Journalists Causing Damage: Three Cases in Fiction
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Abstract

Journalists have a rich history of fictional presentations in novels, film, and television shows. They have played the roles of heroes and villains, as well as appearing in other guises such as the drunk, the crusader with a broken lance, the war correspondent, and the vicious editor. Many of these depictions reveal a concern that journalists wield too much power in society. Since the mid-twentieth century three novels, and two films that are based on one of the novels, contain a different motif: the journalist who causes damage, despite his or her positive motives. Close readings of these texts, played against an examination of the geopolitical events and the cultural environments of their production, raise questions about the ability of journalism to tell the stories that it professes to tell.

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: Drunks, Crusaders, and Vicious Editors	1
Chapter Two: Geopolitics and Fictional Journalists	19
Chapter Three: The Journalist as Betrayer	36
Chapter Four: Abandoning Journalism	61
Chapter Five: Journalism: Not Guilty as Charged	83
Bibliography:	100

Chapter One

Drunks, Crusaders, and Vicious Editors

Like lawyers, doctors, cops, and even public relations practitioners, journalists have a rich history of fictional representations in novels, films, and television shows. Journalists – usually reporters, but also editors and media owners – have been heroes, villains, detectives, and buffoons. Their actions, their ambitions, their successes and failures, and sometimes their hypocrisy have provided rich dramatic or comic value for this fiction. In some instances, the idealism or corruption of their craft has been depicted as exercising a powerful impetus for democracy or, on the other hand, for political repression. But unlike the dramas of the hospital, police station, and courtroom, which generally uphold the sanctity of the public institutions on which we depend, fiction about journalism frequently performs one of the functions of journalism itself: it exposes wrongdoing. Many of these fictional depictions express concerns that journalists or the business of journalism are too powerful or too careless, or that their behaviour is just plain wrong.

In all of these fictional portrayals, several enduring motifs emerge. These motifs or themes not only channel the authors' points of view about their characters, but also organize our response to the material. This Masters

thesis reviews these motifs, and then focuses on three examples of a relatively recent one: the journalist who inflicts damage on his or her world, no matter how well intentioned the journalist is. This first chapter of my thesis begins by reviewing the major motifs of fictional depictions of journalism and their cultural and material roots. It focuses first on the work of Howard Good and the four major motifs that he has identified, and then seeks agreement with or criticism of Good's views by other theorists. This chapter also describes the limits that I have imposed on my study and presents my justification for them, and it outlines the content of each of the following chapters. Some limits are necessitated by the scope of the fictional depictions of journalism. I have chosen limits that I believe are narrow enough so that the material can be handled in detail, but sufficiently broad to justify some conclusions about this genre. The University of Missouri-Columbia library holds a collection of 1,300 novels with journalists as protagonists, and Steve Weinberg, the collection's founder, estimates that a thousand more have been written. Scholars have catalogued roughly a thousand North American films that focus on journalism, as well as a smaller number of television programs.

Chapter Two will argue that, although these and other traditional motifs can still be found in operation today, the images of journalists in

fiction change over time – a natural development, given that the material conditions of journalism are changing, too. (Throughout this thesis I will use the term fiction to include all imaginative works: films and television programs, as well as print works such as novels.) This newer motif, which first appears in mid-twentieth century in Graham Greene's novel The Quiet American, involves a well-intentioned journalist who not only is powerless to stop damage but in fact causes serious damage to other people, to the world in which he works, and even to himself. In a departure from Good's approach and from that of some other critics, I will examine how this theme is rooted in culture and the material world and in the changing material conditions of journalism, including recent corporate concentration and globalization that have alienated journalists from their employers while alienating those employers from the practice of journalism. Thus, Chapter Two will link the development of this motif to the profound geopolitical and cultural changes of the post-Second World War and post-Cold War eras.

Chapter Three will examine this motif as it plays out not only in Greene's novel but also in the two films of the same title that are based on it, the first made in 1958 and the second in 2002. It will search Greene's material world for the conditions that may have prodded him to develop this theme – Britain's declining role as a world power despite its central role in

the Allies' victory in the Second World War, the decline of the French empire and the growth of an American empire – and the effects that these convulsions had on journalism. Greene's protagonist, the prototype for this agent of damage, is Thomas Fowler, a British journalist who is covering the conflict in Vietnam before the defeat of the French occupational forces and the intervention of the Americans. Fowler leaves the safety of Saigon because he wants to share the risks of the war on which he is reporting. But he cannot avoid exposing others, even his friends, to risks and consequences greater than those he faces. I will trace the critical reaction to the three versions of this story, including the furor over the story's alleged anti-Americanism that delayed the release of the second film version in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States of Sept. 11, 2001. I will argue that there are several reasons for the persistence and power of the story and its portrayal of journalism, nearly a half-century after its first appearance.

Chapter Four will explore the motif of the damaging journalist as it plays out in recent novels with strong Canadian connections: A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali by Gil Courtemanche and Charlie Johnson in the Flames by Michael Ignatieff. Both authors are Canadians, and they have journalistic backgrounds similar to Greene's. Each novel features a protagonist who is also remarkably like Greene's: a middle-aged man, worried about his

problematic relationships with women, who is working far from home as a combat correspondent. One is even the epitome of polite good intentions – a Canadian. I will examine these pieces of fiction for any particularly Canadian elements, and I will tease out the ways in which they enact the theme of the damaging journalist, as well as ways in which they might deviate from it.

Chapter Five, the final chapter, will consider larger questions that are raised by my study of these fictions. Such questions will include: What do these stories tell us? Why does that matter and what does it say about us? It will also suggest directions for further study.

In all of my research I am guided by a comment by Howard Good, the academic who writes most prolifically about fictional depictions of journalists. Writing about one genre of fictional depictions, Good says, “The shifting image of war correspondents in fiction is a sort of index to the fantasies by which successive generations of readers have attempted to mitigate, interpret or appeal the judgments of history” (1986b, p. 2). The fact that the protagonists of my three target texts are war correspondents highlights the ways in which these interpretations or appeals change over time. This is a particularly appropriate field of study for the three versions of The Quiet American, which appear in two media and over forty-seven years.

Good's enthusiasm is for fiction and for the medium of film in particular, rather than for grounding fictional portrayals in their cultural and historical contexts. Thus his method is usually a close reading of texts rather than a cultural-studies or political-economy approach. His work is a sort of evangelism for popular culture. "Popular literature can tell us a lot – and much of it wrenching – about the relationship between the public and the press and about the inner lives of journalists. We have only to listen with an open mind to the faded voices speaking out of history and dreams" (1986a, p. xii). Like Good, I will perform close readings of my selected texts. But I will also examine how they are rooted in the cultural and material worlds.

In the Good analysis, there are four major motifs in fiction about journalists: the drunk, the crusader with a broken lance, the war correspondent, and the vicious editor. I will review his evidence of each, and then introduce the views of other critics, so as to lengthen this list of motifs.

His first theme, the journalist as drunk, is one of the most persistent. "From the 1920s through the 1990s, the journalist has been identifiable in Hollywood films as much by the drink in his hand as by the cynical gleam in his eye" (2000, p. 12). This is one area in which Good includes a cultural critique in his analysis. The portrayal of drinking journalists, which has included every imaginable construction from heroic to evil, is connected

with changing public attitudes to drinking, he argues. “Whether the journalist is a saint or sinner or a combination of both depends on whether drinking is defined as a normal social activity, an insidious addiction, or a moral evil” (2000, p. 20).

Although this drinking is frequently stylish and companionable, it can also impose costs on the journalists and their families. In the play The Front Page, for example, Mrs. Schlosser, a reporter’s wife, begs her husband’s boss for his pay cheque before the reporter drinks it up. One of her husband’s fellow reporters muses, “If I was married to that dame I’d kick her humpbacked” (Hecht and MacArthur, p. 124). Nobody other than perhaps a bartender would call such journalists heroic. Some of the most heroic film journalists – for example, Robert Woodward and Carl Bernstein in All the President’s Men, made in 1976, and the eponymous protagonist of Veronica Guerin in 2003 – are workaholics rather than alcoholics. Films at the start of the twenty-first century, Good suggests, are stuck in the past, overtaken by changes in real-world attitudes. “But though newspapers can now get along without alcoholic star reporters, Hollywood can’t – not completely. The stereotype is too symbolically charged, too useful, even in its watered-down yuppie form, for filmmakers to relinquish it.” (2000, p.

144). In the texts that I examine in this thesis, the journalists drink in varying amounts, although alcohol does not inhibit their ability to do the job.

Good's second motif, the crusader with a broken lance, involves an actor beyond the usual range of the law who reforms corruption, and then either is rewarded with high standing in the community or leaves town mysteriously. His examples are taken from pre-1930 fiction, although this motif is still apparent in some current fiction. The columnist Porter Wren in Colin Harrison's novel Manhattan Nocturne, for example, opens with a sustained evocation of an urban hell observed and partially created by a journalist:

I sell mayhem, scandal, murder, and doom. Oh, Jesus I do, I sell tragedy, vengeance, chaos, and fate. I sell the sufferings of the poor and the vanities of the rich. Children falling from windows, subway trains afire, rapists fleeing into the dark. I sell anger and redemption. I sell the muscled heroism of firemen and the wheezing greed of mob bosses. The stench of garbage, the rattle of gold. I sell black to white, white to black. To Democrats and Republicans and Libertarians and Muslims and transvestites and squatters on the Lower East Side. I sold John Gotti and O.J. Simpson and the bombers of the World Trade Center, and I'll sell whoever comes along next. I sell falsehood and what passes for truth and every gradation in between. I sell the newborn and the dead. I sell the wretched, magnificent city of New York back to its people. I sell newspapers. (2004, p. 1)

In the genre of fictional war correspondents Good identifies a third motif, which he divides into three subsets. First is the knight-errant, the

reporter in search of adventure, represented by Rudyard Kipling's The Light That Failed, a tale of "the adventurous spirit that animated the golden age of war correspondence" (1986b, p. 6). Then comes the fool and liar, epitomized in Evelyn Waugh's 1937 satire Scoop. Waugh's foreign correspondents are "blindly competitive, morally obtuse, and criminally negligent" (1986b, p. 11). Finally there is the witness, a type created by the mechanization of battle that began in the First World War and carries over to the attacks on civilian populations that typify modern conflicts. These witnessing journalists "come to identify with the victims of war. It is both their downfall and their redemption." (1986b, p. 17). The protagonists of the works by Greene, Ignatieff, and Courtemanche that I will examine in Chapters Three and Four work particularly within the motif of the witness. In various degrees it is their downfall or their redemption, and sometimes both.

Good's fourth motif, the vicious editor, occurs less frequently than the first three. In fact, it seems that Good creates this category largely as a way to discuss fictional editors who are named for animals. Sometimes the names chosen for these journalists reinforce their activities or behaviour. The wren is noted for its song, as the columnist Porter Wren in Manhattan Nocturne is noted for the distinctive voice of his columns. The features editor Shrike in

Nathanael West's 1933 satire Miss Lonelyhearts is "perhaps the most personally vicious editor in all of fiction" (Good, 1986a, p. 63). In the avian world, the shrike frequently impales its prey on thorns. Two other evil fictional editors are named Beakman and Wolfe. In my three texts the editors may appear to the reporters as tyrannical, fatuous or ignorant. But only the editor in Charlie Johnson in the Flames has a name, the unremarkable Shandler.

These motifs could persist only if they resonate with models in the real world. Good traces the development of newspaper fiction as a genre to the 1890s, when the reporter emerged as "a distinct type" (1986a, p. 3). As the American newspaper became a mass medium in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the total circulation of daily papers in the United States grew four times as quickly as the country's population (1986a, p. 3). He also argues that journalistic myths such as the heavy drinker or the crusader with a broken lance are important because they help organize the public perception of journalists into patterns that are consistent and "agreeable" (1986a, p. 105). But journalistic myths contain an element that transcends the general human need for believable stories, Good argues.

Amid the pain and confusion of modern existence, literary stereotypes fulfil the poignant human need for identifiable heroes and villains. Popular imagination has invested journalism, which has told the calamitous story of the past

century in shocking headlines and measured out our lives in column inches, with inordinate power to do good or evil. ... These are figures borrowed from reality and set down with a half-soothing, half-terrifying dream from which there is no awakening. (1986a, p. 106)

There are clear parallels between books and films about journalists, he notes. "The similarities can be explained by the fact that the films adopted unchanged the formulas that the fiction originated" (1986a, p. 14). The formulas may be unchanged, but not so the characters' actions or motivations. In the two film versions of The Quiet American there are several examples of substantive changes from the original novel. I will explore these in Chapter Three.

