he lays the blame elsewhere (while thinking of having his shoes cleaned) 'they shouldn't have cancelled the parade, it must have been the Communists.' The contempt the reader feels for him far exceeds the anger expressed by Fowler. Later Pyle tells how he has reprimanded General The, but we know, as does Fowler, that he has no conception of war or of the corruption it brings in its wake.

Pyle is the all-American boy from the right kind of hat background; he is a university graduate whose study and appreciation of the complexities of politics in the East are based on the misguided opinions of a third-rate journalistic hack. Though he has spent but a few months in the East (compared to Fowler's years of experience), Pyle thinks he has all the answers. In effect he has none, and is totally ignorant of the chaos he creates. The implication here is that decency and respectability are skin-deep and for this reason Greene makes a penetrating study of the character of Pyle.

Easily shocked and embarrassed, dancing at arm's length with somebody else's mistress, buying a boat to get to Phat Diem to confess to Fowler his love for Phuong, Pyle is intent on doing the right thing, and relieved when Fowler's response is more reasonable than he had been led to expect. Admittedly he does respond to Fowler's baiting and asks Phuong to go away with him, but prior to this he has held forth on Phuong's need for children and a settled life. Again his immaturity is apparent, and one wonders if his love for Phuong is a part of his determined democracy; whether he sees in their union the meeting of East and West which his ideology and practical action covet.

But Pyle is a minnow among tritons, a quiet American whose errors of ideology are mirrored in his errors of execution. He is easily found out by Mr Heng,

easily traced by Fowler in his search for clues, easily misled and betrayed by Fowler to his death. However, Pyle is responsible for a frightful escalation in human suffering from the joke of the bicycle bomb to the explosion in the square, and just as his appearance has belied the power he innocently wields, so the cover-up after his death is equally superficial, misleading and dishonest. Pyle has not died a hero's death, though his parents will think he has, and that the secret operations were important. They were, but not, as Pyle perhaps believed, to the cause of peace - they were symptomatic of and subservient to the cause of war-mindless, with common sense offered as an excuse for a degraded and inexcusable assertion of power.

Fowler says: "I couldn't see her face, only the white silk trousers and the long flowered robe, but I knew her for all that. She had so often waited for me to come home at just this place and hour." (Greene 1956:57)

Phuong, Fowlers mistress, is from a good mandarin family and has a possessive and influential older sister Miss Hei, who is intent on respectability for Phuong; by this Miss Hei means a good marriage, preferably with a European or an American or a settlement. She therefore disapproves of Fowler who can neither marry nor afford a settlement. The imagery used to describe Phuong is bird imagery: lightness, the ease of coming and going, marking a certain impersonality; for the core of Phuong, should she have one, remains a mystery. She is the typical Eastern girl, subservient to the male, making his opium pipe with great care and deliberation, responding obediently to Fowler's sexual needs and being shunted between the two men with no apparent display of emotion. Phuong accepts Pyle's death quietly, never speaks-of him or advances an opinion; she moves back in with Fowler just as unassertively as she moved out.

In fact we know little of Phuong; we know that Fowler met her when she was a dancer, and we also know that it took him some four months to persuade her to live with him. She speaks in French, having acquired no or very little English since she has lived with Fowler. Only twice in the novel does Phuong display any positive response to the intimate events which surround her. The first occasion is when she says that she will not go to live with Pyle, and the second is at the very end of the novel when she races off to tell her sister that she is going to be the second 'Mrs Fowlair'. Her one passion in life is for films, which provide a temporary refuge from the commonplace of living.

Fowler of course understands what Phuong's exterior conceals or at least he thinks he does; here she is after Pyle's death: 'There was no scene, no tears, just thought -- the long private thought of somebody who has to alter a whole course of life.' (Greene 1956:57) Yet no one would know. Phuong is obviously very attractive, for Granger admires her even in his inebriated state; she clearly has an air of innocence, despite her life with Fowler, which endears her to Pyle. There is every

suggestion that she is under her sister's thumb or rather hand, for Miss Hei clamps it down on Phuong's knee on one occasion to register her authority. Moreover Phuong is proud of this sister who, according to her, was once in business in Singapore.

