

# Unreliable Narration in Fiction and Film

The Unreliability of Fowler's Narration in Graham  
Greene's *The Quiet American* and How It Is Adapted in  
Noyce's 2002 Film

Syme van der Lelij 3838587  
Cambridgelaan 227  
3584DZ Utrecht  
BA Thesis English Language and Culture  
Supervisor: dr. Roselinde Supheert  
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## Introduction

Graham Greene's "most controversial novel" (Gaston 93), *The Quiet American*, first published in 1955, has been called an "anti-war novel" (Gaston 93), a "political novel" (Böker 133), a "novel about writing" (Kerr 95), "existentialist" (Evans 241), "allegorical" (Erlebach 25), and much more. However, its unique approach to the concept of the unreliable narrator has rarely been mentioned. In her introduction to Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*, Zadie Smith says that, besides it being a "brilliantly constructed novel," two of the main characters, Fowler and Pyle, "have their equally distorting, unavoidably colonial, story about Phuong" (vii). Phuong the third main character of the story, is an innocent Vietnamese girl who is desired by both Pyle and Fowler. Smith warns for the unreliability of their "tales", as they are "shot through with personal need" (vii).

Thomas Fowler, a British war reporter, is the narrator and protagonist of the story, which is set in Indochina. As the story develops, he turns out to be unreliable to some extent. As Smith mentioned, his narration is "shot through with personal need," (vii) but that is not the only way Fowler can be considered unreliable. Using Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's widely accepted theory on unreliable narration, it is possible to analyse the extent of Fowler's unreliability in *The Quiet American*.

In 2002, a film adaptation of the novel by director Philip Noyce was released. Originally set to be released a year earlier, it was "sideswiped by the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks" (Thompson). A political film which portrayed an American performing a terrorist attack was not welcome at the time. When it was eventually released, critics were positive. In the film, various camera techniques are used to create a sense of unreliability. The film is focalised through Fowler and takes his side, even when he is wrong and faulty. Fulton, Lothe and Murphet have shown how focalisation works in film and how that can make a film's narration unreliable. Using their theories, Noyce's film can be analysed on its unreliability.

Combining their theories with Rimmon-Kenan's, an analysis of unreliability in film adaptation can be made.

There are many ways a novel and a film can be unreliable. This thesis will research to what extent Fowler can be considered unreliable in Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*, using Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's three criteria, and how that unreliability is adapted in Noyce's 2002 film adaptation.

## 1. Defining the Unreliable Narrator

Most readers are familiar with the concept of the unreliable narrator. Yet, it is quite a difficult term to define (Currie 19). Therefore, to be able to analyse a film adaptation of an unreliable narrator, it is necessary to explain exactly what an unreliable narrator is, how it can be analysed in fiction, how unreliable narration works in film and how such a narrator can be adapted from novel to film.

A definition of the term narrator is required before being able to define the unreliable narrator. In literary theory, a narrator can be defined as someone who “transmit[s] a narrative to a fictional narratee” (Rimmon-Kenan 4). A narrative can be defined as that which “presents a [fictional] chain of events which is situated in time and space” (Lothe 3). A narrator is thus someone who transmits a presentation of events. That narrator can, for example, be an active participant in the story, who tells the story in first person, or an anonymous, detached third person narrator.

In fiction, the reader normally “accept[s] what a narrator tells us as authoritative” (Abrams 276). However, when the author of the text implies that the narrator's “perception, interpretation and evaluation of the matters he or she narrates do not coincide with the opinions and norms implied by the author” (Abrams 276), the narrator is meant to be unreliable. Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes three indications by which narrators can be unreliable: their limited knowledge, their personal involvement, and the problematic value-scheme (101).

A clear example of a narrator with limited knowledge would be a child telling a story, or a narrator describing events that take place when he or she was absent. The information given may still be correct and reliable. However, a narrator's lack of knowledge can become problematic when narrators “tell things they do not fully know” (Rimmon-Kenan 102). The narrator may act or form an opinion, based on that false information. Gullible and naïve

narrators may be very honest, but due to their limited knowledge can cause an unreliable narration.

Personal involvement is the second indication. A classic example would be the jealous husband: his distorted views of events allow for a greatly unreliable narration. Events are coloured and the narrators cannot be expected to be objective, and thus reliable. Narrators may be present at an event and have all the knowledge, if they are personally involved, they may not evaluate all the events correctly. Their emotions may get the upper hand. Even if justified, they are bound to be subjective.

