The Quiet American

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GRAHAM GREENE

Graham Greene was born in Hertfordshire to a prominent local family: his father was a housemaster (administrator) at a prestigious local boarding school, and his mother was one of the owners of the famous Greene King Brewery company. Greene was a heavy drinker and a devout Catholic from an early age—two qualities that he passed on to most of his protagonists. Greene studied at Oxford, where he experimented with Communism, a doctrine that he ultimately rejected. He was lonely and depressed at Oxford, but devoted himself to writing poetry and short fiction. After graduating, he worked as a journalist for a variety of English and Irish publications. His first successful novel was his fourth, *Stamboul Train* (1932). An "adventure yarn," *Stamboul Train* was highly popular, and inspired Greene to write a long series of skillful but "lowbrow" entertainments, such as *Our Man in Havana* (1958) and *The Third Man* (1949). In his early 30s, Greene was recruited to work for MI6, the United Kingdom's espionage agency (the rough counterpart of the CIA in America). As an MI6 agent, Greene traveled to many countries around the world—including Cuba, Liberia, Mexico, Vietnam, and Haiti—and reported on the state of society. Though Greene was rarely in any serious danger during these missions, they inspired him to write novels of espionage and intrigue, including *The Quiet American*. Greene's masterpiece, *The Power and the Glory* (1940), was inspired by his travels through Mexico. Greene lived an exceptionally long life, and continued to write prolifically well into his 80s. He was often considered a contender for the Nobel Prize in Literature, but he never won it (after his death, it was revealed that Greene had been nominated for the prize four times). He died in 1991 of leukemia.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The central historical event connected to *The Quiet American* is the conflict in Vietnam. Throughout the 19th century, the country now known as Vietnam was a part of French Indochina, a huge colonial territory spanning Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and parts of China. The French influence on Vietnam can still be seen in the region today, particularly in the city of Saigon, where *The Quiet American* takes place. In 1945, the northern areas of Vietnam, organized by the charismatic Communist leader Ho Chi Minh, declared independence from French Indochina. Over the next decade and a half, the French military, already severely weakened by World War II, tried to hang on to its colonial outposts in Vietnam—a source of enormous wealth for France. It was believed that the rise of Communism in French Indochina would start a "chain reaction" (alluded to several times in *The Quiet American*) of Communist regimes in the region—a hypothesis known as the "Domino Theory" in the United States. Because the government of the United States opposed the spread of Communism in the Third World, it sent military aid to the French forces in Vietnam. This process began during the early years of the Eisenhower regime—a time during which Greene was living in Vietnam, reporting on the *status quo*. Conspicuously absent from the political conflict in Indochina was the United Kingdom, which had lost the vast majority of its colonial territories during World War II. It's possible to read *The Quiet American* as an allegory for the historical changes in the world during the early 1950s: the United Kingdom (symbolized by Thomas Fowler) was losing its power, America (symbolized by Alden Pyle) was quickly becoming the world's preeminent superpower, and Vietnam (symbolized, arguably, by Phuong Hei) was struggling to decide what path to choose for itself. Even Greene would have been amazed to see how the conflict in Vietnam grew in the two decades after he published *The Quiet American*, however—the United States became the sole foreign power still fighting in Vietnam, fighting a long, bloody war with the Northern Vietnamese forces.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The archetype of the virtuous Westerner who "goes native" when he travels into the exotic East hardly begins with Alden Pyle in *The Quiet American*. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1900) offers perhaps the most famous example of this archetype via the character of Colonel Kurtz, who "goes native" when he travels to the Congo. Kurtz, the product of a luxurious upbringing and a fine education, may have influenced Greene's portrayal of Alden Pyle. It's worth noting that Greene, a lifelong Catholic, is profoundly influenced by the teachings of the Holy Bible: his account of guilt, forgiveness, and the self-inflicted punishment of sin emanates from a belief in the fundamental tenets of Catholicism. *The Quiet American* also reflects the growing number of dark, morally ambiguous spy novels that emerged in the years following World War II. In these works, good and evil aren't easily distinguishable, and the protagonist's allies often devolve into enemies before becoming allies once again. Arguably the master of this genre is John le Carré (like Greene, an MI6 agent turned novelist), whose books include *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* and *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Quiet American*

- **Where Written:** French Indochina and the United Kingdom
- **When Published:** December 1955
- **Literary Period:** Cold War spy novels
- **Genre:** Spy novel, thriller, war novel
- **Setting:** Vietnam, mid-1950s
- **Climax:** The death of Alden Pyle (an event that's never directly described in the novel)
- **Antagonist:** General Thé / York Harding
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Greene and the movies: Although Graham Greene was a great novelist, many of his readers don't realize that he was an equally accomplished screenwriter. To date, more than 60 of Greene's works have been adapted for the screen (*The Quiet American* alone has been adapted twice!), many of them featuring screenplays written by Greene himself. Green was nominated for an Academy Award for his screenplay for the 1948 film *The Fallen Idol*, adapted from his short story, *The Basement Room*. Greene's greatest cinematic achievement is arguably his screenplay for *The Third Man* (1949), Carol Reed's classic film noir. The film won the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival and is often listed as one of the greatest films ever made.

Second comes right after first: During his lifetime, Greene was one of the most popular authors on the planet. His writing style—short, declarative sentences, drenched in irony and world-weariness—became so well-known that in 1949, the British magazine the *New Statesman* held a Graham Greene contest, in which contestants were asked to submit brief parodies of Greene's writing style. Greene himself submitted a parody of his own style under the pseudonym N. Wilkinson. For his efforts, he was awarded second place.

PLOT SUMMARY

We begin in Vietnam in the 1950s, at the height of the tension between French colonialism and local Vietnamese Communism. Thomas Fowler, a middle-aged English reporter, lives in Saigon with his ex-lover, Phuong Hei. Fowler is waiting for Alden Pyle, the young American for whom Phuong has left Fowler. After hours of waiting, a police officer calls Fowler in to the police station, where Fowler learns that Pyle has been killed and thrown under a bridge. The police inspector, Vigot, suspiciously asks Fowler what he knows about Pyle and Pyle's death. Although Fowler explains very little to Vigot, he privately remembers his relationship with Pyle, noting that Pyle, an agent for the American government, was responsible for at least fifty deaths in Vietnam. The novel then unfolds largely in flashbacks.

Fowler remembers meeting Pyle at a bar. Pyle is young, handsome, and quiet—altogether unlike most of the Americans Fowler knew in Vietnam. Pyle works for the Economic Aid Mission, an American institution that tries to promote economic security in Vietnam. Pyle subscribes to the ideas of the political thinker York Harding, who believed that Vietnam and other Eastern nations needed a Third Force—neither colonialism nor Communism. Fowler finds Pyle naïve, but thinks that there's something charming and endearing about his boyishness.

Shortly thereafter, Fowler and Phuong, who are still lovers at this time, go to the Continental Hotel to drink and dance. That night, Fowler thinks about his turbulent relationship with Phuong. She is much younger than he, and her sister, Miss Hei, is irritated with him for being unable to marry Phuong—Fowler is married to a woman, Helen Fowler, in England. At the hotel, Fowler is surprised to find Pyle, whom he greets. Pyle, Fowler, and Phuong move on to the Chalet, another local establishment, where Pyle, who speaks bad French, politely asks Phuong to dance. Pyle is a poor dancer, but his gallantry makes Fowler conscious of his own age and coarseness.

A few days after Pyle meets Phuong, Fowler flies out of Saigon to Phat Diem, a town where, it's rumored, there have been Communist attacks and bombings. In Phat Diem, Fowler stays with the Lieutenant, a well-trained military officer who shows Fowler evidence of incredible violence and destruction. Fowler is reminded that he'll probably be forbidden to publish any information about Phat Diem, since all journalistic dispatches are rigorously censored. During his time with the Lieutenant, Fowler admits that he no longer believes in God, and in fact distrusts many aspects of his Christian faith.

While Fowler is staying in Phat Diem, Pyle visits him. Fowler learns, amazed, that Pyle has tracked Fowler down in only a few days. Pyle explains that he's fallen in love with Phuong, and that he wants to be honest with Fowler, since they're "best friends." Fowler is highly irritated by Pyle's manner—he senses that Pyle thinks he's going to "win" Phuong in the end, because he's younger and handsomer. Pyle leaves Fowler after less than a day. Before he returns to Saigon, Fowler tells his old friend, Pietri, that he's planning to return to England.

Several weeks after his encounter with Pyle, Fowler meets with Pyle and Phuong to discuss their romantic conflict. Pyle asks Fowler to tell Phuong, in French, that he loves her and wants to live with her, and Fowler does so. Phuong is silent, and Pyle and Fowler argue about their affections for her. Fowler claims, falsely, that he's staying in Vietnam, and that he's getting a divorce from his wife. Suddenly, Phuong speaks: "No," she says. With this, Pyle leaves, acknowledging that Phuong has chosen Fowler over him.

Weeks later, Fowler journeys outside Saigon to attend a festival

sponsored by the Caodaists, a religious and political group, led by the mysterious General Thé. The Caodaists fight against both the French colonialists and the native Communists. While he's at the festival, Fowler encounters Pyle, who's polite and warm to Fowler. Fowler offers to give Pyle a lift back to Saigon, but during the drive, their car runs out of gas.

Fowler and Pyle walk away from their car, reasoning that they can find more gasoline in one of the nearby French outposts. Fowler leads Pyle over the walls of one such fortress, where they find two Vietnamese guards, who say and do nothing—Fowler reminds Pyle that, as "disinterested" English speakers, they can largely float through Vietnam without any trouble. Pyle succeeds in taking one of the guards' guns, and he and Fowler spend the night talking about Phuong, their sexual inadequacies, and York Harding's mysterious Third Force, which Pyle believes to be embodied by General Thé.

Late in the night, Fowler and Pyle hear cries and shots—the Vietminh are attacking a nearby French fortress. Suddenly, there is the sound of a megaphone outside their own fortress. Fowler guesses that the Vietminh have found his car, and are telling the two guards to send down their English-speaking guests. Pyle quickly disarms the remaining guard and hands his gun to Fowler; together, they sneak down from the fort and away from the Vietminh. During the descent, Fowler hurts his leg badly and nearly dies after the Vietminh fire a bazooka at the fort. Pyle bravely carries Fowler away from the fort, and promises him that he's going to find help. Fowler curses Pyle and tells him to leave him for dead, but within a few hours, Pyle has found a French patrol, which takes both of them to safety.

A few days after his adventure at the fort, Fowler has been discharged from the hospital with a pronounced limp. He reunites with Phuong, who informs him that he's received a telegram from his wife. In the telegram, Helen tells Fowler that she refuses to grant him a divorce, and that she suspects he'll get tired of Phuong soon enough. Fowler smokes **opium** with Phuong, and lies to her, saying that Helen has agreed to the divorce.

Fowler receives a tip from his loyal informant, Dominguez, that he should go to a warehouse owned by Mr. Chou and Mr. Heng. At the warehouse, Fowler finds plastic mouldings, which, Heng explains, Pyle has sent for processing. Fowler is unsure what Pyle is planning.

Afterwards, Fowler meets Pyle, and Pyle has discovered that Fowler was lying about his divorce. Phuong's sister, Miss Hei, who understands English, learned that Fowler had failed to get the divorce from Helen. Fowler cheerfully acknowledges his deceptions, and reminds Pyle that lies and deception are his only weapons against a younger, handsomer man. Pyle accuses Fowler of manipulating Phuong for sex. Fowler insists that while he's only using Phuong for her body, she's old enough to make up her own mind what she wants.

Jumping forward to two weeks after Pyle's death, Fowler visits Vigot. Fowler insists that he's not *engagé*—in other words, he's not politically involved with either side in Vietnam. Nevertheless, Vigot insists, Fowler *has* chosen sides. Privately, Fowler thinks that he's a suffering prisoner with a life sentence.

The narrative moves back to the weeks after Pyle discovers Fowler's deceptions. Phuong spends more and more time with Pyle, and sees Fowler only rarely. One day, Dominguez tells Fowler to look for a story at the fountain in the center of Saigon. Fowler goes there and witnesses a huge explosion. Mr. Heng, who's also present, tells Fowler that the mouldings Fowler saw at his warehouse were used to trigger explosions across Saigon. Heng stresses that he's only doing his job as a manufacturer, selling his services to the highest bidder.

Fowler returns to his home to discover that Phuong has moved out altogether. He runs to the American Legation, where Pyle works, to find Phuong's sister, Miss Hei, working as a typist. She informs him that Pyle is "working from home," and Fowler deduces that he's at home with Phuong. Alone, Fowler weeps for the first time in years.

Fowler leaves Saigon and goes north to report on the escalating war. He witnesses French airplanes bombing innocent civilian areas, and talks with a French officer, Captain Trouin, who tells him that the French are destined to lose the war in Vietnam. Fowler tries to have sex with a prostitute, but his memories of Phuong are so strong that he finds he can't perform in bed.

Returning to Saigon, Fowler meets with Pyle, who tells him that he and Phuong are going to be married in the United States. Fowler feels a flash of sympathy for Phuong, who'll be out of her element in a new country. He asks Pyle to keep Phuong's interests in mind, and adds that he must not align himself with General Thé. He also accuses Pyle of planning the bicycle bombing, an accusation that Pyle doesn't deny.

A few weeks later, there is another bombing in a heavily colonial part of Saigon. Women and their babies are killed. Fowler, who is walking through the area when the explosion occurs, sees Pyle, and berates him for being so indifferent to human life. Pyle admits that he planned the bombing in order to eliminate some dangerous colonial officials, and didn't count on killing others.

Once more we "flash forward" to the aftermath of Pyle's death. Fowler meets with Vigot once again, and tells him that it was York Harding who killed Pyle, albeit from a "long range." Vigot presses Fowler for more details of Pyle's death, and Fowler insists that he knows nothing about it. After Vigot leaves, Fowler thinks that he *did*, in fact, see Pyle on the night that he died, contrary to what he's just told Vigot.

Shortly after explosion, Fowler goes to Heng and Chou's warehouse again, and tells them that Fowler is responsible for killing babies. Heng nods and tells Fowler that they'll deal with Pyle soon enough. Heng tells Fowler to invite Pyle to dinner at

the Vieux Moulin between 8:30 and 9:30. Before Howler leaves, Heng tells him, "One has to take sides. If one is to remain human."

Fowler invites Pyle to his flat. There, Fowler thanks Pyle for saving his life, but reiterates that Pyle is a fool for using York Harding to enact terrorist policies. Pyle insists that the dead Vietnamese have died for a noble cause. Fowler invites Pyle to dinner, as Heng has requested, and Pyle agrees to come.

On the night that he's supposed to meet Pyle for dinner, Fowler goes to a movie and then walks to the Vieux Moulin. There, Fowler encounters a coarse American reporter, Bill Granger, who tells Fowler that his son is sick with polio. They part, uncertainly, and Fowler wonders what has become of Pyle that night.

The final chapter takes place after Pyle's death. Phuong has returned to Fowler, and Helen has finally granted Fowler his divorce. Even Granger's child has recovered from his polio. Fowler realizes that his life has gotten much better since Pyle's death. Nevertheless, he's still suspicious that Phuong is more in love with Pyle—and America—than with him. He wishes there were someone to whom he could say, "I'm sorry."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Thomas Fowler – The protagonist and narrator of *The Quiet American*, Thomas Fowler is a cynical, middle-aged English journalist who has been reporting on the military conflict in Vietnam for more than two years. An experienced journalist who knows how to maneuver his way through the complicated bureaucracy of the French military, Fowler prides himself on not being *engagé*—in other words, being neutral to the political and military conflicts in the region—but as the novel proceeds, his claims seem less and less true. Fowler is cynical, virtually atheistic, and laconic, and seems perfectly willing to lie and manipulate to get his way. In this way, he succeeds in dissuading his young rival, Alden Pyle, from competing for the affections of his lover, Phuong Hei, at least for a brief time. Despite Fowler's veneer of cynicism and indifference, it ultimately becomes clear that he is *engagé*, both morally and politically. In the end, Greene shows that Fowler is caught in an unresolvable dilemma: he's amoral enough to conspire in the murder of Alden Pyle, but also moral enough to feel tremendously guilty about his actions.

Alden Pyle – Alden Pyle is young, highly idealistic, and romantic—the titular quiet American. A professor's son, Pyle has led a gentle, intellectual life in Boston and at Harvard University, where he first encounters the writings of his intellectual hero, York Harding. Inspire to enact sweeping political change abroad, he joins the American Secret Service and travels to Vietnam. Pyle shows himself to be capable of immense honor and bravery—once saving Fowler's life by carrying him away from an explosion—as well as enormous callousness and brutality. Pyle's faith in his ideals—the mysterious Third Force that Harding celebrates—is so great that he can justify any action—even the murder of babies—if he believes that it will lead to the realization of his political goals. Pyle is often condescending to individual people, since he believes that ideas are more important than lives. At one point, he argues that the Vietnamese are like children, and must be brought into "adulthood" with violence and revolution. As Pyle competes with Fowler for the affections of Phuong Hei, Fowler discovers that Pyle is conspiring with General Thé to blow up buildings throughout Saigon. This discovery, along with Fowler's jealousy over Pyle's relationship with Phuong, leads Fowler to play an important part in Pyle's death.

Phuong Hei – Phuong Hei is a young, beautiful Vietnamese woman, for whom Thomas Fowler and Alden Pyle compete throughout *The Quiet American*. Although Fowler and Pyle often treat her as an "object"—a prize to be fought over—Greene suggests that Phuong is an intelligent, motivated woman, capable of making up her own mind about the political climate in Vietnam, as well as her feelings for the two men in her life. Because the novel is narrated by Fowler, Greene gives us limited access to Phuong's thoughts and feelings, and ultimately, she's a mystery to us.

General Thé – An enigmatic Vietnamese military commander, General Thé uses violence and cruelty to achieve his political aims, but it's never made clear what these aims *are*. Thé becomes an object of great fascination for Alden Pyle, the young idealist who believes that Thé represents the Third Force prophesized by York Harding. In the end, Greene doesn't explain to us whether Thé is a noble idealist, as Pyle thinks, or a brutal "bandit," as Fowler suspects.

Helen Fowler – Thomas Fowler's wife Helen Fowler appears in the novel through the letters she sends her husband from England. She is a Roman Catholic, and thus unwilling to grant Fowler the divorce he requests—but her letters offer unique insights into Fowler's personality. Even when Fowler lies to himself about his love for Phuong, Helen cleverly points out the truth about his relationship with Phuong—a truth that Fowler himself hadn't realized. Ironically, Helen *does* finally grant Fowler a divorce at the end of the novel—but had she done so only a few months earlier, most of the important events in the novel, including Pyle's death, might not have occurred.

York Harding – An influential intellectual and author of **The Role of the West**, a book idolized by Alden Pyle. York Harding believes that the proper "path" for Third World Countries must be neither Communism nor colonialism, but rather a mysterious Third Force (yet it's never explained what form this "Force" takes). Harding plays a huge role in compelling Pyle to use violence to enact political change—indeed, Fowler blames Harding for Pyle's death.