But for all this - her beauty, her beautiful dancing, Phuong is nebulous in terms of personality; as Fowler puts it, 'Sometimes she seemed invisible, like peace.' And of course for Fowler she is peace, the peace of the pipe, the peace of undemanding sexuality, the peace of the third person he often feels her to be - the shield against the past and the comfort of the present.

Vigot is described like this: "...he appeared incongruously in love with his wife, who ignored him, a flashy and false blonde ... and he had a volume of Pascal open on his desk to while away the time... (Greene 1956:73)

Vigot is the French officer at the Surete, quiet, intellectual, tired and depressed. He is apologetic to Fowler for having to interrogate him and establishes with Fowler a kind of understanding. He affects to suspect him, but is sharp enough to notice details, though he is rather caught off balance when Fowler asks if Pyle is in the mortuary. He is honest enough to admit that he is not altogether sorry that Pyle is dead, and realistic, as he demonstrates by the quick and efficient examination of Pyle and the finding of mud in his lungs.

The day after Pyle's death finds Vigot going through his things, pondering on whether or not this is a simple case of jealousy. He allows Fowler to take Phuong's things from Pyle's apartment, and he also lets him take York Harding's *The Role of the West*. Vigot is anxious to find out as much as he can, but admits 'My report's all tied up. He was murdered by the Communists, perhaps the beginning of a campaign against American aid.' (Greene 1956) There is a kind of sadness about Vigot, for he is a thinker and perhaps a philosopher who finds himself doing a particular job. Perhaps too his wife's infidelities bulk large in his mind.

Later Vigot comes to see Fowler to tell him that he now knows that Fowler has lied - that in fact he did see Pyle on the night he died. The thoroughness of his investigations can be seen in this checking of the smallest details. He is scrupulously fair though, and tells Fowler that he doesn't intend to bother him anymore.

"Bill Granger - you can't keep him out of a scrap..." (ibid.)

At first Granger is an unattractive character, drunk, brash, evincing what Fowler calls 'Rough soldierly manners'. He is after 'a piece of tail', obviously enjoys a trishaw race, speaks in colloquialisms and petty obscenities and has a coarse sense of humour. Granger also has a shrewd sense of humour, however, as can be seen in his parody of a French press statement; he gives an accurate account of what happens and of how press conferences are really a form of farce. Fowler is closer to him than he realizes, for it is Granger who penetrates the French press

conference and establishes that, in terms of military aid, the American commitment is feeble and non-productive.

Granger distributes his money and manhood in the House of the Five Hundred Girls, but the final meeting with him reveals that under this vulgar exterior there is more to him; he also has a capacity for suffering. He speaks his mind bluntly to Fowler and tells him that his (Granger's) son has got polio. There is a terrible pathos in the fact that Granger does not believe in God, and he appreciates the sympathy Pyle gives him, while acknowledging that they are 'cat and dog'. We are particularly touched by the fact that although he is suffering himself, by the thoughts about his wife, who 'can't drink, can she?'. In all, Granger is a much more sympathetic character than we are led to believe at first.

We have already mentioned Miss Hei, the older sister who determines that Phuong will achieve a respectable marriage. She has no sense of humour, but knows that her sister's beauty is a commercial asset. Miss Hei encourages Phuong in her conquest of Pyle, and interrogates Fowler about Pyle's parents and prospects. The Economic Attache is a bore and a dishonest one at that, who covers up for Pyle and asserts that he has died a hero's death. He is of course annoyed with Fowler, who informs him in no uncertain terms that he, his kind and York Harding are responsible for the death of Pyle. The Economic Attache's shallowness is shown however when Phuong is mentioned; he is even grateful to Fowler for having tried to prevent the match between Phuong and Pyle, which would have been something of an embarrassment to this pretentious arch-democrat. Trouin is typical, a realist in terms of the war and in terms of life, who shoots up the sampan because it might be acting for the enemy. He offers Fowler the metisse, whom he and another airman have already had.

