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| **Anyone know about the symbolism in ‘A Quiet American’ by Graham Greene?** |
| Pyle represents the idealistic New Age America, thirsty for heroism. Phuong represents pre-war Vietnam, passive, innocent.What exactly does Fowler represent? Is it the wisdom and world-weariness of Old Europe or Britain’s involvement in the war simply for personal gain? |
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| The symbolism of the individual characters has to be placed within the context of colonialism, since that was the relationship between the nations they each represented.Pyle's motives are far from heroic. An idealism that is motivated by interventionism in a Third World country's affairs can be dangerous and destructive, not only in the way Graham Greene saw it in the early fifties, but as history proved it by the events that unfolded years later, leading to the US war in Viet Nam. Or for what is happening now in Iraq, if you will.Fowler had the "old colonialist" wisdom that questioned Pyle's justification for violence. He had already learned that "democracy" is something many countries neither understand nor want, and any foreign attempt to impose it is doomed to failure. I don't know that this helps, but I can't see the novel any other way. |

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| **Outline of characters** |
| *Thomas Fowler* is a British journalist in his fifties who has been covering the French war in Viet Nam for over two years. He meets a young American idealist named Alden Pyle, who is a student of York Harding. Harding's theory is that neither Communism nor colonialism are the answer in foreign lands like Viet Nam, but rather a "Third Force," usually a combination of traditions, works best. Unlike most Americans, Pyle is thoughtful and soft-spoken. Fowler finds him naïve.*Alden Pyle* is the "quiet American" of the title. He is the opposite of a stereotypical American abroad: the loud obnoxious American in a Hawaiian shirt with a camera. Instead Pyle is thoughtful and intellectual, serious and principled. He comes from a fine East Coast background. His father is a renowned professor of underwater erosion who has appeared on the cover of Time magazine; his mother is well respected in their community. Pyle is a brilliant graduate of Harvard University. He has studied theories of government and society, and is particularly devoted to a scholar named York Harding. He has read Harding's numerous books many times and has absorbed Harding's thinking as his own |

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| ‘The Quiet American’ review, Graham Greene.  |
| Although the novel is a political picture of America’s involvement in the Vietnam War, these details enrich rather than encumber the reading experience. An older journalist, Fowler, revisits the love entanglement involving his mistress Phuong and Pyle, a zealous and idealistic journalist. Fowler’s role as a correspondent aids the first-person narration as he recounts without taking sides. His point of view is a springboard to show how personal responsibility overlaps with global considerations. Pyle, described as a ‘quiet American’ is a symbol of America’s insidious impact upon Vietnam’s history. He orchestrates a Third Force to battle Ho Chi Minh’s forces and the French and her allies. In the early stages of the novel, Pyle’s innocence is described with a sense of foreboding: |
| *‘Go in and find a table. I had better look after Pyle.’ That was my first instinct-to protect him. It never occurred to me that there was greater need to protect myself. Innocence always calls mutely for protection when we would be so much wiser to guard ourselves against it innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm.’ 36*The unreality of war--the emotional distance between military and civilian is captured by this theme of innocence. Actions performed without regard to effect show the lack of understanding. Chilling imagery is conjured by Greene’s sparse writing style. A metaphoric depiction of bodies strewn in a ditch as an Irish stew haunts the reader. It represents a hodgepodge cross-section of society who has unwittingly become part of bloodshed. The love relationship between Phuong and the two journalists highlights the impact of French colonialism and the reality that no matter how impartial Fowler seeks to be, neutrality is unattainable where human emotion is involved.  |
| Like many of Greene's spy, or espionage, novels, *The Quiet American* is concerned with the effect the superpowers have when they intervene in the politics of the developing nations, in this case, Vietnam during the last days of French colonial rule. Greene himself is in an interesting position in that England, once a major colonial power, has increasingly surrendered that position to the United States since World War II; as the British character Fowler says to the American Pyle, *"We're the old colonials."* This weakened position makes Greene, like Fowler, something of an observer of... |
| Greene's novel is more than a political statement about whether or not America — or any other country — should become involved in the affairs of another country. Greene, as he so often does, makes the question human and personal. Fowler, from the very opening of the novel, insists that he is not engaged: *"'I'm not involved. Not involved,' I repeated. It had become an article of my creed."* He is the perfect contrast to the American Pyle who is so eager to become engaged, in politics, war, or love. Yet, the novel pushes Fowler without rest: as people tell him*, "Sooner or later, one has...* |
| The novel begins with Pyle's death, and then proceeds as a flashback. Beginning with the ending could destroy any chance for suspense, but Greene, a master of suspense and surprise, actually uses the technique to increase suspense. In the opening, Fowler expresses a sense of guilt over Pyle's death, but the reader is encouraged to think this guilt is like that of a person who does nothing to save a drug-addicted friend, and then feels guilty when the friend dies of an overdose. Fowler says*, "They killed him because he was too innocent to live. He was young and silly and ignorant and he...* |

**CHARACTER MAP**

**Phuong**

Fowler’s Vietnamesemistress. When Pyle falls inlove with her, he becomes amajor threat to Fowler.