Mr. Heng – A Vietnamese businessman and manufacturer who helps Alden Pyle build plastic explosives, but also plays an important part in ordering Pyle's death. Heng is seemingly amoral, and realistic about his position in Vietnam—he explains to Fowler that he sells his services to the highest bidder. Unlike Fowler, Heng believes that it's impossible *not* to be *engagé* in Vietnam.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Lieutenant – An experienced French military officer who escorts Fowler through Phat Diem.

The Commandant – An associate of both Pyle and General Thé.

Dominguez – Fowler's loyal informant and gatherer of facts. Throughout the novel, Dominguez is responsible for most of the discoveries that lead Fowler to realize that Pyle is behind the wave of bombings throughout Saigon.

Mr. Chou – A Vietnamese businessman and manufacturer who helps Alden Pyle build plastic explosives.

Vigot – A French police inspector and supposed friend of Fowler's, who investigates Pyle's death and seems to suspect Fowler of complicity.

Mr. Muoi – A Vietnamese manufacturer who participates in the building of Pyle's plastic explosives.

Captain Trouin – An important French officer, with whom Fowler plays cards and smokes **opium**. He seems unwilling to believe that Fowler is truly not *engagé*, arguing that everyone is "a part" of the war.

Wilkins – A journalist and friend of Fowler's.

Bill Granger – A loud, obnoxious American reporter, self-admittedly indifferent to the facts or the truth. Granger's son is suffering from polio, though by the end of the novel it seems that he will survive.

Miss Hei / Phuong's sister – Phuong's sister, Miss Hei, works as a typist in the American Legation for Alden Pyle. She's intelligent and proficient in both Vietnamese and English. She dislikes Pyle because she thinks he pays no attention to her.

Duke – Alden Pyle's loyal dog.

Pietri – A reporter and old friend of Fowler's.

Joe – An American Legation employee who works alongside Miss Hei and Alden Pyle.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

VIETNAM AND THE WEST

Set in Vietnam from 1952-1955, *The Quiet American* examines the country's colonial history and its relationship to Europe and America at that time. France colonized and controlled Vietnam from 1887 to 1954. In a brief period after World War II, the communist leader Ho Chi Minh declared independence for Vietnam from France, but British and French troops soon reasserted French colonial power. Ho Chi Minh led local communist forces from the north (Vietminh) in a fight for independence. America began to aid the local southern government in order to end French colonialism with the broader goal of establishing a locally run and democratic South Vietnamese government capable of stopping the spread of Communism. In 1954, the French gave the North Vietnamese independence, but South Vietnam and the United States rejected this agreement. *The Quiet American* focuses on the early stages of U.S. involvement in the political unrest that led to the Vietnam War. The novel explores the nuances among French, American, and British social and political relations with Vietnam.

French culture saturates Vietnamese society. French is the common language between the Vietnamese and the Westerners. Gamblers commonly play a French dice game called *Quatre Cent Vingt-et-un* (Four Hundred Twenty-One). Still, the novel highlights that many Vietnamese do not speak fluent French, pointing to the cultural clash resulting from colonialism. Alden Pyle ascribes to the ideas of the fictional political theorist York Harding and believes that the only way to ultimately thwart the communists is for the development of a "Third Force" in Vietnam, which is not communist but also not something imposed by foreign, colonialist leaders. Pyle believes the Third Force would have to combine democracy with local traditions and leaders to create strong local protection against the spread of communism.

In addition to the overt discussion of the political climate in Vietnam, Graham Greene uses the relationships between the characters Fowler (British), Pyle (American), and Phuong (Vietnamese) to mirror the relations between their respective international powers. Fowler and Pyle compete for Phuong, much like America and colonialist Europe were fighting over Vietnam. Fowler's role as a Brit is complicated, since England, a colonialist European power, was implicated in maintaining French colonial rule, and yet not directly involved. Pyle believes he knows what is best for Phuong, and Greene points to the fact that the younger, wealthier, and marriageable American would probably be the more sensible partner for Phoung. Fowler is unable to marry Phuong yet seeks the continued benefits of living with Phuong, suggesting a partnership that looks more like colonization. However, Greene never explores Phuong's desires on the matter, instead depicting her as a

willing and loyal lover of either man. The story is told through Fowler's eyes, and while he is supposed to be the suitor that better understands Phuong and Vietnam, Greene suggests that neither of the Western participants are fully aware of the thoughts or desires of the natives, and instead vie for control over it for their own purposes.

IMPARTIALITY AND ACTION

The Quiet American deals with the difficulty of remaining neutral, or impartial, despite one's intentions. Graham Greene weaves the concept of impartiality into areas of journalism, politics, and personal relationships. Fowler's profession as a journalist means he is only supposed to report on the war, not engage in it. Fowler highly values journalistic impartiality. He prefers to call himself a "reporter," rather than a journalist. To him, "reporting" suggests relaying facts about what he sees, whereas "journalism" suggests recording a journal of opinions on Vietnam. He seeks to publish an objective account of the situation in Vietnam. Moreover, though he is from the West, his British nationality and lack of affiliation with the French or American forces allows him to claim political impartiality. The novel often uses the term *engagé* to describe active political participation, and Fowler prides himself on *not* being *engagé*. However, many people tell Fowler that it is impossible not to be *engagé* and that he must take a side. Though he never admits to being *engagé*, Fowler eventually sides with the Communists to arrange Pyle's assassination, and thus demonstrates that he cannot maintain his impartiality. Contrary to Fowler's passive stance, Pyle represents an active participant in regards to the war. Pyle believes in fighting against communism and instilling democracy. Though his involvement in the war becomes clear only gradually, Fowler eventually discovers that Pyle is a C.I.A. agent providing military counter-insurgency support in the form of plastic used to conceal bombs in bicycle pumps. These bicycle pump bombs were targeted at Communist leaders.

Much of *The Quiet American* explores themes in both political relationships on an international scale and personal relationships on an individual scale. In this way, Greene applies the discussion of impartiality to Fowler's relationship to Pyle. Though Fowler often acts with passive disinterest toward Pyle, he eventually takes action against Pyle in the extreme by helping to arrange his assassination. Along with the journalistic aspect of impartiality comes the idea of investigation. In part, Fowler's journalistically investigative missions into the Vietnamese war zone guide the plot. They make Fowler hate war, contributing to his desire to remain impartial in the war. Other parts of the novel are shaped by the investigation Vigot conducts surrounding Pyle's death, in which Fowler has reluctantly become an active participant. The novel ultimately sides with the several characters who cautioned Pyle that everyone becomes *engagé* at some point. The extremity of war reaches even to civilians who wish to remain uninvolved and forces them into active participation in the war.

INEVITABILITY OF DEATH

Covering the war between the French colonialists and the communist rebels means Fowler must face death throughout the novel. And what he sees—bomb victims and slain women and children—cause Fowler to hate war. However, Fowler frets over the fact that his presence in the war, like accompanying a bombing mission that he is not even allowed to report on, makes him complicit in the death. The inevitability of death weighs heavily on Fowler. He often reflects on death as the one absolute in the world. His own old age and his frequent confrontations with death on a large scale make Fowler doubtful that anything could be considered permanent, since death is an inevitable and approaching end. His belief that nothing will be permanent brings about his passive behavior toward change. And yet, even so, he hates the change he sees coming. He is caught in a kind of stasis: he sees little point in life and claims to want to die, but is afraid of death and change. Fowler also relates his feelings about death to his feelings about relationships. Leaving his wife was a kind of cowardly death, he says. Furthermore, his happiness when with Phuong prevents him from wanting death to come. Yet, the relationship, like any for Fowler, is bittersweet because he fixates on its end, which he believes to be as inevitable as death.

Though Fowler does not kill Pyle himself, he helps arrange Pyle's assassination. Though distanced, Fowler is still actively complicit in Pyle's death, which mirrors Fowler's relationship to reporting on the war. The climate of death spurred on by the war pervades Fowler's personal life. To settle the "fight" over Phuong, Fowler resorts to assassination. The fleeting but horrid images of war dead in *The Quiet American*, coupled with its portrayal of the pervasiveness of cruelty in war, form a striking anti-war novel. While death is inevitable, as so plagues Fowler, Greene focuses on the needless casualties of war – mainly women and children – to condemn the vast toll war and the death it causes takes on individual human life and on society at large.

FRIENDSHIP, LOYALTY, AND BETRAYAL

The central relationship of the novel is the complicated one between Fowler and Pyle. Pyle wants to maintain an amiable relationship with Fowler. Initially, Pyle's youth and political views make Fowler cautious of Pyle, but Fowler also takes a liking to Pyle's blunt and innocent American charm. This complicated relationship is made more complicated when Pyle tells Fowler that he is interested in Fowler's girlfriend, Phuong, as well as by the cultural differences between them: Pyle consistently calls Fowler by his first name, Thomas, though Fowler only feels

comfortable referring to Pyle by his surname. Fowler lies to Pyle multiple times in order to make himself seem a more viable partner for Phuong. Contrastingly, Pyle lays his intentions out to Fowler very clearly, but his lack of consideration for Fowler's relationship with Phuong is as aggressive as Fowler's deceit. They admire each other, but are each also jealous of the other. Their mutual love for Phuong draws them together in a way that is extremely uncomfortable for Fowler.

The relationship between the two is very uneven. Fowler's role in Pyle's assassination demonstrates the ultimate betrayal of friendship. On the other hand, Pyle saves Fowler's life at the risk of his own, a symbol of utmost loyalty. The text shows various ways in which the artifice of friendship breaks down due to deception and betrayal. For example, Fowler tries to maintain the veneer of friendship with Vigot even as Vigot suspects him of Pyle's murder. Yet it is not loyalty or communication that can save a friendship either, as seen in the failure of Pyle's selflessness and communication to produce a successful friendship with Fowler. As in politics, Greene suggests that aligned goals are actually the most important factor in maintaining a friendship.

ROMANCE AND SEX

Fowler and Pyle's desire for Phuong prompts much discussion over differing views of intimate relationships. Fowler, an older, more experienced lover, has a more detached opinion toward relationships. He dwells on their inevitable end, yet hopes to prolong his relationship with Phuong as long as possible. He also claims to be disinterested in Phuong's feelings, only using the relationship for his own physical pleasure, but it is clear that he has deep feelings for her. It is easier for Fowler to deny his own feelings knowing that his relationship with her will likely end soon than to face the difficulties of ending an emotionally invested relationship. On the other hand, Pyle has strong emotional feelings toward Phuong, yet his upright moral background prevents him from pursuing a passionate relationship before their future together, separate from Fowler, is assured. For example, when he dances with Phuong, he maintains a distance from her that Fowler finds comical. Fowler corresponds with his wife, who lives in England. They were separated and could not maintain their marriage, but his wife's religion prohibits them from getting a divorce. Thus, Fowler cannot marry Phuong, as he is already technically married. Pyle, who has a less experienced and more traditional view of romance, believes that Fowler is doing a disservice to Phuong and that she deserves to be married.

For her part, Phuong's approach to love is practical. When Fowler asks for a kiss, for example, she pauses her story, kisses him, and resumes her story with no indication of romantic attachment. She obeys Fowler's commands and maintains a purely domestic role that mostly consists of preparing Fowler's opium pipes and having sex with him. Phuong's older sister, Miss Hei, has a financially-driven view on partnership and marriage. She heavily pressures Phuong to go with Pyle, the richer suitor, which causes anxiety for Fowler. Ultimately, both Fowler and Pyle act in a way that treats her as an object to be won rather than a human being with her own feelings. Thus, on the surface, neither Fowler nor Pyle seem to exhibit real love for Phuong. Instead, Pyle displays the excitement and desire that come with romance and Fowler focuses on the physical pleasure of sex in his relationship with Phuong. Under the surface, however, Greene suggests that each suppress their true feelings of love toward Phuong in their own way, Fowler by being detached, and Pyle by waiting for more traditionally appropriate relationship conditions (getting engaged to Phuong).

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

ALCOHOL AND OPIUM

Graham Greene was famous for his drinking, and the protagonist of *The Quiet American*, Thomas Fowler, shares this trait. At many points in the novel, other characters, particularly those who are in the military, also drink heavily or smoke opium. At the simplest level, **alcohol and opium** symbolize the "escape" with which Fowler tries to distract himself from the basic wretchedness of his situation in Vietnam: he's trapped in an unstable relationship to Phuong Hei, he's competing with Alden Pyle for her love, and, above all, he's seen incredible violence and death—without alcohol, he feels, he'd go insane. As a general rule of thumb, the characters who have experienced the greatest misery are the heaviest drinkers—alcohol represents their sadness, their trauma, and their inability to live with their own experiences and memories.

THE HELMET

An important symbol of machismo (an exaggerated sense of manliness and domination) is the **helmet** that the Lieutenant offers Thomas Fowler when he travels to Phat Diem, a dangerous war zone. Fowler confirms his machismo—and his indifference to his own life—by turning down this important protection. Later, Alden Pyle accepts the helmet, seemingly without any second thoughts. The symbolism is clear enough: Pyle is young, innocent, and optimistic—thus, he wants to live. Fowler is older, more experienced, and comes bearing more suffering. As a result, he's less interested in life itself, and therefore has little drive to continue to survive.

THE ROLE OF THE WEST

York Harding's signature book, **The Role of the West**, plays an important role in inspiring Alden Pyle to turn to violence in Vietnam. Pyle believes that it's necessary to use bombs and other brutal measures to realize Pyle's dreams of a Third Force—a new kind of government—in Vietnam. Both Greene and Fowler have great contempt for Pyle's heartless idealism, which Pyle uses to justify the murder of women and children. For Pyle, *The Role of West* is a Bible—a document of sublime, unimpeachable truth. In general, it symbolizes the possible tyranny of intellectualism and theory, and the way ideas can be used to justify evil.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Books edition of *The Quiet American* published in 2004.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

Pyle was very earnest and I had suffered from his lectures on the Far East, which he had known for as many months as I had years. Democracy was another subject of his—he had pronounced and aggravating views on what the United States was doing for the world. Phuong on the other hand was wonderfully ignorant; if Hitler had come into the conversation she would have interrupted to ask who he was. The explanation would be all the more difficult because she had never met a German or a Pole and had only the vaguest knowledge of European geography, though about Princess Margaret of course she knew more than I. I heard her put a tray down on the end of the bed.

Related Characters: Thomas Fowler (speaker), Phuong Hei, Alden Pyle

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, we're introduced to the dynamic between the three central characters of the novel, Fowler, Pyle, and Phuong. Fowler is a wise, experienced British journalist--world-weary, a heavy drinker, and, it's been suggested, a self-portrait of Greene himself. Pyle, by contrast, is young, optimistic, and energetic. He's been reading pseudo-Marxist literature, which has convinced him to use violence to install a new form of government in Vietnam, where the novel is set. Greene conveys the imbalance between Pyle and Fowler with the phrase "As many months as I had years." The message is clear: Pyle is young and naive, while Fowler is older and more realistic in his thinking.

But what about Phuong? Phuong is young and beautiful, but she's portrayed as hopelessly naive--she doesn't even know who Hitler is. One could say that Phuong is Greene's portrait of Vietnam itself: beautiful but basically ignorant of the outside world, and therefore in need of domination (in every sense of the word) from a Western figure like Fowler or Pyle. (Greene's account of Phuong has been criticized for its sexism--see Themes for more details.)

I walked back with Phuong towards my flat. I was no longer on my dignity. Death takes away vanity—even the vanity of the cuckold who mustn't show his pain.

Related Characters: Thomas Fowler (speaker), Phuong Hei, Alden Pyle

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Here Fowler contemplates the death of Alden Pyle, the young, optimistic American agent in Vietnam whom Fowler himself has had a hand in killing. The passage is illuminating because it tell us, first, that Alden and Fowler were competing for the same woman, Phuong, and second, that Pyle has died very recently.

Notice that Greene portrays Fowler as being obsessed with his appearance--he's trying, desperately, to hide his pain at Pyle's death. Furthermore, it's important to notice that Fowler seems to feel some traces of sympathy for Pyle, even though it's implied that he and Pyle were fighting over Phuong. There's an unwritten "code" of honor and respect between men in Greene's books. Fowler is no exception to the code--when Pyle is dead, he shows respect and remorse, whatever he thought of Pyle personally.

That night I woke from one of those short deep opium sleeps, ten minutes long, that seem a whole night's rest, and found my hand where it had always lain at night, between her legs. She was asleep and I could hardly hear her breathing. Once again after so many months I was not alone, and yet I thought suddenly with anger, remembering Vigot and his eye-shade in the police station and the quiet corridors of the Legation with no one about and the soft hairless skin under my hand, "Am I the only one who really cared for Pyle?"

Related Characters: Thomas Fowler (speaker), Phuong Hei, Alden Pyle

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

In the final part of the first chapter of the novel, Greene sets up the premise of the book: Fowler is remembering his experiences with Pyle, the mysterious American agent with whom Fowler had a conflicted relationship. It is Fowler's duty (as a journalist, as an older man, as a writer) to record Pyle's life--nobody else is going to do it, after all.

The passage is also strange in the way that it suggests a close relationship between Fowler and Pyle. Fowler seems almost surprised to find himself caring so deeply for Pyle, a man with whom he competed frequently. And Fowler's attitude toward Pyle exemplifies the "Greene code" of masculine behavior: there's a grudging respect between the men in Greene's novels, even if they hate one another. There's also a paternal element in Fowler's attitude toward Pyle--he thinks of himself as a reluctant father-figure to Pyle (perhaps paralleling the way that England could be considered a "father" to the United States, the countries from which the two men respectively come).

Part 1, Chapter 2, Section 1 Quotes

I liked his loyalty to Harding—whoever Harding was. It was a change from the denigrations of the Pressmen and their immature cynicism. I said, "Have another bottle of beer and I'll try to give you an idea of things."

Related Characters: Thomas Fowler (speaker), York Harding, Alden Pyle

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

This passage jumps back in time to when Fowler and Pyle first meet, and Fowler gets a sense for Alden Pyle's intellectual curiosity. Pyle is an impressionable reader--as we'll see later on, his favorite author is Harding, an intellectual who inspires him to use violence to control the people of Vietnam. At first, Fowler is intrigued by the mere fact that Pyle *is* reading--he considers Pyle's behavior a welcome contrast from the usual boorishness and cynicism Fowler notices among many foreigners in Vietnam.

It's worth noting that Fowler's admiration for Pyle has a paternal flavor--Fowler seems to see something of his younger self in Pyle (it's literature, after all, that links Fowler and Pyle together: Fowler is a writer and Pyle is a reader). Greene will revisit the paternal bond between Fowler and Pyle (who's young enough to be Fowler's son) many times.

Part 1, Chapter 3, Section 1 Quotes

"Do you think I'd really go near their stinking highway? Stephen Crane could describe a war without seeing one. Why shouldn't I? Its only a damned colonial war anyway. Get me another drink. And then let's go and find a girl. You've got a piece of tail. I want a piece of tail too."

Related Characters: Bill Granger (speaker), Phuong Hei, Alden Pyle, Thomas Fowler

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we meet Bill Granger, an obnoxious journalist with whom Fowler is totally disgusted. Granger is drunk and annoying; moreover, he's totally dismissive of the Vietnamese people, despite the fact that, like Fowler, he's been flown to Vietnam to report on the war. Granger is so unprincipled that he makes up the details of a recent news story he's written on the Vietnam War (which is still in its early stages when the novel takes place).