All the characters contribute to the realism of *The Quiet American*, from the first entrance of the man from the Surete to pick up Fowler, through Fowler's experience with the French patrol in Phat Diem to individuals seen silently in time of stress, like the fat little priest scurrying past with something under a napkin. Greene has the authentic touch, and character exists for him, and hence for us, in verbal and visual clarity of presence.

The structure of *The Quiet American* is the web of interconnected events which links the past with the present. The first part opens on the night of Pyle's death; the narrator, Thomas Fowler, then defines his relationship with Phuong, before going back in time to his first meeting with Pyle. We learn of the latter's views and of his meeting with Phuong; of the visit by Fowler to Phat Diem and the horrors he witnesses; and of Pyle's visit to him there to confess his love for Phuong.

The second part continues on this personal note, with Pyle asking Phuong to go away with him. The issue is complicated following a visit to Tanyin: Pyle contacts one of General The's supporters and later saves Fowler's life after an attack on

the watch tower in which they are sheltering. Fowler recovers, returns to Saigon only to hear from his wife that she will not divorce him. He meets Heng via Dominguez and quarrels with Pyle about Phuong.

The plot moves forward in time in the third part. Two weeks after the death of Pyle, Phuong is back living with Fowler, while Vigot continues the murder investigations into the death. Fowler relates the bicycle bomb incident and Phuong's subsequent desertion of him for Pyle. He had gone north, but returned disenchanted and lonely to Saigon. Fowler had previously been offered promotion and a return home, but had rejected it; now he finds the letter awaiting him confirming that he will be staying in Vietnam for at least a year. There follows the terrible explosion in the square.

The final part again returns to the present, with Vigot continuing his investigations. Inevitably this leads Fowler to reflect on the past and his investigations of Pyle. Effectively Fowler betrays him to Heng, who arranges the killing. Fowler keeps the exact details to himself, but Vigot knows the truth. Fowler ends up back with Phuong, freed at last by his wife, but at the same time experiencing the loneliness of regret and conscience.

The *Quiet American* has twin pivots on which the action turns, and these are facets of style in the broadest sense; they are the use of retrospect, which will be referred to frequently in this Study Aid, and the creation of a convincing atmosphere against which the personal and wider action is played out. The use of a flashback technique is sufficiently covered elsewhere through plot and structure, but atmosphere is endemic in Greene and the locale, whether in Saigon, Phat Diem, Tanyin or a watch tower, is always at the forefront of his presentation. Thus on the very first page of the novel there is the mention of a trishaw, the white silk trousers, the long flowered robe and the first of a number of conversations in a mixture of English and French, the inheritance of the Indo-Chinese just as English is the inheritance of the Chinese in Hong Kong and Singapore.

Note the directness of this atmosphere, which establishes time, place, custom with ease, and with that deft reportage which is so much a mark of Greene's casual yet consummate style. On the memorable night of Pyle's death the atmosphere of snatched love in war 'To take an Annamite to bed with you is like taking a bird: they twitter and sing on your pillow' (Greene 1956:12) is balanced by an equally effective escape from the pressures on those who are close to war through their jobs. This kind of escape is epitomized by Phuong's action in 'beating the small paste of opium, twirling her needle', for drugs provide a refuge from the atrocities of war and from the pressures under which civilians suffer in a time of war: witness Monsieur Chou and the number of pipes he smokes in a day. The tightness of the controls exercised is underlined by references to exit permits and

orders of circulation, while the heat from which there is no escape is underlined in descriptions like 'A mosquito droned to the attack.'

