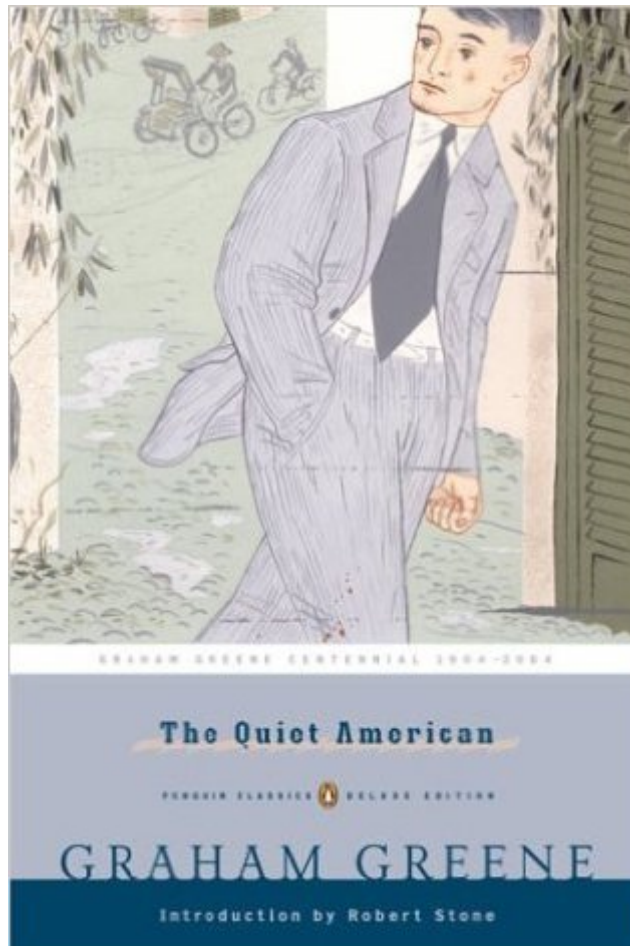


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The Quiet American (Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition)



Synopsis

Graham Greene's classic exploration of love, innocence, and morality in Vietnam "I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused," Graham Greene's narrator Fowler remarks of Alden Pyle, the eponymous "Quiet American" of what is perhaps the most controversial novel of his career. Pyle is the brash young idealist sent out by Washington on a mysterious mission to Saigon, where the French Army struggles against the Vietminh guerrillas. As young Pyle's well-intentioned policies blunder into bloodshed, Fowler, a seasoned and cynical British reporter, finds it impossible to stand safely aside as an observer. But Fowler's motives for intervening are suspect, both to the police and himself, for Pyle has stolen Fowler's beautiful Vietnamese mistress. Originally published in 1956 and twice adapted to film, *The Quiet American* remains a terrifying and prescient portrait of innocence at large. This Graham Greene Centennial Edition includes a new introductory essay by Robert Stone. For more than sixty-five years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,500 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

I can honestly say that I've spent more time thinking about the events of Graham Greene's *THE QUIET AMERICAN* than of any other book I've read in months. In short, this is the story of

America's involvement in Vietnam, full stop. Astounding is the fact that this was written between 1952 and 1955, yet can serve as a metaphor for almost two further decades of US involvement in that region. This is no simple tale, although it can be read as one. It works on many different levels. In its simplest form, this is a story about two foreigners in Indo-China: a middle-aged British reporter, and a young idealistic American. They involve themselves in two main plots: one concerning the French Army's battle with the Vietminh, and the second, concerning the two men's relationship with a native woman and the subsequent fight for her affections. On this level, *THE QUIET AMERICAN* works as an effective thriller. Who is the mysterious "third force" that Pyle, the American, is aiding? Why is he even there, and why is he providing aid to this group? Will Fowler, the British journalist, abandon his policy of neutrality and enter into the conflict? Who will end up with the girl at the end? But there are all sorts of other subtexts and subtleties going on here. Pyle isn't just "the quiet American"; he is America -- at least as far as the US's involvement in Vietnam is concerned. And the difference in age between Pyle and Fowler is no random chance. Fowler is the older man; his country has already had its expansionist, colonial period. Fowler already knows what it's like to get one's fingers burnt interfering in other people's conflicts. But Pyle won't be told. He's the young inexperienced man who has to find out for himself -- to the detriment of everyone. This isn't just a simplistic "America = idealistic, good-hearted, but naive" or "England = experienced, weary, and impotent" view of the world. While Greene builds on several stereotypes of the Old and the New Worlds, he goes much farther beyond that. Both men desire Phuong (the Vietnamese woman), but for starkly different reasons. The woman's own interests are kept to herself deliberately. We learn far more about Pyle and Fowler simply by the way in which they view the woman. On a purely personal level, the characterization is heart-wrenching. When looked at on a national level as far as what the two men represent, it is amazingly thought provoking. After reading *THE QUIET AMERICAN*, I kept replaying and rethinking a number of its scenes and breaking down the characters as much as I could. There is a lot going on here, and much of what Greene wrote about wouldn't fully come into being for a number of years after the book's publication. There are many layers of subtleties occurring in this book's pages, and while I'm certain that I have not yet caught them all, it is not through a lack of interest. This is a very powerful book, and should be on everyone's "To Read" list.

Only the great Graham Greene could have written a story that is as wry and understated as it is prophetic. "The Quiet American" captures several different attitudes during Vietnam's transition from French colonial occupation to American "involvement". In this novel the French do what they do

best, namely they undertake a hopeless struggle and experience painful defeat. The Americans enter the scene with grandiose plans, tons of money, and utterly no sense of reality. The Vietnamese are, of course, hard-edged and practical, while the lone Englishman-God bless him-is the epitome of dying yet dignified colonialism. For those of you who haven't read the book, it's both an odd love story and a metaphor for American involvement in Vietnam. The hero, Fowler is a washed up, middle aged, English war correspondent, content with his opium pipe and his Vietnamese mistress, Phuong. His world is gradually disrupted by the arrival of an American covert operative named Pyle who is both a zealous ideologue and a naïve optimist. Things get complicated when Pyle steals Phuong away from Fowler, yet attempts to remain friends with him. The normally indifferent Fowler soon becomes morally repulsed by Pyle's seemingly well intended terrorist activities, and gradually becomes politically involved. By the time Fowler helps to engineer Pyle's murder it is unclear even to him whether he is doing so to help the Vietnamese people or to win Phuong back. "The Quiet American" explores several different concepts. Like many of Greene's novels and short stories it examines the peculiar morality of love. Fowler and Phuong form a strange symbiosis. Fowler is estranged from his English wife, and is old enough to be Phuong's father. His affection for her is unabashedly sexual and certainly not made for day time TV in the U.S. Phuong's attachment to both Fowler and Pyle is based more on practical reasons than on love. Greene never passes judgement any of the trio. And when Fowler wins Phuong back in the end, he is left-like so many of us-with a lingering doubt about his motives and actions. Equally interesting is Greene's exploration of the politics of Southeast Asia in the 1950s and particularly, the shifting balance of power from European colonialism to American military and economic involvement. Pyle, who is probably based on the real life American operative, Lansdale devoutly worships the books of an intellectual whose thinking bears strong resemblance to that of George Kennan. As the French wrap up their losing streak, the Americans enter the scene with blind stupidity, you can't help but cringe at disaster to come. I loved this book for its intelligent grasp of love and politics. Like many of Greene's other works, this one contains a genius for characterization.

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