

**In the Name of Allah,**  
the Beneficent, the Merciful



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Faculty of Foreign Languages  
Department of English Language**

**M.A. Thesis**

**Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* and *The Comedians*: A  
Colonial and Postcolonial Studies Reading**

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## **Abstract**

Graham Greene is known for novels set in the contemporary world, novels which are often topical. Many of his important novels contain features of interest to colonial and postcolonial studies. In this study two of his novels, *The Quiet American* (1955) and *The Comedians* (1966), are scrutinized in terms of such features. Graham Greene is also widely noted for his anti-American stances. In *The Quiet American* and *The Comedians* he portrays Americans as naïve, inane and ridiculous. They are blind to and ignorant of the other nations' misery. They naively think they have a specific world mission to spread liberty and democracy. However, their interventions are either disastrous (in *The Quiet American*) or unpractical (in *The Comedians*).

Drawing mainly on Edward Said's and Homi K. Bhabha's ideas, the researcher tries to shed light on issues of colonialism and postcolonialism in Greene's selected novels focusing on the emergence of America as a new imperialist power.

**Keywords:** Graham Greene, colonial and postcolonial studies, anti-Americanism, American exceptionalism, *The Quiet American*, *The Comedians*, hybridity, ambivalence and mimicry

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1. Introduction**

Graham Greene addresses contemporary and topical subjects in almost all of his novels. He himself declares that his works are first political, then Catholic, and then political again. However this division is more complex than it may appear. Greene's religious and political views are intermingled so much so that his "religious views have political implications and his politics imply a religious understanding of the human situation" (Hynes 3). As Frank D. McConnell says in his essay 'Graham Greene', "Greene seems most religious when he is writing about spies and policemen and most political when he is writing about priests and saints" (173).

Graham Greene is distinctly influenced by the cinema; he developed the cinematic techniques in his novels. He refers to himself, in a Paris Review interview, as a "film man", and he is right in this regard. He is interested in thrillers, as well. He utilizes the conventions of the thriller in most of his prominent novels. Greene is often 'entertaining', and his use of

film and thriller techniques conveys a ‘good deal of the entertainment.’ However, he is not merely ‘entertaining’ (Hynes 3, 4). In his essay, ‘Graham Greene: A Pioneer Novelist’, Neville Braybrooke asserts that “although Greene’s landscape is stark, sordid, and seedy, his picture of man is not a pessimistic one. Time and again one finds the hint projected through his characters that despair is not the final ending” (423).

Greene is also known for his using anti-American views in almost all of his works especially the novel *The Quiet American* in which such attitudes were embodied in the character of Fowler. “During his travels in Latin America, Greene came across a wealth of evidence of America’s reactionary role in that region. US policies seemed to threaten all that he believed in. By the 1970s and 1980s, as he observed the United States undermining the governments that he supported, Greene’s anti-American sentiments culminated in a series of highly polemical articles” (Benz 120). Greene expresses a strong repugnance for American values in his early novels. He was particularly skeptical towards the superficial values promoted by Hollywood, “an industry dedicated to falsifying life” (Boardman 104).

## **1.2. Thesis Statement**

Said’s *Orientalism* is a criticism of Western representations of the Orient in which the East is inferior to the West. Orientalists portrayed the East “as the West’s weak and irrational ‘other’, a shadowy reverse mirror image of a vigorous and reasonable occident” (qtd. in Chew and Richards 18). Said assumes that, instead of providing a ‘real’ image of the Eastern people, Orientalism is a construction of the unequal power relations between the West and the East. He also notes that, Orientalism is the West’s construction of the orient to maintain its global colonial hegemony

(18). Said's views have had a significant effect on the postcolonial debate on identity and cultural representation.

Most of Greene's novels are ample fields for examining notions in postcolonial studies. In this study notions by Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Frantz Fanon are probed in two of Greene's novels, *The Quiet American* and *The Comedians*. Among these notions are 'hybridity', 'place and displacement', 'diaspora', 'ambivalence', 'mimicry', question of identity and so forth.