The last indicator is the narrator's problematic value-scheme. This is the case when the narrator's moral values "do not tally with those of the implied author" (Rimmon-Kenan 102). The difficulty here lies in finding out what the moral value's of the implied author are:

When the facts contradict the narrator's views, the latter is judged to be unreliable (but how does one establish the "real facts" behind the narrator's back?); when the outcome of the action proves the narrator wrong, a doubt is retrospectively cast over his reliability in reporting earlier events; when the views of other characters consistently clash with the narrator's, suspicion may arise in the reader's mind; and when the narrator's language contains internal contradictions, double-edged images, and the like, it may have a boomerang effect, undermining the reliability of its user. (102)

Closely related to this factor and worth taking into consideration, is Phelan's idea of the ethical framework in a novel, as narratives "explicitly or more often implicitly establish their own ethical standards in order to guide their audiences to particular ethical judgements" (Phelan 325). A narrator has its own moral values, and it might try to impose those values on the reader.

These factors allow a literary text to be analysed on the reliability of its narrator. There is a large varying degree of reliability; most narrators are only to a certain extent reliable. By using Rimmon-Kenan's three criteria to analyse a fiction text, this degree can be determined.

Defining the unreliable narrator in film is a bit more troublesome: Lothe considers film narration "complex and fragmented" (31). The main difference with fiction is that the story is not told to us, but shown. There is no human narrator as in a novel. Bordwell introduces the concept character-narrator: a film character who "is presented as recounting story actions" (Bordwell 61), much like in a novel. However, such characters are "swallowed up in the overall narrational process of the film, which they do not produce" (Bordwell 61). We do not perceive the story through a character's eyes, but with the camera's. The camera "decides what we see" (Lothe 44): cameras show "the vision of an invisible or imaginary witness" (Bordwell 9). Being the witness, the camera can be regarded as an "invisible" and "extradiegetic" narrator (Fulton 113). The camera narrator can be "humanised", for example by using voice-over (Murphet 90). That gives the camera a human aspect, but does not make him a human narrator as in a novel: it is the camera that narrates the story.

Unreliability in film is therefore vastly different from unreliability in fiction. A camera cannot tell lies, at least not to the same extent as in fiction. A camera can, however, be subjective. As Lothe explains, "the camera decides not only what the viewer sees, but also how and for how long" (43). The camera is able to focalise the events through different characters. Focalisation in film is defined as the "anchoring of narrative discourse to a specific subject position in the story" (Murphet 88). This focalisation is the "filmic equivalent to the subjectively personal perspective" (Lothe 43). This allows a film to "present not only external but also internal perspective" (Lothe 45). A clear case of focalisation would be the camera looking "over the shoulder of the main character" (Lothe 44). Focalisation becomes problematic when the viewers have their "perceptions and thoughts shaped by the characters

who attract and direct narrative discourse” (Murphet 89). In other words: using focalisation, a film narrative can benefit certain characters by having the story shown from their viewpoint.

The effect of focalisation in film is caused by different camera techniques. The camera can project the story “through the interested ‘point of view’ of a given character” (Murphet 90). As an example, Fulton refers to the use of a handheld camera, which “creates a sense that the viewpoint [. . .] is giving us an internal perspective on the action, one that is therefore more ‘authentic’, but less privileged and authoritative, than an externally located viewpoint,” (114-115) such as from a fixed camera. Another example is the close-up, which allows for a “remarkable and unprecedented degree of ‘identification’” (Murphet 90). Murphet explains that “whenever we watch a close-up of a face followed by a close-up of an object, we are seeing the object as it were through the eyes of the face” (90). This trick is called the “eye-line match” (Murphet 90). Fulton and Murphet provide examples of different camera techniques used to focalise a film through a character: the optical point of view; the close-up; the middle-shot, a shot in middle-distance which, when shot from a character perspective, can indicate a “reserve” between characters (Fulton 114); the voice-over; tracking, where the camera follows and moves with the character; and the use of lighting. These techniques, combined with the use of different camera positions, can reduce the “modality - the assertion of truth” (Fulton 114), so that the viewer is unsure of what “is being told or whose authority is privileged” (Fulton 114). Camera techniques and positions thus allow a film to be focalised through different characters, which in turn allows a film to have a subjective and unreliable narration.

Combining Rimmon-Kenan’s factors of unreliable narration in fiction and Murphet and Fulton’s indications of focalisation and subjectivity in film, unreliable narration in a novel and its adaptation can be compared. The following table shows how Rimmon-Kenan’s factors correspond with different camera techniques:

Text	Film
Limited Knowledge	Camera only shows events the character acting as focaliser is able to see
Personal Involvement	Internal focalisation: close-up; use of hand-held camera; medium shot; tracking; voice-over
Problematic Value-Scheme	Internal focalisation: close-up; use of hand-held camera; medium shot; tracking; voice-over

If limited knowledge in a novel harms the narrator's reliability, the director can apply more or less the same technique to the film: the camera can choose not to show certain events, keeping the viewer in the dark. If personal involvement and a problematic value-scheme are a cause of unreliable narration in a novel, they can be translated to film using techniques that focalise the narration through a character. This internal perspective allows a film to be subjective and thus unreliable. Using these criteria, a film adaptation of an unreliable narrator in fiction can be analysed.