Granger is an important character in the novel, because he helps us understand Fowler's code of behavior more clearly. Granger and Fowler aren't really so different--they're both

drinkers, both writers, and both willing to bend the truth at times. But where Granger thinks of his writing as a mere "racket," good for making money, Fowler thinks of his writing as an almost sacred business--he'd never think of falsifying a story. Furthermore, Fowler is possessed of more respect for Vietnam itself than Granger is--Fowler has come to love a Vietnamese woman, while Granger seems interested in having sex with Vietnamese women, but nothing more.

Part 1, Chapter 3, Section 2 Quotes

"Home?" I said and laughed, and Pyle looked at me as though I were another Granger. Suddenly I saw myself as he saw me, 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, and I saw Phuong for a moment as I had seen her first, dancing past my table at the Grand Monde in a white ball-dress, eighteen years old, watched by an elder sister who had been determined on a good European marriage. An American had bought a ticket and asked her for a dance: he was a little drunk—not harmfully, and I suppose he was new to the country and thought the hostesses of the Grand Monde were whores. He held her much too close as they went round the floor the first time, and then suddenly there she was, going back to sit with her sister, and he was left, stranded and lost among the dancers, not knowing what had happened or why. And the girl whose name I didn't know sat quietly there, occasionally sipping her orange juice, owning herself completely.

Related Characters: Thomas Fowler (speaker), Phuong Hei, Bill Granger, Alden Pyle

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the love triangle between Pyle, Fowler, and Phuong first becomes clear. Somehow, the mere presence of Pyle is enough to make Fowler feel old and ugly--Pyle is so young and handsome that Fowler becomes deeply conscious of his drunkenness, his weight, etc. (he even compares himself to Granger, a man he despises).

The passage sets up the basic dynamic between Pyle and Fowler. As Greene himself acknowledged, Pyle and Fowler could be considered embodiments of their respective countries: as Greene sees it, Great Britain is a lot like Fowler--older and more experienced than the U.S., and possessed of a code of honor that an American could never quite understand--even though America is more successful in the present (as Pyle eventually wins over Phuong).

This passage also contains a remarkably poignant description of how Fowler first met Phuong and fell in love with her. Throughout the book Phuong is a rather problematic and sometimes dehumanized character, and Fowler doesn't always treat her well, but here it's suggested that he was immediately attracted to her precisely *because* of her individuality and personhood: she "owned herself completely."

From childhood I had never believed in permanence, and yet I had longed for it. Always I was afraid of losing happiness. This month, next year, Phuong would leave me. If not next year, in three years. Death was the only absolute value in my world. Lose life and one would lose nothing again for ever. I envied those who could believe in a God and I distrusted them. I felt they were keeping their courage up with a fable of the changeless and the permanent. Death was far more certain than God, and with death there would be no longer the daily possibility of love dying. The nightmare of a future of boredom and indifference would lift. I could never have been a pacifist. To kill a man was surely to grant him an immeasurable benefit. Oh yes, people always, everywhere, loved their enemies. It was their friends they preserved for pain and vacuity.

Related Characters: Thomas Fowler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

Fowler cynically considers his situation in life, and finds nothing to be happy about. He's afraid that Phuong, his young, beautiful Vietnamese girlfriend, is going to leave him for someone else (perhaps Alden Pyle). In general, Fowler is frightened by the impermanence of life itself--every happy moment fades away into sadness, given enough time.

The passage is a great example of Fowler's simultaneous cynicism and machismo--he is praising and even embracing death here. Death, he notes, is the only perfect thing in the world, because death alone never changes. One could say that Fowler--bereft of any belief in God--only focuses on death as giving life meaning. Thus he risks his life to report on the war, drinks and smokes heavily, and generally embraces the inevitability of dying.

Part 1, Chapter 4, Section 1 Quotes

❝ The canal was full of bodies: I am reminded now of an Irish stew containing too much meat. The bodies overlapped: one head, seal-grey, and anonymous as a convict with a shaven scalp, stuck up out of the water like a buoy. There was no blood: I suppose it had flowed away a long time ago. I have no idea how many there were: they must have been caught in a cross-fire, trying to get back, and I suppose every man of us along the bank was thinking, "Two can play at that game." I too took my eyes away; we didn't want to be reminded of how little we counted, how quickly, simply and anonymously death came. Even though my reason wanted the state of death, I was afraid like a virgin of the act. I would have liked death to come with due warning, so that I could prepare myself. For what? I didn't know, nor how, except by taking a look around at the little I would be leaving.

Related Characters: Thomas Fowler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Fowler offers a gruesome description of some of the horrors of the Vietnam War: he compares a ditch full of bodies to an Irish stew. The sight of the bodies (which the solders come across) prompts some interesting thoughts for Fowler: he thinks about the inevitability of death for all human beings, himself included, but also expresses his desire to at least "take a look around" at life before he leaves it.

The passage reinforces the savagery and bloodiness of the Vietnam War, which is only in its early stages during the period in which the novel is set. Note the *anonymity* of death in the scene--Fowler has no way of knowing who the dead bodies belong to; death is faceless and depersonalized. In the Vietnam War, and perhaps in war in general, human beings don't count for much--they're just bodies sent to die defending an abstract political ideal. (The passage is a stunning rebuke to Alden Pyle's philosophy, especially his glib willingness to sacrifice lives for his political ends.)

Part 1, Chapter 4, Section 2 Quotes

❝ "Of course," he said without conviction, "she may choose to stay with you."
"What would you do then?"
"I'd apply for a transfer."
"Why don't you just go away, Pyle, without causing trouble?"
"It wouldn't be fair to her, Thomas," he said quite seriously. I never knew a man who had better motives...

Related Characters: Alden Pyle, Thomas Fowler (speaker), Phuong Hei

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the sexual rivalry between Fowler and Pyle comes to its peak. Fowler and Pyle acknowledge that they both love Phuong, and they also decide that they should let Phuong choose between the two of them. To Fowler's amazement, Pyle is being completely principled in his competition--he even believes that abandoning Vietnam would be "unfair" to Phuong. Pyle seems to think of his relationship with Phuong as being completely magnamimous--he loves Phuong because he wants to help her. (In this way, Pyle's relationship with Phuong may be emblematic of the rather deluded American relationship with Vietnam itself.)

Greene draws a stark contrast between Fowler--old, cynical, and devious--and Pyle--who's young and virtuous, but also causes greater harm through his good intentions.

❝ We began to throw and it seemed impossible to me that I could ever have a life again, away from the rue Gambetta and the rue Catinat, the flat taste of vermouth cassis, the homely click of dice, and the gunfire travelling like a clock-hand around the horizon. I said, "I'm going back." "Home?" Pietri asked, throwing a four-to-one. "No. England."

Related Characters: Pietri, Thomas Fowler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

Here Fowler decides that it's time for him to return to England. He's been competing with Pyle for Phuong's affections, but he senses that he'll be unable to win Phuong, since Pyle is younger, handsomer, and more earnest. Resigned to his failure, Fowler prepares to go back--but as he makes clear, he doesn't think of England as his "home" on any level.

Where, then, is Fowler's true home? Greene implies that Fowler--a globe-trotting, world-weary journalist--has no home at all. Fowler has spent his entire adult life traveling

around, forming momentary attachments to the local people in the countries where he's stationed. (For all we know, he's had a comparable adventure in another country before the events of the novel even begin.) Paradoxically, Fowler's remarks help us understand why he *was* so attached to Phuong--he has no real friends or family back in England (except for a wife whom he despises), and so Phuong represented a chance at a new life in Vietnam.

Part 2, Chapter 1 Quotes

Pyle said, "I think I ought to put all my cards on the table. I'm not rich. But when my father dies I'll have about fifty thousand dollars. I'm in good health—I've got a medical certificate only two months old, and I can let her know my blood-group."
"I don't know how to translate that. What's it for ?"
"Well, to make certain we can have children together." "Is that how you make love in America—figures of income and blood-group?"

Related Characters: Alden Pyle, Thomas Fowler (speaker), Phuong Hei

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

Pyle and Fowler have confronted Phuong, asking her, point-blank, to choose between them. Fowler is put in the odd position of having to translate his romantic rival's statements to Phuong. Here, for instance, Pyle tells Fowler to communicate to Phuong that Pyle has some money and is in good health. Fowler can't help but mock Pyle for his childishness in wooing Phuong--it's certainly a little odd and not very romantic that Pyle is telling Phuong his blood-type as a way of winning her over.

The passage uses comedy to convey the differences between Pyle and Fowler. Pyle may be younger and handsomer than Fowler, but he's a little clueless about how to go about wooing a woman. Fowler, on the other hand, is a little old for Phuong, but she's attracted to his experience and insight. As we should expect by now, Fowler "nationalizes" his criticism of Pyle, suggesting that Pyle's cluelessness in wooing Phuong is representative of America's cluelessness in other similar departments.

She gave me a quick look over the needle and registered her mistake. Then as she kneaded the opium she began to talk at random of what clothes she would wear in London, where we should live, of the tube-trains she had read about in a novel, and the double-decker buses: would we fly or go by sea?
"And the Statue of Liberty..." she said.
"No, Phuong, that's American too."

Related Characters: Thomas Fowler (speaker), Phuong Hei

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 73-74

Explanation and Analysis

In this opium-influenced dialogue, Phuong tells Fowler that she's excited to spend the rest of her life with him. Phuong thinks that she and Fowler are going to get married and travel back to England--there, Phuong looks forward to seeing the famous sights of the Western world.

But as the passage makes clear, Phuong doesn't really understand the first thing about the Western world--she even thinks the Statue of Liberty is in England, rather than America. As Fowler seems to interpret it, Phuong's mistake suggests that some part of her is still more attracted to Pyle the American than to Fowler the Englishman. Ina broader sense, though, Phuong's words make us wonder if she's really in love with either Pyle *or* Fowler. It's entirely possible that she thinks of Fowler as a means to an end--a way for her to get out of Vietnam and make a better life for herself--rather than a loving husband. Fowler has suggested that he really doesn't know much about Phuong or Phuong's culture, and here, it's implied that Phuong doesn't know anything about Fowler.

Part 2, Chapter 2, Section 2 Quotes

I have read so often of people's thoughts in the moment of fear: of God, or family, or a woman. I admire their control. I thought of nothing, not even of the trap-door above me: I ceased, for those seconds, to exist: I was fear taken neat. At the top of the ladder I banged my head because fear couldn't count steps, hear, or see. Then my head came over the earth floor and nobody shot at me and fear seeped away.

Related Characters: Thomas Fowler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

Here Fowler describes a harrowing moment in which he and Pyle sneak into a French fortress in the middle of the Vietnamese wilderness. Fowler is genuinely frightened as he climbs up the ladder into the fort--even though he's an experienced journalist, and has seen all sorts of things in his career.

It's interesting to consider the way Greene depicts Fowler's fear as both a weakness and a strength. Fowler describes himself as feeling "fear taken neat"--i.e., he's comparing his fear to an alcoholic beverage served without ice to dilute it: something pure but also harsh. And yet even if Fowler is extremely frightened of losing his life, his loneliness and atheism seem to give him strength--he thinks of "nothing," and seems to cease to exist altogether. Paradoxically, Fowler's ability to disappear into his own fear makes him capable of taking action,even when he's very frightened. Fowler's refusal to have a family or believe in God gives him a peculiar, nihilistic strength.

Part 2, Chapter 2, Section 3 Quotes

"I've no reason to believe in a God. Do you?" "Yes. I'm a Unitarian."
"How many hundred million Gods do people believe in? Why, even a Roman Catholic believes in quite a different God when he's scared or happy or hungry."
"Maybe, if there is a God, he'd be so vast he'd look different to everyone."
"Like the great Buddha in Bangkok," I said. "You can't see all of him at once. Anyway he keeps still."

Related Characters: Alden Pyle, Thomas Fowler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Pyle and Fowler stay up late at night, frightened for their lives. The two men are stationed in a remote fort, and know that they could be found and captured. To pass the time, Fowler asks Pyle about God, and Pyle claims to believe in God. Notice that Pyle follows Unitarianism--often considered one of the more progressive, free-spirited sects of Christianity--while Fowler, who is an atheist, mentions Roman Catholicism--often considered one of the more traditional, austere sects of Christianity, and a kind of ancient cultural signifier (appropriate for the "Old-World" Fowler.

The passage is important because it suggests some common ground between Pyle and Fowler, who seem like polar opposites. Even if Fowler doesn't exactly believe in God, he seems to obey *some* code of personal behavior; he believes in principles like honor and loyalty that suggest a kind of religiosity.

"That's just it," Pyle said. "You shouldn't be against York, you should be against the French. Their colonialism."
"Isms and ocracies. Give me facts. A rubber planter beats his laborer—all right, I'm against him. He hasn't been instructed to do it by the Minister of the Colonies. In France I expect he'd beat his wife. I've seen a priest, so poor he hasn't a change of trousers, working fifteen hours a day from hut to hut in a cholera epidemic, eating nothing but rice and salt fish, saying his Mass with an old cup—a wooden platter. I don't believe in God and yet I'm for that priest. Why don't you call that colonialism?

Related Characters: Thomas Fowler, Alden Pyle (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Pyle and Fowler debate the role of colonialism in Vietnam. Pyle takes the position that the Vietnamese people must be compelled to adopt their own form of government, one that is neither Western and democratic nor Communist. Pyle's philosophy is a strange beast, and seemingly nonsensical in many ways: he rails against colonialism, and yet he's an American agent stationed in a foreign country, there to manipulate it to American interests.

Even if it's difficult to understand what, exactly, Pyle believes in, it's important to notice the way he favors ideology over the hard facts. Pyle is a loft, idealistic philosopher, willing to think in terms of big words like "colonialism" and "democracy." Fowler, the experienced journalist, believes in individual facts and details. As a result, he has a much harder time than Pyle believing that it's justifiable to sacrifice human lives for the good of a cause.

Pyle looks at a priest and automatically concludes that he's an agent of imperialism and evil; Fowler, on the other hand, would examine the details of the same priest's life and see much to praise.

"But she loves you, doesn't she?"
"Not like that. It isn't in their nature. You'll find that out. It's a cliché to call them children— but there's one thing which is childish. They love you in return for kindness, security, the presents you give them—they hate you for a blow or an injustice. They don't know what it's like—just walking into a room and loving a stranger. For an aging man, Pyle, it's very secure—she won't run away from home so long as the home is happy." I hadn't meant to hurt him. I only realized I had done it when he said with muffled anger, "She might prefer greater security or more kindness."

Related Characters: Alden Pyle, Thomas Fowler (speaker), Phuong Hei

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Fowler tells Pyle what he thinks of Phuong. Fowler's words are harsh, bitter, and rather racist--he claims that he doesn't really think of Phuong as an adult at all; rather, he considers her a child. It's interesting to note that Fowler speaks in terms of "them," not "she." Although the supposed subject of his speech is Phuong, he's really talking about Vietnam and Vietnamese people themselves. This is typical of racist ideas--seeing one individual as a representative of his or her race, and making vast generalizations based on personal experience--but it also reinforces the symbolic, allegorical structure of the novel.

Fowler realizes too late that his words are harsh--he genuinely didn't realize that Pyle would be so offended by his callous attitude toward Phuong. Fowler's surprise is a sign that he's grown so accustomed to his own cynicism and callousness that he can barely remember a time when he acted any other way. Pyle, who's still young and romantic, loves Phuong (albeit in his own idealistic and condescending way) and believes that Phuong loves him in return.

Part 2, Chapter 2, Section 4 Quotes

"You saved my life there," I said, and Pyle cleared his throat for the conventional response,
"So that I could die here. I prefer dry land."
"Better not talk," Pyle said as though to an invalid.
"Who the hell asked you to save my life? I came east to be killed. It's like your damned impertinence . . ." I staggered in the mud and Pyle hoisted my arm around his shoulder. "Ease it off," he said.

Related Characters: Alden Pyle, Thomas Fowler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Pyle has saved Fowler's life in the Vietnamese wilderness. Pyle could have left Fowler for dead; Pyle could even have hurt Fowler as revenge for stealing Phuong away. Instead, Pyle treats Fowler mercifully, getting him to a hospital as soon as possible. Fowler doesn't want to be saved--not by Pyle, and not by anyone else. He's so used to embracing death in his journalism and his drinking that he seems totally prepared to die.

The passage makes it clear that Fowler is every bit as callous and cynical as he claims to be. Fowler really would prefer dying to being in Pyle's debt--and not just because Pyle is his romantic rival. Fowler hates the idea of owing anyone a debt--he prefers the individualized machismo of embracing death and tragedy. Now that Fowler owes Pyle his life, however, there's a strong bond of honor and loyalty between the two men, much to Fowler's annoyance.

Mr. Heng turned away. "I only want you to remember what you have seen," he said, walking back in the shadows of the junk-pile. "Perhaps one day you will have a reason for writing about it. But you must not say you saw the drum here." "Nor the mould?" I asked. "Particularly not the mould."

Related Characters: Mr. Heng, Thomas Fowler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

In this important section, Fowler finds evidence of military technology in a small factory, owned by Mr. Heng. By this point in the novel, Fowler has a suspicion that Pyle is

involved in covert military activity in Vietnam. Mr. Heng's advice to Fowler is a classic example of a "Chekhov's Pistol"--a detail that's introduced early on in a work of literature and isclearly going to be important later on.

The passage conveys Fowler's status as a reporter and a recorder of information. Fowler is an active participant in the events of the novel, but he's also the character who *remembers* the novel's events--he writes a whole book about them, after all. Fowler has a unique burden: he has the challenging job of writing down Pyle's story, honoring his memory while also exposing his flaws. Here, for instance, Fowler provides early evidence that Pyle is a murderer--someone who's willing to use plastic explosives (made from Mr. Heng's mould) to kill innocent civilians.

Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3 Quotes

"Yes. I wish you hadn't written it."
"Why?"
"Because it was a pack of lies. I trusted you, Thomas."
"You shouldn't trust anyone when there's a woman in the case."
"Then you needn't trust me after this. I'll come sneaking up here when you go out, I'll write letters in typewritten envelopes. Maybe I'm growing up, Thomas." But there were tears in his voice, and he looked younger than he had ever done. "Couldn't you have won without lying?"
"No. This is European duplicity, Pyle. We have to make up for our lack of supplies."

Related Characters: Alden Pyle, Thomas Fowler (speaker), Phuong Hei

Related Themes:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Pyle confronts Fowler for his deceptions--he's tricked Pyle into thinking that he's going to stay in Vietnam to be with Phuong, when in fact he's going back to England presently. Pyle is genuinely shocked that Fowler would tell him a lie--Pyle is so open and honest that he can't conceive of a grown man with "lower" morals than his own.

Once again, Fowler frames the difference between himself and Pyle in nationalistic terms: Pyle is a representative American, while Fowler is a classic Englishman. Although England is an older, weaker country, it's capable of using its experience and moral deviousness against America--by the same token, Fowler has outmaneuvered Pyle. (The irony of the passage is that Pyle is actually capable of great deviousness--he conspires to murder innocent civilians in Vietnam, as his philosophical beliefs compel him to sacrifice his own strong moral values.)