In whatever guise, the journalist himself (and increasingly, herself) frequently inspires writers of fiction. Mark Bowden observes, "America has always had a soft spot for the clever, no-nonsense common man or woman making a buck by his or her wits, which is how reporters have most often been portrayed," (2004, p. 146). Is this an instance of American exceptionalism? This fixation is not shared by other cultures, particularly the British, Richard B. Woodward argues. "[T]he British public seems to accept that the press is grossly imperfect, and no big deal" (2004). In North America there is no shortage of portrayals of reporters, editors, media owners, and other characters associated with journalism. The first of

probably more than a thousand films in which journalists are central is the 1900 silent film Horsewhipping an Editor, now unfortunately lost. Its title suggests the villainy that, side by side with the practicality that Bowden cites, is a recurring characteristic of fictional journalists. Prominent among film bad-guy (and gal) journalists is flamboyant editor Walter Burns, who lies and conspires to keep his star reporter from getting an honest job away from the business in the play The Front Page and its four filmed versions. In a less central role, the Mafia in The Godfather keeps journalists on its payroll to produce convenient newspaper stories about, for example, corrupt police officers. Citizen Kane depicts a press baron who revives a newspaper but whose journalistic generosity does not extend to allowing objective reviews of his singer-girlfriend. Some reporters, though, can perform good deeds, for example alerting America to the dangers of war as does the fictional journalist in Alfred Hitchcock's Foreign Correspondent or, alternatively, bringing down a corrupt administration as do the reporters in All the President's Men, who are based on the real-life Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of The Washington Post. Then there is the journalist who will do anything to get ahead – frequently, in a sexist portrayal, a woman. A prime example is the film To Die For, whose television-journalist protagonist hires three gullible teenagers to kill her husband.

Television also provides instances of these themes. If ever a news director should be horsewhipped, it is George Findlay on the Canadian series The Newsroom. The narcissistic George is more conniving than Walter Burns; he even tries to manipulate an office pool on the time of death of a staff member's dog. Also on the show, Jim Walcott plays the anchor as well-dressed moron. This newsroom merits Nora Sayre's description of the lowest-common-denominator fictional newsroom: "a giant nursery seething with infantile beings" (1975, unpag.). In a recent episode of another Canadian series, The Eleventh Hour, producer Isobel Lambert flirts with the truth and with journalistic integrity as she impersonates a medical patient in order to break a story about a corrupt fertility-clinic doctor. There have been, though, more positive depictions of journalists on television. In Murphy Brown, for example, an energetic journalist battles sexism in the search for the big story – and for romance. Good argues that Murphy Brown is made from the mold of Torchy Blane, the female journalist in a series of nine films made from 1937 to 1939. "Murphy, played by Candice Bergen, is a top reporter with sexy blonde hair and a tough, masculine manner" (1998, p. 3). Another television series, Lou Grant, features an old-fashioned, principled journalist whose heart is always in the right place.

Incorporating and developing many of these stereotypes is a fascinating episode of the HBO series From the Earth to the Moon. “We Interrupt This Program” features a struggle between the aging but wise TV reporter Emmett Seaborn and the smarmy greenhorn Brett Hutchins. Covering the failed Apollo 13 moon mission, they are nominally colleagues but actually rivals for access to information and for air time. Representing the sober traditions of objective, respectful news coverage – which are sufficiently elastic to allow him to pursue a source for a urinal-side interview – Seaborn works his NASA contacts to ferret out the latest scientific and technical information about the crisis. Hutchins scorns this approach as “Sominex.” Assuming the role of a male “sob sister,” he manipulates one astronaut’s young daughter and another’s elderly mother to obtain more personal material. Hutchins’ combination of ignorance and ambition make him easy prey for a politician’s manipulative public-relations operative.

Sometimes a newsroom serves as a more passive background, as it does in the television series The Mary Tyler Moore Show. At other times the journalistic aspect of a character is mentioned but undeveloped; for example Oscar Madison’s sports-writing job on the television series and film The Odd Couple. There are also many fictional works in which journalists play subordinate roles, narrating the story or advancing the plot in minor ways.

My interest, though, is in fictions in which journalists or their craft play central roles.

Why do fiction writers reach so frequently for journalists as their protagonists? Writing in the Boston Globe, arts critic Richard B. Woodward cites the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and of the press. “Journalists may rank with lawyers and politicians in the index of odious professions, but nowhere else are the rights of the press so central to a nation’s vaunted idea of itself” (2004). Canada has enacted the same protections in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but perhaps that 1982 legislation is too recent to have become “central” to our nation’s idea of itself. Perhaps in keeping with the American fetish for individual rights, fictional representations often focus on the journalist as an individual, rather than on the structure of his or her media organization, thus conferring much more agency on journalists than many of their real-life counterparts experience. But the journalists of novels and screen, whether honest or corrupt, spend remarkably little time carrying out the activities that preoccupy their real-live counterparts – interviewing, researching, writing, rewriting, editing, and presenting. Rather, journalists in fiction spend a lot of time doing much the same things as other characters in comparable fiction: falling in and out of love, traveling, or chasing bad guys, depending on the

genre. This division is consistent with John Hersey's observations on the distinctions between fiction and journalism.

In fiction, the writer's voice matters; in reporting, the writer's authority matters. We read fiction to fortify our psyches, and in the pleasure that that fortification may give us, temperament holds sway. We read journalism – or most of us still do, anyway – to try to learn about the external world in which our psyches have to struggle along, and the quality we most need in our informant is some measure of trustworthiness. (1986, p. 308)

Good argues that films in particular make it safe for an audience to participate vicariously in the adventures of a journalist. “Whether portrayed as a cynic or idealist, a scandalmonger or crusader, he absorbs our pain, fear, rage, doubt, and then diffuses them in the golden fluorescence of a fantasy” (1989, p. 164). Other critics suggest different concerns about fictional depictions of journalists. Loren Ghiglione, for example, warns that “fiction provides only partial truths” (1991, p. 460). He expresses concern that the concentration in fiction on the bad side of journalists leaves their good side uncovered, and may contribute to public disaffection with the craft and its practitioners. Ehrlich argues that films about journalism enact an ambiguous relationship with the business they depict, simultaneously denigrating and glamourizing the press. “[W]hile they may not do this in a ‘realistic’ way or in a manner always consistent with journalism’s self-image, the cultural

conflicts they portray do reflect the paradoxical relationship real-world journalism has with its audience” (1996, p. 39).

Heidi M. Langner-Burns, whose dissertation examines the image of journalists in American films and fiction from 1975 to 1987, finds that these media glamourize the journalistic profession, portraying professionals at the height of their careers doing important and exciting work. “However, this adventure and glamour seems to be reserved for male and female Caucasians” (1989, abstract). Finally, Steve Weinberg, who has collected the journalism novels at the University of Missouri, warns about the dangers of seeking truth in fiction. “In fact, I worry a lot about the unrealistic picture a nonjournalist must take away from these novels: according to most of them, we lack an ethical centre, sleep regularly with sources, and solve so many crimes, especially murders, that it is a wonder the police have anything to do” (1997, p. 17).

Matthew C. Ehrlich expresses the other extreme in an argument that, I believe, applies equally to novels. “The films regularly have suggested that the journalist can see through lies and hypocrisy, stick up for the little guy, uncover the truth, and serve democracy” (2004, p. 1). Clearly journalism is a business unlike the others.

Among the other professional groups that express similar concerns about their image in fiction are public relations practitioners. A study that found 118 novels and films containing at least one PR character asserts that this business needs to provide better PR about itself. “Positive characterizations of practitioners are rare. Negative characterizations, embellished with the zeal of poetic licence, are disheartening at best and malicious at worst” (Miller, 1999, p. 22).

So much for the motifs of history. The following chapter explores a motif of journalistic fiction that is rooted in a novel that appeared five decades ago and is evident in two recently published works: the journalist as an inadvertent agent of damage.

Chapter Two

Geopolitics and Fictional Journalists

The motif of the fictional journalist who causes unintended damage is distinctive from the generally more positive motifs identified by Good and others, such as the crusader with a broken lance and the detective. The texts which I am examining portray journalists more ambiguously. In addition, I want to pay more attention to geopolitical factors and their effects on journalists than these critics do. In this way, my thesis builds on the extensive scholarship on the topic of fictional journalists, while staking out some new territory. These fictions all contain versions of the four stock elements that Matthew C. Ehrlich identifies in fiction about journalists: the reporter, the story, the love interest, and the editor (2004, p. 10). But the fictions that interest me in this thesis highlight the journalist's view of himself as a moral agent. These journalists may or may not afflict the comfortable, but they endeavour to comfort the afflicted. They repair broken aspects of the social system in which they live – or at least they aim to perform repairs. Because of this, these fictional journalists fit into some of the earlier motifs. Along the way, though, they also cause serious damage.

As do many journalists in earlier fictions, the damaging fictional journalists live in worlds that are recognizable as analogues of the real one.

In these worlds, they want to right a wrong, prevent a disaster, or expose malfeasance. But there is a crucial difference: they operate in a world that has gone so desperately wrong that it can no longer be made right. In my target texts, this is a world of war, a particularly horrible kind of war spawned by the real-life twentieth century, war that targets civilian populations. From Vietnam to Kosovo to Rwanda, these fictional journalists try to do the right thing, to function as moral correctives. But not only are they unable to do the right thing, they discover that no matter what they do, it is the wrong thing. Rather than righting wrongs, they exacerbate them.

Novelist Milan Kundera warns that such conflict is an inescapable element of modern life.

The Modern Era has nurtured a dream in which mankind, divided into its separate civilizations, would someday come together in unity and everlasting peace. Today, the history of the planet has finally become one indivisible whole, but it is war, ambulant and everlasting war, that embodies and guarantees this long-desired unity of mankind. Unity of mankind means: No escape for anyone anywhere. (1988, p. 10-11)

Unable to escape from this real-world war, the fictional journalists battle a sense of individual powerlessness. I believe that this powerlessness is connected to a growing sense of the powerlessness of journalism itself. In The State of the News Media 2004, its 2004 annual report on American

journalism, the Project for Excellence in Journalism found the public skeptical about the business of journalism and its practitioners.

Americans think journalists are sloppier, less professional, less moral, less caring, more biased, less honest about their mistakes and generally more harmful to democracy than they did in the 1980s. ... The notion of a credibility crisis in the press first gained significant notice in 1985, when a survey report by Kristin McGrath of MORI Research conducted for the American Society of Newspaper Editors declared that “three-fourths of all adults have some problem with the credibility of the media.” (Edmonds, 2004)

North of the border, Decima Research recently found somewhat different concerns among Canadians. “Not only do they agree that the volume of foreign media is threatening to overwhelm Canadian voices in Canadian media but they also feel that the reliance on such foreign media is likely to increase due to declines in funding for Canadian content” (Canadian Newspaper Association, 2003). Decima does not report any concern with the honesty of the news media, a possible consequence of the identity of the sponsor of the survey, the association of newspaper publishers.¹

¹ Some news media appear perversely determined to lower themselves in public esteem. Recent scandals in the United States at The New Republic, where Stephen Glass fabricated dozens of articles, and at The New York Times, which allowed Jayson Blair to continue reporting on major stories over protests from reporters and editors about his journalistic dishonesty, are blatant examples of journalists’ choosing short-term gain over

On a wider scale, changing geopolitical events such as the end of the Cold War encourage the development of new motifs. This chapter examines the post-Second World War historical and cultural milieus in which Graham Greene created The Quiet American, the first text that I examine. Then I apply the same questions to the corresponding worlds a half-century later, the milieus of the two most recent texts. In both times, I will argue, radical geopolitical changes that erase traditional communities and certainties are reflected in the fictional characters' unmooring from moral certainties. Adrift from certainty and from the comforting advice of traditions, these journalists endeavour to impose morality on an implacable world. They cannot succeed, any more than they could change the weather.

Coincident with these geopolitical changes, as an aspect of the worldwide triumph of capitalism, is the growth of integrated global media conglomerates. For these multinational corporations, many of which own non-media properties as well, cutting costs is a primary goal. Since

long-term survival. Several Canadian publications have confessed that, on a smaller scale, individual writers have invented sources or quotations. The blinkered point of view that allows these offences is not restricted to the newsroom. The Chicago Sun-Times and Newsday, two of the largest-selling newspapers in the United States, and the Spanish-language Hoy have recently confessed to inflating their circulation numbers. The publishers of Newsday and Hoy were forced to retire early because of these practices (Steinberg, 2004). The papers also face lawsuits from advertisers and investigations from government agencies.

journalists are often better paid, and therefore more costly, than many other of these corporations' employees, they often fall victim to cost-cutting exercises. These developments could be expected to taint journalists' view of their employers. But my two target novels that are set in the 1990s do not really deal with this development; they find enough drama in the wars that their protagonists cover. The protagonist of Charlie Johnson in the Flames reports in Kosovo for the London bureau of a large American television network – a typical modern employment relationship. Johnson bears the reporter's usual grudge against his boss, but the grudge does not appear to be directed at anyone above the level of the chief of London office. In the other novel, A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali, the journalist deals with small magazines and makes a film for an unspecified buyer. He has no single journalistic boss with whom to develop an antagonistic relationship.

There have been several fictional treatments of the apparent conflicts between the investigative and truth-telling interests of journalists and the short-term profit imperatives of multinational corporations that employ them. One of the most entertaining and thought-provoking is The Insider, a 1999 film that deals with the conflict between a television journalist and his program's corporate parent over an expose of the tobacco industry. Conflicts between journalists and their corporate employers have the potential to

furnish more plots for novels and films – and for theses about those novels and films.