## 2. Limited Knowledge

Thomas Fowler, the first person narrator in Greene's *The Quiet American*, presents a limited view of the storyworld. Fowler filters this world, so readers are left to Fowler's own judgements and interpretations. In general, this applies to the film as well. Apart from an important scene in which Fowler is absent (more on that later), the entire film is focalised through Fowler. His face can often be seen in close-up and the camera often tracks him. Fowler sometimes uses voice-over to narrate the story, which is a way of "humanising the film image" (Murphet 90). Sometimes, the optical point of view is used, where the camera is at eye-level and from the point where Fowler is standing, literally "[comparing] the camera with a human eye" (Murphet 92). This limited knowledge sets the mood for the novel and the film, but also creates a certain degree of unreliability and subjectivity.

Having only access to Fowler's knowledge does not make him unreliable per se: he is an authoritative character and there is no sign of dramatic irony in the novel. In Rimmon-Kenan's terms: Fowler is an "adult and mentally normal" (Rimmon-Kenan 102) narrator. The first person narration allows tension to build, for example in the following passage in the novel, where Fowler is entering a guarded watchtower at night:

I wondered whether the guard would have drawn up his ladder, but there it stood – though and enemy might climb it, it was their only way of escape. I began to mount. 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. (Greene 83)

Here, Fowler's uncertainty of what is about to happen, creates tension. There is no indication of unreliability in this passage: his fear of the guards is justified, as he is entering their watchtower in a warzone at night, and the event sounds plausible.

Noyce's adaptation of this passage creates a similar tension. In the dark, Fowler walks to the watch-tower. When he is near the tower, the point of view switches to Fowler's own point of view: the camera is shaky and on eye-level, as if it is Fowler's perspective. This optical point of view mimics the impression of a first person narrative, as if the camera is giving us "an internal perspective on the action" (Fulton 115). The climbing of the ladder and Fowler banging his head are not shown in the film. Instead, his frightened face appears on screen. After two seconds of watching his fear, the point of view switches again to the first person perspective: the narrowly opened trap-door reveals a rifle pointed at him. This is an example of optical point of view, but also of the "eye-line match" (Murphet 91). In this case, it is as if the viewer sees the rifle through the eyes of Fowler. This creates degrees of "intimacy" and "identification" (Murphet 90). When he sees the fear in the soldier's eyes, Fowler becomes a bit more comfortable (Noyce 43:11-43:53).

The trap-door episode is a good example of first-person narrative with limited knowledge adapted to film. We only perceive what Fowler is able to perceive. It is impossible, without using voice-over, to literally adapt the description of fear that Fowler feels in Greene's novel, but by using the optical point of view and the eye-line match, Noyce successfully captures the amount of fear Fowler must feel.

A much more crucial gap in knowledge is revealed in the narration of the events that lead to Pyle's death. Fowler implicitly orders the assassination of Pyle and is not present at his death. As Kerr points out, the murder "takes place during the action narrated in the book's first sentence, although it is not entered into the narrative record that point" (97). This allows Fowler to keep up his innocence: he did not kill Pyle, nor does he know for sure it is because

of him that Pyle is dead: someone else could have given the same orders. Fowler only agrees with Mr. Heng, a communist leader, that Pyle has to be stopped. Mr. Heng is eager and suggests that Fowler and Pyle meet and have dinner, so Mr. Heng and his people can “talk to him on the way” (Greene 166). Fowler, not feeling really comfortable, asks: “What will you do?”, to which Mr. Chou replies: “You do not want to know that, Mr. Fowler. But I promise you we will act as gently as the situation allows” (Greene 166). Fowler consents and gives Mr. Heng permission to stop Pyle. Afterwards, he contemplates warning Pyle and he wonders whether he has really just given the orders to kill Pyle: “I tried to persuade myself that Mr. Heng had other means at his disposal but the crude and obvious one” (Greene 170). He half-heartedly tries to convince Pyle to not go to dinner and thus avoid being killed, but without success.