Part 3, Chapter 1, Section 3 Quotes

I went into the passage. There was a door opposite me marked Men. I went in and locked the door and sitting with my head against the cold wall I cried. I hadn't cried until now. Even their lavatories were air-conditioned, and presently the temperate tempered air dried my tears as it dries the spit in your mouth and the seed in your body.

Related Characters: Thomas Fowler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Fowler has just found out that Phuong is conducting a romantic affair with Pyle. All of Fowler's machinations have been in vain—in the end, Phuong has chosen the younger, handsomer man. Fowler is so overcome with emotion that he goes into the bathroom and cries.The scene is remarkable because it's the only time in the novel that Fowler shows any bona fide expression sadness. He often feels sad, but it's only in this scene that he breaks down and shows external signs of his misery.

The ironic juxtaposition of the "Men" sign and Fowler's weak, stereotypically-feminine tears reminds us that Fowler has always considered himself a manly, stoic man, for whom crying is a hideous show of weakness—for Fowler to cry, then is a mark of genuine anguish. And Greene also conveys the transitive nature of life here. Even Fowler's tears are short-lived—they dry almost immediately. In the universe of *The Quiet American*, everything (even or especially emotion) is always on the verge of disappearing.

Part 3, Chapter 1, Section 5 Quotes

He watched me as I stretched out for my second pipe. "I envy you your means of escape."
"You don't know what I'm escaping from. It's not from the war. That's no concern of mine. I'm not involved."
"You will all be. One day."
"Not me."
"You are still limping."

Related Characters: Captain Trouin, Thomas Fowler

(speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Fowler argues with a French military commander, Captain Trouin, about his role in Vietnam. Fowler wants to believe that he's basically uninvolved with life in Vietnam—he's a reporter, passively observing and writing about the things he witnesses in the country. To be involved—"engagé"—is the last thing on his mind.

And yet as Captain Trouin points out—and as we've known for a long time!—Fowler is anything but disengaged from Vietnam. On the contrary, he's deeply involved, both in the culture of Vietnam itself and in the military conflict there. Fowler has struck up a romantic relationship with Phuong, and as he investigates Pyle's actions in more and more detail, he becomes increasingly involved in the country's military struggles. Trouin (whether wittingly or not) conveys his point with a metaphorical example: that Fowler is still "limping," suggesting the lasting scars he's sustained on account of his involvement in Vietnam.

Part 3, Chapter 2, Section 1 Quotes

❝ "We are the old colonial peoples, Pyle, but we've learnt a bit of reality, we've learned not to play with matches. This Third Force—it comes out of a book, that's all. General Thé's only a bandit with a few thousand men: he's not a national democracy." It was as if he had been staring at me through a letter-box to see who was there and now, letting the flap fall, had shut out the unwelcome intruder. His eyes were out of sight. "I don't know what you mean, Thomas." "Those bicycle bombs. They were a good joke, even though one man did lose a foot. But, Pyle, you can't trust men like Thé. They aren't going to save the East from Communism. We know their kind."

Related Characters: Alden Pyle, Thomas Fowler (speaker), General Thé

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Fowler tries to talk Pyle out of his political plottings. Fowler knows that Pyle has been working on behalf of General Thé, a military strongman in Vietnam. Although Pyle barely knows Thé, he thinks of him as a symbol of everything his favorite book, *The Role of the West*, argues for. Pyle thinks that by helping the General, he'll be able to install a new, virtuous form of self-government in Vietnam, ensuring peace and prosperity. As Fowler points out, however, Pyle has made a huge mistake in putting his faith in Thé. Even if *The Role of the West* is correct about the Third World, Pyle is wrong to think that Thé (in reality just a petty tyrant hungry for power) will be the one to change things in Vietnam.

As Fowler strongly implies, Pyle is a lofty idealist who simply doesn't understand how people work. Pyle is so eager to believe in abstract ideals that he barely gives any thought to the way such ideals are realized. As a result, he's willing to work for Thé, setting off bombs and hurting innocent people. Fowler, for all his supposed stoicism and indifference, can't help but try to dissuade Pyle.

Part 4, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ "No. I'm not so stupid. One doesn't take one's enemy's book as a souvenir. There it is on your shelf. The Rôle of the West. Who is this York Harding?" "He's the man you are looking for, Vigot. He killed Pyle—at long range."

Related Characters: Vigot, Thomas Fowler (speaker), York Harding, Alden Pyle

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

After the death of Alden Pyle, Fowler crosses paths with Vigot, the police inspector who's been tasked with investigating Pyle's death. Vigot notices a copy of *The Role of the West*, Pyle's favorite book, in Fowler's home. When he asks Fowler about the book, Fowler claims that it was York Harding (the author) who truly killed Pyle.

Fowler's remarks are both totally self-serving and totally accurate. Fowler is himself responsible for Pyle's death—terrified by Pyle's politics and jealous of his romantic success with Phuong, Fowler allowed Pyle to be murdered. By blaming Harding for Pyle's death, Fowler is cynically trying to absolve himself of guilt. But in another sense, Fowler is right to blame Harding. Pyle lived his adult life according to a set of lofty, unrealistic ideals. In so doing, he

entered into a world of violence and bloodshed, in which he wasn't equipped to last very long--and in which he did great harm.

Part 4, Chapter 3 Quotes

I said to Phuong, "Do you miss him much?"
"Who?"
"Pyle." Strange how even now, even to her, it was impossible to use his first name. "Can I go, please? My sister will be so excited."
"You spoke his name once in your sleep."
"I never remember my dreams."
"There was so much you could have done together. He was young."
"You are not old."
"The skyscrapers. The Empire State Building."
She said with a small hesitation, "I want to see the Cheddar Gorge." "It isn't the Grand Canyon." I pulled her down on to the bed. "I'm sorry, Phuong."

Related Characters: Phuong Hei, Thomas Fowler (speaker), Alden Pyle

Related Themes:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Fowler talks to Phuong about Pyle, who's been killed recently. Fowler, who was partly responsible for Pyle's death, asks Phuong if she misses Pyle, and Phuong claims that she barely thinks about Pyle at all. Fowler is suspicious of Phuong, and even when she tells him she's eager to go to England with him, he still feels strangely inadequate.

Fowler is haunted by Pyle's death. It's not clear if Phuong has truly forgotten Pyle as she claims, or if she's secretly missing him (it's certainly possible that Phuong, as a rather cynical opportunist, has merely latched on to whomever will take her out of Vietnam). In either case, though, it's clear that Fowler continues to fear that Phuong still loves Pyle. And even though Pyle is dead, and Fowler feared that he was the only one who "cared," Pyle's memory still lives on strongly in Fowler's consciousness.

I thought of the first day and Pyle sitting beside me at the Continental, with his eye on the soda-fountain across the way. Everything had gone right with me since he had died, but how I wished there existed someone to whom I could say that I was sorry.

Related Characters: Thomas Fowler (speaker), Alden Pyle

Related Themes:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel, things seem to be looking up for Fowler. His wife has granted him a divorce, he's living with Phuong, etc. And yet Fowler is still haunted by Pyle's death, in which Fowler himself had a hand. In a strange way, Fowler's guilt suggests that he valued and respected Pyle—for all their differences and rivalries, they were still friends.

The passage is crucial to the end of the novel because it shows how someone like Fowler—someone who's been shown to be sometimes devious and untrustworthy, and who doesn't seem to believe in God or a set of rigid morals—deals with guilt. Fowler seems to wish that he could embrace his Catholic faith—he wishes that he could confess his sins and transcend them. Instead, Fowler feels that he's above all redemption—he's so thoroughly guilty that Pyle's death will haunt him forever and ever. The almost childish simplicity of Fowler's wish—that he could say, "I'm sorry"—reinforces his isolation and moral confusion—as the novel ends, he's truly, profoundly alone.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1

The narrator, a middle-aged British reporter named Thomas Fowler, is in his apartment in 1950s Saigon, waiting for a younger American man named Alden Pyle, who is two hours late. It is odd for Pyle, a meticulous and punctual man, to be late without giving notice. Anxious, Fowler goes down to the street, where he sees a young Vietnamese woman named Phuong waiting on Fowler's doorstep. "Phuong" means Phoenix in Vietnamese, but Fowler comments that "nothing nowadays is fabulous and nothing rises from its ashes." Phuong used to wait in that same place at the same time for Fowler to come home when Phuong and Fowler were in a relationship, but now Phuong is waiting for Pyle. Phuong left Fowler for Pyle some time ago. Though Fowler is bitter about it, he avoids making an ironic reference to the circumstances of their relationship, and he invites her to wait for Pyle with him in his apartment.

The three main characters' relationships mirror the relationships between countries: Fowler, representing Europe, is losing control over Phuong, representing Vietnam, whereas Pyle, representing America, is starting a new relationship with her. While Fowler initially seems to be a loyal friend—waiting over two hours for Pyle—his feelings toward Phuong and later narration show that he would readily "betray" his friend by sleeping with Phuong—as Pyle betrayed him earlier by "stealing" Phuong for himself. Fowler's musings on Phuong's name expose his cynical views about death, but also associate Phuong with a beacon of hope that Fowler's relationship with her, now "dead," may be rekindled.

Phuong and Fowler go up to Fowler's apartment. Phuong speaks in simple French, noticing that Fowler seems troubled by Pyle's absence. Phuong says Pyle is very fond of Fowler, but Fowler responds that she should "thank him for nothing." Fowler looks at Phuong as she prepares tea and closes his eyes, trying to remember how it felt when they were together.

Phuong's simple French shows how the French colonial presence has not melded harmoniously with Vietnamese culture. Fowler misses his relationship with Phuong and is angry with Pyle, even though Pyle apparently holds no ill feelings toward Fowler.

Phuong tries to comfort Fowler by saying Pyle will be there soon. Fowler wonders what Pyle and Phuong talk about together and remembers how Pyle likes to talk at length about the Far East and how the United States is helping instill democracy around the world. Phuong, however, knows very little about world history or politics, though she is obsessed with the British royal family. Fowler asks Phuong in English if Pyle is in love with her, but Phuong laughs and asks, "In love?" Pyle supposes Phuong may not understand what that means.

Pyle's obsession with topics like the Far East and Democracy reveals his interest in the United States playing an expanding role in Vietnam. However, these issues mean nothing to Phuong, who remains a mystery, apparently only focusing on the allure of British royalty. Phuong's conception of love is never explained, but her actions seem to follow the path of the most loyal and practical companionship.

Phuong begins the laborious task of preparing an **opium** pipe for Fowler to smoke. According to Vietnamese superstition, a lover who smoked opium would always return, "even from France." Fowler suggests Phuong should get Pyle to start smoking. Smoking opium also may damage sexual capacity, but according to Fowler, a Vietnamese woman would rather have a faithful lover than a potent one. Fowler is proud of his two-foot-long bamboo pipe and likes opium's unique smell. He becomes less tense when he inhales and his concerns about Pyle's whereabouts begin to fade away.

The opium allows Fowler to disengage from his concerns about death and love. Opium is said to make for a loyal lover, and this superstition suggests that opium somehow creates an intercontinental love connection (or addiction) between French men and Vietnamese women. Fowler's opium use suggests that he is also "hooked" on his relationship with Phuong, and has merely replaced one addiction with another.

Fowler smokes a second pipe of **opium** and tells Phuong that when she left him for Pyle, he fell back into heavy opium use. Fowler suggests Phuong should not live with Pyle if Pyle doesn't smoke, but she replies that Pyle is going to marry her. Fowler asks if Phuong would stay with Fowler that night if Pyle does not show up, but she avoids the question and asks where Pyle is. Fowler says he wouldn't know. He asks for a third pipe, which Phuong prepares.

When Fowler asks if Phuong would sleep with him, Phuong looks to the practical issue of where Pyle is instead of answering yes or no. She ultimately ends up spending the night with Fowler, though, revealing an apparent lack of emotional attachment to either man. Phuong acts and is treated almost like a servant, despite Fowler's "love" for her.

There is a knock at the door, but it is not Pyle. It is a Vietnamese policeman, who tells Fowler in heavily accented French that he is needed at the French Sureté, the police station. Fowler thinks about the extreme power that the police exert in Vietnam. He tells the policeman he will go to the station, but only if the officer pays for his trishaw, a three-wheeled bicycle cab, so Fowler can avoid the indignity of walking.

The distortion of language again points to the imperfect relationship between the French colonizers and the Vietnamese. The French police exert great power in their colony, which suggests a less democratic system than what Pyle would like to impose in Vietnam. Fowler's concern about dignity again indicates a kind of colonialist mindset, in which the Europeans see it as important to set themselves apart from the Vietnamese.

Not long after, Fowler and Phuong arrive at the police office. Fowler is still high on **opium**. The French officer questioning them is named Vigot, a polite man whom Fowler has met before. Vigot asks Phuong how long she has lived with Pyle and says the situation is serious. Vigot says Fowler seems like Pyle's friend, and Fowler agrees. When Vigot asks Fowler about Phuong, Fowler seems defensive and says he has no reason *not* to be friends with Pyle because of Phuong.

Vigot is one of the French officers in charge of the powerful police force, and he acts with the refined politeness of the European upper-middle class. Fowler agrees that Pyle is his friend, but his defensive response reveals that he does *have a reason not to like Pyle, and that reason is (as far as we know) his relationship with Phuong.*

Fowler describes Pyle as a "quiet American" employed by the Economic Aid Mission. Fowler does not tell Vigot how he and Pyle met, but he does describe it in the narration, jumping back into a past scene, where a young and eager Pyle introduces himself at a bar, his innocent face appearing to Fowler to be "incapable of harm." With serious courtesy and youthful excitement, Pyle asks if a noise was a nearby grenade, but Fowler, used to hearing about grenade casualties in the paper, calmly guesses the sound was a car backfiring, which disappoints Pyle. Fowler remembers feeling like he wanted to tease Pyle because of his innocence. In the present time—at the French police station's interrogation room with Vigot and Phuong—Fowler guesses that Pyle is dead, which Vigot confirms. The **opium** makes Pyle's death less meaningful to Fowler.

Fowler contrasts Pyle's youthful innocence with Fowler's own more reserved and weary attitude. Pyle is even excited by the prospect of grenades, symbols of the violence of war, whereas Fowler finds nothing exciting about them. Pyle's youth and innocence versus Fowler's age and experience also mirrors America's experience in Vietnam versus Europe's, as America is only now entering what will become a long and wearying war in Vietnam. The news of Pyle's death is unsurprising to Fowler, in part because of the emotion-deadening opium—but also because of Fowler's pessimistic worldview, and other reasons we will learn later.

Suspicious of Fowler, Vigot asks him how he knew Pyle was dead. Fowler claims he's not guilty of murdering Pyle, but the narration suggests that the **opium** is suppressing some feelings of guilt. With Phuong still in the room but silent, Vigot questions Fowler about his whereabouts earlier in the night, around the time Fowler was waiting in his apartment at the beginning of the novel. Fowler describes a tranquil night of dinner by himself and then a few **drinks** around the city. Vigot reveals Pyle was found in the water under a bridge near where Fowler had dinner by himself.

Even though Fowler claims not to be an active participant in Pyle's death, Fowler's feelings of guilt reveal that he is perhaps not as impartial as he says he is. Vigot's suspicions of Fowler call into question Fowler's loyalty to his friend, if Pyle can even be considered Fowler's friend. Their relationship is obviously complicated by Phuong, who remains in the room but who is hardly mentioned, a silent reminder of the way that she (like Vietnam itself) is a kind of object the two men (like America and Europe) fight over.

Vigot suggests Pyle did a lot of harm, but is unclear about why. Fowler sarcastically retorts, "God save us always from the innocent and the good," calling Pyle good "in his own way." Vigot would not understand, Fowler tells him, because he is Roman Catholic, and not a "damned Yankee" like Pyle. Vigot leaves Phuong in the interrogation office and brings Fowler to the morgue to identify the body. Fowler assumes Vigot is bringing him because he wants Fowler to feel some sense of guilt at seeing the body, which he calls an old French police technique. Fowler tells himself he is innocent and casually identifies the body as Pyle.

Vigot's suggestion that Pyle did a lot of harm points to the mystery surrounding Pyle's role as an American in Vietnam. Fowler also emphasizes the differences between the Americans and the French in terms of religion, with the term "damned Yankee" used in conjunction with other descriptions of Pyle—calling him someone who is at once innocent and capable of doing bad things with good intentions. Yet Fowler does defend Pyle's actions, showing the more positive side of their complicated relationship.

After meeting with Vigot, Fowler and Phuong walk back to his apartment. Dwelling on thoughts about death, Fowler is no longer concerned with the indignity of walking. Fowler thinks about sending a story to his paper about Pyle's death, but knows he would not be able to reveal the true nature of Pyle's job, in which Pyle was responsible for at least fifty deaths. Fowler finally reveals to Phuong in French that Pyle is dead. She reacts calmly and makes more **opium** for Fowler. She stays with him that night, and he wakes up to find his hand in a familiar place, resting between her legs. He wonders to himself, "Am I the only one who really cared for Pyle?"

For Fowler, death erases any vain sense of dignity that he had before hearing that Pyle died, so he does not avoid walking as he did earlier. Phuong barely reacts to the news about Pyle's death, and instead loyally returns to Fowler's side in bed. The ease with which she does so suggests a lack of emotional attachment. Fowler's thought that he was the only one who cared for Pyle is complicated by the fact that he is benefiting so obviously from Pyle's death (by sleeping with Phuong), and by even seeming to blame Phuong for betraying Pyle. The way Fowler's hand is on her even in sleep again emphasizes Phuong as a kind of possession.

PART 1, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 1

Fowler's narration flashes back to the first day Fowler met Pyle. Fowler had been spending too much time with his American colleagues in the Press. He describes them as "big, noisy, boyish and middle aged" people who would often make wry comments at the expense of the French. They maintained a safe distance from the war, flying above the range of machine guns between Saigon and Hanoi and back again. Unlike these noisy American journalists, Fowler describes Pyle as quiet. In a literal sense, Fowler needed to lean in to listen when they first met. Pyle was also very serious and reserved. Fowler notices that Pyle has feelings of homesickness, which makes Fowler remember his own initial feelings of homesickness when he arrived in Vietnam years ago.

Fowler's narration jumps around at several points in the text. This creates a mood of constant uncertainty and suspense—as we must always be asking ourselves where and when the narration is taking place. It's important that Fowler and Pyle like each other immediately, and see much of themselves in one another. Indeed, Fowler seems to be taking an almost fatherly interest in Pyle—as if Pyle is Fowler as he once was. Perhaps this helps to explain why Fowler also despises Pyle so much—he hates himself for making so many mistakes in the past.

In the bar in Saigon on that first day Fowler and Pyle met, Pyle speaks highly of York Harding, a political theorist whom Fowler has never heard of. Pyle finds Harding's books to be profound examinations of the clash between Communism in the East and Democracy in the West. Pyle respects nonfiction writing like Harding's, but not fiction. Pyle's reverence for Harding's views amuses Fowler, but he likes Pyle's honest loyalty to Harding in contrast with the other Americans' "immature cynicism."

It's difficult to grasp Pyle's loyalty to Harding, but Greene is writing at a time when political theorists had an unprecedented amount of control over American foreign policy (one thinks of the "Domino theory," which was applied to the Vietnam War—see Background information), and Americans as a whole weren't as jaded regarding war as we are in the present, post-Vietnam, post-Iraq era.