One of the crucial issues presented in this study is Greene's anti-American notions in his novels. According to critical consensus, Greene is against the US imperial dominance over other countries. He shows this hatred and opposition through his characters in his writings. He juxtaposes Americans, Europeans, and Orientals in his novels and shows the inanity and foolishness of the Americans. In *The Quiet American* and *The Comedians* American exceptionalism and its consequences in once colonized nations, how disgusting it is and how it fails are demonstrated.

### **1.3. Methodology**

The present study consists of five chapters and in general puts forward the colonial and postcolonial theories and issues and applies them to Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* and *The Comedians*. The current chapter is an outline of the whole thesis plan. Therefore the thesis would practically begin with the second chapter, which is an overview of colonial and postcolonial theoretical issues. The third chapter applies these theoretical issues and features of colonial and postcolonial studies to Greene's *The Quiet American*. The fourth chapter analyzes Greene's *The Comedians* in the light of colonial and postcolonial theories. And the final chapter is a review of the whole discussion.

## 1.4. Definition of Key Terms

**Orientalism** is a term applied to the Orient as “discovered, recorded, described, defined, imagined, produced and, in a sense, ‘invented’ by Europe and the West” (Cuddon 618). It refers to the discourse constructed by the West about the East, including a vast collection of texts – literary, sociological, scientific, historical, linguistic, political, anthropological and topographical – which “has been accumulating since the Renaissance and particularly since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and to which there is no counterpart in the East about the West” (618). Therefore,

the term originally meant the study of the Orient but it was redefined by Edward Said in his *Orientalism* (1978) as a mode of Western dominance through the production, by Orientalists and institutions, of authoritative texts concerning the Orient. It creates the Orient as an object of knowledge, which needs to be discursively and politically represented by the West, as well as constructing the Orient as the West’s ‘Other’ and a site of dreams, myths and fantasies. (Innes 239)

**Colonialism** is defined as

the extension of a nation’s power over territory beyond its borders by the establishment of either settler colonies and/or administrative control through which the indigenous populations are directly or indirectly ruled or displaced. Colonizers not only take control of the resources, trade and labor in the territories they occupy, but also generally impose,

to varying degrees, cultural, religious and linguistic structures on the conquered population. (Innes 234)

**Postcolonialism** is one of the most recent approaches to literary analysis to appear on the literary scene. It refers to the effects of colonialism from the time of its first impact, culturally, politically, economically. Therefore, postcolonial studies takes in colonial literature and history, and the literature and art produced after independence has been accomplished (Innes 239).

Postcolonial literature and theory “investigate what happens when two cultures clash and when one of them, with its accompanying ideology, empowers and deems itself superior to the other” (Bressler 356).

**Neocolonialism** can be defined, according to Innes, as a new form of imperialism in the postindependence era, by which major powers continue to control newly independent and/or developing nations politically, economically and culturally. The term began to be used as early as the 1950's (Bressler 238).

**American exceptionalism**, in short, is the theory that the United States is different from other countries in that it has a specific world mission to spread liberty and democracy.

**Hybridity**, biologically, refers to the offspring of two different species of animals or plants. Innes declares that,

the term was used in racialist discourse to refer to those of ‘mixed race’. In postcolonialism the notion has been used to refer to the processes and consequences of encounters between different peoples and cultures, and in formulating a model of identity which is not fixed and stable. The term is

most associated with Homi Bhabha, who in his essays such as ‘Signs Taken for Wonders’, identifies it as a source of anxiety for the colonizer, and therefore constituting a potential site of colonial resistance. (Bressler 236)

## 1.5. Review of Literature

William Spanos’s essay, “Who Killed Alden Pyle? The Oversight of Oversight in Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*,” (2006), on Graham Greene’s novel *The Quiet American*, offers an example of what Said has called the “epistemology of imperialism” and how it works – what imperialism sees and what it does not, how it chooses to see the world (qtd. in Tong et al. 13). This essay deals with the US exceptionalism, embodied by its practitioner Alden Pyle and its theoretical exponent York Harding in Greene’s *The Quiet American*. Spanos believes that “Pyle’s unconcealed contempt for French colonial rule and his conviction in the virtue of US actions in Indo-China embodies an imperial imaginary that not only distinguishes the US from an old Europe but also endows it with a moral authority that historical imperialism has never had in its overseas operations” (qtd. in Tong et al. 4).