As Fowler is not present at Pyle’s death, he is able to keep up the illusion he is innocent, as he regularly tries to convince himself, the police and the reader. For example, when Fowler is suspected by the police, he replies: “You can rule me out.[. . .] I’m not involved. Not involved” (Greene 20). In the same way, he tries to convince himself he is innocent: “‘not guilty,’ I said. I told myself that it was true. Didn’t Pyle always go his own way? I looked for any feeling in myself, even resentment at a policeman’s suspicion, but I could find none. No one but Pyle was responsible” (Greene 10). When asked what could be the reason of Pyle’s death, Fowler replies: “They killed him because he was too innocent to live” (Greene 23). Fowler even suggests possible killers: the Vietminh, the Vietnamese Sureté, the Caodaists, General Thé, the Hoa-Haos, or someone who “wanted his money” (Greene 19). The strength of these suggestions lies in the fact that they might be true. Many parties might have benefited from Pyle’s death, and Fowler exploits his own lack of knowledge. Perhaps Pyle was not killed by Mr. Heng’s men, but by someone else. Fowler does not know, and neither does the reader. Fowler basically says: I was not present at his

death, so anyone could have killed him. Yet he seems to be aware of his guilt: the novel ends with Fowler desiring to say sorry (180). Rimmon-Kenan explains that unreliable narrators “tell things they do not fully know” (102). Fowler seems to reverse that assumption: he does not tell things he almost fully knows. He does not want to know who killed Pyle, in order to remain innocent. This makes him unreliable to a certain degree.

Noyce’s adaptation is slightly different concerning Fowler’s instructions to kill Pyle. For example, another reason to eliminate Pyle is introduced: immediately after the explosion which causes Fowler to take action, it turns out Pyle speaks fluent Vietnamese. Fowler feels deceived, as Pyle had pretended all the time to be helpless in the Oriental setting. This does not occur in the novel, where Pyle is helpless all the time. This causes Pyle to appear much more important and better trained than Fowler originally thought. In the same manner, Fowler accuses Pyle of being the boss at the American legislation: “It’s you isn’t it? Joe Tunney, the staff at the legislation, Mr. Muoi, General Thé. They all take their fucking orders from you, Pyle.” Pyle dismisses this accusation by saying Fowler has “no idea of the big picture”(1:16:00 - 1:16:12). Again, this conversation does not occur in the novel. The result of these additions is that Fowler’s motivations for assassinating Pyle appear to be much more noble than in the novel.

The most crucial difference, however, is that, during the murder, the focalisation of the film, for the first and only time, shifts from Fowler to Pyle. The entire killing scene is shown in detail. This scene does not, however, reveal who the killers are, as they are a gang who have not been on screen before. After killing Pyle, though, the leader of the gang cycles past Fowler and makes eye contact (1:21:39). By this very short shot, the connection between Fowler and the killers is established, a connection which remains implicit in the novel. It remains unclear, though, why Noyce chose to switch from Fowler’s to Pyle’s focalisation for the killing scene. A reason might be that the preparations of the murder were rather subtle, as

it is not explicitly mentioned beforehand that Pyle is going to be killed. It requires a bit more attention from the audience to connect the dots, whereas in the novel the author directs the reader's thoughts. This causes the narration in the film to have more knowledge than the narrator in the novel.

This chapter has analysed the effect the limitation of a narrator's knowledge has on the narration in both the novel and the film. In the novel, Fowler is an "adult and mentally normal" (Rimmon-Kenan 102) narrator who does not fully know what is going on, but is smart enough to find out. At the end of the novel, almost no knowledge gaps are left open. Only the real identity of the killer remains unclear, which causes Fowler to be able to uphold his innocence. The film is almost entirely focalised through Fowler. That effect is created by using different camera techniques, for example optical point of view, where the camera is literally the human eye (Murphet 92), and the eye-line match, where a close-up of a face precedes a shot of another object, which creates a degree of intimacy and internal focalisation. Because Fowler is the focaliser most of the time in the film, the viewer does not know more than Fowler does, except for the killing scene, where Pyle is the focaliser. In both the novel and film, the limited knowledge is used to create tension, for example in the trap-door scene. However, Fowler also exploits his limited knowledge by declaring himself innocent when he is not. Above all, Fowler has a good sense of what is going on in both the novel and the film, but the film does not leave any knowledge gaps at all, opposed to the novel. In this regard, the film narration can be considered more reliable than the novel's.

### 3. Personal Involvement

When narrators play a role in the story they tell, their views may not be wholly objective. They might report events correctly, but it is the evaluation of these events that can be distorted by their personal involvement (Rimmon-Kenan 102). Narrators may not see the positive attributes of their enemies, or the negative of their lovers. Their emotions may get the upper hand. Even if justified, the evaluations and judgements of an involved narrator are bound to be subjective. Therefore, in fiction, narrators need to be detached from the story before they are able to evaluate events objectively. In film, where the camera is the narrator, events can be coloured and evaluated through the use of focalisation, as cameras themselves “cannot easily comment on those actions from an external perspective, except through an interventionist device such as voice-over” (Fulton 98). Voice-overs allow the narrator to “muse” and communicate to the audience” (Chatman, "New Directions in Voice-Narrated Cinema" 320). However, by using camera techniques such as close-up, eye-line matching, the usage of a hand-held camera, the medium shot, camera tracking and voice-over, the film can be focalised through a character. In a way, that gives the impression of a first person narration, as events are coloured by the character’s viewpoint. This happens consistently in Noyce’s *The Quiet American*, which is almost entirely focalised through Fowler.