**Thomas Fowler**

British journalist in Saigon. Encounters Pyle and gradually uncovers his secret activities.

**Alden Pyle**

The ‘Quiet American’, from Boston. Poses as member of the ’Economic Mission’ while secretly involved in local political and military activity. Wants to being ‘denouement’ to Vietnam.

**General Thé**

Pyle champions him; has high hopes for him as ‘Third Force’. Dangerous tactic, a ‘loose cannon’. Symptomatic of the political instability in Vietnam at the time.

**Miss Hei**

Phuong’s sister. A powerful woman who seeks to advance her sister’s (and family’s) interests by securing Pyle as her husband.

**Helen Fowler**

Fowler’s wife in England. Obstacle to Fowler’s plan to marry Phuong because of her strong opposition to divorce. Finally relents.

**Vigot**

French-born police inspector. Suspects Fowler’s role in Pyle’s death, but not sorry that Pyle is dead.

**Dominguez**

Fowler’s assistant. A kind and very gentle man. Assists Fowler in his investigations into Pyle’s secret activities by directing him to Mr Hung.

**Mr Hung**

Viet Minh agent who confirms Fowler’s suspicions of Pyle’s involvement in the explosion in central Saigon. Helps arrange Pyle’s murder.

**Granger**

A loud American. Aggressive, macho journalist whom Fowler sees as reflecting all he dislikes about America. In the end, though, a touch of humanity shows through.

**Insight Study Guide on ‘The Quiet American’ excerpt:**

**INTRODUCTION**

First published in 1955, following the departure of the French from Vietnam (then known as Indo-China) in 1954, *The Quiet American* anticipates with uncanny foresight the growing American involvement in that country. This reached its peak by the late 1960s when more than 500,000 American troops were stationed in South Vietnam. So many of the errors and disasters committed by the French as described in Greene’s novel were repeated during the later American war, known as the ‘Vietnam War’. In an American cartoon of 8 June, 1954, ‘Uncle Sam’ stands with a rifle in his hand, facing a dark, barren wasteland labelled ‘French Mistakes in Indochina’. The caption of the cartoon asks: ‘how would another mistake help?’.

 *The Quiet* *American* implicitly asks this question too, doesn’t it? In the first half of the 20th century, the United States successfully intervened in both World Wars after entering them late in both cases. They aided the Allied nations in Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East. In World War II they joined the nations in the Pacific and Asian regions also, to defeat the Japanese invasions of these countries. In the process, the USA established itself as the pre-eminent world power. In Vietnam, however, the USA faced a most unfamiliar environment, society and way of making war, which it was ill-equipped to understand or to control. Greene was always keenly interested in international affairs, wars and covert action. His experience of working as a journalist in the Indo-China war is used directly in the creation of his narrator in *The* *Quiet American*, who is also a journalist. In his memoir, *Ways of* *Escape*, Greene wrote of how he used his personal observations of Vietnam at war: Perhaps there is more direct reportage in *The Quiet* *American* than in any other novel I have written…The Press Conference is not the only example of direct reporting. I was in the dive bomber (the pilot had broken an order of General de Lattre by taking me) which attacked the Viet Minh post and I was on the patrol of the Foreign Legion paras outside Phat Diem. I still retain the sharp image of the dead child couched in the ditch beside his dead mother. The very neatness of their bullet wounds made their death more disturbing than the indiscriminate massacre in the canals around