At the bar, Fowler educates Pyle on the current situation in Vietnam, as he has done for many others. Most of the fighting is taking place in the north, where the enemy can disappear into marshy rice paddies and jungle. In the south, the French control the main roads and watch towers, but it is still not completely safe – restaurants put grates over their windows to protect from grenade attacks. Several private armies exchange services for money, including the Caodaists, a Vietnamese religious group led by General Thé to fight against both the French and the Communists.

Here again, Fowler treats Pyle as something of a surrogate son: he educates him in the "way of the world," passing on his own hard-earned experience. Ultimately, it's suggested, Fowler bears some of the responsibility for Pyle's actions, since it's he who first introduces Pyle to the status quo in Vietnam. At the same time, however, Pyle clearly only hears what he wants to here, unconsciously twisting reality to fit his political theory.

Provoked by the idea of the Caodaists fighting against both sides, Pyle tells Fowler that York Harding wrote that the East needs a "Third Force," but does not expand on this idea. In retrospect, Fowler suggests in the narration that he wishes he had seen the destructive potential in Pyle's zeal for Harding's Third Force theory. Instead, Fowler leaves Pyle to think about the basic outline of the political climate of Vietnam, knowing that it does not convey the real experience of Vietnam, which Fowler describes in the narration as a series of colorful, vivid sensory images of life in the country.

It's illuminating that Pyle's mind instantly jumps to York when he hears about the situation in Vietnam. It's often said that a good theory is a "strong" theory—it can be applied indiscriminately to anything, and yield valuable results. Yet perhaps this is the problem with Pyle's love for Harding: Pyle arrogantly thinks that his knowledge of an academic text gives him license to interfere with the lives of Vietnamese people.

Leaving Pyle, Fowler walks down the rue Catinat to his apartment and thinks about how Vietnam has become his home now, and how he has lost the innocent interest in his surroundings that he once had as a newcomer. As Fowler walks down the street, he makes more cynical observations, noting the smells of urine, the injustice of the police, pornographic magazines, and a group of drunk sailors, which Fowler guesses would make a good target for a bomb. Jumping forward to later in the day, Fowler and Phuong have lunch in his apartment. Fowler reveals that that day is the second anniversary of their meeting.

Pyle's presence as a newcomer to Vietnam reignites some of Fowler's initial feelings about the place: he remembers what it was like to be young and naïve, and sees how far he's strayed since those earlier days. Fowler's remarks about the bomb provide some ironic foreshadowing of the events to come—and once again, they imply that Fowler himself is at least partly to blame for Pyle's actions in the succeeding chapters.

PART 1, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 2

Flashing forward to the morning after Phuong stayed with Fowler after Pyle's death, the two have a casual morning tea and breakfast, much like they did before Phuong left Fowler for Phuong. They do not speak of Pyle except to say that since Phuong is staying with Fowler again, she needs to move some belongings from Pyle's apartment to Fowler's. Fowler says he will join her in case the police are there. They then go to Pyle's apartment, where the police let only Fowler inside because of his press pass.

With each chapter, Greene gives us a little more information about the relationship between Pyle and Fowler. The fact that Phuong and Fowler don't *talk about Pyle at all says a great deal: we can sense that Fowler was far closer to Pyle than he's letting on here, and the same can be said of Phuong. Here Greene reminds us of the privileges Fowler has as a European reporter.*

Inside Pyle's apartment, Fowler runs into Vigot washing his hands in Pyle's bathroom, which Fowler quietly finds disrespectful. Vigot explains that Pyle's car is in the garage without any gas, which may have been drained, which means Pyle either walked or took a trishaw the previous night, when he was murdered. Fowler asks Vigot if he has any hunches about Pyle's death. Vigot suggests a multitude of general suspects, from the Vietminh to the Vietnamese police to the Caodaists and still others, all of which are purely guesses. Vigot then suggests it was a murder caused by "simply jealousy," to which Fowler defensively suggests it was the French police that killed him, thus implicating Vigot.

Greene sets up an enticing mystery: we can sense that Fowler had some role in Pyle's death, but we're not told exactly what this role was—despite the fact that it's Fowler who narrates the novel. We can feel him struggling with his guilt and anxiety—emotions which will become more prominent in his behavior as the novel goes on. The suggestion that Fowler killed Pyle over jealousy is dismissed suspiciously quickly, making it in fact seem like a more likely possibility.

Still in the apartment, Fowler says Vigot can rule him out of his investigation and claims he is "not involved," which he repeats for emphasis. Fowler narrates that not being involved is part of his creed. Fowler prefers the title of "reporter" to "journalist" or "correspondent" because he feels "reporter" suggests someone who simply writes what they see and takes no action.

Here Greene establishes one of the key themes of the novel—lack of involvement in the status quo. As a reporter, Fowler isn't supposed to be become entangled in the political or military affairs. Nevertheless, it seems that it's impossible for a reporter to truly be uninvolved—the fact that Fowler settles in with Phuong would seem to prove this.

Vigot helps Fowler get Phuong's box of belongings from under Pyle's bed. Pyle's black dog is missing. Fowler teases Vigot that he can analyze the earth on its paws if it returns, but Vigot responds that he could not perform that kind of detective work with a war on. Fowler looks at Pyle's bookshelf, mostly filled with York Harding's books, reports, and other informational texts. Fowler takes one of the Harding books, **The Role of the West**, for himself.

Vigot reminds us that the Vietnam War makes his investigation into Pyle's disappearance of secondary importance, and in fact, almost guarantees that the crime will never be solved. Fowler's decision to take Pyle's book for himself suggests a strange level of familiarity, and gives the book (and Harding) more significance regarding Pyle's death.

Vigot reveals that he has already submitted a report that said the Communists killed Pyle as the beginning of a campaign against American aid, but Vigot still wants Fowler to give him information, as a friend. Fowler tries to shrug it off, and says that the last time he saw Pyle was in the morning, before the "big bang." This information seems to conflict with Vigot's report in a way that is damning for Fowler, but before Vigot can question Fowler further, the American Economic Attaché arrives in a car outside.

It's still not yet clear how Fowler was involved in Pyle's death, as Greene draws out the mystery even with a first-person narrator. Vigot's relationship with Fowler is hard to classify—clearly they know each other well, but it's not clear how antagonistic Vigot is to Fowler. Vigot seems to have a vested interest in solving the case, or at least in indulging his own curiosity.

As Fowler leaves Pyle's apartment, he runs into the American Economic Attaché. The Attaché has trouble directing his driver, even though the Attaché learned French in Paris for three years. Fowler speaks to the driver in French and tells the Attaché that it is a matter of different accents. Fowler calls the Attaché's Western accent "the voice of Democracy," which Fowler says sounds like a York Harding title. The Attaché then expresses his sadness about Pyle's death and says he knew Pyle's father, a prominent professor, whom he wrote with the news that Pyle died a soldier's death. Fowler questions whether Pyle actually died a soldier's death, since the Economic Mission doesn't sound like the Army, and the Attaché angrily replies that Pyle had special duties.

Only a few days after Pyle's death, we see the coping mechanisms that Fowler has used to survive in Vietnam. Instead of showing remorse for someone to whom he was evidently close, Fowler retreats behind a shell of sarcasm, wisecracks, and drinking. It's also in this section that Greene builds additional suspense by suggesting that Pyle wasn't as innocent as he seems—he had "special duties," suggesting, perhaps, that he was more directly involved in the Vietnam War than his academic training and youthful idealism might suggest.

The Attaché asks Fowler if he knows who killed Pyle and why. Fowler feels sudden anger toward the American forces in Vietnam, and blurts out that Pyle was killed because he was "too innocent to live" and because he got involved. Fowler says Pyle only knew about Vietnam from the books he read and had no real experience, but was still expected to end Communism and ensure democracy in Vietnam. The Attaché scorns Fowler and says he thought he and Pyle were friends. Fowler says they were, but that he would have liked to see Pyle end up with an American girl back home. The Attaché knew about Pyle stealing Phuong from Fowler, and says that he was on Fowler's side in that matter. Fowler walks off toward Phuong, who is waiting, and leaves the Attaché perplexed at Fowler's complex relationship with Pyle.

At the end of this chapter, we're given a basic problem that the text is, on one level, trying to solve: a man is dead, and his romantic rival seems to be responsible—what exactly could have happened? In this sense the Attaché is a kind of "stand-in" for the audience—confused and a little contemptuous of Fowler, but above all else, puzzled about his relationship with Pyle. The basic difference between Fowler and Pyle seems clear, though: Pyle is an idealist, who believes that intelligence and training can solve any problem, while Fowler is looser and more realistic in his thinking.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 1

The narration flashes back to the first time Pyle met Phuong, an early evening at the Continental Hotel. Fowler sits with Phuong at a table, silently content to be together, when Pyle approaches and asks the two to join him and the American Economic Attaché at their table. The Attaché says he is surprised to see Fowler, since the American journalists are in Hanoi for a press conference about the fighting there. Fowler responds that he is tired of flying north for press conferences, and suggests that the American journalists are not really doing much work.

Fowler's indifference to the situation in the north suggests his general indifference to the state of the war effort in Vietnam. Unlike the Americans who take a more active role in the conflict (eventually being the sole foreign power in Vietnam), the English take a more cynical, laconic approach. It's important that Fowler is more concerned with defending his position to the Attaché than in noticing that Pyle is interested in Phuong.

Fowler and the others watch as Bill Granger, a loud and obnoxious American journalist, arrives in a trishaw outside the Continental and drags a drunken colleague out of another trishaw. Granger argues with his trishaw driver about the fare and then brings the unknown drunken man, whom Granger nicknames "Mick," over to Pyle's table where Pyle, Fowler, Phuong, and the Attaché are sitting. Granger hits on Phuong and makes Fowler defensive. Granger then describes the press conference he just returned from, alluding to the fact that the French military only reports things that make them appear to be winning. When the Attaché praises a story Granger wrote, Granger reveals he made up all the details.

Greene, a self-described "Englishman through and through," is often broadly satirical about Americans. Indeed, the only Americans in his novel are either foolish, immature drunks, or over-refined, unworldly innocents. This isn't a bad characterization of the way England saw the United States following the Second World War: England was no longer the dominant world superpower, and they looked on with a mixture of jealousy and sadness as American took their place. It's also important that Granger, one of the two important Americans in the text, is both a liar and a racist—Greene seems not to have much love for the U.S.

At the table in the Continental Hotel, the Attaché says that there are rumors that the Vietminh have burned down the Phat Diem Cathedral. This piques Fowler's interest. Pyle hopes the Catholics would be opposed to Communism, but Fowler reveals that to be a naïve view, since the Catholics and Communists rely on each other for trade. Granger says he's going to a brothel. Pyle invites Fowler and Phuong to dinner, and Granger convinces them to eat at a restaurant next to the brothel. The Attaché says he will take the drunken Granger home.

Greene, a Roman Catholic, is often praised for dramatizing the religious conflicts that plague the modern-day Catholic. Here, Fowler mentions Catholicism with a degree of familiarity that suggests the author's faith. Once again, we see Fowler's experience and intelligence juxtaposed with Pyle's youth and inexperience. Pyle thinks his education is enough to entitle him to succeed as an agent in Vietnam.

Pyle, Granger, Fowler, and Phuong take trishaws to the Chalet and brothel, The House of the Five Hundred Girls. Alone in one trishaw, Fowler tells Phuong that he likes Pyle. Phuong merely responds, "He's quiet." Fowler observes that the war in Vietnam seems like the middle ages in Europe, but adds that the Americans would not fit into that historical analogy.

On one hand, Pyle lacks any of the experience that has helped Fowler survive in Vietnam for so long. On the other hand, Pyle's great advantage—and America's—is precisely that he has no experience, so he's not tied down by his past or his prior obligations to others. This leaves him free to still be idealistic and recklessly brave.

When they arrive, Pyle and Granger have already entered the brothel. Fowler feels an instinct to protect Pyle. He goes inside and sees hundreds of women lounging with male companions in an outdoor courtyard surrounded by curtained cubicles. Unaccompanied women aggressively pursue Fowler as he walks over to Pyle and Granger. Pyle is very disturbed by the brothel. Fowler thinks he may be a virgin. Fowler extracts Pyle from the group of women and brings him to the Chalet, where Phuong has been waiting.

Fowler's friendship with Pyle occasionally takes on an almost homoerotic flavor—here, Pyle's apparent inexperience with women transitions into a special level of friendship with Fowler. This might also be another instance of Greene emphasizing Pyle's innocence and idealism in the face of harsh, complicated reality.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 2

In the Chalet, Phuong, Fowler and Pyle sit near the dance floor. The orchestra plays an out-of-date Parisian song. Fowler observes two aloof Vietnamese couples dancing, and muses that the Vietnamese are never careless or too passionate. He likens them to 18th century furniture. Pyle apologizes to Phuong (in bad French) for the delay. Pyle's politeness makes Fowler try to see himself as Pyle sees him, as a middle-aged, cynical man without innocence. He also remembers how he saw Phuong two years ago, when she was a beautiful 18-year-old dancing with an American who thought she was a prostitute.

Fowler observes the Vietnamese as almost a different species—or even a kind of furniture—suggesting an almost total indifference to their thoughts and feelings as individuals. The one exception to this, it would seem, is Phuong—yet it's unclear exactly what attracted Phuong to Fowler in the first place.

Pyle asks Phuong (in his bad French) to dance. They do, and Pyle is a bad dancer, holding Phuong comically far away from his body. Fowler reminisces that Phuong was the best dancer in the hall when he met her. In the narration, Fowler thinks back on the complexities of his courtship with Phuong. His inability to offer marriage, which Fowler does not explain further, made Phuong's protective older sister, Miss Hei, wary of him. The courtship lasted seven months before Fowler slept with her.

Pyle's presence reminds Fowler of his own love for Phuong, and even bolsters Fowler's self-confidence because of his awkwardness and bad dancing. Fowler likes having Pyle around, at least for now, because Pyle proves that experience is a convincing and attractive alternative to innocence.

Phuong's sister, Miss Hei, enters the Chalet while Pyle and Phuong are dancing. She joins Fowler at the table. Fowler explains that Pyle is with the American Economic Mission. Miss Hei, a blunt and literal woman, says he dances badly. Pyle and Phuong return to the table. Fowler can see that Phuong likes Pyle's formal manners, and he feels bad that he does not offer manners to her. In front of Fowler, Miss Hei grills Pyle about his background—obviously trying to determine whether he is a financially stable option for Phuong to marry (instead of Fowler). Pyle answers seriously, oblivious. Miss Hei invites him to dinner with Phuong at a time when Fowler will be away in the north. Pyle dances with Phuong again and makes Fowler think of the early days of being in love with Phuong.

The presence of Miss Hei introduces an immediate conflict to Fowler's relationship with Phuong and Pyle. Although Miss Hei seems to be challenging Pyle, the overall effect is to make Fowler even more insecure about his relationship with Phuong—he realizes that he's coarse, drunk, and generally unmannered when contrasted with Pyle. That Fowler is prone to such sudden changes in his feelings—he goes from confident to insecure in only a few seconds—suggests that much of his cynicism and depression comes from low self-esteem.

Fowler thinks about the rumor about the cathedral burning in Phat Diem and wishes his job did not require him to go there for a scoop. Fowler then dwells on his longtime skepticism for the idea of permanence. He likens the inevitability of the end of his relationship with Phuong to the inevitability of death. He both envies and distrusts religious people, and believes death is more certain than God. Fowler's appreciation for the certainty of death extends to the extreme – he claims to believe that to kill a man is to benefit him, and for that reason, enemies are preferred to the pain of friendship.

Fowler's belief in the certainty of death parallels the structure of the novel: just as Fowler knows that we're all going to die, the plot of the novel builds, inevitably, to the death of Pyle—an event which was known to us from the start. At the same time, Fowler's belief in death and his rejection of God suggests another coping mechanism. Surrounded by war, it's only natural that Fowler abandons his faith and embraces death, not God, as the ultimate power.

Pyle and Phuong return to the table after their second dance. Pyle speaks about Phuong as if she weren't there, saying he liked to watch her dance even though he knows he was bad. A raunchy cabaret show begins and Pyle gets upset. He asks that they leave, because he feels the entertainment is not suitable for Phuong.

Pyle's affection for Phuong seems emphatic but also condescending—he treats her like a child, not capable of deciding what she should or shouldn't experience. This is an extension of Pyle's attitude toward Vietnam itself: he thinks of it as a kind of child, needing the guidance of educated Americans.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 1

Chapter 4 begins a few days after Fowler, Phuong, and Pyle's night of dinner and dancing at the Chalet. Fowler has flown to Phat Diem to investigate the rumors surrounding the attack on the town. He stands in the Cathedral bell tower overlooking a scene of battle in the distance. From such a distance, Fowler observes, the battle looks picturesque and clean. Fowler then describes what Phat Diem was like before the attack: a quaint village that felt alive, despite not having electricity except in the French offices. Now, however, it is "dead"—all flames and rubble.

Fowler's birds-eye view of the village suggests the world as Pyle sees it. Pyle has only encountered Vietnam in books by York Harding—he's utterly unprepared of the specificities of life in Vietnam. Fowler, by contrast, has been in Vietnam long enough to realize that the birds-eye view of Phat Diem isn't accurate—it seems peaceful and simple, but in actuality is complex and often dangerous.

Fowler goes on to explain what he learned of the recent attack: Vietminh forces snuck into a Catholic parade and mounted a strike when they reached Phat Diem. Four days later, when Fowler arrives, the enemy was pushed back only half a mile. In the bell tower, the Bishop explains that the townspeople of Phat Diem – Catholics, Buddhists, and pagans alike – have gathered in the Cathedral for shelter. The situation is still a major blow to the French, so to keep it quiet, no journalists were allowed. Fowler made it through because he knew a French officer, and kept quiet about his intentions until he got far enough into enemy territory that officers stopped caring if he was there or not. Talking to the Bishop, Fowler admits that he is not Catholic, and actually hates some aspects of the religion, like confession.

Greene reveals a fundamental dilemma of the writer in Vietnam: his most interesting and productive writing is the least likely to survive the censorship imposed by the French military. Thus, Fowler is always fighting with French censors to get information of the war back to England. At times, it seems that Fowler has given up in his struggle—he says that he's too tired or lazy to investigate war stories, perhaps because he knows that these stories will never be published. In another instance of pessimism, his experiences in Vietnam have made him challenge his own faith in God.

Fowler leaves the Bishop and proceeds to a group of officers and soldiers. He introduces himself as an English journalist, and one of the officers, a Lieutenant, tells him that he is welcome to join them as they proceed with "a very small affair." The Lieutenant offers Fowler his **helmet**, but Fowler refuses. The Lieutenant leads him, along with the troops, to a large canal, full of dead bodies. Fowler feels a strange sense of revulsion and attraction—and suddenly the Lieutanent turns and asks him, "Have you seen enough?"—seemingly as angrily as if Fowler himself is responsible for the dead bodies.