In Greene’s *The Quiet American*, Fowler is greatly involved, in both the war and the love storyline. He portrays Pyle as a monster and takes matters in his own hands. This goes against all of Fowler’s own values. Being a journalist, Fowler sees objectivity as a high ideal: “My fellow journalists called themselves correspondents; I preferred the title of reporter. I wrote what I saw. I took no action - even an opinion is a kind of action” (Greene 20). These lines are transferred directly to the film, where Fowler speaks them to Pyle, so Fowler wants to portray himself as an objective, uninvolved reporter in both the novel and the film.

As mentioned before, Fowler attempts to remain neutral in the war. He does not really seem to care: he has seen everything and is not easily impressed. That is, until the bomb that kills 30 innocent people goes off. Fowler tries to convince Pyle, who has blood on his hands, of the horror of the event: “I forced him, with my hand on his shoulder, to look around” (Greene 154). Without success: Pyle claims to be innocent, as he thought there would be a communist parade: an attractive target. He did not know that the parade was cancelled and that the bomb would just kill innocent people. Fowler then thinks to himself: “What’s the good? He’ll always be innocent, you can’t blame the innocent, they’ll always be guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity” (Greene 155). It is at this point Fowler decides to become involved in the war, as he subsequently hails a trishaw and goes to visit Heng. Heng convinces Fowler that Pyle must be stopped, saying: “One has to take sides. If one is to remain human” (Greene 166). This convinces Fowler to become involved and subjective. He proceeds to collaborate in Pyle’s assassination and does not regret that: “I looked for any feeling in myself, even resentment at a policeman’s suspicion, but I could find none. No one but Pyle was responsible” (Greene 10). These thoughts show that Fowler himself is unable to evaluate the situation correctly. He knows he should feel resentment, but he admits he does not feel anything at all. While his actions may be justified, “his motives for doing so are ambiguous and his action is such that his ‘involvement’ is itself a form of corruption” (O’Prey 152).

In Noyce’s adaptation, Fowler’s lack of feelings is shown nonverbally. When interrogated, Fowler says: “[t]here’s a war on. People are dying every day” (Noyce 1:23:39). A close-up of his face shows how cold and detached he is, as if he does not care. He stares at Vigot, his interrogator. The camera is located directly behind Fowler’s left shoulder. This is a typical example of focalisation in film: the viewer takes Fowler’s position. It should also be noted that Fowler is standing on the stairs, while Vigot is below him. This gives Vigot a sense

of disempowerment (Fulton 116). Fowler refuses to help Vigot, even though he knows how Pyle died. This scene bears a close resemblance to the opening scene, in which Vigot and Fowler sit opposite each other. When Vigot asks Fowler whether he has “anything to help” (Noyce 4:06), Fowler replies with: “no, nothing at all.” He is blatantly lying, which the viewer does not know at that point. This means that in this case, the unreliability of Fowler can only be “recognised after the fact” (Bordwell 60). His personal involvement in the story causes him to lie to other characters, which raises doubts about his trustworthiness as a narrator.

Fowler’s reporting of his own love life is even more unreliable, as he is quite irrational about his feelings. He is no longer the ideal of a “mentally normal narrator” (Rimmon-Kenan 102). He admits so himself, shortly after Phuong has left him for Pyle:

I had been punished. It was as though Pyle, when he left my flat, had sentenced me to so many weeks of uncertainty. Every time that I returned home it was with the expectation of disaster. Sometimes Phuong would not be there, and I found it impossible to settle to any work till she returned, for I always wondered whether she would ever return. (Greene 132)

Just before Phuong leaves Fowler, he finds himself unable to trust her, and thus he cannot evaluate her answers correctly. He is so worried about Phuong leaving, that he distrusts her: “my anxiety would speak for me, and I said, ‘When did you last see Pyle?’ She hesitated -- or was it that she was really thinking back?” (Greene 132). This shows that Fowler is too involved in this storyline to be able to think clearly. His evaluations are coloured by feelings, and harm his reliability as a narrator. His distorted evaluations lead Fowler to immoral actions: Fowler lies to Phuong and Pyle about divorcing his wife. On asked why, the following dialogue occurs between Pyle and Fowler: “‘Can’t you explain, Thomas, why...?’ ‘Surely it’s obvious enough. I wanted to keep her.’ ‘At any cost to her?’ ‘Of course’” (Greene 123). The readiness with which Fowler is prepared to lie testifies to his involvement: lying is

the only possible way for him to keep Phuong. The reader is all the time fully aware he is lying, and it makes Fowler untrustworthy. If Fowler is able to lie to other characters, he is able to lie to the reader as well.