 ***Relevance to contemporary readers***

**Australia and Vietnam**

Vietnam has played an important part in recent Australian history. Few Australians would have given a thought to events there at the time when *The Quiet American* was first published. Many would not even have been sure where Vietnam was. Only ten years later, however, Australians were confronted with the then government’s decision to send troops to fight alongside the United States and South Vietnam in their war against the communists. For the duration of the war, events in Vietnam were closely followed by many Australians. Our involvement in the war sparked protests and strongly influenced domestic politics. The government of the day frequently referred to the ‘Domino Theory’ which Pyle starts to outline to Fowler. “If Indo- China goes” (p.95), he begins, and he would have gone on to say that if that happened, all the other countries in the region would have ‘gone’, too, that is, fallen to communism. The ‘domino theory’ became a favourite notion of nervous Western governments regarding the spread of communism. In the Asian and South-East Asian region, it was feared that if communism were allowed to take over one country, it would start a domino effect, and all others would fall to communism one by one as a result. This theory was whole-heartedly embraced by Australian governments from the 1950s, perhaps from as early as the late 1940s. Australians were told that events in Vietnam had a vital bearing on our national security. The young Australians serving there in the 1960s and early 1970s were victims of mistaken policy just as much as were the young French soldiers in the war that Graham Greene witnessed pp.164-165. In the late 1970s, Australians were confronted with the challenge posed by the arrival of the many Vietnamese ‘boat people’ who fled Vietnam after the communists took over in 1975. In more recent times, the sporadic arrivals of boatloads of Vietnamese refugees seeking asylum in Australia continue to attract controversy. The relative proximity of Vietnam to Australia continues to make it important to us.

**The role of the United States in the rest of the world**

Greene’s critical portrayal of America and its intervention in the affairs of other countries has aroused considerable debate. When the first version of the film, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, was released in 1958, Greene’s anti-American message was altered and the ending of the novel changed to avoid the risk of offending domestic American opinion. The release date of Phillip Noyce’s more recent film of the novel was delayed as a result of the events of 11 September, 2001, when terrorists hijacked passenger planes and flew two of them into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and a third into the Pentagon in Washington. About 3000 people were killed on the planes and in the buildings. A film linking the United States with terrorist activity was considered to be too controversial at that time. However, before the US began its full-scale involvement in Vietnam in the mid-1960s, it had also fought the Korean war to a stalemate, which occurred before *The Quiet American* was written, had overturned the democratically elected government of Guatemala and installed a puppet regime, and was meddling in Africa, playing a significant part in overturning the first democratically elected government of the Congo.

The United States’ view of itself as a paragon (model) of democracy, of which Greene is so sceptical, was again apparent when the President argued that an Iraq rid of Saddam Hussein would provide a shining model of freedom and democracy for other countries in the region. We can hear echoes of Pyle’s claims that America can bring democracy to Vietnam.

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| ***The Quiet American*** *asks the questions:*  |
| * *Do world powers like the United States have the right to intervene in the affairs of other countries, even if their intentions are good?*
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| * *Is violence ever justified, even if the ends it is designed to achieve are worthwhile?*
 |
| * *Can we, like Fowler’s assistant Dominguez, live without doing violence and harm to others?*
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We can see, then, why this novel still holds such an important place in the vast body of literature relating to the history of Vietnam since the Second World War. Later events in Vietnam made it a work of even greater interest than it would have been when it was first published. When we note the many similarities between the French war in Vietnam as described by Greene, and the later war with America, it is difficult to believe that the novel was published as early as 1955, written without the benefit of hindsight.

Apparently Greene sensed at an early stage that America’s attempt to succeed in Vietnam was doomed. In *Ways of Escape*, mentioned earlier, he describes the decisive battle of Dien Bien Phu, in which the French were defeated and forced to sue for peace. He states that it was ‘a defeat for more than the French army…The battle marked virtually the end of any hope the Western Powers might have entertained that they could dominate the East’. He goes on to say: ‘that young Americans were still to die in Vietnam only shows that it takes time for the echoes even of a total defeat to encircle the globe’.

 **The role of the war correspondent**

Central to *The Quiet American* is the role of the war correspondent, that enduring figure of the twentieth century, and now of the twenty-first century. The character of Fowler raises the question: should the war correspondent simply report the facts of the war or become more deeply involved? Fowler describes himself as *‘the reporter, not the leader-writer’* (p.119), yet as time passes he clearly becomes emotionally involved. Is such involvement avoidable for a war correspondent? Is it even desirable? Consider the role of war

Correspondents in the recent war in Iraq. Such correspondents were deliberately ‘embedded’ with the troops, an official policy designed to encourage reporting which was more favourable to the American cause.

(For an interesting report on this policy, see ‘Operation Persuasion’, the Four Corners report screened on Channel 2, 24 March, 2003.)