Until then, this thesis will also consider the international ideological controversies created by Greene's 1955 novel The Quiet American and the films made from the book in 1958 and 2002. I will argue that the character and actions of this fictional damage-causing journalist Thomas Fowler are central to these real-world controversies.

During that Cold War period, Daniel C. Hallin notes, "the dominant professional ideology of objective journalism" required journalists to report mainly what powerful people said and did (1987, p. 6). Also, the central fact of world politics was the conflict between the United States, seen in the West as representing capitalism and freedom, and the Soviet Union, seen as representing Communism and oppression. All smaller conflicts, such as that in Vietnam, were seen through this lens, Hallin argues (1987, p. 6). This point of view is reflected in The Quiet American in Alden Pyle's argument that allowing Vietnam to fall into Communist hands would amount to knocking over the first of a set of dominoes that would include Laos, Cambodia, and other countries in the region. In real life, this "domino effect" was an oft-repeated justification for U. S. military interventions, especially in Southeast Asia and Central America. Nonetheless, the book

and the first film that is based on it inhabit a world where long-lived political and moral verities are dying. Among the fallout of the Second World War were the end of Great Britain's worldwide empire and France's smaller one, and the birth of the Soviet empire. No wonder the fictional journalist feels the need to maintain a moral toehold in a world where long-standing moral certainties are decaying more quickly than the radioactive weapons that threaten civilization. His efforts to do so are less destructive than the system he is opposing only because their scale is much smaller.

George Fetherling notes the intimate connection of this novel with the world in which its author lived. "Writing a decade after the Second World War, Greene revealed in a totally non-polemical way the slow geopolitical cross-fade between the European colonialism that was finally expiring and the beginning of America's ascendancy to the status of superpower" (2003, p. D18). Central to this ascendancy is the myth of the American Century. Propounded by Henry Luce in his Life magazine on the eve of the United States' entry into the Second World War in 1941, it asserts that America's primary goal in entering the war must be to establish its dominance over all other nations. Economic profit would be inseparable from the ideological gains.

The vision of America as the principal guarantor of the freedom of the seas, the vision of America as the

dynamic leader of world trade, has within it the possibilities of such enormous human progress as to stagger the imagination. Let us not be staggered by it. Let us rise to its tremendous possibilities. (Qtd. in Swanberg, 1972, p. 181)²

It was already clear that the twentieth century was no longer Britain's, if it ever had been. The rise of the United States and the Soviet Union was made possible not only by their defeat of the Axis forces in the Second World War, but also by the collapse of their British ally. The conflict seriously weakened Britain to the point where it could no longer maintain the empire on which the sun never set; within two years after the end of the war, India, its largest colony, gained its independence.

In 1939, Britain was the world's greatest imperial power; by 1945, even though the empire remained intact, Britain was an enfeebled state in a world divided between two new superpowers, the USA and the Soviet Union. Britain's wartime defeats had convinced many under British rule that the British Empire was no longer invulnerable. (Davies and Sinfield, 2000, p. 1)

On both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, then, there was a sense of the end of things, and it is this sense that pervades the texts that I examine in this

² For contemporary reaction to the press baron's proselytizing, see Swanberg, 1972, pp. 180-183. The competition between Luce's idea and the Century of the Common Man, proposed by United States vice-president Henry Wallace, is described in White, 1996, pp. 8-12. For Luce's argument two decades later that war in Vietnam offered the final chance to create the American Century, see Swanberg, 1972, pp. 438-441.

thesis. First, the Cold War setting of The Quiet American incorporates a struggle between Communism and capitalism that is ideological even more than military.

The Cold War which, as the term implies, is a climate rather than a series of events, has two aspects: the external and easily discernible opposition of the military and diplomatic forces of East and West, and the much more subtle internal conditions that opposition creates, the mood of fear and suspicion that affects both opponents. The Cold War climate was felt in areas a long way from the political events that created it. (Hewison, 1981, pp. 20-21)

One of the expressions of that climate is the 1958 film of The Quiet American directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. It departs sharply from the depiction of the eponymous American from Greene's novel; Mankiewicz transforms Pyle into a sympathetic, upright character rather than Greene's naïve, dangerous one. Novel and film handle the journalistic character similarly. The 2002 film, on the other hand, is much more faithful to the novel in most respects, including its depiction of the American.

My remaining two texts are set in a world in which the Cold War is over, won by the United States, which could more easily afford the required huge military expenditures. The power blocs into which the Cold War had organized the nations of the world have broken down, and localized chaos prevails in a distressingly large number of areas. This is again a world where moral and ideological constructs of long standing are falling, this time

because of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the international political and business hegemony of the United States. The concept of the nation-state is collapsing in many places, to be replaced by the resurgence of ethnic groups struggling to create their own nations even if that requires the massacre of competing populations. In this world of collapsing civilizations, these fictional journalists see themselves as agents of civilization itself.

Charlie Johnson in the Flames by Michael Ignatieff and A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali by Gil Courtemanche depict foreign journalists trying to make sense of war-torn countries. These settings are terrifying not only because of their violence but because, as in the 1950s Vietnam of The Quiet American, the violence is directed almost indiscriminately against innocent civilian populations. Covering such conflicts in Kosovo and Rwanda, these journalistic witnesses cannot accept the senseless slaughter. Each tries to save one or two individuals from the conflict. Although they are acting from the highest of motives, they are unable to save the people they want to save. In Ignatieff's novel, Charlie Johnson even destroys himself.

The issues in which these fictional journalists are intervening are really human rights issues, although that is not necessarily the phrase that they use to describe them. In one of his many other pieces of academic

writing and journalism, Ignatieff traces a major change in human rights issues between the era depicted in The Quiet American and that of his and Courtemanche's novels.

Whereas the abuses of the cold war period came from strong tyrannical states, the ones in the post-cold war world chiefly originate in weak or collapsing states. We have not come to terms with this changed situation. Our current debate about humanitarian intervention continues to construe intervening as an act of conscience, when in fact, since the 1990s began, intervening has also become an urgent state interest: to rebuild failed states so that they cease to be national security threats. (2002, p. 229)

Howard Good cites Absence of Malice, in which a reporter destroys people's lives in the name of freedom of speech, as embodying a similar theme, and blames the narrow-minded pursuit of journalistic values for the damage that is caused. "Of all the journalists we have met in film history, the drunk and the cynical and the lazy, the comic and the idealistic and the glib, the sober, hard-driving workaholic has become at the end of the century the most stereotypical and, ironically, the most dangerous" (2000, p. 154).

The protagonists of my three target texts are sober much of the time, and they certainly are hard-working. They lack the glib self-assurance, though, of the principal journalists in Absence of Malice, Megan Carter and her editor McAdam (who, as a veteran-editor stereotype, dares to be known by his last name alone). After Carter's newspaper stories about a

government investigation into the disappearance of a mobster cause the suicide of an innocent person, Carter questions her own work. Over cups of spiked coffee in the newsroom, her editor explains the ethics of journalism. “I know how to print what’s true and I know how not to hurt people,” McAdam tells her. “I don’t know how to do both at the same time, and neither do you.” This editor, embodying the traditions of journalism, sees hurting people as an inescapable byproduct of the practice of the trade. Apparently it doesn’t bother him, either.

My protagonists face much the same problem as McAdam, although they eschew his brew of bravado and negligence. Theirs is not the swagger of executive producer George Findlay of CBC’s The Newsroom, who views the harm he does to others as merely collateral damage in his lifelong crusade of self-aggrandizement. In “Reality Strikes,” for example, Findlay snubs an old friend who has become a compulsive gambler. The man dies, but Findlay marches blithely on.

I would argue that the dangerous-workaholic journalist is also identifiable in All the President’s Men, the popular 1976 film that was based on the work of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, two real-life journalists at The Washington Post who played a central role in uncovering the Watergate scandal that led to the resignation of U.S. President Richard

Nixon. The message that many viewers and critics took from that film was that crusading journalists can save the world for democracy. Woodward and Bernstein became instant models for journalists and journalistic wannabes. But a dispassionate viewing of All the President's Men reveals that the crusaders' lances were unfairly sharpened. Woodward and Bernstein bullied and lied to their sources, especially the women, to get their scoops. Seen from the twenty-first century, Woodward's and Bernstein's loyalty to their newspaper, and its owner's and editors' loyalty to them, seem as anachronistic as Linotype machines. This image of the journalist as crusader was so heavily hyped that a reaction such as Absence of Malice was inevitable.

The novels by Ignatieff and Courtemanche depict one of the consequences of the absence of coherent intervention by powerful states: individuals such as journalists assume some of the responsibilities of intervention. But, equipped with little more than moral outrage, these fictional journalists only exacerbate the problem. An observation by Ignatieff about real-world intervention applies equally to these fictional worlds: "As long as the chief motive for intervention is conscience alone, we can only expect sporadic action from a few responsible actors" (2002, p. 238).

Other important changes have occurred since the Cold War era of The Quiet American. The 1980 election of Ronald Reagan, a former Hollywood B-movie actor, as president of the United States endorsed the politics of greed and self-interest. These principles infect journalism in such films as Absence of Malice, made in 1981, and they have outlived Reagan. At the same time, the trend to corporate concentration created corporate monsters that extend no loyalty to their journalistic employees. Many real-world journalists have learned to their dismay that their employers have deemed them disposable. In the harsh cost-cutting ethos of multinational media ownership today, some media owners even mistrust their own journalists' impartiality.

The development of this ideal of impartiality is outlined in News and the Culture of Lying: How Journalism Really Works by Paul H. Weaver.

This view of journalism as an objective mode of discourse – and its corollary, the image of the journalist as an observer and reporter *who has no point of view* (italics in original) – is the emblem and product of a historic shift that took place in the news business toward the end of the nineteenth century and that continues to characterize it roughly a century later. (1994, p. 23)

But Leonard Asper, president and chief executive officer of CanWest Global Communications Corp., Canada's largest integrated media company,

which employs several thousand journalists, argues that reporters and editors not only fail to meet this ideal, but they are in fact not to be trusted.

Many news journalists are either doctrinaire socialists or hold political views left of centre. That leads them to be suspicious of free markets and capitalism, to resent the corporate world and politicians who support the capitalist system. They are generally supportive of anyone who they deem to be oppressed, victimized or otherwise aggrieved by a stronger party. (2003, p. A16)

Whether or not Asper's assertions could be proven in a way that would satisfy an independent critic, they certainly highlight a dichotomy between journalists' views of themselves and those of their bosses. In the texts that I will examine in detail in Chapters Three and Four, the fictional journalists experience this gap painfully. Although they observe tragedies, feel them sharply, and try to ameliorate their effects on local residents, they are powerless to interest their far-off employers in these stories. This estrangement of the fictional journalists from their employers is a central feature of these texts. For all three fictional journalists, dissatisfaction with their employers, and skepticism about the capacity of journalism to perform the public service they think it should, prompts them to take the direct action that causes damage.³ Ignatieff also says, "[I]n Charlie Johnson I wanted to

³ The divide between these fictional journalists and their employers parallels contemporary criticism of real-world news media. In general, conservative commentators

strip the intervention issue down to two people and to admit – in fiction – that intervening can be a disaster” (Conlogue, 2003).

The fictional protagonists with whom I am concerned are tragic figures. I am particularly interested in the sorts of damage these journalists inflict on themselves and others. Just who is damaged? How do the journalists cause the damage? Why are they unable to realize their high motivations? When their stories end, where do the journalists stand?

In Chapters Three and Four I will examine my target texts for four elements that contribute to this motif. First, what are the distinguishing personal features of the fictional journalists, such as gender or age, training or personal interests? Second, what are the characters’ moral points of view and how are these expressed? Third, how is journalism portrayed? What aspects of the relationships between the fictional journalists and their distant bosses contribute to or conflict with the motif of the journalist who causes

(who sometimes are also current or former owners of news media, such as Leonard Asper or Lord Black of Crossharbour) blame left-leaning reporters and editors for departing from objective or responsible journalistic practice. On the other hand, liberal critics highlight distortions that are caused by the operations of media institutions as a whole, particularly those driven by commercial imperative. Hackett and Zhao investigate the implications of these views for Canadian journalism (1998, pp. 138-150). Since the three novels examined in this thesis are written from the point of view of the journalist rather than the boss, and therefore find fault with the system rather than with the journalists, they can be read as an expression of the liberal tradition.

damage? Fourth, how do these texts portray the worlds of culture, politics and ideology in which their characters live and act?

Chapter Three

The Journalist as Betrayer

In this chapter I argue that the motif of the journalist who causes damage is a central element of The Quiet American, the novel by Graham Greene that was published in 1955 in Great Britain and in 1956 in the United States. The motif also plays out in the two films of the same title that are based on the novel, made in 1958 and 2002. I will perform close readings of these three texts to examine the workings of this motif, I will also argue that the theme of the damaging journalist is central to the political controversies that accompanied the publication of the novel and the release of the films, and that delayed the release of the second film. These controversies took shape in the earliest reviews of these works, which I will examine.