In the film, it is not immediately revealed Fowler is not telling the truth. At Fowler's own home, Phuong is very grateful to Pyle for offering her sister a job at the American legislation, probably in an attempt to seduce Phuong. Fowler then successfully attempts to take control of the situation by saying his wife has agreed to divorce him. He throws away the letter he is holding in his hands. The contents of the letter are not revealed: this is a prime example of what Bordwell calls a limit on "communicativeness" (59). The camera could have access to the letter, but the director chooses to create a knowledge gap. A letter of which the contents are of great importance, we learn later, is being kept back. This is a sign that the narration is focalised through Fowler. Fowler benefits by the camera not showing the letter. If the camera had revealed the letter, and thus the lie, Fowler as a character would be discredited. Phuong then kisses Fowler, while Pyle is humiliated: he stands awkwardly in the room while Fowler enjoys his victory over Pyle. Fowler is then able to say, with a smug look on his face, "Thank you for dropping by" (53:44). In the next scene, it is revealed that Fowler was blatantly lying. Again, this is a case of an unreliability which is only recognised after the fact. The narration in the film seems to purposely mislead its audience by focalising through Fowler. In this scene, Fowler creates his own victory by lying, and the camera has the means to catch him out, but does not. Instead, the narration allows Fowler to lie and make it believable.

In the novel, Fowler's narration is considerably influenced by his personal involvement. He feels himself unable to witness Pyle being responsible for the death of innocent people, nor Pyle leaving with Phuong. As a result, rather than his "reporting of the events themselves," it is Fowler's evaluations of events and characters that is "suspect"

(Rimmon-Kenan 102). He cannot trust Phuong any longer and he refuses to help the police investigate Pyle's death. Since the reasons for his dishonesty are plausible, it seems that Fowler is lying for a good cause. Yet he even admits that he cannot feel emotions, and is filled with anxiety. Therefore, his personal involvement has a severe limiting impact on his reliability. In the film, his unreliability as character is given extra effect by the use of different techniques. By revealing Fowler's lies only after they had the effect he desired, Noyce purposely deceives the viewer. The film is focalised through Fowler using close-ups, tracking and voice-overs. The film attempts to have the viewer's "perceptions and thoughts shaped by the characters who attract and direct narrative discourse" (Murphet 89). While the camera is the narrator, it is Fowler who seems to direct what is shown: objects that discredit him, are not shown. The film seems to want the viewer to believe Fowler's lies. The narration is coloured by personal involvement in both the novel and the film, making it unreliable to a degree.

#### 4. Problematic Value-Scheme

Rimmon-Kenan's third indicator of unreliable narration is the narrator's problematic value-scheme. A narrator's value-scheme can be considered problematic when it clashes with the value-scheme of the implied author (102). A narrator may, for example, perform the most atrocious acts: if the implied author does share those values, the narrator can be considered reliable (Rimmon-Kenan 102). This is rather vague, as it is based on assumptions: the reader can only assume that the implied author does not agree with the narrator, as the former is unable to speak directly to the reader. Rimmon-Kenan gives some indicators of disagreements between implied author and narrator. When a narrator ignores the facts; is proven wrong; constantly clashes with other characters or his language contains internal contradictions, it may be a sign the implied author does not agree with the narrator (Rimmon-Kenan 102). Just as the personal involvement factor, it is not the reporting of events, but the narrator's evaluations that can be distorted. In Greene's *The Quiet American*, Fowler often clashes with other characters. There is only one scene, at the American legation, where he ignores the facts and is proven wrong. At that moment, it seems, the implied author of the novel, dismisses the ethical values of Fowler.

In film, the narration's value-scheme has to be analysed in a different way. Internal incongruities and contrasts of a character have to be "conveyed externally and visually, through gesture and expression, or directly through dialogue" (Fulton 110). As Noyce's film is focalised through Fowler, the narration is shaped by his value-scheme. At points where his value-scheme is questioned, the film chooses Fowler's side by using camera techniques as close-up, eye-level matching and tracking. This causes the film narration to be biased. In this manner, a comparison between novel and film can be made.

Before doing so, it might be useful to analyse Fowler's ethical framework in Greene's *The Quiet American*, as it is problematic. As Phelan states, narratives have the power to

“explicitly or more often implicitly establish their own ethical standards in order to guide their audiences to particular ethical judgements” (325). This happens in *The Quiet American*.

Fowler cheats, lies and kills, yet he is able to evoke sympathy with the reader, as he is able to make these actions seem completely normal and reasonable.