Here we see the impressive, "masculine" aspect of Fowler's predicament in Vietnam: he is so indifferent to life that he feels no need to protect his own life. This again suggests Fowler's conflict with Catholicism, where the love of one's life is understood as a necessary prerequisite to the love of God. Fowler has abandoned his faith and his love for himself at the same time. Like Fowler, the Lieutenant seems to feel a similar sense of guilt, disgust, and nihilism after being surrounded by so much death.

The narrative cuts ahead: Fowler has left the soldiers, and is spending the night back at the officers' quarters. He drinks and plays cards with various officers. The Lieutenant arrives, and tells Fowler that he'll be given a gun shortly. Fowler seems to accept this, and returns to his card game. A short while later, the Lieutenant announces that Fowler is going to bed, and that he'll be provided with a gun and matches. This sends a clear signal, and the soldiers leave to go to bed, along with Fowler.

Throughout the novel, we see the ways that men adjust to life in Vietnam: here they drink and play cards, two classic "masculine" activities during wartime. Despite the atmosphere of world-weary indifference to the war, it's clear that the French run a "tight ship": when the Lieutenant announces lights out, everyone leaves almost immediately.

It's 3 in the morning, and Fowler is lying in his bed at the military base. He hears a sudden noise—reflexively, he reaches for the gun the officers have provided him. He is then surprised to find Pyle standing before him, wearing a **helmet**. Pyle explains than "somebody" lent him the helmet—Fowler points out that Pyle is very well equipped.

It's illuminating that Pyle wears a helmet while Fowler doesn't. Fowler, who's already lived a long life of danger and adventure, has no energy or motivation to protect himself. Pyle, who's younger and more hopeful, naturally wants to live for as long as possible. This is a potent symbol of Fowler's apathy and despair.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4, SECTION 2

Fowler has just encountered Pyle, who's staying with him in the military base. Pyle explains how he came to be at the military base: he bought a boat, which he rode "against the current." Fowler asks why he wanted to come to the military base at all, but Pyle says that this would take too long to explain. After a long pause Pyle tells Fowler that he's come to find Fowler himself. Pyle has fallen in love with Phuong, he explains. Fowler finds this hilarious—he wonders aloud why Pyle couldn't have waited a week for Fowler to return to Saigon. Pyle answers that he couldn't stand to be away from Phuong for so long.

Pyle's struggle against the current of the river symbolizes his mad, contradictory struggle to impose peace and order in Vietnam. He fights the natural chaos of all things, in the naïve hope that his academic training will give him the ability to succeed. For the time being, Pyle seems fairly successful in his goals—he manages to track down Fowler, after all. His love for Phuong, based on only a few moments with her, seems both excessively chivalric and excessively condescending.

Pyle tries to speak frankly with Fowler—he asks Fowler for his first name, which is Thomas. Pyle, calling Fowler "Tom," tells Fowler that he's going to ask Phuong to marry him. Fowler is dismissive of this news, though he feels envious when Pyle undresses—he thinks that Pyle "has youth too." Fowler tells Pyle that he himself can't marry Phuong, because he has a wife, Helen, back in England—-a Catholic who refuses to divorce. Pyle seems relieved by this news. He tells Fowler that his first name is Alden, and climbs into bed, almost cheerily.

It's telling that Pyle tries to address Fowler by his first name, while Fowler himself never addresses Pyle by any name other than "Pyle." Pyle is trying to be friends with Fowler and establish a very American sense of camaraderie. Fowler, on the other hand, is so used to a life of cynicism and distance that he can't express any interest in befriending Pyle, especially now that he knows Pyle is his rival for Phuong's affections.

As Pyle and Fowler lie in bed, they hear the sounds of bombs in the distance. Pyle continues speaking about Phuong, and he tells Fowler that they both have Phuong's "interests" in mind. Fowler angrily disagrees, telling Pyle that he's only interested in Phuong's body. He asks Pyle why he doesn't leave Phuong. Pyle replies that doing so would be unfair to Phuong: he explains that he has planned to "take care" of Phuong, providing for her for the rest of her life. Exhausted and infuriated, Fowler pours whiskey for himself and Pyle, and they drink it, "saying nothing."

It's not abundantly clear why Pyle is any more or less acquainted with Phuong than Fowler. Neither man seems to understand Phuong too deeply: she's a beautiful foreign woman who barely speaks their language, and seems totally mysterious and reserved about her inner life. Yet at least Fowler is upfront about his shallowness, while Pyle fools himself into thinking that he truly loves Phuong. His reason for staying with Phuong seems entirely self-deluding: Pyle wants to believe that he has a "duty" to her.

PART 1, CHAPTER 5

Three weeks after arriving at the military base, Fowler returns to Saigon—he was gone much longer than he'd expected to be. Pyle had left the base the morning after he arrived. Pyle is incapable of causing any pain, Fowler muses, but months later (as the narrative jumps ahead) he thinks that Pyle finally had to endure pain himself—under a bridge to Dakow.

Fowler's struggle to return to Saigon symbolizes the weaknesses of the "old world"—Europe. Where America, the young, strong new superpower, manages to achieve its goals quickly and efficiently, Europe/Fowler struggles with delays and setbacks.

Fowler learns that Pyle left the military base by convincing a young officer to take him back to the city by boat. Fowler finds that Pyle has left a letter for him. In this letter, Pyle thanks Fowler for his company, and promises him that he won't see Phuong until Fowler is back in Saigon, too. Fowler finds this letter infuriating—clearly, Pyle thinks he's going to end up with Phuong.

Pyle's politeness seems like a smokescreen for his obvious arrogance about ending up with Phuong in the end, since he's the younger, more attractive man. At the same time, it's not clear to us if Pyle actually feels this way, or if Fowler is only projecting his own insecurities onto Pyle—Fowler thinks he's old and weak, so he assumes that Pyle thinks so too.

Fowler attends a Press Conference at the military base. A French officer speaks with an English interpreter. The officer explains that losses have been heavy. Granger, who is also attending the conference, angrily criticizes the military for not keeping close enough tabs on its casualties of war. The French officer explains, very patiently, that the military is waiting for more supplies from the American military, which haven't arrived yet. Fowler pities this officer—he has no idea that Granger cares more about news than about his country. The officer begs Granger not to report his statements about the delays in American supplies, and then leaves the room.

Although it often seems that Fowler is a cynical, utterly amoral man, Greene stresses that he has some deeply-buried pity and affection for others. We see this by contrasting him with the callous Granger. Another difference between Fowler and Granger is that Fowler cares about the truth—not the truth of God or Christianity, but the literal truth of reporting facts. This reflects his belief that he's not engagé*—part of being indifferent to the war means reporting everything fairly.*

Fowler leaves the press conference, thinking that none of the information he's collected will make it "through the censors." He thinks about his predicament: if he gets a good "scoop," he'll have to leave Vietnam to report it—otherwise, it'll be censored. But by leaving Vietnam, Fowler will in essence be surrendering to Pyle.

For the first time in a while, Fowler sees a clear conflict between his career as a journalist and his love for Phuong. He can't write a story that's too good, or he'll be sent away from Phuong—so he has to keep up a general pattern of mediocrity.

After leaving the press conference, Fowler goes to a bar, where he plays cards with an old friend, Pietri. As they play, Fowler tells Pietri that he's "going back." "Home?" Pietri asks—"No," Fowler replies, "England."

Fowler's loneliness is clear in this scene. He doesn't regard England as anything like a home anymore, but it's also suggested that Vietnam isn't much of a home for him either.

PART 2, CHAPTER 1

A few weeks have passed since the events of the previous chapter: Fowler is back in Saigon, and Pyle has "invited himself" for a **drink**. Fowler sits in his home with Phuong, who has no idea that he's planning to leave Vietnam and return to England. Phuong says that she's going out—when Fowler reminds her that Pyle is coming, she explains that she's annoyed with Pyle for ignoring her sister. She adds that Pyle orders a huge amount of "parcels," some of which contain "plastic."

We're given an early hint that Pyle's involvement in Vietnam is less innocent than it seemed at first. He's ordering plastics, one of the most important ingredients in explosives. While we're not yet sure why he does this, destruction seems to be his most obvious motive.

After Phuong leaves, Fowler writes a letter to his employers, arguing that, for the "good of the paper" he should be recalled to England, as he lacks the experience or insight to write about the state of affairs in Vietnam. Fowler adds that he has "private reasons" for wanting to leave, but crosses this information out before he sends the letter—writing this will only cause amusement to his editor.

Fowler seems perfectly willing to give up his career in order to escape from Pyle with Phuong. Fowler's relationship with Phuong isn't based on love, by his own admission, but he's bound to her by a kind of affection and possessiveness that runs deeper than he'd admit. It's significant that Fowler censors his own letter, cutting out anything personal or emotional.

Fowler hears a knock, and finds Pyle waiting at his door, accompanied by a dog, whose name is Duke. Fowler invites Pyle and the dog inside, explaining that he's alone. Pyle, once again addressing Fowler as "Thomas," tells Fowler that he wants to discuss Phuong while she's present. Fowler, remembering Phuong's words, sarcastically asks Pyle if he wants to talk about plastics. Pyle seems perturbed that people know about his mail.

It isn't clear if Fowler knows that Pyle is using plastics as weapons—he seems to be probing Pyle for information, rather than accusing him, but he's clearly suspicious of something. Pyle's reaction also seems suspicious—he wants his mail to remain a secret, so he must be involved in something secretive.

Fowler asks Pyle if he'll be "sensible" and mentally stable if Phuong were to die, and Pyle replies that he would—he'd continue to serve the government of the United States in Vietnam. Fowler seems skeptical of this explanation—he wonders how stable Pyle really is. As they argue, Phuong returns to the house. She greets Pyle in French, and Pyle confesses that his French is very poor. Fowler offers to serve as the interpreter for both of them. Pyle agrees, and tells Fowler to tell Phuong that he's in love with her, and has been ever since he danced with her. Phuong listens carefully, but does not react. Pyle asks Fowler what Phuong is thinking, and adds, unexpectedly, that Fowler is his best friend.

There's some light comedy in this section—one can imagine the absurd tableau of Fowler translating for his romantic rival. Yet we're also given several indications that Fowler and Pyle have more in common than it seems. Fowler seems perfectly willing to translate Pyle's message accurately, even though it would be easy for him to sabotage the message. Pyle, for his part, thinks that Fowler is his best friend.

After a long pause, Fowler asks Phuong if she's going to leave him for Pyle. He explains that he'll be unable to marry Phuong, but that Pyle will gladly marry her. Phuong asks Fowler if he's going away—Fowler lies and says that he isn't. Pyle adds that he's not wealthy, but that he's a trained doctor, meaning that he'll be able to raise children with Phuong. Without translating any of this for Phuong, Fowler mocks Pyle for saying these things, and suggests that in America, love is a matter of "income and blood-group."

Pyle's affections for Phuong aren't explained in any detail, and when Pyle himself tries to explain, his love sounds hilariously unromantic. While Greene evidently doesn't subscribe to everything Fowler believes, there are points when he seems to be speaking directly through Fowler—like this scene, in which Fowler criticizes American romance.

As Pyle and Fowler argue, Phuong suddenly says, "No." Pyle, surprised, asks Phuong, in clumsy French, if she'll come away with him—she replies, "No," once again. Fowler is cheered by this, and offers Pyle a whiskey, which Pyle reluctantly accepts. He tells Fowler that "The best man has won," and begs him not to leave Phuong. Fowler replies that he won't, and Pyle leaves Fowler's home.

It seems as if Fowler is only pleasant with Pyle when he knows he has Phuong's love—implying that the mens' friendship with each other and their individual relationships with Phuong both have to do with rivalry and possessiveness. It's still not clear why Pyle is so attracted to Phuong, aside from her physical beauty—he doesn't know her at all.

Alone with Phuong, Fowler goes to write a letter to his wife, Helen. In the letter, he tells her that he's returning to England, and asks her for a divorce. He explains that he's fallen in love with someone, with whom he's lived for two years. He also says that if he leaves her (Phuong), she'll be "a little unhappy," but nothing more.

We see Fowler at his most devious in this scene. He's just preserved his relationship with Phuong by lying about his wife, and now he tries to divorce his wife in order to marry Phuong. More to the point, he describes Phuong as if he doesn't really love her at all—indeed, he seems fairly indifferent to the possibility of leaving her behind.

Finishing his letter, Fowler goes to bed with Phuong. In bed, he tells Phuong that he's been ordered home, and that he wants her to come with him. Phuong tells Fowler that she'll come home with him even if he doesn't succeed in getting a divorce from his wife. Phuong packs a pipe full of **opium**, and inhales. She asks Fowler if there are skyscrapers in England. Fowler tells her that she'll need to go to America to find such things.

Even at a moment of apparent victory over Pyle, Fowler seems haunted by the possibility that Phuong will leave him for his young, American rival. Phuong's attraction to Fowler seems as superficial as Fowler's attraction to her—she's interested in Western culture, even though she has little knowledge of it.

PART 2, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 1

It is the day of an important festival in Vietnam—the festival of Caodaism. The religion of Caodaism was invented by a civil servant, and consists of a combination of three religions, including Christianity, Confuciansim, and Buddhism. The "Holy Seat of Caodaism"—complete with a Pope, and female cardinals—is located in the city of Tanyin, and Fowler goes there to cover the festival for his editor.

The combination of Christianity, Buddhism, and Confucianism seems hilariously pell-mell (there are all sorts of fundamental tenets of these three religions that could never be combined with others). The church of Caodaism seems to be founded on the kind of naïve optimism that Fowler finds so distasteful Pyle finds so attractive.

At the festival in Tanyin, Fowler overhears talk of General Thé. The Pope's deputy tells Fowler that Thé has kidnapped a cardinal from Tanyin, but he refuses to say anything else. He reminds Fowler that Caodaism is "love and truth."

The deputy's advice about Caodaism seems utterly vague—there's no specific explanation of what Caodaism stands for. Furthermore, "love and truth" have challenged Fowler in the last few chapters—he's tried and failed to show love for Phuong, and tried and failed to report the truth. Thus, the Caodaist motto seems almost mathematically designed to irritate him.

After he leaves the Pope's deputy, Fowler notices Pyle, whom he's run into several times since arriving in Tanyin. Pyle is always friendly to Fowler, and inquires about Phuong frequently. Seeing Fowler, Pyle greets him warmly. He's eating a "Vit-Health" sandwich, which his mother has sent him from America, despite the fact that food is being served at the Caodaist festival. As they talk, a Caodaist commandant, who, Fowler remembers, had been an assistant to General Thé, greets Pyle. Fowler senses that Pyle and the commandant want to talk alone, and he leaves them.

We see more illustrations of Pyle's childish optimism. Here, he refuses to eat Vietnamese food, instead favoring ridiculous American health food. We see, first-hand, how shamelessly Pyle refuses to get involved in Vietnamese culture, and seems to have no interest in it whatsoever. It's strongly implied that Pyle is working with General Thé, though it's not yet clear exactly what Pyle is doing for him.

Fowler walks around the Caodaist temple, noting, with a little disgust, the garish combination of Christian, Buddhist, and Confucian imagery. When he returns to Pyle, he is still talking to the commandant. Fowler offers to give Pyle a lift back into Saigon.

Fowler has a very European scorn for the new, the garish, and the naïve—qualities that seem at the heart of Caodaism, and are also very American.

PART 2, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 2

Pyle and Fowler are driving away from the Caodaist festival. In the car, Pyle raises the topic of Phuong. He explains that he's applied for a transfer out of Saigon, and asks Fowler if he's leaving Vietnam any time soon. He doesn't want Phuong to be alone without either of them. As they talk, Fowler realizes that his car is running out of gas—thieves in Tanyin must have stolen gas from his tank.

Pyle's affection for Phuong seems perfectly sincere—clearly he's thinking about her almost constantly—but he's barely spent any time with her. It's as if Pyle is going through the motions of romance, based on what he's read or seen in films.

Fowler and Pyle drive toward a French fortress, using the remaining gas in Fowler's car. They climb out of the car and Fowler yells to the guards, in French, that they are friends. There is no reply. Fowler finds a ladder leaning against the wall of the fortress, and climbs to the top.

Once again, Fowler displays greater bravery than Pyle. He's lived a long life already, and seems willing to sacrifice it for the sake of other people, even his romantic rival.

PART 2, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 3

Fowler has just climbed over the walls of a French fortress. On the other side, he sees two men, both carrying guns. They are Vietnamese. Fowler tries to tell them his situation: his car has run out of gasoline. The soldiers, who speak French, tell Fowler that they have no gasoline, but that he can spend the night there. Fowler calls for Pyle, who climbs over the wall of the fort. When he's climbed inside, Pyle notices that one of the guards has a gun lying next to him. Slowly, Pyle inches toward the gun, and quickly snatches it up. To his surprise, the guard makes no attempt to grab the gun back. Pyle now has a rifle, as does one of the Vietnamese guards.

The indifference of the guards to the war in Vietnam is obvious from the moment that Pyle snatches a gun from one of them. These officers have been stationed at their fort for so long that they pay no attention to the Europeans who seek shelter there. As English speakers, Fowler and Pyle have many privileges in Vietnam. The Vietminh aren't directly at war with either America or England at this point, meaning that people like Fowler and Pyle can largely carry on with their business.

Pyle and Fowler spend the night at the French fort. Fowler, pointing to the two soldiers defending the fort by themselves, asks Pyle if they know they're defending democracy, and sarcastically asks if York Harding could explain democracy to them. Pyle is unperturbed by Fowler's sarcasm, and tells him that York writes about noble intellectual truth. Fowler asks Pyle about his religion, and Pyle explains that he's a Unitarian. Pyle goes on to explain that the people of Vietnam don't want Communism. He urges Fowler to oppose the French, and the history of colonialism in Asia. Fowler replies that he hates injustice, but can't think in terms as broad as "colonialism." He adds that he dislikes liberalism—he's more in favor of the "exploiter who fights for what he exploits, and dies with it." Fowler insists that he's not *engagé*—that is, not involved in the political conflicts in Vietnam.

Pyle's attraction to York Harding is based on his idealism: Pyle is interested in universal truth, and committed to the notion that academic theory can be used to enact meaningful change in Vietnam. We begin to see why he might be attracted to Caodaism, too: Unitarianism is a similar blending of "three into one" (the Holy Trinity into one God). Indeed, Caodaism might be Greene's wry critique of Unitarianism itself. Greene concludes this section by reminding us that Fowler still believes that he's not engagé. *While we've just seen evidence of this—he wasn't shot by the Vietnamese for exactly this reason—by now it seems almost impossible to be detached in a war zone.*

As Pyle and Fowler talk, they hear shouts and gunshots from outside the fort. The two soldiers seem uninterested in the noise. Fowler explains to Pile that the Vietminh have just attacked a nearby fort. Pyle asks Fowler if he's frightened—Fowler replies that he is, but adds that their chances of survival are high, since the Vietminh rarely attack more than a few forts in one night.

Fowler's greater experience and patience with the war is clear in this scene: while Pyle wants to panic, Fowler has learned how to deal with his fear and use logic and reason to calm himself down.

The time drags on, very slowly. Pyle confesses to Fowler that he can't stop thinking about Phuong. Fowler thinks that Pyle is as innocent as a dog. Pyle confesses that he's "never had a girl." Fowler tells Pyle about his most "meaningful" experience with a woman. The woman was neither his wife nor Phuong, but rather another woman he met in Vietnam. Now, he admits, he's afraid of losing Phuong. Fowler instantly regrets telling Pyle this.