The Quiet American is set in Vietnam in the early 1950s, just as the Communist Vietminh guerrillas are pushing the French out of their former colony. The title character is Alden Pyle, an idealistic and impressionable young man who claims to be interested in the development of a “Third Force” that will lead Vietnam out of war and into prosperity. In this fancy he has been misled by a fictional journalist, York Harding, whose works Pyle quotes incessantly. Pyle is actually working for a secret American government organization that closely resembles the Central Intelligence

Agency. The “Third Force,” led by General Thé, which Pyle is supplying with weapons, becomes increasingly violent. Eventually it kills about fifty civilians in a Saigon bombing. The journalist who observes these developments and befriends Pyle is Thomas Fowler, a weary middle-aged correspondent for a British newspaper. Pyle and Fowler collide over Phuong, the journalist’s Vietnamese girlfriend; the young man wins her. He also saves Fowler’s life during a Communist attack. Throughout the story, Fowler strenuously protests his non-involvement in the growing military conflict, asserting that he is just there to report what he sees, not to form opinions. But the Saigon bombing outrages him. In an effort to prevent further carnage, he betrays Pyle to the Communists, knowing that they will kill the quiet American. Thus Fowler breaks his vows of non-involvement and he causes the death of the man who called Fowler his best friend. Fowler finally gets Phuong back – and his wife agrees to a divorce so that he can marry her.

The novel is narrated in the first person from Fowler’s point of view, and in a series of flashbacks. It opens with Pyle’s death; here he truly is a quiet American. This structure emphasizes Fowler’s moral debates with himself over “involvement.” The journalist is an unreliable narrator, though; at the beginning of the novel he conceals his involvement in Pyle’s death,

even his knowledge of the death. Howard Good calls this fictional depiction the first that provides a war correspondent with a complex set of moral conflicts.

With the portrayal of Fowler, the war correspondent suddenly acquired a tortuous inner life. ... The world of The Quiet American is a world without obvious heroes, where good motives share qualities with their opposites, and where every action, however, [sic] seemingly right or noble, casts a shadow of guilt. (1986b, p. 18)

It is not only the journalist who causes damage. In sheer body count, Pyle far outdoes Fowler. But only the journalist makes a fetish of non-involvement, of the priority of observation over action. He eventually discards his scruples only because he believes that he is serving a higher cause in preventing further civilian deaths. This end of Fowler's principles, or of his naivete, is an interior expression of the end of things, culturally and geopolitically, that I have discussed in Chapter Two. Discussing The Quiet American and other Greene novels of the same period, Robert Hewison situates Greene's fictional characters such as Fowler squarely in the real world of the Cold War.

Greene's fascination with the flawed personality who has some perception of absolute values yet who cannot live up to them, a deceiver who is also self-deceiving, reflects a period when nations were behaving with the same moral confusion. (1981, p. 76)

Just as those nations caused damage, so the journalist damages his world. Now I will look at the first of four elements that contribute to this motif: the distinguishing personal features of the journalist. Fowler displays his world-weariness when he introduces Phuong as the story opens. Her name means Phoenix, he says, “but nothing nowadays is fabulous and nothing rises from its ashes” (2002, p. 11). Fowler has gone native: he no longer counts the days of his assignment. “I wanted to keep the sight of those silk-trousered figures moving with grace through the humid noon, I wanted Phuong, and my home had shifted its ground eight thousand miles” (p. 25). Looking at himself through Pyle’s eyes, Fowler finds similarities to the loud American reporter Granger. He sees “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” (p. 40). He is also a bad dancer. Although he is far removed from England, Fowler retains some British reserve: he snubs Pyle’s attempts to call him Tom, insisting on Thomas, and he refuses to use Pyle’s first name.

Fowler’s professional experience and training are not revealed; we know only that he has been assigned to Vietnam for five years and that he initially resists his paper’s call to return to London and become an editor. This silence suggests that Fowler’s background is unexceptional, that he is a

kind of journalistic Everyman. In turn, this emphasizes the importance of Fowler's views on "intervention," assigning to them the significance of an unseen larger journalistic community. Fowler fancies himself an individual, and accordingly there is no reference to his membership in a trade union, although in 1950s Britain, trade unions had thoroughly organized newspapers. Foreign reporting, on the other hand, has traditionally been the province of more individualistic and idiosyncratic journalists, who are perhaps less likely than their brothers and sisters at home to admit allegiance to a union.

The second element of the motif of the damaging journalist involves expressions of the character's moral point of view. Fowler expresses his individual morality frequently, so frequently in fact as to raise the question of whether he is trying to convince himself. This personal morality springs from and expresses itself through his profession of journalism. For example, he invokes journalistic objectivity when he insists to the police that he is not responsible for Pyle's death.

"You can rule me out," I said. "I'm not involved. Not involved," I repeated. It had been an article of my creed. The human condition being what it was, let them fight, let them love, let them murder, I would not be involved. 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. (p. 28)

But Fowler's declarations of moral purity turn into lies. He is indisputably involved, having sent Pyle to his death. Fowler's realization of his involuntary involvement in the war comes earlier, on a dark road outside Saigon, when he hears the crying of a Vietnamese soldier injured in an attack from which Fowler and Pyle have escaped. "I was responsible for that voice crying in the dark; I had prided myself on detachment, on not belonging to this war, but those wounds had been inflicted by me just as though I had used the sten [gun], as Pyle had wanted me to" (p. 113).

Fowler frequently defines his moral disengagement and therefore superiority in opposition to someone else's. For example, he mocks Pyle's version of morality. "[H]e was determined – I learnt that very soon – to do good, not to any individual person but to a country, a continent, a world. Well, he was in his element now with the whole universe to improve" (p. 18). Pyle's sin, in Fowler's eyes, is his devotion to the abstract rather than the particular. In an argument about Phuong, Fowler tells Pyle, "I wish sometimes you had a few bad motives, you might understand a little more about human beings. And that applies to your country too, Pyle" (p. 133). In one sense Fowler is right; Pyle's ideology causes many deaths. But Fowler's corresponding blindness to the importance of the abstract causes one particular death: Pyle's.

Even in the face of gruesome death Fowler remains at least an agnostic. When a priest mourns for “poor souls” who have been killed in crossfire, Fowler retorts, “I’m not a Roman Catholic. I don’t think you could even call me a Christian” (p. 49). Even if he believed in God, Fowler tells the priest, he would find kneeling for confession “unmanly” (p. 50). The priest dismisses Fowler’s argument. “I expect you are a good man. I don’t suppose you’ve ever had much to regret” (p. 50). Appropriately in a novel by an author who is much concerned with questions of religious belief in general and Roman Catholicism in particular, Fowler continues his religious debates with himself, conflating religion and his profession. “I am a reporter; God exists only for leader- [editorial-] writers” (p. 60). But, in denying the existence of a deity, Fowler makes himself responsible for the consequences of his actions, just as other people are responsible for theirs. When a French army unit that Fowler is accompanying kills a woman and her baby, Fowler fears that the lieutenant in charge blames him for the deaths. Fowler thinks, “Perhaps to the soldier the civilian is the man who employs him to kill, who includes the guilt of murder in the pay-envelope and escapes responsibility” (p. 54). Fowler cannot fool himself. He realizes the damage that he has done to his estranged wife in England by taking an earlier mistress and now by seeking a divorce so that he can marry Phuong. “I thought, ‘How much you

pride yourself on being *déagé*, the reporter, not the leader-writer, and what a mess you make behind the scenes. The other kind of war is more innocent than this. One does less damage with a mortar” (p. 119). Helen, his wife, sees through Fowler. She writes, “Thomas, your truth is always so temporary” (p. 119).

Concerned though Fowler is about the horrors of emotional violence, it is the broken bodies caused by the Saigon bombing that force him to become engaged. Realizing that Pyle has been naively supporting the bombers, Fowler thinks, “What’s the good? He’ll always be innocent, you can’t blame the innocent, they are always guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity” (p. 163). It is Fowler’s reputation for neutrality that ensnares him in betrayal and death. Mr. Heng, a Communist, shows Fowler evidence that the Americans are sponsoring the Third Force violence, and asks him to report it. But Fowler’s newspaper is not interested, and so Fowler finally becomes involved, betraying Pyle.

The third element of the motif that I am examining involves the depiction of journalism in this fiction. The failure of Fowler’s newspaper to report the facts of war that he so diligently observes is central to The Quiet American. (This criticism of journalism, made by its practitioners, is an

important element that all my texts have in common. I will discuss it further in Chapters Four and Five.) Fowler is simultaneously proud of his profession and cynical about its practice. He believes that honest reporting is a worthwhile occupation, reserving his scorn for deskbound editorial writers who possess opinions but not facts. But Fowler learns that there is such a thing as too many facts.

Faced with the biggest story of his Vietnam posting, the death of fifty civilians in the Third Force bombing, Fowler is overwhelmed by the sights and sounds, and is left unable to report it. "Being there on the spot, perhaps I got a bit shocked," he tells his assistant. "I can't think of the thing in terms of a cable" (p. 175). He asks his assistant to make up a story to file to the newspaper. Elsewhere, Fowler confesses to Pyle, "I haven't noticed much regard for truth in our papers" (p. 96). Fowler rejects a promotion to foreign editor of his paper, which would mean returning to dreary London. Instead, he threatens to quit. When this threat wins Fowler an extra year or more in Vietnam, he reflects on the gullibility of his editor. "He believed I cared about the job, and the paper" (p. 155).

Journalistic conventions of storytelling are inadequate for normal social relations, Fowler finds. Wondering how to tell Phuong that Pyle is dead, Fowler thinks, "I had no technique for telling her slowly and gently. I

was a correspondent: I thought in headlines. 'American official murdered in Saigon.'" (p.21). But if Fowler's newspaper prints that headline, it will be over someone else's story, because the censors would delay the telegram of his story until French reporters had filed theirs. Even if Fowler's story had got through, it would have been untrue. "It wouldn't have done to cable the details of his true career ... it would have damaged Anglo-American relations" (p.21). Perhaps for this reason, or perhaps for some other mysterious reason, Fowler's truthful report on an earlier bombing by Pyle's Third Force "was altered in the office" (p. 142). This distant editorial decision frustrates Fowler's efforts to alert the world to the danger posed by the American support of the Third Force and thus contributes to Fowler's eventual decision to betray Pyle. Sometimes the censorship takes the form of prior restraint, of restriction from observing certain actions. On one occasion he is allowed to fly on a bombing mission as long as he writes nothing about it. The censorship to which Fowler is subjected prevents him from employing his professional skills of observation and reporting to prevent further deaths, Fowler resorts to the direct action of handing over Pyle to the Communists.

Fowler may find these restrictions, and even the practice of journalism itself, frustrating. But outsiders take a rosier view of the craft. The American

economic attaché, for example, congratulates a writer on his story *Highway to Hell*, which featured a man kneeling in a ditch with his head blown off, as “worthy of the Pulitzer [Prize]” (p. 35). In reply, the scornful journalist invokes the nineteenth-century author of the novel *The Red Badge of Courage*: “Do you think I’d really go near their stinking highway? Stephen Crane could describe a war without seeing one. Why shouldn’t I?” (p. 36).

Fowler recognizes the potential of journalism to cause harm; indeed, he blames the fictional journalist York Harding, rather than himself, for killing Pyle “at long range” (p. 167).⁴ Pyle tries to put into practice Harding’s ideas about a Third Force, which he had formed on a one-week visit to Vietnam. Such hit-and-run investigation would offend an old pro like Fowler, for whom journalism is an individualistic enterprise that requires time-consuming investigation. Fowler tries to avoid other reporters, with their bluster, and press conferences, with their ritualized falsities. He waits to travel to northern Vietnam to see the war until the other reporters have returned. To Fowler, even God does not know enough to assist in this quest

⁴ Thus the fictional journalist York Harding causes damage of his own, simply through having written a book with a point of view. Harding’s ideals, as expressed admiringly by Pyle, correspond to the opinions which Fowler professes to shun. Fowler sees Harding’s abstract notions as having seduced Pyle. The irony is that Fowler’s professed objectivity and practicality make him a killer, too.

for truth. A priest of the Caodaist religion, which claims to synthesize all religions, invokes the deity in blessing Fowler. “‘God’s blessing on your work,’ he said unctuously. ‘Remember God loves the truth.’ ‘Which truth?’ I asked” (p. 85). Fowler frequently struggles with the religious implications of his work. “But I had never desired faith. The job of a reporter is to expose and record. I had never in my career discovered the inexplicable” (p. 88).

With no help from a higher power either heavenly or earthly, Fowler must rely on his journalistic techniques to find the truth, and those techniques make him an agent of damage. I agree with Judith Adamson that there is a vital link between Fowler’s job as a journalist and his taking sides that costs Pyle’s life. Several characters tell Fowler repeatedly that eventually he will have to take sides, Adamson notes.

What that means here is that involvement will come from honest observation whereas nothing will be learned from living with pre-conceived abstractions. Fowler is passive. He allows the ebb and flow of experience to change him, which is what Greene said the process of writing should do. (1996, p. 492)

The ebb and flow of experience also erases any distinctions between Fowler’s personal and professional lives. Not for Fowler the nine-to-five job, with time for relaxation afterward; his day is all work, and at the same time all play. Whether eating, drinking, making love to Phuong or trying to outwit her manipulative sister, Fowler is always observing and reporting.