War photographers such as Larry Burrows and Henri Huet, both killedin the course of the later Vietnam War, deliberately set out to causean emotional reaction with their photographs from the combat zone,to show the sorrow of war. Without necessarily implying thatjournalists should be as deliberately *engagé* as this, Greene clearlyrespects Fowler’s increasing engagement in the harsh reality of thewar. And he clearly discredits, by contrast, the armchair cynicism ofGranger, who sees no need to venture near the war zone, as *“it’s only a damned colonial war anyway” (p.36).* Greene asks us to question the accuracy and authenticity of the newswe are given. Granger acidly remarks that the French have *“recaptured two villages they never told us they’d lost” (p.35*). The truth is thefirst casualty of war when the national interest is considered to be atstake; at such times, *‘the papers must carry only victories’ (p.48*).The reports from the war zone end up as sanitised versions of anhorrific reality. Fowler complains of one report which ‘bore no relationto the sad and heavy affair in the north, those canals in Phat Diemchoked with the grey days-old bodies, the pounding of the mortars,the white glare of napalm’ (p.141).More recently we have been confronted with the question: was themuch-televised toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdadthe spontaneous expression of the Iraqi people it was portrayed tobe immediately after the event or, as alleged on the internet and lateradmitted in some mainstream media, a media event staged by the Americans? A wide shot of the scene showed only a small crowd of Iraqis amid lots of US soldiers and tanks. The toppling took place outside the main media hotel in Baghdad, which had been more or less sealed off from access by Iraqis.

*Q How much of what is reported to us can we believe? How much of the instant history of modern war is really true?*

***Greene’s passion for Vietnam***

It is interesting to learn that American journalists in Vietnam after the French had left carried a copy of *The Quiet American* in their backpacks. I was interested, too, to observe that the novel was one of the books being peddled by the numerous street vendors of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) when I visited Vietnam in 2001. Indeed, it was the only English language novel widely available on the streets, a fact attesting to its reputation outside of the West. People everywhere can appreciate Greene’s passion for Vietnam itself. He wrote of falling in love with Indo-China, of drinking ‘a magic potion’ there. His novel stands as a testament to the beauty and richness of Vietnam, a country which has so often been identified only with violence, war, and misery. In *The Quiet American*, I think that Greene is saying, through Fowler, that it is better to yield to the magic, to let it work on us, rather than to interfere with it or try to improve upon it, as Pyle and the Americans do.

***Greene’s insight into human beings***

We can appreciate the novel as an exciting and dramatic narrative of the violence and tangled politics of a country at war, written by a man who experienced them at first-hand. And we can also appreciate Greene’s acute psychological insight into the complexity of human beings and of their behaviour. For Greene, the world is never black and white, but always grey and morally unclear. Like Fowler at the end of the novel, people do not always understand themselves and their own motives. And, ultimately, we cannot claim to understand each other*. ‘Wouldn’t we all do better’, asks Fowler, ‘not trying to*

*understand, accepting the fact that no human being will ever understand another, not a wife a husband, a lover a mistress, nor a parent a child?’ (p.60).*

Greene is implying that people will always surprise us and behave in ways that contradict our pre-conceived views of them. ‘The greatest saints have been men with more than normal capacity for evil’, he once wrote, ‘and the most vicious men have sometimes narrowly evaded sanctity’. *The Quiet American* reminds us that the simplistic notions of good and evil, right and wrong — popular concepts in Western thought — fail to tell us the truth about human beings. For more on this theme, you might like to read Greene’s novels *The Heart of the Matter* and *The Power and the Glory*.

In Fowler, Greene has created a character with a complex personality, which is revealed little by little as the narrative develops.

***Graham Greene himself***

Graham Greene had an insatiable hunger for adventure which took him to many trouble spots in the world, including, of course, Vietnam. His travels provided the background material for a number of his novels. Greene’s biographer, Norman Sherry, wrote of Greene’s

‘obsessive need to escape from the creeping boredom of everyday life’. He was always looking for ‘ways of escape’. There is much of Graham Greene in Thomas Fowler’s dislike for the banality of domestic life in London. Unhappiness in marriage and guilt over adultery caused Greene much suffering; he confessed that he was a bad husband and an unreliable lover. In *The Quiet American*, Fowler is much the same. Greene was an extremely private person who never revealed his extra-marital affairs in his two autobiographies; he seems to have dealt with his concern over them through the characters in his novels.