Anthony Burgess in his essay, “Politics in the Novels of Graham Greene,” (2005), asserts that *The Quiet American* is a work of fiction told in first-person narrative and it is wrong to identify the narrator with the author, although he believes that the image of the American military operations in Vietnam, presented in this novel, accords with Greene’s own American Philosophy: “the Americans are naïve.” As a writer Greene considers that too many Americans respond adversely to the term ‘communism’ without giving themselves a chance to examine the referent

of the term. He is assumed by pro-Americans to be anti-American and pro-communist.

In his essay, 'Revisiting 'The Quiet American,'' (2003), Kurt Jacobsen after a short summary of the novel and adding some analytical points, asserts that Greene's novel 'foreshadowed' the heartless and stupid massacre in Vietnam. However, he believes that the depiction of the 'supposedly emblematic' character of Pyle in this novel is completely wrong, not because men like Pyle do not exist, but because of the fact that although "the Vietnam War was waged on the ground by many human beings like the pathologically sincere and sentimental Pyle, the war was neither instigated nor run by them" (4439). He continues that Greene's 'quiet American' was a misleading stereotype, because Pyle seemed so modestly unconcerned about his own profit. What Greene's portrait of this character missed, as similar people in Pyle's position are concerned, was the "febrile fanaticism in calculated self-interest" (4440).

Leila Christenbury in her essay "Recommended: Graham Greene," (1982), tells the reader about life and the works of Graham Greene. She argues that Greene is a craftsman of high seriousness, high comedy and great vision. Concerning Greene's novel *The Comedians* Christenbury believes that while the novel explores the problem of being committed or uncommitted in a corrupt society, where taking a stand can be dangerous to one's health, Greene relies heavily upon the "metaphor of comedy, jokes, laughter, and black humor used as a bulwark against and an interpretation of reality. They lend pathos to a compelling and dark novel" (77).

David Lodge in his book, *Graham Greene*, (1966), talks about the literary life of Graham Greene and his achievements. Then, he offers a brief analysis of Greene's novels including *The Comedians*. He says that the theme of the book seems to be that "in an era in which cruelty and

injustice in the public life have grown to uncontrollable proportions, the private pursuit of happiness is inevitably attended by absurd incongruities that compel the individual into the resigned adaptation of a ‘comic’ role” (42).

Haim Gordon in his book *Fighting Evil: Unsung Heroes in the Novels of Graham Greene*, (1997), argues that Greene's writings have much to teach us about fighting evil here and now, and about endeavoring to live a worthy life. In novels that span half of the twentieth century, Greene related stories of evil persons who destroyed the freedom of others and of a few simple people who fought them. “Through these stories he showed us three basic truths: first, evil exists; second, it is possible to fight it; and third, one may attain wisdom and sometimes a very limited glory by undertaking such a struggle” (14). Gordon's study sets forth its own important lesson: thinking and assuming responsibility for the world, guided by the reading of great literature, are keystones of any worthy life.

In his book *Graham Greene: A Literary Life*, (2003), Neil Sinyard explores Graham Greene's literary career. Among other things, it explores his motives for writing; the literary and cinematic influences that shaped his work; his writing routine and the importance of his childhood experience. Sinyard believes that Greene is elusive, enigmatic and his book examines his fictions from his autobiographies, and his autobiography from his fictions, sharing Paul Theroux's view that you may not know Greene from his face or speech "but from his writing, you know everything" (31).

*Orientalism* is a book published in 1978 by Edward Said that has been highly influential and controversial in postcolonial studies and other fields. In the book Said redefined the term "Orientalism" to mean a constellation of false assumptions underlying Western attitudes toward the East, especially the Middle East. Said argued that a long tradition of



romanticized images of Asia and the Middle East in Western culture had served as an implicit justification for European and the American colonial and imperial ambitions. He condemned the practice of Arab elites who internalized the US and British orientalist's ideas of Arabic culture.