Fowler's story is not so much a failure of journalism as a failure of a journalist to live up to his idealistic view of the business.

The fourth element of the motif that I am examining involves the portrayals of culture, politics, and ideology. In The Quiet American these are all overshadowed by wars past, present and future: the recent Second World War and the nascent Cold War. Fowler even invokes images of a nineteenth-century colonial conflict, mediated by the journalism of its day, to explain his reaction to the sight of the battle for a small Vietnamese town. "From the bell tower of the Cathedral the battle was only picturesque, fixed like a panorama of the Boer War in an old Illustrated London News" (p. 46). The destruction in the town invokes a Second World War image that is more personal. "[I]t reminded me of a London thoroughfare in the early morning after an all-clear: one expected to see a placard, 'Unexploded Bomb'" (p. 47). As for the Cold War, the Vietnam conflict is morphing into one of its defining struggles, and the novel clearly presages the struggle of Communism versus the West, primarily the United States. For example, just before the attack on the guard tower during which Pyle saves Fowler's life, the two debate the growing role of the United States in this colonial conflict. Fowler says, "You and your like are trying to make a war with the help of people who just aren't interested." Pyle responds, "They don't want

Communism.” Fowler, uncomfortable as always with abstractions, tries to move the debate to the concrete. ““They want enough rice,’ I said. ‘They don’t want to be shot at. They want one day to be much the same as another. They don’t want our white skins around telling them what they want’” (p. 94). But whatever the Vietnamese might really want, neither their leaders, the French, nor the Americans are giving it to them. As Adamson notes, “So we come to the necessity for the courageous individual act. ... Fowler turns Pyle over because, given his own liberal conscience, he has no alternative” (1990, p. 135).

Despite this betrayal and despite lecturing Pyle, Fowler recognizes him as a mirror image of himself. “Was I so different from Pyle, I wondered? Must I too have my foot thrust in the mess of life before I saw the pain?” (p. 185-86). Philip Stratford notes, “[T]here are many instances in the novel where Pyle’s and Fowler’s characters are shown to overlap (the whole story is one of the transfer of Pyle’s traits to Fowler and to some extent vice versa)” (1996, p. 406). But at the end of the story Fowler remembers Pyle with regret. “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” (p. 189). What does Fowler have to apologize for? One dead American, one dead marriage. He has also killed Phuong’s cherished future

in the United States as Pyle's wife and condemned her to a second-rate life in Britain with him (p. 183).

Contemporary reviews of The Quiet American seldom considered any of these four elements of the motif. Instead, they focused on the character and actions of the title character. British reviews tended to be brief and somewhat positive. For example, the novel is "a tragedy of good intentions gone wrong," said The Times (8 Dec. 1955, p. 13). Similarly, a mention in The Daily Telegraph and Morning Post found that "the theme, so far as there is one, is the ruinous damage that can be caused by idealism when ill-balanced and ill-informed" (Ridley, 1955, p. 8). Both these reviews mention Fowler only in passing, although I see their comments about Pyle as being equally applicable to the English journalist. Greater focus on Fowler is found in the Daily Mail review, which finds the character "a convincing portrait" of a "glum, cantankerous, self-tormented hero" (Quennell, 1955, p. 6). The Telegraph reviewer apparently could not resist a shot at the entire United States. Ridley says, "Anyone who feels that Pyle, the American, is inconsistent to the point of unreality has a good deal to learn about Americans" (1956, p. 8).

Across the pond, reviewers generally viewed the novel through lenses that were more ideologically coloured – not pink, of course, but red, white,

and blue. The Atlantic Monthly found Pyle “a warmly outgoing and earnest idealist” (March 1956, p. 82). The first review in The New York Times focused on “the bitter anti-American bias that fills this book with sour and peevish satire of all things American” (9 Mar. 1956, p. 21). Somewhat more perceptively, Saturday Review noted, “Mr. Greene takes sides. The book will arouse indignation here” (10 Mar. 1956, p. 13). The most sustained bombardment of this initial attack on the novel was initiated by The New York Times Book Review. “The thesis is quite simply that America is a crassly materialistic and ‘innocent’ nation with no understanding of other peoples” (11 Mar. 1956, p. 1). Reviewer Robert Gorham Davis discovered this message in the novel: “America should leave Asians to work out their own destinies, even when this means the victory of communism” (p. 1). The novel does not allow any real debate, he argued, “because no experienced and intelligent anti-Communist is represented there” (p. 32). Five months later the publication weighed in again on the novel. Under the guise of sober second thought about Davis’s attack, Granville Hicks opined, superciliously and inaccurately, “We can pretty well take it for granted that, if the book has readers ten or a dozen years from now, they will not be interested one way or another in Greene’s views on American foreign policy” (p. 5). Of course, ten years after that review, American involvement in Vietnam was one of

hottest political issues in the world. The novel, meanwhile, retains its popularity into the twenty-first century.

In the McCarthy witch-hunt era of the early 1950s when the hint of red sympathies could cost artists and civil servants their jobs, and in the strongly anti-Communist atmosphere that persisted even after Senator Joe McCarthy was exposed as a fraud, Greene found himself a target. He openly admitted having joined the Communist Party while a student at Oxford – for six weeks, as a prank. This offence was enough for the United States to deny him a visitor's visa in 1952; the denial was overturned after The New York Times and other newspapers reported it.⁵ But the later reviews demonstrate the durability of the anti-Communist fervour that infected even the famously liberal New York Times.

Perhaps the most splenetic ad hominem attack was delivered in an editorial in The Saturday Evening Post. "Graham Greene is an opium

⁵ Such discrimination apparently did not disappear with McCarthyism. British journalist and novelist Elena Lappin was interrogated, body-searched, fingerprinted, and detained for two days before being deported in May, 2004 when she tried to enter the United States at Los Angeles. Thirteen other foreign journalists were treated in the same manner since March, 2003, she says. Lappin's offence? Failing to apply for a special visa limiting the access of journalists, even those from countries with a visa waiver agreement with the United States. Lappin says, "[A]s dissident writers seem to have disappeared from the public sphere, journalists have become the new subversives, even when they have no agenda at all" (2004).

smoker, and some readers may wonder whether the preposterous statements in his book came to him in a pipe dream,” snorted the anonymous author (1956, p. 10). In dialectical opposition to the Telegraph, the Saturday Evening Post declared, “The chief American in the book is an unbelievable caricature, a Simple Simon whom the author presents as a high-ranking American secret agent” (p. 10). The editorial culminates in an attack on an unnamed newspaper reviewer who “even outdoes the Reds” by suggesting that all employees of the U.S. State Department should read the novel.

One of the most thoughtful and sympathetic American notices, written by Ralph Freedman, appeared in The Western Review. “In this novel Greene has delivered a high-pitched indictment of our time, yet in a voice so penetrating and to some critics so repelling, that the novel’s depth and point have been sometimes obscured by a welter of arguments about political truths” (1956, p. 77). Unlike most reviewers, Freedman paid attention to Fowler and the harm that he causes, although he did not specifically connect this harm to Fowler’s role as a journalist. He emphasized the Englishman’s acting in concert with the quiet American. “Fowler, insight-ridden, is in utterly helpless agony over the deaths his and Pyle’s presence in the tower have caused” (p. 78). He does suggest, though, a connection between the detachment of Fowler’s journalistic pose and the damage that he causes.

“Fowler is the passive hero who realizes the need for choice, the need for commitment, which to implement is beyond his reach” (p.78).

A long review in Soviet Literature also concentrates on Fowler’s choice to betray Pyle, barely mentioning his activities as a journalist.⁶

“Fowler ... performs a deed that requires great moral courage because it a flagrant violation of the code accepted by the people of his circle”

(Elistratova, 1956, p. 153). The review portrays Pyle primarily as “socially dangerous” rather than anti-Communist (p. 153). In this reading, the Englishman strives to overcome his liking for Pyle and his obligation to the American for saving his life. “Fowler comes to regard Pyle as the incarnation of malignant and anti-human forces to which he can no longer

⁶ Most contemporary British reviews of The Quiet American appear in review essays that cover several novels published about the same time. They also place Greene’s novel in the context of his earlier stories, novels, and criticism. This Soviet review also discusses Greene’s previous work at length. Most American reviews and articles, on the other hand, deal only with The Quiet American. To the British, Greene was a known quantity, and so they tended to see this novel as the most recent addition to a large and respected body of work. To the Americans, though, Greene appeared from nowhere, having no credentials to criticize America. But there is a common factor in the British, American, and Soviet reviews: none sees the function of journalism as particularly important in The Quiet American. I believe this is a result of the reviewers’ focus on the geopolitics of the Cold War. In particular, the rabid anti-Communism that infected America in the mid-fifties resulted in many reviewers’ confining their analysis to the obvious references to Communism and anti-Americanism in the novel.

reconcile himself” (p. 154). Elistratova asserts Soviet dogma that human beings are largely defined by larger forces. But her review is remarkable for its calm approach to Greene’s work, in contradistinction to many American voices.

As many reviews from all political points of view mention, Greene formed his views of the American involvement in the Vietnam through Fowler’s techniques of observation and reporting. A British journalist himself as well as a novelist, Greene visited Vietnam four times, according to his autobiography Ways of Escape. The “spell” which the country cast over Greene had many sources, but primary among them was “that feeling of exhilaration which a measure of danger brings to the visitor with a return ticket” (1980, p. 131). He also says, “Of those four winters which I passed in Indo-China opium has left the happiest memory” (1980, p. 141). I do not claim in this thesis that Thomas Fowler is Graham Greene, but I believe that the concept of a return ticket is important to the theme of the journalist who causes damage. Fowler, by virtue of his employment with a British newspaper, has a return ticket to London. Although he resists using the ticket until the end of the novel, it remains a kind of assurance that he will not have to suffer in full the effects of the war that he is covering – or of his

own actions. The return ticket, in effect, is a guarantee that the journalist can avoid at least some of the consequences of his own actions.

In studying the two films that are based on Greene's novel, I have two interests: any substantial ways in which they differ from the novel, and aspects of their popular and critical reception that involve the workings of the motif of the journalist who causes damage. On the first question, only the 1957 film directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, an American, deviates substantially from the novel. The 2002 version, directed by Phillip Noyce, is very faithful to Greene's version. Both films, however, created controversy.

Many of Greene's stories were filmed, but the process of filmmaking frustrated him. As soon as a shooting script is finished, he wrote, the screenwriter no longer has anything to create.

Unless a crisis arises in the studio and the director needs his presence to rewrite a scene, the author is a forgotten man who emerges again, a bewildered figure watching the rough cut, clearing his throat nervously at new lines that are not his, feeling a sense of guilt because he is the only spectator who remembers what happened once – like a man who has witnessed a crime and is afraid to speak, an accomplice after the fact. (1980, p. 199)

The first filmed version of The Quiet American bears out Greene's fears. Stephen J. Whitfield says the film "misses the point ... switches Pyle from a CIA agent to an employee with a private U.S. aid mission and turns Greene's anti-American ending into a [sic] anti-Communist final reel instead"

(1991, p. 206). These changes should not be surprising, though. Mankiewicz sought the guidance of the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency on details of the Vietnamese conflict. In a letter dated 17 March 1956, Col. Edward Geary Lansdale, chief of the CIA's Saigon military mission, answered some questions that Mankiewicz posed during a visit to Saigon. The letter, printed by John Clark Pratt, portrays the real-life Gen. Thé as independent of U. S. influence, and colours the entire story with an anti-Communist hue. Pratt comments, "It is obvious that Colonel Lansdale has a noticeable effect on the final version of the movie" (1996, p. 299). A letter on 28 Oct. 1957 from Lansdale to Ngo Dinh Diem, president of South Vietnam, demonstrates the colonel's pleasure at the film. He finds Mankiewicz's work even better than his original treatment, which Lansdale called "an excellent change from Mr. Greene's novel of despair" (Pratt, 1996, p. 307).

The essential difference between the 1957 film and the novel is that Mankiewicz confers nobility on Pyle (played with laughable woodenness by Audie Murphy, an American hero of the Second World War) and reduces Fowler to a dupe of the Communists. Several scenes emphasize that Fowler's betrayal of Pyle is motivated by jealousy over his love for Phuong rather than his horror at the carnage of the Saigon bombing. Vigot, the police officer investigating Pyle's death, reveals that Pyle was not even involved in the

bombing. To ensure that the audience gets the point, Mankiewicz has Vigot tell Fowler, “They have made a bloody fool of you.” At the end of the film, Phuong takes a job as a paid nightclub escort rather than returning to Fowler as she does in the novel. But even this version of the story emphasizes the centrality of Fowler’s journalistic occupation to his moral choices. In the film, Fowler’s failure to perform the basic journalistic duties of observing and reporting leads him to the faulty – and fatal – conclusion that Pyle is behind the bombing.