One of Fowler’s most hypocritical characteristics is his behaviour regarding his wife, whom he sees as his enemy. He seems ashamed of being married: it is only revealed at a third of the novel, when he says to Pyle: “I can’t marry her. I have a wife at home. She would never divorce me. She’s High Church - if you know what that means” (Greene 50). Throughout the novel, Fowler unsuccessfully attempts to divorce Helen, his wife. He much rather marries Phuong, as he explains: “It had been a long and frustrating courtship. If I could have offered marriage and a settlement everything would have been easier” (Greene 32). The fact that he is married does not influence his behaviour: it is merely a hurdle that prevents him from marrying Phuong.

In Noyce’s adaptation, it is also revealed rather late, 20 minutes into the film, that Fowler is married. “But not to her,” Fowler adds as Phuong joins his and Pyle’s conversation. He says that rather grimly, as if he is a victim of the situation. Fowler does not await Pyle’s response; instead, he rather abruptly leaves. In different ways, in both the novel and the film it is made clear Fowler regards his wife as excess baggage, and has no scruples at all about having a mistress in the country he is working.

As the narrator of the novel, Fowler establishes the narrative’s ethical standards: he does not want to give “private reasons” as a reason for not wanting to return to England, as gossip would ensue among editors of his newspaper: “every correspondent, it was assumed, had his local girl” (Greene 64). Here it is implied that Fowler is doing a normal thing by cheating on his wife. When Pyle discovers Fowler has lied about wife divorcing him, Fowler does not show any remorse: “You shouldn’t trust anyone when there’s a woman in the case”

(Greene 122), cynically stating it is “European duplicity” (Greene 122). Fowler suggests that correspondents have their local girls, and Europeans deceive: it is in his nature. Being a European correspondent, Fowler seems to feel free to commit either act.

The film does not raise any questions about Fowler being married and sleeping with Phuong. In an intimate moment at the start of the film, Fowler, lying in bed next to Phuong, says: “I’d marry you if I could”. Phuong asks if his wife would consent to a divorce, to which Fowler replies: “I doubt it” (Noyce 21:39). There is a big close-up of Fowler’s face at this point, in an intimate situation. He looks down, avoiding eye-contact with the camera. The big close-up is a sign of emotion, internal focalisation (Fulton 116), and allows a degree of “identification” and “intimacy” (Murphet 90). Here, the narration shows two people who want to marry each other but cannot. By creating this mood, the ethical standards of this film are being established in Fowler’s favour.

When Pyle confronts Fowler with his lies in the novel, Fowler is more ashamed than anything else: “there wasn’t any point in being angry with anyone - the offender was too obviously myself” (123). However, he views the confrontation as an annoying discussion, not as something that could lead Phuong away from him. He says to Phuong: “I noticed you were quiet. [. . .] What a fury you might have been, but you’re Phuong - you are no fury” (123), as if her being quiet means that she does not care about his lying.

The confrontation is more dramatic in the film. Pyle, Phuong and her sister are all present. Fowler is in a weak position. He is sitting, while Pyle, Phuong and her sister are standing angrily before him. Fowler again acts as a focaliser in this scene. There is an optical point of view from where he is sitting, and the eye-line match technique is used. These techniques are combined: first the viewer sees a close-up of Fowler’s face, followed by an optical point of view shot from where Fowler is sitting, looking up at Pyle, Phuong and her sister. He does not give a satisfactory answer to the question why he lied. In a weak voice, he

says “I was taught never to read other people’s letters” (55:15), as the evidence was gathered from a stolen letter from his wife, to which Phuong’s sister replies: “I was taught not to tell lies” (55:18). Fowler does not reply to this. He is then left alone, with the camera looking down on him, a sign of disempowerment (Fulton 116). By focalising through Fowler and emphasising his feelings of loneliness, as opposed to Pyle and Phuong’s sister’s anger, the narration seems to sympathise with Fowler. Whereas Phuong leaves Fowler immediately in the film, in the novel she stays with him a little while longer, and then leaves on her own accord. In the film, it is clear that Fowler is left alone and miserable.

As a result of his anger, Fowler misbehaves at the American Legation in both the novel and film. He feels a great injustice has been done to him after Phuong has left him for Pyle, even though, objectively seen, it is the result of him being unable to divorce his wife and lying about it. He is, however, unable to reflect on this. He is just angry that “Pyle’s taken [his] girl” (Greene 138). When asked to calm down, Fowler replies: “All right. I know I’m behaving badly, and I’m going to go on behaving badly. This is a situation where people do behave badly” (Greene 139). After that, he locks himself in the bathroom and cries. In this scene, Fowler ignores the facts, is proven wrong and clashes with other characters. According to Rimmon-Kenan’s criteria, it can be argued that there is a disagreement between the implied author and the narrator. The implied author wants the narrator to be punished. Again, Fowler tries to establish an ethical framework here: when necessary, it is completely acceptable to behave badly and emotional. The implied author seems to disagree: Fowler really makes a fool of himself, making innuendos: “I don’t care a damn about his guts. There are other parts of his body that are more à propos,” to which the economic attaché replies: “Now we can’t have any innuendoes like that, Fowler, with a lady in the room” (139).