Pyle and Fowler engage in some male bonding here. Greene's novels are full of displays of masculinity in this mode: two men, usually in the midst of a crisis, put aside their differences by talking about women. Again there is a homoerotic tinge to this scene, as the two men share their weaknesses and insecurities regarding women.

As Pyle and Fowler talk, a voice suddenly speaks from a megaphone outside the fort. Fowler, noticing that the two soldiers look frightened, guesses that the Vietminh have noticed Fowler's car, and are ordering the guards to send Fowler and Pyle out of the fort. Pyle quickly points his gun at the other guard and motions for him to drop his weapon; the guard does so, and Fowler picks it up. Pyle asks Fowler what to do next, and suggests that they kill the two guards. Fowler rejects this idea, reasoning that they've done absolutely nothing wrong.

In spite of his lack of experience, Pyle is no fool: he uses his gun to disarm the other guard. It's revealing that, in the midst of this criss, Pyle seems perfectly comfortable killing the two guards—and it's equally telling that Fowler is the one who wants to keep them alive. Fowler affects cynicism and indifference to the world, but Pyle is the one who considers Vietnamese lives expendable.

Fowler and Pyle decide to sneak away from the fort by climbing down the ladder under the cover of nightfall. They do so, very slowly, hearing the two guards whispering to one another behind them. When they've climbed to the bottom of the ladder, they quietly walk away from the tower toward a field. Suddenly, a bazooka fires at the fort, and the force of the explosion knocks Fowler over.

Greene ends his chapter with a "cliff-hanger"—it seems that Fowler has finally encountered some genuine danger. It's unclear if Pyle will help him or not, but in any event, they've become much closer during this chapter, admitting highly personal things to one another about love and women.

PART 2, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 4

Pyle and Fowler have just escaped from a fort, and Fowler has been slightly injured in a bazooka explosion. He says that he thinks his leg is broken. Pyle carries Fowler away from the fort, despite Fowler's yells that Pyle should leave him to die. As Pyle carries Fowler, Fowler notices a bonfire in the distance, and realizes that the Vietnamese must be burning his car.

Fowler's nihilism is so thorough that he's willing to die rather than slow Pyle down. We've seen hints of this before, but it's not until now that we see just how little Fowler values his own life. It's also possible—indeed, quite likely—that Fowler particularly doesn't want to be saved by Pyle, *his romantic rival.*

Pyle carries Fowler away from the fort. Fowler criticizes Pyle for his "schoolboy heroics," and tells him that he wanted to die—indeed, that he came to Vietnam with the intention of dying. Pyle explains that he saved Fowler's life because he couldn't have looked Phuong in the eyes if he'd let Fowler die. He tells Fowler that he'll try to find a French patrol. He leaves Fowler by the side of the road and runs off to do so.

Although Fowler and Pyle became much closer with one another in the previous chapter, their affection for Phuong continues to drive them apart. Ironically, it's competition for Phuong that makes Pyle save *Fowler—Pyle's idealism leads him take a brave a noble action here. One could easily see another man leaving his romantic rival to die.*

Fowler waits by the side of the road for many hours. At one point, he tries to run after Pyle, but finds that he's in too much pain. Eventually, he becomes conscious of a flashlight shining in his eyes—it is Pyle, who's found a French patrol and brought it to help Fowler.

It's clear that Fowler owes Pyle his life. What's less clear is what effect this new development will have on Pyle's relationship with Fowler—and on Phuong's relationship with both of them.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 1

The chapter begins with Fowler walking to the rue Catinat, a street of Saigon. It has been a few days since he and Pyle escaped the fort. In advance of his return, Fowler has sent Phuong a telegram explaining that he is going to be back in to Saigon soon.

Greene doesn't describe Fowler's time in the hospital since the explosion at the fort. This is a short novel, and Greene doesn't linger on his character's suffering—the plot must always move forward.

When he arrives at his home, Fowler finds Phuong waiting for him. She tells him to lie down and rest, and adds that he's received a telegram from his editor, requesting 400 words on the military and political situation in Vietnam. Fowler is surprised that Phuong opened his mail, and asks her if she would have left him had the telegram been from Fowler's wife, Helen. Phuong doesn't answer the question, but tells Fowler that there *is* a letter from his wife.

Here, we're given another suggestion that Phuong is less passive—less of a "piece of furniture," to borrow Fowler's image—than she seemed at first. Phuong is perfectly willing to disobey Fowler and break his trust, opening his mail without his permission. She also seems to genuinely love him, hence her interest in Fowler's divorce.

Fowler opens the letter from his wife. In it, she tells him that she'll never divorce him—both because of her religious convictions and because she sympathizes with "the poor girl" (Phuong) whom Fowler has claimed to love. She suggests that Fowler must already be planning to leave Phuong, since he can't have imagined that Helen would agree to a divorce.

Helen seems remarkably insightful about her husband's romantic inclinations. We'd already known that Fowler was willing to leave Vietnam without Phuong—this is why he asked for a transfer before he asked for a divorce—but we sense that Fowler hadn't admitted this fact to himself.

Fowler finishes reading his wife's letter, without displaying any outward signs of his distress or anger. When Phuong asks what Helen has said, Fowler says that he doesn't know—Helen hasn't made up her mind yet. Phuong and Fowler smoke **opium** together, and Fowler lies and tells Phuong that Helen is consulting a lawyer about divorce proceedings.

Fowler respects Phuong (and the concept of honesty) so little that he's willing to lie to her about his divorce. He wants Phuong to stay with him for as long as possible, even if she eventually has to remain in Vietnam while he returns to England.

Later in the evening, Phuong and Fowler go to buy scarves and clothes. As Fowler waits outside a store for Phuong, he writes Pyle a letter. In it, he thanks Pyle for saving his life—though he refers to the heroic deed as "saving me from an uncomfortable end." He says that Helen has agreed to divorce him, meaning that Pyle "need not worry" about Phuong any longer. As Phuong calls to Fowler, he thinks that he might be able to find a way to stay in Vietnam after all.

Fowler is uncomfortable showing affection or loyalty to other people, even when it's a case of his life being saved. In part, this is because Fowler is uncomfortable with affection of any kind, but it certainly doesn't help that Fowler and Pyle are rivals. Even when he thanks Pyle, Fowler slips in a cutting reminder that he, not Pyle, is going to end up with Phuong.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 2

A number of weeks pass in Vietnam, and Fowler continues with his reporting. He knows that he is scheduled to leave Vietnam in April of the next year. At the same time, he is disappointed that his loyal assistant, Dominguez, has taken ill. Dominguez is instrumental in obtaining useful information for Fowler, and without his help, Fowler can't do much to report on the *status quo* in Vietnam.

As the novel goes on, we get a better feeling for the scope of Fowler's involvement in Vietnam. He can't simply get stories, but instead relies on a network of informants. This reinforces how difficult it is to stay neutral in the midst of a war: Fowler has to rely on other people, and this means picking sides.

Fowler visits Dominguez several times. On one particularly memorable visit, Dominguez, who's become very sick now, tells Fowler that he has a story for him. Dominguez explains that he has a friend who owns a warehouse outside of the city. He also asks Fowler how much he knows about Pyle—Fowler replies that he knows that Pyle works for "Economic Mission," and not much else. Dominguez explains that Pyle has been meeting local politicians and lecturing them on the writings of his beloved York Harding, especially Harding's argument that Vietnam must embrace the "Third Force"—neither Communism nor colonialism.

Pyle has become bolder with his actions in Vietnam. before, he seemed satisfied to tell Fowler about York Harding, but now, Pyle is trying to spread Harding to the political leadership in Vietnam. It's not clear what the "Third Force" in Vietnam will be, and perhaps this points to the fundamental naiveté of Pyle's project: he's working hard for something, but can't say exactly what this something will be.

Inspired by Dominguez's information, Fowler goes to the warehouse in search of a "scoop." The name of the man who owns the warehouse is Mr. Chou. Inside, Fowler finds Chou, a well-dressed, sickly man. As Fowler introduces himself to Chou, another man, introducing himself as Mr. Heng, walks into the warehouse, which is covered in a fine white powder. Mr. Heng explains to Fowler that he's seen Pyle in touch with General Thé. Heng adds that he and Chou have been experimenting with plastic moulds—"not for toys"—on behalf of Pyle. They send the moulds to the warehouse of a Mr. Muoi for further processing. Though Fowler isn't surprised to hear that Pyle knows Thé—it's his job to make connections with the Vietnamese—he's confused about why Pyle would be using plastics. Heng makes Fowler promise not to portray him and Chou in a negative light when he writes about them—he insists that he's only doing his job.

In this important expository section, we learn that Pyle is actively using his plastic to create other things—while it's not explained exactly what they are, we can imagine that they're explosives, and suddenly Pyle's idealistic naivete seems much more sinister. Heng and Chou are mysterious characters—much like Fowler, they seem neutral, selling their services to the highest bidder, uninterested in the details of what their products will be used to do. Also like Fowler, Heng and Chou seem highly aware of the importance (as well as the limitations) of publicity and information—they make an effort to control their image in whatever Fowler might write.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 3

Fowler, having just spoken with Heng and Chou, thinks about Pyle—he hasn't seen him since Pyle saved his life. He's irritated with himself for being so grateful to Pyle—life would be so much easier, he thinks, if he didn't have a conscience.

Fowler wishes he were totally nihilistic, but he still has obligations to and affection for other people: both a blessing and a curse.

One night, while Fowler is sleeping, he awakes to hear a knocking at his door. It is Pyle, trying to get inside. Fowler tries to ignore Pyle, but ultimately he gets up and opens the door. There, he finds Pyle standing with Phuong. Pyle accuses Fowler of lying to Phuong: Phuong's sister, who can read English, has learned that Fowler is planning to return to England. Fowler cheerfully admits his deception—it's precisely this kind of lie, he explains, that Europeans must perfect in order to defeat their younger, stronger American enemies.

Again Fowler tries, almost successfully, to be totally nihilistic. He seems to be taking a keen pleasure in lying to Pyle, and seeing the effects of his lie on the man's idealism. It's interesting that Greene uses this opportunity to capture the symbolism of Pyle and Fowler's relationship. If Pyle is America and Fowler is England, then England has won this round: England may be weaker and slower than America, but it's smarter.

Pyle tearfully accuses Fowler of manipulating him, along with Phuong, for his own selfish needs. Fowler doesn't deny any of this. Pyle says that Fowler was only using Phuong for sex, but Fowler takes issue with this, arguing that Phuong is old enough to make up her own mind what she wants. Pyle claims that he can offer Phuong far more than Fowler ever could: wealth, security, affection, etc. Fowler dismissively tells Pyle to go to his "Third Force and York Harding and plastics." Looking back, Fowler thinks, Pyle carried out these instructions "to the letter."

Neither Pyle nor Fowler is a saint when it comes to women, but at the very least, Fowler respects Phuong enough to allow her to make up her own mind—Pyle, by contrast, thinks of Phuong with toal condescension. This explains why Pyle could believe that he's in love with Phuong after so short a time—he's not interested in Phuong's inner life, so he can "size her up" at first sight.

PART 3, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 1

The third part of *The Quiet American* opens two weeks after Pyle's death. Fowler goes to visit Vigot, who's playing cards and gambling in a local club. Fowler joins the game, and as he and Vigot play, they talk, very casually, about Pyle's death. Vigot tells Fowler that "they" found Pyle's dog, Duke, with its throat slit. Fowler shakes his head at this news, and claims, once again, that he's not *engagé*—he's just a journalist. Vigot disputes this—Fowler is *engagé*, even if he doesn't admit it.

It's been a while since we've been on the other side of Pyle's death. This "cut forward' is especially jarring because in the previous part of the novel we were getting a sense for Pyle's character, and now he's suddenly dead again. Vigot's reminder that Fowler is engagé *is the most straightforward expression of Greene's theme: you can't help but be* engagé *in a war.*

Vigot and Fowler continue to talk and gamble. Vigot asks Fowler about Phuong, and Fowler replies that he and Phuong are "all right," but then admits that they've been unhappy. Vigot gets up to leave Fowler. Fowler thinks that Vigot looks at him as if Fowler is a suffering prisoner, sentenced for life.

For not the first time in The Quiet American, *Greene suggests that Fowler sees the world as a projection of his own anxiety. Thus, it's not clear if Vigot actually looks at Fowler this way, or if Fowler just thinks he does, because of his own guilt in Pyle's death.*

PART 3, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 2

Fowler "jumps back" to describe what happened after the end of Part 2, when Pyle left Fowler's home. In the weeks afterwards, Fowler would sometimes come home to find Phuong, and sometimes he'd go days without seeing her. Fowler suspects that she's going to see Pyle, but can't prove it.

Fowler has no control over Phuong—and curiously, this is refreshing to read. Phuong has been so passive in the novel that it's pleasant to be reminded that she's an adult, capable of making her own choices.

A few weeks after last seeing Pyle, Fowler becomes aware of the "incident of the bicycle bombs." Dominguez, who's recovered from his illness, tells Fowler about a story worth reporting, and sends him into the center of the city. When he arrives, Fowler is surprised to see a group of police frantically searching through a group of bicycles that are parked by a large fountain. The police officers confiscate three bicycles and wheel them away.

Greene is talented at building a sense of danger and suspense out of the most banal of things. Thus, we're told straight away that the danger in this scene has something to do with a bicycle, but Greene doesn't give us any more information than that. This creates a mood of anxiety and uncertainty.

Fowler notices Mr. Heng standing near the bicycles. When Fowler greets him, Heng, looking at his watch, advises Fowler to stay away from the fountain. Fowler obliges, though he points out that Heng's watch is about four minutes fast. A few moments later, at exactly 11 AM, the fountain explodes. Heng and Fowler look at the destruction coolly: a few buildings have been destroyed. Heng casually points to a bicycle pump lying near the bicycles, and asks Fowler if it looks familiar. Fowler realizes that he's looking at the same mould he saw in Heng's warehouse. Heng explains that he and Chou have inadvertently been making cases for plastic explosives, all of which have been detonated across the city at 11 AM.

Fowler's cynicism is on full display at this moment—it's as if he's seen so much death and destruction during his two years in Vietnam that a little more can't hurt him. Here we also realize that the stray details Greene has mentioned before (plastic, the warehouse, the moulds) were all part of a "master plan"— Pyle's, it would seem. Pyle's obsession for York Harding seemed amusing when he was just talking at a bar, but when Pyle is suddenly in control of explosives, his ideas—disconnected from the reality of Vietnam—become deadly.

Fowler writes a story about the "Bicycle Bombs," in which he blames General Thé for the damage. He thinks that Pyle must have been responsible for the bicycles, and thinks that it's better for Pyle to "play with plastic" than to concentrate on Phuong. Shortly after he finishes his story, Fowler goes to visit Mr. Moui, the man Mr. Heng had mentioned when Fowler visited his warehouse.

Fowler's journalism is both true and misleading—clearly, Fowler himself believes that Pyle, along with General Thé, is responsible for the explosions, but he doesn't say this in his story. Fowler remains curiously detached from this potential for violence and death—another sign of his apathy and depression.

At Mr. Muoi's warehouse, Fowler finds a dirty cluster of machines. On some of the machines there is a fine white powder, exactly like the powder Fowler noticed at Heng's warehouse. Because there is no one in the warehouse, Fowler leaves and returns to his home. Phuong is not there, and it seems to Fowler that she has taken some of her possessions—scarves, books, etc.

At the end of this chapter, Greene establishes the basic tension between the two halves of his story: the love triangle between Fowler, Pyle, and Phuong, and the political/ideological conflict between Pyle's idealism and Fowler's cynicism. Ironically, it is Pyle's idealism that ultimately seems more dangerous—he is perfectly happy to kill people "for the greater good."

PART 3, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 3

After visiting Mr. Muoi's warehouse, Fowler goes to the American Legation, and asks to speak with Pyle. He says that he has an appointment with Pyle—a claim that the guards in the Legation reluctantly believe.

Fowler is talented at bluffing his way into any situation—clearly, he's had years of practice doing exactly this.

Inside Pyle's office, Fowler finds Phuong's sister, who works as Pyle's typist, and Joe, another American Legation employee. Joe greets Fowler and tells him that Pyle is working from home that day—Fowler mutters darkly that Pyle is probably with Phuong. Joe scolds Fowler for talking about "such things" with Phuong's sister in the room.

In this quietly devastating scene, Fowler is confronted with a dark truth: Phuong has chosen Pyle over him. There's also a hint that Pyle has gotten in Phuong's good graces by getting Miss Hei a job—suggesting that Pyle isn't above some manipulations of his own.

Fowler decides to leave the office. He goes to the men's bathroom and weeps for the first time in years.

Fowler, for all his cynical jabs, is only human—he felt something strong for Phuong, whether it was love or not. The fact that she's chosen Pyle is devastating for him.

PART 3, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 4

Shortly after discovering that Phuong has left him for Pyle, Fowler decides to go north of Saigon, where he has friends and associates. He stays with the Gascogne Squadron, and manages to convince a pilot to fly with him while bombing the Vietnamese countryside. During this brief flight, Fowler momentarily forgets about Pyle and Phuong.

This chapter—a break from the novel's overarching plot—can be interpreted as a moment of "temptation" for Fowler. Upset over losing his lover of two years, Phuong, Fowler drowns his sorrows in the numbing horror of war.

The flight continues, with Fowler's pilot releasing many tons of explosives from the plane. Fowler thinks, "I hate war," and remembers the sight of the dead bodies in the ditch at Phat Diem (see Part 1, Chapter 4, Section 1). After the bombing, the pilot informs Fowler that they'll make a detour before landing, so as to enjoy the beautiful Vietnamese sunset. Fowler watches with amazement as the pilot looks out at the sun, apparently forgetting all about the murders he committed only a few minutes ago.

The fact that Fowler looks on his pilot with amazement suggests that Fowler is more moral than he lets on: he can't forget about the death of innocent people so quickly or easily. This is what makes Fowler a sympathetic character: yes, he's an alcoholic cynic, but he's turned to drink and cynicism because he's so sensitive.

PART 3, CHAPTER 1, SECTION 5

When his plane lands, Fowler spends the evening with Captain Trouin, an important officer of the Gascogne Squadron. As they **drink** and gamble together, Fowler asks Trouin if the areas the squadron bombed that afternoon were dangerous. Trouin replies, casually, that he has no idea—his orders are to bomb everything in the area. He adds, a little defensively, that Fowler is "a part" of the war, too. Fowler disagrees, stressing that he's only a reporter, preparing to return to England.

Many sections of The Quiet American *begin with Fowler reiterating that he's indifferent to the fighting in Vietnam. While this repetition can be a little irritating at times, it serves a useful purpose: with every time that Fowler insists he's not* engagé, *he seems to actually get a little more* engagé.

Fowler and Trouin continue to talk about the war. Trouin tells Fowler that the French will never win in Vietnam—they're losing troops every day.

Trouin's words are prophetic—the French would eventually pull out of Vietnam, paving the way for an unstable country and a long and bloody war.