This film marches in ideological lockstep with many other American films of the period which, in the phrase of Peter Biskind, “generally reflected the anticommunism of an anticommunist decade” (1983, p. 4). Greene denounced Mankiewicz’s handling of the film as “treachery” (Parkinson, 1993, p. 463). But in another comment Greene expressed a more ambivalent attitude, weighing the changes against the income they brought him.

The most extreme changes I have seen in any book of mine were in The Quiet American; one could almost believe that the film was made deliberately to attack the book and the author, but the book was based on a closer knowledge of the Indo-China war than the American director possessed and I am vain enough to believe that the book will survive a few years longer than Mr. Mankiewicz’s incoherent picture.⁷ Again, why should

⁷ Greene’s prophecy is at least partly true. In my research for this thesis, I found it impossible to obtain a videotape copy of Mankiewicz’s film in North America; indeed,

one complain? He has enabled me to go on writing.
(Parkinson, 1993, p. 443)

Not only does the 2002 film version adhere firmly to Greene's plot, but it emphasizes the accuracy of the novel's implied prediction of the French defeat and the growing American involvement in the battle against Communism in Vietnam. The final scenes of the film flash forward to newspaper headlines and stories up to 1965, reporting these developments. Some of the stories bear Fowler's byline.

The content of this film created an ideological storm of its own, with intriguing parallels to the battles of forty-five years earlier. This time, ten years after Greene's death, the motivation is not anti-Communism but anti-terrorism. The film's timing was terrible. "In fact there was a test screening in New York on Sept. 10, 2001 and the audience reaction was excellent" (Knelman, 2002, page B2). The next morning, of course, Middle Eastern terrorists hijacked four airplanes and killed about three thousand people in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania. As Knelman says, "Clearly, it wasn't going to be an easy sell to get U.S. audiences to accept a film in which Americans were seen as a wrong-headed, malevolent force in Asia" (2002, page B2). Miramax Films withheld the film, and later planned to

several supposedly authoritative sources insisted that one did not exist. But, with the help of Mike Jackson of Carleton University, I eventually located a copy in Britain.

release it without fanfare, perhaps directly to the video market, in early 2003. But Michael Caine, who plays Fowler with panache, put pressure on the distributor to show it at the Toronto International Film Festival in September, 2002, in time to be considered for the 2003 Academy Awards. The film received rave reviews, and Caine received a nomination for Best Actor.

Meanwhile, in a reunited, peaceful, and increasingly capitalist Vietnam, this film won praise that was reminiscent of the Soviet review of Greene's book. The Associated Press reported, "The Quiet American won a red-carpet reception from Vietnam at its Hanoi premiere Tuesday. Praising the Hollywood film's 'progressive' view, Nguyen Thi Hong Ngat of Vietnam's Cinema Department said it accurately portrays American involvement in Vietnam" (2002, p. B7).

The remaining two books that I study in this thesis have not caused such political controversies, but they contain the same motif of the journalist who causes damage. In Chapter Four I will examine Charlie Johnson in the Flames and A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali, seeking the same four elements that I have found in The Quiet American that contribute to the theme. In addition, I will explore Canadian connections in the novels. Both authors are Canadians, and the journalist in A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali is Canadian.

Chapter Four

Abandoning Journalism

In this chapter I perform on my remaining two texts, Charlie Johnson in the Flames by Michael Ignatieff and A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali by Gil Courtemanche, the same examination I performed in Chapter Three on The Quiet American. This time, though, there are no film versions of the stories. Also, since these novels were published quite recently, there is relatively little scholarly comment on them. Ignatieff's and Courtemanche's novels contain many parallels with The Quiet American. Both these novels employ the motif of the well-intentioned journalist who causes damage. Both feature a middle-aged white male war correspondent far from home whose employer cares much less about the story than he does. There is again a strong sense of the end of things, as civil society breaks down. The internecine war that is the subject of Ignatieff's novel, for example, is one of the consequences of the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. The government-sponsored genocide in Rwanda, on which Courtemanche's book is based, occurred in the power vacuum of postcolonial Africa. Joe Schlesinger, the veteran Canadian television reporter, describes these actions as "wars that do not involve combat between regular armies, civil and guerrilla wars in which

there is often no frontline, no central command, little discipline and a lot of hate” (2003, p. A19).

The novels contain a lot of discussion about this breakdown of civil society and about the business and practice of journalism. Both incorporate religious imagery, although their protagonists side with Fowler of The Quiet American in refusing to profess any faith in particular. But each novel, of course, is unique. I will examine them separately, with some references to their intertextuality. Then in Chapter Five I will draw conclusions about their relationships, their use of the central motif, and the wider significance of these questions.

The protagonist of Charlie Johnson in the Flames is an American television reporter who is based in his network’s London bureau. He fancies himself immune from the effects of all the war he has seen. Covering the ethnic conflict in Kosovo, Johnson and his cameraman Jacek persuade a villager to take them into the conflict. Then, as they hide from the militia, the journalists’ guide stupidly makes a radio call. It attracts the militia, which attacks the village. Johnson is burned trying to rescue a woman who has been doused with gasoline and set afire by a Serb special-forces colonel. She dies in agony. Johnson commits the journalistic sin of abandoning Jacek to help the woman. The cameraman later escapes, but Johnson’s network

blames him for this violation of procedure. Johnson also blames himself, and his self-absorption destroys his already shaky marriage. When the network broadcasts a 90-second story of the event, it is narrated by one of Johnson's colleagues who specializes in "empty portentousness" (p. 82). The novel highlights the inadequacy of the journalistic medium for telling the story that Johnson has found, and satirizes its failure to distinguish between the important and the mundane.

Disillusioned with journalism, Johnson curses his boss and embarks on a crusade for revenge on the killer. But a career in journalism has not qualified Johnson for this task. Instead, the colonel kills Johnson. Again, journalism fails to tell the story properly. The network, in the person of Etta, an efficient administrator, agrees to cover up the murder in exchange for allowing one of Johnson's colleagues to leave the country safely. "[A]nd so Etta was the one who let the ground swallow up Charlie's quest. She conspired in the embassy's official story that there had been a tragic accident, and it did not surprise her that the local journalists did not dig further" (2003, p. 154). The list of Johnson's well-intentioned damage thus includes the burned woman, who remains unnamed in death, his own marriage and career, and finally himself and even his story.

Looking at four component elements of the theme of the journalist who causes damage, as I did in Chapter Three with Fowler, I will begin with distinguishing personal characteristics. If Johnson matches the other fictional journalists of this study in gender and age, he differs in nationality. Johnson is an American, although his origin figures hardly at all in this narrative. This gap, and the Everyman nature of his name, emphasizes the importance of Johnson's vocation of journalism in creating and expressing his morality. Johnson has been covering wars for three decades, since 1971 in Vietnam – about two decades after Greene's Fowler. Johnson is getting tired, and increasingly he relies on guile rather than energy in the tough competition with younger reporters. But witnessing the commander set the woman afire ends Johnson's interest in practising journalism.

As for Charlie, he knew he was finished. For thirty years he had been fucked around by rogues and chancers and drugged-up hoods at checkpoints from Kabul to Kigali, but none of them had ever laid a glove on him, not really. He had heard the bullets whine over his head but in all that time he had never believed any of them were meant for him. He had seen the flames and always believed they would not touch him. Until that afternoon. (pp. 7-8)

Despite his rejection of journalism, Johnson “didn’t want to rejoin his life” (p. 16). Not prepared to return to the orderly domestic sphere of life with his wife and daughter, Johnson gets Etta to nurse him, listen to his stories, and have sex with him. She warns Johnson that he has “a gift for

misery” (p. 35). Etta sees Johnson’s emotions and motivations clearly, certainly more clearly than Johnson sees those of Etta, his wife, or other women. Like the other fictional journalists examined in this thesis, Johnson possesses a spotty record in relationships with women. In fact, Johnson is an emotional cripple, unable to tell his wife the most important story of his life when he returns briefly to her. For a person who has made a career of telling stories, Johnson is remarkably inarticulate away from the camera. In a passage of Hemingwayesque introspection, Johnson reveals to the reader, if not to himself, the destructive effects of journalism on the social relationships of its practitioners. “He was trying to understand why it was that when you told a story, once, for good – in this case to Etta – it all dried up inside you when you were ordered to tell it again” (p. 68).

Now for the second element of the motif, the fictional journalist’s moral point of view. Perhaps trying to understand larger questions, Johnson thinks in religious terms, especially in reference to other people.

Accompanying the burned woman in a helicopter to a medical base, “[h]e hoped she knew her salvation was only minutes away” (p. 3). Thinking of himself, Johnson conflates religious feelings with show business. “Charlie’s penchant for righteous rage normally left him feeling exalted, like George C. Scott playing Patton” (p. 4). And yet, he has little insight into his own

motivation; his life is full of actions that “didn’t make sense, but which seemed logical at the time” (p. 15). Like Fowler in The Quiet American, half-heartedly asking God to preserve Pyle from his betrayal, Johnson relaxes in a church after Etta has lit candles for the soul of the burned woman. It makes no difference that “[h]e knew it was sentimental to feel comforted by consolations in which he did not believe” (p. 36). Etta reflects, “He would have thought righteousness was within his grasp. But in reality, all the truth and righteousness calling to him was nothing more than annihilation” (p. 94). Indeed, at one point Johnson admits to himself, “Vengeance was just a dignified name for a crime and a reckoning was just a piece of righteous foolishness. The world was wrong and it was not your business to fix it” (p. 122). But when two men beat him up, Johnson forsakes these attractions and resumes his search for the killer.

The third element of the motif deals with depictions of journalism. This novel is no more positive about the business and practice of journalism than is Greene’s. Johnson has found that the camera leaches the danger out of its stories, robbing them of their reality. He has committed too much journalism to believe in it any more. He can barely recall the prizes that his work has won. Jacek’s wife Magda feels that her husband and Johnson have been corrupted – “coarsened by the scenes their profession paid them to

witness” (p. 93). Johnson himself feels “emptied out by a life of following stories” (p. 113). Johnson’s dislike of his bosses is even stronger than Fowler’s disdain in The Quiet American. “Charlie’s contempt for management was unruly and professionally suicidal” (p. 20). In return, the only reward that management provides for a job well done is a “significant nod” from the boss (p. 24). Entering the subway on his way to visit his bosses after recuperating from the injuries he suffered in Kosovo, Johnson feels as if he is going down to hell.

After the fight with his boss, Johnson thinks he is abandoning journalism. But his actions as a journalist follow him to his death. Johnson’s break from journalism is foreshadowed by Jacek’s leaving behind his camera in the effort to save the burned woman. Johnson leaves the only craft in which he is skilled. At the heart of that craft is the requirement to get the story first, and Johnson has been good at that. This competitive impetus obliges Johnson and Jacek to set out at 2 a.m. in search of rebels, beginning the series of events that costs his life. Obeying the rules of journalism kills Johnson.

The final element of the motif deals with the moral world in which Johnson practices journalism and then deserts it. The novel is set in the 1990s, after the fall of communism and the resultant end of the Cold War.

Now there is one hegemonic power, the United States, Johnson's country. At the field hospital where U.S. Navy medics try to save the burned woman's life, he feels its power. "It was ridiculous, Charlie knew, but there he was, tears in his eyes, at the thought that they were safe in the arms of the empire" (p. 1). Jacek can offer only "Polish patience or his prayers," but the American expertise is "the real deal" (p. 4). Not even the real deal, though, can save the woman's life. Her death in the centre of American power recalls the death of Johnson's patriotic father. In the Second World War, Johnson's father had rescued his mother from a concentration camp. He "turned her into an American and gave her a sense that the world would always be steady under their feet" (p. 22). But then she finds him dead of a heart attack, and she dies soon afterward. In both these cases, U.S. power is not all that it appears. Likewise, the Serb rulers of Kosovo look tough, but their powers are limited. "Whenever the editorial writers and other deep thinkers tried to portray the regime as serious Big Time Evil, Charlie always thought of the incredible mediocrity of its official television" (p. 110). Fowler would agree with Johnson about the stupidity of the editorial writers.

Johnson feels strongly that he needs to do something to deal with the colonel who burned the woman to death. But strong feelings do not guarantee the capacity to express them or to understand them. Johnson's

motivation to do good, the motivation that has already led to the woman's death, is connected with the failure of journalism. "The reason lay deeper, in how he had witnessed so much in a life of reporting and had done so little, how he had never saved anyone, and needed to now. But saving wasn't the right word" (p. 118-19). In deciding to hunt down the colonel so that both he and the colonel will understand the significance of the war crime, Johnson specifically ignores the consequences. "What he cared about was the burning woman and, for her sake and for his, going through to the very end, wherever it was, no matter what" (p. 120). Fixated on the rightness of his crusade, Johnson abandons the journalistic instincts that made him a success. "Some of the cunning and watchfulness essential to survival had gone missing and, as a result, Charlie was a danger to himself and to anyone else in his vicinity" (p. 128).

In the final confrontation, the colonel tells Johnson that he killed the woman because she had sheltered Johnson and his group. She was "collateral damage" (p. 151). Just before the colonel kills him, Johnson admits to himself that he bears responsibility for the woman's death, because he had been seeking a story. "You risk her life for this. It is not what you intend. But it is what results. No one ever intends the consequences, especially when the intentions are good" (p. 151).