There is a considered stress on the American nature of the quiet American, with his crew cut (very much the style of the period), his choice of books and his 'unmistakably young and unused face flung at us like a dart'. This brief quotation in fact summarizes the Greene method, for *The Quiet American* is a figurative novel in the sense that the language is speckled with images of surprising and sudden truth. There are first those redolent of nostalgia: these vary from the relatively innocent 'like a school treat' to the positively ominous 'like the dark passages on upper floors one avoided in childhood': for though the nightmares of childhood are past, the nightmares of the present - senseless and mindless slaughter will not go away. Thus Fowler's experience in Phat Diem is nowhere more frighteningly endorsed than in the image he chooses to describe the carnage in the canal 'I am reminded now of an Irish stew containing too much meat.' The very homeliness of the association gives the moment a sickening perspective that remains with us. Each body is a human being, or rather was, and Fowler's involvement has begun.

Sometimes the comparisons reflect the quiet order and organization away from it all, for Miss Hei is 'like a chairman with his gavel' or 'He looked like a face on television.' The interested readers will find many examples of the range of Greene's figurative style in this novel; perhaps even more impressive are the moments of casual wisdom, phrases and sentences which remain in the mind because of the essential truth they reflect. Take, for example, statements like 'You cannot love without intuition', 'Sometimes she seemed invisible, like peace' or 'He had in his hand the infinite riches of respectability'. Frequently of course these statements are reinforced by imagery, by apt comparisons and associations which extend their own validity 'Silence like a plant put out tendrils' and 'carrying Fate in the lines of their faces as others on the palm'.

But if Greene writes with imagination and figurative force, he also has a wealth of wisdom on which to base his assertions. He and Vigot quote Pascal, an Indo-Chinese official is interested in Wordsworth, and Fowler's threatened recall to England causes him to remark inwardly 'Dante never thought up that turn of the screw for his condemned lovers. Paolo was never promoted to Purgatory.' At another time Fowler quotes Baudelaire, and there are many other quotations which indicate a wealth of reading on Greene's part. There is too an insistent commentary of wider reference the political heads of state from Eisenhower through Ho Chi Minh to Sun Yat Sen to de Gaulle to de Lattre, so that a broad atmosphere of realism is created. Because Fowler is the narrator, this is often given an ironic tone; Fowler is not only jealous of Pyle, he is also extremely satirical about the American way of life 'We used to speak of sterling qualities. Have we got to talk now

about a dollar love? This satire sometimes takes the form of parody, as when Granger gives a mock account of a telegram:

“Great victory north-west of Hanoi. French recapture two villages they never told us they'd lost. Heavy Vietminh casualties. Haven't been able to count their own yet but will let us know in a week or two.” (Greene 1956:12)

This moves from the formal to the laconic, the style exactly reflecting the hopelessness of ever discovering the truth.

Part of Greene's style is deliberately colloquial, as in the conversations between Vigot and Fowler, and for him dialogue is character, from the sometimes cynical irony of Fowler to the cliché-ridden conventionalities of Pyle 'You have to fight for liberty'. No word is wasted, and again one is forced to admire the exactness of description which can bring a scene alive. Greene, as we have said, is a strongly visual writer:

“Across the way a metisse with long and lovely legs lay coiled after her smoke reading a glossy woman's paper, and in the cubicle next to her two middle-aged Chinese transacted business, sipping tea, their pipes laid aside.” (Greene 1956:151)

This is the eye for detail, but the eye for realism and the spiritual associations of death and destruction is even more sure, even more graphic both in terms of the scene and the observer's comment inlaid in an uncompromising directness of language:

“A woman sat on the ground with what was left of her baby in her lap; with a kind of modesty she had covered it with her straw peasant hat. She was still and silent and what struck me most in the square was the silence. It was like a church I had once visited during Mass ... The legless torso at the edge of the garden still twitched, like a chicken which has lost its head.” (Greene 1956:162)

We have given these extracts in some fullness because they indicate the variety of Greene's powers. It is not enough to claim that he is a camera - as Fowler claims he is merely a reporter - for cameras cannot have feelings, and Greene's writing is imbued with feeling for suffering, frail, vulnerable humanity. The narrative tension is maintained by switches of focus until all the pieces in what is a kind of moving jigsaw are fitted together. The adhesive is irony (but with compassion), figurative vividness (nearly always appropriate and moving), a mastery of the colloquial and the realistic, and a kind of in-built moral commentary which gives perspective to events.