## **Chapter Two**

### **An Overview of Colonial and Postcolonial Theoretical Issues**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

*Orientalism* (1978) by Edward Said is considered a very significant text of postcolonial studies as a field. In this book Said discusses the ways in which knowledge is ‘produced’ by Europeans to gain power. He believes that people live and judge others by the ‘truths’ defined by those in power. He contends that anthropology, history, linguistics, literary criticism and European literary works can form a network of ‘discourses’ which shows the ‘orientals’ as a people to be governed, not one capable of self-government (Innes 9). Edward Said also analyses, in *Orientalism*, the American attitudes toward ethnicity and the general indifference of the American population toward the world, in general. Said discusses the ideology of American exceptionalism. He puts forward the America’s representation of itself and then opposes it from a point of view of an outsider (qtd. in Schwarz 10).

Homi K. Bhabha, another prominent figure, argues that the ‘mimicry’ of the colonizers by colonized subjects blurs the difference - between ‘them’ and ‘us’ - which is the basis of colonialist and nationalist ideologies and it can be a kind of subversion (Innes 12). Bhabha argues that culture is not innate but something which can be learnt and performed through fiction and drama, classrooms and lecture halls, so much so that it can be ‘copied’ and ‘appropriated’ and therefore it is no longer the ‘specific property’ or the ‘unique expression’ of one society (Lazarus 251).

Before 1970s, there was no field of study known as “postcolonial studies” (Lazarus 1). However, in the late twentieth century, postcolonial studies became a discipline for the study of literature produced in or about postcolonial societies. Its early concerns were directed especially at ‘Eurocentricism’ and the ‘cultural racism of the West’ (Lazarus 6). Eurocentricism, as Said asserts, is “the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (Said, *Orientalism* 3).

## **2.2. Colonialism: Critical Overview**

The history of Colonialism, as a strategy and policy of great empires, goes back to centuries and it has not come to an end yet. Colonial rule had destructive consequences and effects, among which ‘territorial and economic exploitation, psychological repression, and epistemic violence’ are the most significant ones (Chew and Richards 2). From the First World War onwards, resistance to colonial domination became pervasive during the decolonizing period. The colonized people struggled for the power to recreate themselves as “the subject of their own stories and histories” (2).

According to McLeod, there are some key concerns and aspects of colonial studies which are also significant in postcolonial thought. One of

them is the *demographical and geographical* domination of European colonialism. Colonialism often is concerned with the matter of territory, seizing lands and crippling the indigenous people and changing them to what the colonizers want. The territorial divisions between the colonizer and colonized, which is the offspring of colonialism, indicate other and, of course, serious kinds of differences and discriminations which represent the colonized people as lacking the same value and human rights as the European colonizers. “Colonialism transformed place, reorganizing and restructuring the environments it settled; and it also changed the people involved – on all sides – who lived in colonized locations” (McLeod 2).

Another aspect is the *material and economic realities* of colonialism. By exploitation of the colonies’ natural resources as well as weakening and depriving the native colonized people of their legal rights and privileges, ‘the European capitalist machine’ was able to accumulate boundless fortunes and unimaginable wealth. “To be blunt,” John McLeod says, “the fortunes and success of modern Europe – perhaps of modernity itself – depended squarely on the pecuniary pursuits of empire” (2).

The next aspect is the *unequal imaginative distinctions* between those who benefit from colonialism and the disenfranchised people. There was a gap between these two. The colonizers were considered as “rational, reasonable, cultured, learned,” while the colonized were “dismissed as illogical, awkward, naïve, ignorant” (2). European colonialism had created such inequalities of power and the imagined differences between colonizer and colonized. Hence, they could make use of the energies and skills of the indigenous people for attaining the wealth. As the Europeans began to travel to the colonial lands, certain kinds of behavior, new models of identity and cross-cultural relationships were determined and imposed. The relationship between colonizer and colonized was complex and variable