This scene is adapted by Noyce in a dramatic manner. First, we see Fowler returning home and realising Phuong has moved out. At the American Legation, classical music

accompanies his tantrum in the office. The camera moves with him behind his back; it tracks him, creating a sense of inner focalisation and involvement (Fulton 116). When Fowler cries at the toilet, the camera films him from above, portraying Fowler as a weak and hurt person. This has the effect of the viewer sympathising with him.

These scenes show that the implied author of Greene's *The Quiet American* sometimes clashes with narrator Fowler. He fights with other characters, is proven wrong and perceives events as if he is the victim. Besides these factors, it is also apparent that he attempts to establish his own ethical framework. Fowler lives in a world where he considers lying and cheating quite normal and where marriage is an annoyance that stops him from marrying Phuong. This moral framework is present in the novel and film. Fowler is the focaliser of the film, which is made clear by the usage of techniques as the close-up, the optical point of view and the eye-line match. The clashes are more dramatic in the film, with Fowler being put in worse positions, for example when he is confronted by Pyle, Phuong and her sister. Even at those moments, the narration of the film allows the viewer to "identif[y]" (Murphet 90) with Fowler. Because the narration of the film is largely focalised through Fowler, the film seems to sympathise with his views, making for a coloured narration. Therefore, with regards to ethical framework and problematic value-scheme, *the Quiet American*, both novel and film, can be considered to be unreliably narrated to an extent.

## Conclusion

Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* and Noyce's adaptation show how huge the difference is between novel and film regarding narration. Where Fowler is the only narrator in the novel and can be analysed as such, the film proved more complicated to analyse. The narration is performed by cameras, which do have the power to narrate in a less than completely reliable manner. Comparisons between novel and film can, despite the differences, be made, and it can be concluded that both the novel and the film are, in their own way, unreliable to a certain extent.

Fowler lacks knowledge of how exactly Pyle got killed in the novel. That does not have to be problematic, but Fowler remains purposefully naive in attempts to stay innocent. By doing that, he tries to deceive the reader. The film does show Pyle's assassination, causing the film to leave no knowledge gap about the killer at all. That is an important exception of the viewpoint of the film: it is the only scene which is not focalised through Fowler. The rest of the film does not show anything which Fowler is unable to perceive himself. In the novel, Fowler is a smart and mentally stable narrator and is fully aware of what is going on. The film does not leave the viewer with any knowledge gaps.

His personal involvement causes Fowler to lie and also to collaborate in an assassination. His evaluations and judgements in the novel are therefore not to be trusted completely; he admits so himself. In the film, the narration allows the viewer to be fooled by Fowler. His lies are not revealed immediately, but only after they have had an impact. The film narration is also coloured by Fowler's involvement, as he is the focaliser of the film. Techniques as the close-up, tracking, eye-line matching and voice-over are used to humanise the narration and to allow the viewer to identify with Fowler and his coloured evaluations and judgements.

Lastly, the narration in both the novel and the film is coloured by Fowler's ethical framework, even though he is certainly not always right. In the novel, it is because Fowler is the narrator of the story: he tells the story from his own point of view. He views the world through his own ethical framework, in which lying and cheating are considered normal. In the film, this effect is achieved by different camera and positioning techniques. For example, in the scene where Fowler is confronted with his lies, the camera shows a close-up of his face followed by a shot of Fowler's optical point of view, giving viewers the impression they are looking through Fowler's eyes (Murphet 91). These techniques are used throughout the film, inviting the viewer to sympathise with Fowler's ethics.

There is reason enough to distrust Fowler and the manner he narrates the novel. He exploits his lack of knowledge, is so personally involved his evaluations and judgements cannot be trusted, and has a troubled ethical framework.

Noyce succeeds in adapting Fowler's unreliability: the film narration is focalised through Fowler, causing the viewer to sympathise with his views and colouring the narration. The film allows Fowler to lie without exposing it immediately. That makes both the novel and film adaptation of *The Quiet American* quite unreliable, albeit in a different way.

Interesting though these findings may be, this field of research lacks an adequate and well-supported theoretical framework about adapting an unreliable narrator from novel to film. As much as has been written about adaptation and about unreliable narration; the link between the two has not been sufficiently made yet. That would be a great subject for further research, one that could seriously move this research area forward.

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