Another of Fowler’s problems shared by Greene was a sense of personal despair that he had to struggle to contain. From an early age, Greene was troubled by thoughts of suicide. As an adolescent boy, he physically harmed himself. In *The Quiet American*, Fowler claims that he has come to Vietnam because it is a dangerous country where he might be killed. Perhaps similar thoughts, conscious or unconscious, were driving Greene. In coping with these personal anxieties, Greene found comfort in his Catholic faith. That faith’s strong instruction against suicide in any circumstances probably helped Greene keep temptation at bay. As

with Fowler, reflections on the question of religion and the search for meaning in life were at the forefront of Greene’s mind. Although Fowler is an unbeliever, he often seems to hunger for belief, and thoughts about man’s place in the universe are always close to the

surface of his mind. Greene was fascinated by the world of disguise and espionage.

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| The Quiet American |
| From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia |
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***The Quiet American*** is an anti-war novel by British author [Graham Greene](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graham_Greene), first published in [United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) in 1955 and in the United States in 1956. It was adapted into [films](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film) in 1958 and 2002. The book draws on Greene's experiences as a [war correspondent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_correspondent) for [*The Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Times) and [*Le Figaro*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Figaro) in [French Indochina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Indochina) 1951–1954. He was apparently inspired to write *The Quiet American* in October 1951 while driving back to [Saigon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saigon) from the [Ben Tre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Tre) province. He was accompanied by an American aid worker who lectured him about finding a “third force in [Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam)”. Greene spent three years writing the novel, which foreshadowed US involvement in Vietnam long before it became publicly known. The book was the initial reason for Graham Greene being under constant surveillance by US intelligence agencies from the 1950s until his death in 1991, according to documents obtained in 2002 by [*The Guardian*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Guardian) under the US [Freedom of Information Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_Information_Act_%28United_States%29).[[1]](file:///F%3A%5CYEAR%2012%20ENGLISH%5CThe_Quiet_American.htm#cite_note-0)[[2]](file:///F%3A%5CYEAR%2012%20ENGLISH%5CThe_Quiet_American.htm#cite_note-1) |
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Plot |
| Thomas Fowler is a British [journalist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journalist) in his fifties who has been covering the [French war in Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Indochina_War) for over two years. He meets a young American idealist named Alden Pyle, who lives his life and forms his opinions based on the books written by York Harding, with no real experience in matters of south-east Asia at all. Harding's theory is that Communism or colonialism are not the answer in foreign lands like [Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam), but rather a "Third Force," usually a combination of traditions, works best. Pyle is young and idealistic. When Pyle and Fowler first meet, Pyle says he would be delighted if Fowler could help him understand more about the country. Fowler is much older, more realistic and more cynical. |
| Fowler has a live-in lover, Phuong, who is only twenty-years old and was a dancer at The Arc-en-Ciel (Rainbow) on Jaccareo Road, Cholon, until she met Fowler. Her sister's intent is to arrange a marriage for Phuong that will be of benefit to her and her family. The sister disapproves of their relationship as Fowler is already married and an atheist. So, at a dinner with Fowler and Phuong, Pyle meets Phuong's sister who immediately starts questioning Pyle about his viability for marriage with Phuong. Towards the end of the dinner Pyle dances with Phuong, and Fowler notes how poorly he dances. |
| Fowler goes to the city to cover a battle there. Pyle travels there to tell him that he has been in love with Phuong since the first night he saw her, and that he wants to marry her. They make a toast to nothing and Pyle leaves the next day. Fowler gets a letter from Pyle thanking him for being so nice. The letter annoys Fowler because of Pyle's arrogant confidence that Phuong will choose to leave Fowler to marry him. Meanwhile, Fowler's editor wants him to transfer back to England. |
| Pyle comes to Fowler's place and they ask Phuong to choose between them. She chooses Fowler, her lover of two years. She does not know that he is up for a transfer. Fowler writes to his wife to ask for a divorce in front of Phuong. |
| Fowler and Pyle meet again in a war zone. They end up in a tower, and their discussion topics range from their sexual experiences to religion. As they escape, Pyle saves Fowler's life. Fowler goes back to Saigon where he lies to Phuong that his wife will divorce him. Pyle exposes the lie and Phuong moves in with Pyle. After receiving a letter from Fowler, his editor decides that he can stay in Indo-China for at least another year. Fowler goes into the midst of the battlefield to cover the unfolding events. |