Unlike the ideological splits that were evident in the reviews of the novel The Quiet American, reviews of Charlie Johnson in the Flames, at least those in larger Canadian and American newspapers, focused on the novel's handling of the moral implications of journalism. Notable is a review by Christopher Dickey in The New York Times Book Review of three novels: those by Ignatieff and Courtemanche that are the subjects of this chapter, and A Walking Guide by Alan S. Cowell. Dickey argues that fiction can tell more about some aspects of journalism than can journalism itself. "Most novels by or about war correspondents are haunted by a passionate sense of guilt that's normally kept out of the newspapers and off the television screen" (2003, p. 12). This guilt has several sources, he argues. "But at the core of it is the reporter's impotence in the face of horror, the failure to stop the genocide in Africa, or the tide of blood in the Balkans or the latest Middle Eastern crusade into quicksand" (p. 12).

I would argue that Dickey misses an important element of this novel. Rather than displaying simple impotence in the face of horror, Johnson actively damages those around him; not only is he powerless to help the burned woman, he actually is complicit in causing her injuries and her

death.⁸ But I agree with Dickey about the importance of the geopolitical breakdown at the time in which Ignatieff's novel is set, "when the old order of the world broke down, no new order took its place, and whole populations and societies were obliterated in 'news briefs' and 'roundups'" (p. 12).

Clearly, in Charlie Johnson in the Flames, the journalist is responsible for causing part of that chaos.

The review in The Globe and Mail also notes Johnson's responsibility for exposing the woman to danger. Alan Cumyn writes, "the camera is not neutral here" (2003, p. D5). Cumyn also makes an intriguing connection with The Quiet American, not between the two fictional journalists, but between Alden Pyle, the innocent and destructive American in Greene's novel, and Ignatieff's reporter. "Charlie is an American, as the colonel reminds us in the end. He seems to be blessed and cursed with that particularly American blend of self-serving and perhaps self-destructive political righteousness and naiveté so bewildering to much of the rest of the world" (p. D5). A review in the Calgary Herald also links this novel and The Quiet American, and specifically their journalist characters. "Ignatieff's Charlie Johnson is reminiscent of Graham Greene's morally ambivalent

⁸ I must disclose that the headline on my review of Charlie Johnson in the Flames in the Winnipeg Free Press is, "Western Journalists Impotent in the Face of Hatred" (2003, p. B9). Like all reporters and reviewers, I disclaim responsibility for the headline.

Fowler trying to do the right thing” (Myers, 2003, p. ES12). I cannot agree, though, with Myers’ argument that the book “feels like a minor effort, something dashed off quickly without thought for developing some of the deeper themes in a novelistic context that [Ignatieff] had earlier uncovered as reporter; the novella is more escapism than serious literature” (p. ES12). Perhaps Myers does not distinguish between economy of style and shallowness of thought. A Toronto Star review, on the other hand, clearly outlines what I consider the main point of the novel. Elizabeth Johnston asks, “How can Charlie maintain his journalistic distance from a tragedy in which he is implicated?” (2003, p. D14).

This question applies equally well to the second novel with which I am concerned in this chapter, A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali by Gil Courtemanche. Here, traditional Western journalism is powerless to comfort the afflicted. Worse, in the novel as in real life, journalists are directly implicated in genocide. In Rwanda in 1994 the Hutu journalists at Radio Mille-Collines denounce Tutsi citizens as “cockroaches,” broadcasting their names and addresses, and encouraging listeners to murder them. The audience does so, to horrifying effect: a death toll estimated in real life at 800,000. In the novel, Canadian journalist Bernard Valcourt is in Rwanda to help local citizens set up a television station. But bureaucratic roadblocks

thwart that project, and Valcourt is left with little to do but drink beer with other white people and a few locals beside a hotel pool. In a country already suffering from an epidemic of AIDS, there are signs everywhere of the coming “barbarian Holocaust” (p. 41). A widower and a veteran of several failed romances, Valcourt falls in love with twenty-two-year-old Gentille Sibomana, a waitress at the hotel. They marry and adopt a baby girl whose parents have been murdered, but Valcourt does not want to take his new family out of a country whose people and landscape he loves.

Valcourt is directly responsible for several deaths. A Rwandan friend who escorts him through militia roadblocks is murdered because of his association with the Canadian. So is the friend’s wife, after she is gang-raped. Later, Valcourt introduces the pregnant wife of a Canadian diplomat to a Rwandan man who boasts of his sexual conquests of white women. In a lurid passage, the man infects the woman with AIDS and causes the premature birth of her child. The baby lives, but her mother dies.

Courtemanche describes the squalor of these deaths in harrowing detail. Even Valcourt’s eventual decision to leave Rwanda has fatal consequences for his wife. On the way to the airport she is abducted, and then repeatedly raped. She dies later of AIDS.

Throughout this carnage Valcourt makes sporadic efforts to act like a journalist. But he cannot interest Canadian news media in the Rwandan government's murder of a Canadian priest who had been helping farmers. When Canadian television repeats the government's obviously false explanation that thieves are to blame, Valcourt reflects that there are some stories that journalism is incapable of telling.

“Thus is life recounted, compressed into capsules and composed by people far away, ignorant but without ill will, who, sitting at their computers, do not differentiate between a settling of accounts among bikers and a political assassination in Rwanda. A dead man is a dead man” (p. 133)

At the end of the novel, Valcourt has abandoned journalism. Instead, he works with a group that defends the rights of people accused of genocide. This work is more fulfilling than his previous job. “Valcourt is at peace with himself” (p. 258). He lives with a new woman, not a young African but a Swede of his own age. Perhaps this change of life distracts him from the memories of his damage: at least four people dead and his adopted daughter abducted.

In the first element of my motif, the personal characteristics of the journalist, Valcourt resembles Fowler and Johnson. He is roughly middle-aged, somewhat disillusioned with journalism and the world, and he has no desire to return to the country of his birth. Valcourt is “Quebecois, but has

almost forgotten it over the years” (p. 4). It’s not that the social scene at the pool in Kigali is compelling, Valcourt thinks as he watches French paratroopers pursue women swimmers. “The vaguely surrealistic play being acted out at the pool day after day ceased to interest him some time ago. The plot is heavy-handed and the characters behave as predictably as in a TV soap opera” (p. 14). Valcourt is waiting for something to happen.

Valcourt’s lack of interest is important because it is in periods of boredom that he makes unthinking decisions that change his life. Bored with his job as a Radio-Canada producer in Montreal, he accepts an offer to become co-director of an educational television station that the Canadian government is establishing in Rwanda. Likewise, with no apparent forethought, he promises to take Gentile away from Rwanda. The job at the Rwandan TV station, which never actually broadcasts anything, leaves Valcourt time to work on a documentary film about AIDS and the Roman Catholic priests and nuns who were breaking the rules of the church to teach prostitutes about “the virtues of condoms” (p. 18). So Valcourt still feels the journalistic impulse. But this impulse, Gentile warns him, distances him from seeing real life in Rwanda. “[Y]ou never understand anything because you complicate everything. You think, you take notes” (p. 70).

When Valcourt selects material for his notes he is guided by his moral sense, the second element of the motif of the damaging journalist. His initial reaction to a Canadian bureaucrat's speech about the value of information in promoting democracy and tolerance reveals a journalistic skepticism, or even cynicism. "Bullshit, thought Valcourt" (p. 18). But, when the bureaucrat offers him the position of co-director of the Rwandan TV station, "Valcourt said yes without thinking it over even two seconds" (p. 18). Arriving in Kigali, Valcourt thinks that at last he is going to be useful in changing "the course of things. My real life is beginning, he said to himself" (p. 19). This disconnect between thought and action, with subsequent self-justification, marks Valcourt's career in Africa, and perhaps accounts for his decision at the end of the book to defend Rwandans accused of genocide. Perhaps that decision can also be accounted for by his reflection, on discovering the butchered body of a friend, that "[w]e can all turn into killers. ... All it takes is a certain circumstance, something that clicks, a failing, a patient conditioning, rage, disappointment" (p. 103).

This liberal point of view does not, however, blind Valcourt to the brutal realities of the looming slaughter. Visiting a Rwandan family whose children are playing in a small garden, "Valcourt was not seeing children, he was seeing dead bodies on reprieve" (p. 81). Although he could perhaps

become a killer, he cannot be happy. “How can we be happy when the earth is falling apart before our eyes and humans are turning into demons, and extortions and unspeakable abominations are all that come of it?” (p. 146). Nevertheless, at a party where everyone is having a good time, Valcourt feels “guilty once again of being happy in the midst of barbarity” (149).

Of the three texts that I examine in this thesis, A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali entails perhaps the harshest depictions of the business and practice of journalism, the third element of the motif of the damaging journalist. In The Quiet American and Charlie Johnson in the Flames, Fowler and Johnson express anger or contempt for their bosses. They frequently question the ability of journalistic forms to represent truth as they experience it. But they remain journalists. Fowler plans to return to England to join the deskbound ranks of the editors that he formerly despised. Johnson, although he abandons his employer, continues to perform the basic journalistic functions of research and interviewing. He even records the final conversation in which he confronts the woman’s killer. In the end, Johnson gets the story, although he is killed in the process. Both Fowler and Johnson remain intensely involved with journalism, as if it were a lover who often infuriates them. But Valcourt’s attitude is different. Journalism in Canada bores him, and this boredom makes him susceptible to the offer to move to Rwanda.

There, Valcourt attempts sporadically to produce journalistic pieces, but he is not surprised when they do not pan out. The novel refers to journalism in increasingly critical terms, culminating in the perversion of journalism by the extremist Hutu radio station. Between playing Mozart's "Requiem" and John Lennon's "Imagine," the station urges its audience to kill Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

The entire novel interrogates the basic notion of journalism: that the world, its people, and its events can be accurately reproduced as detached and disjointed stories. In announcing his intention, Courtemanche rejects this claim as inadequate, although he acknowledges the importance of the function of observation or reporting.

This novel is fiction. But it is also a chronicle and eyewitness report. The characters all existed in reality, and in almost every case I have used their real names. The novelist has given them lives, acts and words that summarize or symbolize what the journalist observed while in their company. If I have taken the liberty of inventing a little, I have done so the better to convey the human quality of the murdered men and women. Those who planned and carried out the genocide are identified in this book by their true names. (Preface)

In the novel, Valcourt reflects on the structural inability of journalism to tell the truth. He blames "the cautious language of journalism that turns a lying prime minister into a man making progress and a slimy financier into an astute businessman" (p. 151). The novel also contains several barbs

aimed at the pretentiousness of journalism. A television set in a bar “was blathering CNN” (p. 39). A Rwandan who is dying of AIDS tells Valcourt, “You see dead bodies, skeletons, and on top of that you want us to talk like we’re dying” (p. 82). Valcourt writes a long article about recent murders, the coming genocide, and the failure of the United Nations to intervene. He tries to place it in a dozen publications, but only a small Catholic weekly in Belgium accepts it. His experience covering famine in Ethiopia prevents him from being surprised. “The media don’t show dead bodies cut up by men and shredded by vultures and wild dogs. They show the pitiful victims of drought ... Then committees get set up and humanitarian souls get busy and mobilize” (pp. 111-12). But that mobilization, Valcourt knows, comes too late for the subjects of the media reports. He himself had ignored predictions of the Ethiopian famine. A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali also devotes a lot of time discussing the worlds of culture, politics, and ideology, the fourth element in the theme of the damaging journalist.⁹

⁹ Canada and its ineffectual good intentions are savagely caricatured in the novel. The Canadian commander of the United Nations troops in Rwanda (unnamed but clearly modeled on Gen. Roméo Dallaire) is “[u]nassuming, apprehensive, ineloquent and naïve, like Canada” (p. 12). And a diplomat fears losing “his first villa, his first gardener, or his first cook, which are today – short of being able to influence the course of history – the foremost pleasure for a diplomat representing a country like Canada in Rwanda” (p. 132). Also, Valcourt describes himself to Gentile as slothful. “My country is naturally slothful

Just as Pyle in The Quiet American is influenced to kill by a book, so too in A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali does a book cause havoc. This time it is a volume by a doctor from Belgium, the former colonial ruler of Rwanda. The book classifies the Tutsis as a superior race and the Hutus as inferior, fanning their racial hatred. On several occasions the novel refers to the Second World War Holocaust, caused by white Europeans, as providing the model for the Rwandan genocide. The “scientific Holocaust” makes way for the “barbarian Holocaust” (p. 41). Perversion occurs in individuals as well as in nations. A Belgian doctor, for example, hopes to get rich by discovering a hair-straightening product through his AIDS research. The entire nation of France feeds the inhumanity with arms and advisers. “In the designs of the great powers, these Rwandans were of negligible weight, people outside the circle of real humanity, poor useless types” (p. 95).

