

The Resonance of Conflict:

Political Violence in the Transatlantic Reception of *The Quiet American*

This article examines the effects of shifting contextual factors on perceptions of political violence in the transatlantic reception of Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955). When the novel first appeared it caused a political uproar in the US, where critics saw the story of increased American involvement in the French Indochina War as an 'anti-American attack'. In Europe, things were different. While the American debate was continually referred to and given some credence, the novel was generally well received. Rather than foreign policy, the main crux among critics was whether *The Quiet American* marked a new direction in Greene's oeuvre, especially in regards to its traits of analytical journalism and distinct overlap with Greene's reportage from French Indochina for *The Times* and *Le Figaro* in 1952-54.

Drawing on Butler's analyses of 'excitable speech' (1997) and Mailloux's notion of 'rhetorical pragmatism' (1998), the article first compares the novel's immediate reception on either side of the Atlantic, with an emphasis on how external factors such as authorial persona, ideological climate and generic convention resonated both with commentaries on the novel's depictions of political violence, and in denunciation of the novel as political violence. The article then investigates how these perceptions and resonances have shifted over time, especially following American withdrawal from the Vietnam War; a shift that the variations between the novel's two screen adaptations (Mankiewicz 1957 and Noyce 2002) clearly delineate.

The historical shift is also evident in the fact that *The Quiet American* is often viewed as Greene's first overtly political novel – a view that, at least in part, relies on both the political prescience of the novel, its generic complexity and the forcefulness of the initial American criticisms (Bergonzi 2006, Adamson 1990, Sharrock 1984). But despite this notion being well known among Greene aficionados, no thorough analysis of the novel's reception has been made. Given this situation, the article directly contributes to research on Greene. Further, as both the transatlantic comparison and the delineation of historical shifts deal with distinct but interacting cultural milieus, the investigation of contextual resonances within *The Quiet American's* reception also connects to methodological considerations on defining contexts and horizons of expectation; considerations which relate to a wider problematic in contemporary Comparative Literature.

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