The use of the first-person narrator is also a triumph, for the revelations of Fowler's consciousness constitute the mainstream of the action. The ironic mode of his own expression is qualified even at the end - with marriage before him he has to live with betrayal and regret, with a past which has removed him from the degage to the engage but which may still leave him a wanderer, unwilling to return

to the desk being kept warm for him. But the horror of man's bestiality to man is very strong upon him, and that which corrupted Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* has corrupted Pyle in *The Quiet American*. And just as the river in Conrad's remarkable story is symbolic of the twistings and turnings of corruption and justification, so the Christian/Unitarian Pyle has learned in the words that typify Greene's style in this novel, and which Fowler uses to Dominguez - 'from Nero how to make human bodies into candles'.

G. Greene's *The Quiet American* could be accepted as the very specific and unique example for the modern fiction in the second half of the twentieth century. The author has introduced innovative and usual modern elements into all levels, into theme, style, structure, the characters and the first person narrative technique as the conscious of age, what is the main and unique experiment in Anglo-American literature at that time.

NOTES

1. G. Greene, *The Quiet American*, Viking Press, New York, 1956, p.20
2. Ibid, Part 1, Chapter 2, p.32.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid, Chapter 12
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid, Part 3, Chapter 2, p.151.
12. Ibid, p.162.

REFERENCES:

1. Richard Michael Kelly, *Graham Greene*, Ungar, 1984.
2. Richard Michael Kelly, *Graham Greene: A Study of the short fiction*, Twayne, 1992.
3. Paul O' Prey, *A Reader's Guide to Graham Greene*, Thames and Hudson, London&New York, 1988.
4. Diemert Brian, *Graham Greene's Thrillers and the 1930.*, McGill – Queen's University Press, 1996.
5. Cedric Watts, *A Preface to Greene*, Longman, 1996.
6. W. J. West, *The Quest for Graham Greene*, Weindenfeld & Nicolson, London, New York, 1997.
7. Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*, William Heinemann, London, 1955.
8. Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*, Viking Press, New York, 1956.

Мирјана Лончар-Вујновић

РОМАН ГРАХАМА ГРИНА: НЕОБИЧАН ЕКСПЕРИМЕНТ У МОДЕРНОЈ ПРОЗИ

Резиме

Роман постаје најпопуларнија књижевна форма у другој половини двадесетог века, форма која приповеда приче са тематиком из другог светског рата. Могуће је да ратна тематика није била најпопуларнија, али је свакако била најчешћа. Када говоримо о савременом, тачније о роману двадесетог века, свакако најчешће мислимо на експериментални роман, са мноштвом иновативних елемената, који препознајемо с почетка века на пример, роман Џејмса Џојса, Вирџиније Вулф, Виљема Фокнера и многих других и након другог светског рата са још богатијим дијапазоном нових експерименталних елемената, као на пример код Селинцера, Сингера, Мајлера, Вонегата и код мноштва других. Неки аутори комбинују традиционално и експериментално, неки потпуно одбацују традиционално, а експериментално најчешће траже и посматрају само са једног аспекта: синхроније, дијахроније, технике писања или експерименталног метода нарације и наратора и тако даље.

Роман Грахама Грина слободно можемо сматрати јединственим примером постмодерне прозе овог типа. Оно што Грин уводи у дело, као иноваторске и врло специфичне модерне елементе експерименталног романа, можемо сагледавати са свих аспеката истовремено, како тематике, стила, структуре, ликова, тако и са аспекта наративне технике у првом лицу јединине, лика који представља свест савременог доба. Од педестих година двадесетог века, сви се ови постојећи елементи уводе у прозу, али појединачно, а у прози Г. Грина јавља се експеримент на свим нивоима истовремено.

Кључне речи: необичност, експериментисање, вера, част, свест.