| When Fowler returns to [Saigon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saigon), he goes to Pyle's office to confront him but Pyle is out. Pyle comes over later for drinks and they talk about his upcoming marriage to Phuong. Later that week, a car bomb is detonated and many innocent civilians are killed from the blast. Fowler puts the pieces together and realizes that Pyle is behind the bombing. Realising that Pyle is causing innocent people to die, Fowler takes part in an assassination plot against him. Although the police believe that Fowler is involved, they cannot prove anything. Phuong goes back to Fowler as if nothing had ever happened. In the last chapter Fowler receives a telegram from his wife in which she states that she has changed her mind and that she will start divorce proceedings. The novel ends with Fowler reflecting on his first meeting with Phuong, and the death of Pyle. |
| Major characters |
| **Thomas Fowler** is a British journalist in his fifties who has been covering the French war in Vietnam for over two years. He has become a very jaded and cynical man. He meets Alden Pyle and finds him naïve. Throughout the book Fowler is often caught in lies and sometimes there may be speculation that he is lying to himself. Fowler’s relationship with Vietnamese woman Phuong often fuels the conflict in the story, especially between Fowler and Pyle. Fowler is also used as a metaphor to describe the character. The word foul is relatively similar to his last name and connections can be made about the character's actions in the book. |
| **Alden Pyle** is the "quiet American" of the title. Pyle is thoughtful, soft-spoken, intellectual, serious, and idealistic. He comes from a privileged East Coast background. His father is a renowned professor of underwater erosion who has appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine; his mother is well respected in their community. Pyle is a brilliant graduate of Harvard University. He has studied theories of government and society, and is particularly devoted to a scholar named York Harding. Harding's theory is that neither Communism nor colonialism is the answer in foreign lands like Vietnam, but rather a "Third Force", usually a combination of traditions, works best. Pyle has read Harding's numerous books many times and has adopted Harding's thinking as his own. Pyle also strives to be a member of this "Third Force". U.S. military counter-insurgency expert [Edward Lansdale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Lansdale), who was stationed in Vietnam 1953-1957, is sometimes incorrectly cited as a model for Pyle's character.[[3]](file:///F%3A%5CYEAR%2012%20ENGLISH%5CThe_Quiet_American.htm#cite_note-World-2) |
| **Phuong**, Fowler’s lover at the beginning of the novel, is a beautiful young Vietnamese woman who stays with him for security and protection, and leaves him for the same reason. She is viewed by Fowler as a lover to be taken for granted and by Pyle as a delicate flower to be protected, but Greene never makes clear which, if either, of these views is actually the truth. Pyle's desire for Phuong was largely interpreted by critics to parallel his desire for a non-communist South Vietnam. Her character is never fully developed or revealed. Some[[*who?*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3AAvoid_weasel_words)] say she was intentionally underdeveloped by Graham Greene in order to symbolize the silence of her country, Vietnam. She is never able to show her emotions, as her older sister makes decisions for her. She is named after, but not based on, a Vietnamese friend of Greene's.[[4]](file:///F%3A%5CYEAR%2012%20ENGLISH%5CThe_Quiet_American.htm#cite_note-3) |
| **Vigot**, a French inspector at the [Sûreté](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%BBret%C3%A9), investigates Pyle's death. He is a man torn between doing his duty (pursuing Pyle's death and questioning Fowler) and doing what is best for the country (letting the matter go). He and Fowler are oddly akin in some ways, both faintly cynical and weary of the world; hence their discussion of [Blaise Pascal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blaise_Pascal). But they are divided by the differences in their faith: Vigot is a Roman Catholic and Fowler an atheist. |
| Literary significance and reception |
| After its publication in the U.S. in 1956, the novel was widely condemned as anti-American. It was criticized by *The New Yorker* for portraying Americans as murderers, largely based on one scene in which a bomb explodes in a crowd of people. According to critic Philip Stratford, “American readers were incensed, perhaps not so much because of the biased portrait of obtuse and destructive American innocence and idealism in Alden Pyle, but because in this case it was drawn with such acid pleasure by a middle-class English snob like Thomas Fowler whom they were all too ready to identify with Greene himself”.[[5]](file:///F%3A%5CYEAR%2012%20ENGLISH%5CThe_Quiet_American.htm#cite_note-4) However, it was popular in England and over the years has achieved notable status, being adapted into [films in 1958](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Quiet_American_%281958_film%29) and [most recently in 2002](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Quiet_American_%282002_film%29) by Miramax, starring [Michael Caine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Caine) and [Brendan Fraser](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brendan_Fraser) and earning the former a Best Actor nomination. |