Fowler and Trouin smoke **opium**, and shortly thereafter, Fowler retires to have sex with a prostitute, whom Trouin recommends very highly. As he lies in bed with the prostitute, he realizes that she is wearing the same perfume as Phuong. He finds that he can't perform sexually with her. He apologizes and blames his impotence on the **opium**—an excuse which the prostitute accepts, smiling.

Greene reminds us of how fragile Fowler's masculinity is. Though he jealously fights with Pyle for Phuong, it's never made clear to us that Fowler is particularly interested in sex. This is also a very physical and depressing sign that Fowler truly is heartbroken about Phuong.

PART 3, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 1

Fowler returns to Saigon, noting that there is no one to welcome him back to the city. When he returns to his home, he is surprised to find Pyle waiting for him, in the chair where Phuong always used to sit. Pyle explains that Joe told him that Fowler went to the Legation to confront him—so now he has come to Fowler's home to talk.

Pyle, as usual, is almost laughably insensitive while also being well-intentioned. He wants to still be "buddies" with Fowler, even after totally betraying him and causing him great pain.

Fowler asks Pyle if he and Phuong are married yet—Pyle says that they're not, and that he's trying to find a way to take a leave of absence so that he and Phuong can be married "properly" in America. Fowler imagines how strange Phuong will find America, with its fast pace, its grocery stores, etc. He tells Pyle to "go easy on" Phuong—the same advice that Pyle gave him months ago. Pyle nods and says that he will.

Pyle's arrogant love for the United States is always clear. Here, we see how blatantly he conflates "properness" with Americanness. It's appropriate that Fowler reminds Pyle to keep Phuong's interests in mind—it often seems that Pyle is uninterested in Phuong's feelings, and only wants to bring her back to America with him, like a trophy.

Pyle says that he's glad he and Fowler can talk, and that he still considers Fowler a friend. Fowler nods in agreement. As Pyle prepares to leave, Fowler shakes his hand and tells him not to trust too much in York Harding. He warns Pyle that General Thé doesn't represent the Third Force Harding discusses—on the contrary, Thé is only a small-minded "bandit." When Pyle says he doesn't know what Fowler means, Fowler accuses Pyle of designing the bicycle bombs that detonated in the fountain. Pyle doesn't admit or deny his involvement in the bombing, but only thanks Fowler for his advice. He assures Fowler that they'll see one another soon.

Here Fowler offers his most articulate attack on York Harding, and, in general, the tyranny of ideology. Harding is a practitioner of "Strong theory"—the technique of developing a very simple idea and then applying it to everything. The problem with such an approach is that it encourages its practitioners to trust in tyrants and demagogues, just because they're so certain and inspiring in their conviction. Pyle's lack of response to Fowler's accusations suggests that Pyle was involved in the bombing, and also that he's in over his head in trying to apply simple ideals to a complex reality.

PART 3, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 2

In the weeks after Fowler's discussion with Pyle, he looks for a new apartment, without any success. Eventually, he finds a flat on the other end of the rue Catinat. The neighborhood surrounding his new home is more obviously "colonial" than that of his old flat: there are American and European shoppers everywhere. Fowler thinks that such a sight could provoke Pyle to another bombing.

As the novel approaches an end, Fowler increasingly takes on the role of protecting Vietnamese civilians from the deadly repercussions of Pyle's misguided ideals. This is surprising, and reiterates that Fowler, while hardly a hero, is more virtuous than he seems.

One day, Fowler is walking through the area around his apartment, when he sees a group of Europeans who claim to be weary of Vietnamese "demonstrations." Fowler despises such an attitude, but also finds himself envying the Europeans for their innocence. Just as he's thinking this, there is a loud explosion, only a few buildings away from where Fowler is standing. A restaurant collapses, shooting broken glass everywhere. Suddenly, Fowler realizes that Phuong must be in the milk bar near the building that has just blown up—it's her habit to spend afternoons in this place.

Fowler is caught between his two reactions to the Europeans—he despises them for not caring enough about Vietnam, but also wants to identify with them, and to leave Vietnam behind. In a sense, these two sides of Fowler's relationship with Vietnam parallel the two sides of his relationship with Phuong. Again we see evidence of Fowler's real love for Phuong, as he is immediately concerned for her safety.

Fowler runs toward the explosion, pushing past the crowd of onlookers. He tries to make it past the police, but they refuse to let him get any closer to the danger. Fowler reaches for his wallet, which contains a press badge, but finds that his wallet is missing. As Fowler is looking for his wallet, he hears Pyle's voice—Pyle is trying to move through the crowds as well. Fowler tells Pyle that Phuong is in the milk bar, and may have been injured. Pyle replies that he warned her not to go to the milk bar—she's safe at home.

Pyle's warning to Phuong is final, unambiguous proof that Pyle is responsible for the explosions, both today and at the fountain. It's bizarre that Pyle can "love" Phuong and murder other Vietnamese people as if their lives are completely without value—a contradiction that Fowler will point out.

Pyle uses his American Legation badge to move past the police, taking Fowler with him. They see dead bodies, including women with their babies. Pyle seems distressed with the sight of blood, and Fowler mocks him, suggesting that he's never seen it before. Fowler accuses Pyle of planning the bombing, timing it so that it coincided with a parade that had been scheduled for that afternoon. Fowler angrily informs Pyle that the parade had been canceled. In response, Pyle sheepishly admits that he didn't hear that the parade had been canceled.

Fowler's attack on Pyle reinforces the flaws in extreme idealism. Pyle is so devoted to his ideas that he doesn't bother to look at the facts: the individual people who will be murdered because of his actions, or the fact that the object of his attacks won't even be present that day. Pyle's sheepish response is curiously childlike: he claims the authority to change Vietnam, and then seems immature when his plans go awry.

Fowler continues to berate Pyle for his actions. Because Pyle has believed in York Harding and the Third Force, he's enabled a dangerous thug, General Thé, who clearly has no qualms about killing dozens of Vietnamese innocents. He dares Pyle to admit to Phuong what he's done. In response, Pyle can only murmur that Thé would never have caused such an explosion—somebody, probably a Communist, must have tricked General Thé. Furious, Fowler leaves Pyle.

Pyle can apparently rationalize anything—even mass murder. To begin with, he can justify killing if it's for the "greater good"—that is, "The Third Force": a supposed good that Pyle can't even explain or define. Furthermore, when his attacks fail to complete their intended purpose, Pyle simply blames the failure on others—like Communists. Fowler finally points out the disconnect between Pyle's "love" for Phuong and his disregard for other Vietnamese lives.

PART 4, CHAPTER 1

Part Four begins shortly after Pyle's death. Fowler has given Phuong money to take her sister to the movies—it's not explained why he's done this, except that he wants them both "out of the way."

Fowler still often treats Phuong like a child, just as Pyle did. Neither man seems to have much respect for as an individual.

Fowler meets with Vigot at 10 PM. He insists that he had nothing to do with Pyle's death, and asks why Vigot thinks he was involved. Vigot says that he doesn't think Fowler was involved, but points to a copy of York Harding's book, **The Role of the West**, lying on Fowler's bookshelf. Fowler nods darkly, and says that it was Harding who killed Pyle, "from a long range." Harding, Fowler explains, is the kind of journalist who chooses a "big idea" and then twists reality to fit with his idea.

Even as Fowler criticizes York Harding for causing Pyle's death, he falls into the same trap that Pyle often fell into. Just as Pyle used Harding as a way to justify his own bad behavior, Fowler is using Harding and Pyle's flaws to make himself forget his own *involvement in Pyle's death—an involvement that Greene, we presume, will presently explain to us.*

Vigot tells Fowler that Pyle was killed by a "rusty bayonet,"and Vigot can't imagine that Fowler would use such a weapon. Nevertheless, he asks Fowler where he was on the night Pyle died. Fowler claims that he was drinking at a hotel bar, the Continental, at 6:10 PM, and later talked to another reporter, Wilkins, at 6:45, just before going to see a film. Vigot calmly points out that Fowler has kept these facts very clear in his head, and he adds that Fowler has misremembered the times by about ten minutes. In response, Fowler shows Vigot his watch, proving that it always runs about ten minutes fast.

Even though we know how *Pyle was killed, we don't exactly understand who caused his death. Fowler's alibi is hardly convincing: Greene has already established in an earlier section that Fowler's watch is on time, meaning that he must have set it ahead to fit his story. Similarly, Fowler's perfect memory of his behavior that evening suggests that he's hiding something. Again Vigot seems more interested in satisfying his curiosity than in prosecuting someone.*

Fowler tells Vigot, who continues to look at him with a vague suspicion, that he has nothing more to explain about Pyle's death. Vigot stands to leave. Just before he goes, he points out how odd it was for Fowler to see the film that he claims to have seen—*Robin Hood*. With this, he walks out. Alone, Fowler drinks and thinks about Phuong and Pyle. He admits the truth to himself: he *did* see Pyle the night he died.

The simplistic division of good and evil on display in Robin Hood *contrasts ironically with the complicated blending of good and evil in* The Quiet American. *Unlike in a Hollywood movie, wrongs are not always righted in the real world: thus, Fowler keeps his guilt and complicity in Pyle's death to himself.*

PART 4, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 1

Shortly after the explosion on the rue Catinat, Fowler walks to Mr. Chou's warehouse. There, he finds Mr. Chou and Mr. Heng. He tells Heng, who understands more English, about the explosion, and insists that Pyle was to blame for killing the people who died. Heng nods calmly, and explains that Pyle is "his own master," even though he seems loyal to General Thé. Heng suggests that Fowler go to the police and tell them what he knows, but Fowler insists that the police will never touch Pyle—he's an American agent, and a popular, likable man, besides.

It's not immediately clear why Fowler goes to Chou and Heng after the explosion—we don't know what he wants them to do, even though he clearly feels that they will do something when they hear the news. We sense that Fowler wants Pyle dead, but even so, it's not clear why: is it because he is trying to protect people from Pyle's misguided, deadly idealism, or does he just want Phuong to himself? Most likely it is a combination of the two.

In response to Fowler's protests, Heng nods, and makes another suggestion: Fowler should invite Pyle to dinner at the Vieux Moulin, between 8:30 and 9:30 PM. When Fowler suggests that Pyle will be busy, Heng suggests that he invite Pyle to his home around 6:30, and then suggest that they go to dinner afterwards. Heng tells Fowler that he should hang back while Pyle walks to dinner, making the excuse that he wants to read a little before dining. Fowler is suspicious—he asks what will happen to Pyle at dinner. Heng replies that he's not allowed to tell Fowler, but that "they" will be as gentle with Pyle as possible.

In this scene, Fowler essentially kills Pyle, even if he doesn't commit the murder in person. He's not entirely sure what he's doing, and this is how he excuses his actions to himself—because Fowler doesn't know exactly how Pyle is going to die, he can delude himself into believing that he didn't want to kill Pyle in the first place. Fowler's belief that he's not engagé *has been based on these kinds of lies all along—of course Fowler is* engagé*—he's just obscured his guilt and complicity by depending on other people to send his messages and carry out his demands.*

Fowler seems to accept Heng's advice. As he prepares to leave the warehouse, Heng tells him, "One has to take sides. If one is to remain human."

Heng's philosophy is a direct rebuttal to Fowler's efforts to be disinterested, and it couldn't come at a better time. In essence, Heng is saying, "You may think *you're ridding yourself of all guilt in Pyle's death, but you're not." It is then up to Fowler, and us as readers, to decide if Fowler's decision was a moral one or not.*

PART 4, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 2

Fowler leaves a note at the American Legation, asking Pyle to come to his flat to talk. While he waits for Pyle to receive the note he goes to have a **drink** at the Continental. He sees workers repairing the damage caused by the explosion a few days ago. After drinking for a while, he returns to his flat, and reads. He hopes that Pyle won't come.

The sight of the aftermath of the explosion reminds Fowler of why he wants Pyle dead—or at least one of the reasons he wants Pyle dead.

There is a knock at the door, and Fowler finds Dominguez waiting outside his flat. Dominguez asks Fowler if there's anything for him to do, but Fowler sends Dominguez away. Shortly thereafter, Pyle arrives, accompanied by his dog, Duke. Fowler invites them both inside.

The fact that Fowler sends Dominguez reminds us of how focused he's become on doing away with Pyle, even if he'd never admit this to himself.

Inside Fowler's flat, Pyle explains that he's seen General Thé that afternoon. He insists that the people of Vietnam aren't complicated—indeed, they're like children. Fowler laughs and explains to Pyle that all children are complicated. Pyle goes on to say that "we" are taking care of the relatives of the victims of his explosion. Fowler interrupts Pyle and asks him to dinner on the Vieux Moulin. Pyle accepts the invitation.

In the hours before his death, Pyle provides something of a summary of his beliefs—he considers the Vietnamese to be children, incapable of making decisions for themselves. This is also consistent with the way Pyle has treated Phuong all along—with condescension disguised as romance and chivalry. Fowler, while certainly no saint, at least defends the complex humanity of the Vietnamese.

Pyle and Fowler continue to chat in Fowler's flat. Pyle mentions that his father is a professor and a disciple of Darwin. Fowler mentions that he might like Pyle's father, since they're both isolationists. Pyle continues talking about his family—and as he talks, Fowler contemplates warning him about Heng's plot. He asks Pyle if he carries a gun, and Pyle says that he doesn't.

Almost unknowingly, Pyle is making it more difficult for Fowler to kill him. Pyle describes his family, reminding Fowler of the misery he'll cause to Pyle's father after Pyle dies.

Pyle points out that he's been talking too much—he senses that something strange is happening that night. Fowler suggests that they cancel the dinner, a suggestion that Pyle dismisses. Fowler reminds Pyle that he saved his life, and Pyle shrugs. He praises Fowler for staying neutral in Vietnam, even after he hurt his leg at the fort. Unexpectedly, he then insists that the victims of his bombings have only been casualties, dying for the "right cause"—for democracy. Fowler finds this absurd.

It's ironic that Pyle praises Fowler for staying neutral at precisely the moment when Fowler is definitively not *neutral anymore (if, indeed, he ever was). It seems clear enough that Fowler is right to scoff at Pyle's heartless "tyranny of ideas," but this doesn't mean that Fowler is right to kill Pyle.*

As he talks to Fowler, Pyle accidentally knocks over a glass—he seems nervous. Fowler helps him clean up the mess, and tells him that he's going to see a film at the Majestic, the local theater, before they dine together. He stresses that if Pyle can't make it to dinner, it won't be a problem. Pyle insists that he'll be there. He leaves, accompanied by his dog.

Fowler wants it both ways: he wants to kill Pyle, but he doesn't want to suffer the consequences of killing him (guilt, mostly.). In this way, he invites Pyle to dinner, then makes a pathetic attempt to dissuade him from coming to dinner (if Fowler really wanted to save Pyle's life, he could just reschedule or warn him).

PART 4, CHAPTER 2, SECTION 3

Having just invited Pyle to dinner, Fowler goes to the Majestic to see a film. On the way, he encounters Wilkins, a fellow reporter. They chat about their journalistic projects. Wilkins invites Fowler to dinner, but Fowler says that he'll be at the Vieux Moulin. Wilkins mentions that Granger will be there, as well. Wilkins and Fowler part ways, and Fowler watches *Robin Hood* in the theater.

The presence of Granger at the Vieux Moulin gives Fowler a clear reason not *to go to the restaurant that night. Similarly, there's no particular reason why Fowler needs to leave the film early to go to the restaurant. It's as if Fowler is trying to punish himself as much as possible for killing Pyle—but he still isn't willing to save Pyle's life.*

Fowler walks out of *Robin Hood* early and takes a trishaw to the Vieux Moulin. Arrived at the restaurant, he asks for a table for one. Saying this out loud almost makes him admit to himself that Pyle is dead. Inside the restaurant, he sees that Granger is sitting in the back with a few friends. Fowler sits and waits, though he's not sure what he's waiting for. Perhaps Pyle will be killed by a bomb as he walks to the Vieux Moulin, or perhaps he'll be shot or stabbed.

Fowler tries to conceal his own guilt, but he finds this (understandably) impossible—even the act of asking for a table for one reminds him of how important a role he's played in Pyle's death.

As Fowler waits for news of Pyle's death, Granger approaches him, and asks him to step outside. Fowler obliges—outside, Granger tells Fowler that he doesn't like him in the least, because Fowler is an effeminate Englishman. Nevertheless, Granger wants Fowler to help him travel north of Saigon so that he can report on politics in Hanoi. Fowler seems reluctant, but Granger insists that Fowler must help him— Granger's son has polio. Fowler offers to complete Granger's story for him. Granger seems reluctant to accept this offer, since he's worried that Fowler will get "the accent" wrong. They part, uncertainly. Fowler leaves the restaurant, and finds Phuong waiting for him on the street outside.

For the first time in the novel, we see how other people regard Fowler. In spite of his heavy drinking and nihilistic cynicism, Fowler appears weak and generally un-masculine to Granger, the loud, arrogant American. It's not clear how Granger and Fowler leave their conversation—but the fact that Fowler offers to help Granger suggests that he's trying to atone for his sins by doing something positive for someone else.

PART 4, CHAPTER 3

The final chapter begins shortly after Vigot questions Fowler about Pyle's death. Phuong has returned from the film Fowler sent her to see. Phuong mentions that she saw Granger there, laughing at the film even though it wasn't funny. Fowler nods and says that Granger has much to celebrate—his son has been saved from his polio infection. Phuong mentions that Fowler has a received a telegram. Fowler opens the message—it's from Helen. Helen tells Fowler that she's reconsidered, and is now willing to grant Fowler a divorce. Fowler explains the news to Phuong, and she is overjoyed.

Curiously, Fowler seems almost to envy Granger, much as he envied the tourists who complained about the Vietnamese in the previous part of the novel. Granger is obnoxious, but he's free of the moral anxiety that Fowler will have to deal with for the rest of his life. It's ironic that Helen finally grants Fowler the divorce he's been asking for—if Helen had made up her mind a little sooner, Fowler would be with Phuong, and Pyle might still be alive.

Fowler notices the copy of **The Role of the West** on his bookshelf. He asks Phuong if she misses Pyle at all, and tells her that she says his name in her dreams sometimes. He suggests that she wants to see the great American sights: the Grand Canyon, the Empire State Building, etc. Phuong denies this, saying that she only wants to see the Cheddar Gorge, a relatively obscure U.K. natural landmark.

Even here, when Fowler doesn't have to worry about Pyle any longer, he can't shake the suspicion that Phuong still loves Pyle. This suggests that Fowler will continue to struggle with his own guilt, and any "victory" he has achieved in "winning" Phuong will always be tarnished by Pyle's death.

Phuong and Fowler kiss. Fowler thinks: everything has gone right since Pyle's death. Nevertheless, Fowler wishes there was someone to whom he could say, "I'm sorry."

Greene ends by reminding us of the paradox of Fowler's character. He's capable of lying, manipulating, and, ultimately, killing, while at the same time, he's moral enough to recognize that he has done these things, and to feel great guilt and self-hatred for them. Many of his sins in fact seem to stem from how sensitive he is, and how he tries to become calloused in order to hide or drown out his own suffering. Yet in the end, Fowler never confesses to the "murder." He continues on with Phuong, who also seems totally unconcerned by Pyle's death, leaving us feeling ambivalent and unsatisfied—as is the nature of the conflict in Vietnam, and often of life itself.

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