Valcourt bears some responsibility for the deaths of only Gentile and the diplomat’s wife who was raped by the pool attendant. Perhaps, journalist or not, he should not feel guilty for all those other deaths. Back in the real world, a recent study by the Brookings Institution concludes that, once the likelihood of genocide became apparent, immediate military intervention

and uncourageous too. It only gets off its butt when catastrophes and horrors get beyond the bounds of understanding” (p. 141).

would have saved only about twenty per cent of the people who lost their lives (Kuperman, 2001, p. 109). Prevention would work better than intervention, Kuperman argues. But he finds the news media at fault. Having failed to report the impending Rwandan genocide in a timely fashion, “the media now suffers from exactly the opposite problem: the exaggeration of atrocities and premature characterization of civil violence as genocide” (p. 112). This is not a problem that is suffered by the media in any of the works under examination in this thesis.

The French-language edition of A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali was a best-seller in Quebec, and the book has been published in fourteen languages in about thirty countries (Stoffman, 2003, p. E1). Canadian reviews of the English-language translation were generally politely positive, except for several that objected to the love affair and marriage of a middle-aged white Canadian and a young black Rwandan. It was left to The New York Times Book Review to comment on the journalistic elements of the story.

“Valcourt cannot bring himself to leave Rwanda because he is not journalistically detached. He is deeply, intimately, fatally involved with everything that is happening around him” (Dickey, 2003, p. 12).

This struggle between journalistic detachment and the well-intentioned involvement that causes damage forms the basis of all three of

my target texts. What are we to make of these fictional connections? Why might they be important? These are the questions that I will explore in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five

Journalism: Not Guilty as Charged

My examination of The Quiet American, Charlie Johnson in the Flames, and A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali reveals that all three contain indictments of the practice of journalism. These indictments are particularly powerful because they come from authors who are themselves experienced journalists. Graham Greene wrote from around the world for newspapers and magazines as well as writing novels and screenplays. In his role as one of North America's most prominent public intellectuals, Michael Ignatieff writes newspaper and magazine articles as well as books. Gil Courtemanche writes for the Quebec daily Le Devoir. Fiction is not real life, but each of these novels is enriched by its author's extensive experience of journalism. The wealth of physical detail and the particulars of journalistic practice make these fictional settings believable. They lend credibility to the narrative, and thus strengthen the critique of journalism.

At the same time, I would argue that the authors' experiences and achievements as reporters rather than editors create in these texts an overwhelming belief in the virtues of the individual reporter and the corresponding vices of others in the business, particularly editors. All three protagonists see themselves as victims of their employers, who in turn lack

the discernment to appreciate the reporters' excellent work and superior moral vision. Thus, when the rest of the world does not immediately share the reporter's concerns, the fault must lie with editors or even with the business of journalism itself. This reportorial egocentrism weakens the criticism of journalism in these texts.

The many commonalities among these texts, which may well flow from the authors' own journalistic experiences, make it easy to compare the texts, although they also open my selection of texts to the criticism that it is too narrowly based. At the end of this chapter I will suggest avenues for broadening the study of this issue. But before doing that, I will present other conclusions of my thesis. First, I will draw out the threads that my three texts have in common, and point out some of the elements in which they differ. Second, I will consider the place of these texts in the larger canon of fiction about journalism. Third, I will argue that fictions about journalism in general and these texts in particular comment in important ways on our lives. In discussing these second and third points I will refer frequently to a recently published book by Matthew C. Ehrlich, Journalism in the Movies. Finally, I will suggest areas for further study.

There are many common threads among these texts. In the first section of my motif, the personal features of the fictional journalists, the

three protagonists are cut from nearly identical cloth. They are middle-aged white men, and they come from developed Western countries. I believe that this limited selection of characters also weakens the criticism of journalism in these texts. Without confusing fiction with real life, I find it noteworthy that one of the most recognized faces in international reporting today belongs to a woman, Christiane Amanpour, CNN's chief international correspondent. The numbers of foreign correspondents who are women and members of visible minorities is growing, in life if not in fiction.

After several decades of journalistic experience, these male protagonists find themselves covering wars in places that much of the world would rather ignore. Their employers are not particularly interested in reporting what is really happening, either. Unsuccessful in romance and marriage, each in his own way is still seeking love. These journalists have "gone native" in the sense that they have adopted the countries where they work, rather than the countries of their births, as home.

There are also parallels in the second element of the motif, the journalists' moral sense. None of them has lost his sense of outrage at the immorality of the military attacks on civilians that they are witnessing. Observing the multiple deaths of innocents and the immunity of the guilty forces the journalists to question their traditional detachment and neutrality.

Fowler recites his doctrine of non-involvement, Johnson feels righteous rage, and Valcourt experiences guilt because he finds happiness in love while Rwanda falls apart. But in each case the journalist's revulsion at the horrors that he witnesses pricks his conscience, and his personal morality overcomes the journalistic detachment on which he had based a career. In this process each man comes to understand that his journalistic employer, whether it is Fowler's newspaper, Johnson's television network, or Valcourt's freelance customers, does not share this outrage. Although the texts present this absent corporate outrage as an indictment of journalism, I would argue that these fictional journalists naively assume that their witnessing tragedy and horror grants them a moral superiority to their bosses. These fictional reporters operate as traditional journalistic outsiders, and they claim the moral superiority of the uncorrupted outsider. Rather than promoting any particular ideology such as communism, as Fowler is accused of doing, the protagonists of all three texts become involved because they want to save people – an individual in Charlie Johnson in the Flames, and individuals as well as larger groups in both A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali and The Quiet American.

The journalists' disillusionment with their employers and by extension with journalism itself lies at the heart of the third element of my motif, the

depiction of journalism. Both Fowler and Johnson find their stories changed by faceless editors in ways that weaken the descriptions of modern war. Fowler's dispatches are also subject to censorship before they leave Vietnam. Valcourt encounters indifference from editors more than malice or incompetence, with the result that his warnings of the impending genocide reach only a small audience. These fictional journalists' different experiences lead them to the same conclusion: journalism is incapable of telling the stories that they believe need to be told. This realization prods them into action to protect or avenge the victims that they observe, and this action causes the damage that constitutes the defining feature of the theme that I am examining. I would argue that it is this abandoning of journalism, rather than any defects inherent in the business, that gets them into trouble. Of the three fictional journalists, only Valcourt makes a real effort to seek alternative journalistic outlets for his stories before taking the action that causes damage. In this way A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali performs a more persuasive critique of journalism than the other texts. Even so, there is not a lot new in the accusation that Western news media ignore news stories from Africa.

The major differences between these texts are found in the endings. All three men get out of the reporting business, but in different ways. Fowler

is about to return to London to become an editor. Love for Phuong and his desire to provide her with something close to the Western home of her dreams have prodded him to overcome his often-asserted aversion to editors and editing. Johnson is dead, having abandoned reporting – the only area in which he possesses skills – for military action, where his moral outrage is impotent. Valcourt finds happiness with a new lover and a new business: defending people accused of genocide. In dramatic terms, his reinvention of himself is the most difficult to accept, since nothing in the text has prepared the reader for it. These rejections by Fowler and Valcourt strike the reader as being nearly as irrevocable as Johnson's.

In the fourth element of my motif, the portrayals of culture, politics, and ideology, there are common threads but also marked distinctions. All three texts portray the global as strongly influencing the local. Decisions made in faraway capitals have devastating effects in small areas of conflict. In The Quiet American France's colonial power is waning as the Cold War waxes colder, while decisions about Vietnam are made in Paris and increasingly in Washington. The contexts of Charlie Johnson in the Flames and A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali are the upheaval of geopolitical roles and the emergence of American hegemony. Decisions about Kosovo and Rwanda are made in several far-off places; in particular, they are deferred or

not made at the United Nations headquarters in New York. Although new realities are emerging in their worlds, the three fictional journalists identify similarities between the conflicts that they are witnessing and earlier ones that they have experienced. The destruction of a town reminds Fowler of Second World War London. Johnson frequently recalls the many wars that he and his cameraman Jacek have covered. Valcourt lives with the memory of the failure of international institutions, as well as his own failure, to prevent famine in Ethiopia.

Now I turn to the second part of this chapter, placing these texts in the larger canon of fiction about journalism. Here I have found a useful guide in From Headline Hunter to Superman: A Journalism Filmography, in which Richard R. Ness analyzes depictions of journalism in films up to 1996.¹⁰

¹⁰ Throughout this thesis I have compared films with novels with little regard to their technical differences. I believe I am justified in doing so for several reasons. First, I deal primarily with the novel-like narrative components of the films rather than technical aspects that have no equivalents in novels, such as camera work and the quality of the acting. Second, novels are often made into films, such as The Quiet American. And real-life journalists such as Greene, Ignatieff, and Courtemanche create fiction about journalists in both print and film. Third and most important, similar motifs can be found at work in both media. Most current academic analyses of fiction about journalism concentrate on film, almost as if the presumably larger audience for movies than for books justified ignoring print works, or even as if no novels were being written in this genre.

Ness identifies a pattern of character development as a defining element of this genre.

Chiefly, the journalist plays a role in the instigation of the action, goes through some transformation or development as a result of that action, and ethical questions or other issues related to the profession are addressed by the character or by others around the character with regard to his or her actions. The transformation the journalist undergoes does not always take the form of a complete reformation, but usually involves a sense of growth or heightened awareness. (1997, p. 4)

Ness also argues that conflict is generated by “who knows the truth and who is trying to find out about it” (p. 4). In my texts, the reporters tell the story, so it is not surprising that they paint themselves as the truth-seekers, the good guys in international tales of morality.

My three texts fit well into both of Ness’s definitions. After Fowler in The Quiet American betrays Pyle to the Communists, the police chief and the journalist debate the ethical aspects of involvement in the local conflicts. Fowler also debates with himself about his own ethical principles, and he ends up with the heightened awareness of wanting to apologize to someone. In Charlie Johnson in the Flames the journalist instigates the action of saving the burned woman, and then debating the ethical implications of his action with most of the other characters in the novel. His personal transformation is radical, turning him into a vigilante and leading to his death. In A Sunday at

the Pool in Kigali the action that is instigated by the journalist is simply his decision to stay in Rwanda and try, somehow, to help to avert the coming ethnic slaughter. Many of the other characters in the novel try to persuade him that his ethical point of view is wrong or at least impractical. His failure and the death of his wife provoke a transformation even more radical than Johnson's: Valcourt becomes a defender of those accused of perpetrating the genocide. These three texts also satisfy Ness's second criterion, concerning the conflict between those who know the truth and those who are trying to discover it. Fowler is trying to unmask the quiet American and uncover his role in the Saigon bombings. Johnson is seeking the identity of the militia commander who killed the woman. Valcourt faces an analogous task. He already knows the truth about the genocide, but he is trying to reveal it to an ignorant world.

In Journalism in the Movies, a comprehensive book about film depictions of journalists, Ehrlich argues that the four story elements that appear most often in this genre are the reporter, the story, the editor, and the love interest. These films also address tensions between a journalist's professional life and home life and the conflicts between objectivity and subjectivity, Ehrlich says (2004, pp. 10-11). Again, my texts fit these definitions. The reporter and the story lie at the centre of all three. Editors

play important roles, and the apparent arbitrariness of their actions is enhanced by their distance and impersonality. The love interest is important, too. Fowler achieves his desired love, Johnson loses his life over a kind of love for a woman whose name he does not know, and Valcourt finds a new love to replace his dead wife. For these fictional journalists, love has more staying power than journalism. These matches with Ness's and Ehrlich's definitions place my texts in the mainstream of fiction about journalism, although their shared theme of the journalist who causes damage is an unusual feature.

To return to Howard Good, where I began this thesis, these texts conform to Good's argument that this genre of fiction reveals a lot about the inner lives of journalists. The three protagonists debate painfully and at length with themselves about how to do the right thing. Such a debate provides evidence of an inner life that usually would not be apparent to anyone who simply analyzes the journalists through Good's four motifs: the journalist as a drunk, a crusader with a broken lance, a war correspondent, or a vicious editor. The texts examined in this thesis do indeed contain, in varying amounts and combinations, characters that fit Good's themes. But the damage done by their protagonists is evidence of a motif that lies beyond Good's analysis.

The third section of this chapter considers the connections between these fictions about journalism and the world in which we live. If, in these texts, journalism lacks or has lost the ability to tell the real story, can the texts themselves tell us anything useful about the real world? I would argue that they can. I agree with Ness's argument that the journalism genre, "like any genre, reflects the society that created it" (1997, p. 6). But we also need to bear in mind Ghiglione's warning that fiction provides no more than partial truths (1991, p. 460). One factor that makes the truth in my three texts partial is their common point of view, that of the reporter in the field. All three fictional journalists disagree with decisions made by their editors, but none even asks the editors to explain their reasoning. Rather, these fictional reporters nurture their grievances to career-ending proportions. Only Fowler remains in the business. But the reader puzzles how Fowler could learn to work as an editor on his return to London, having consistently defined himself as being almost anything other than an editor.

One useful function of fiction about journalism is simply to cut journalists down to size. Focusing on film, Ehrlich argues that this is an important function.

The films have undercut some of the more sanctimonious claims journalists have made on behalf of their profession, which makes it hardly surprising that journalists have often complained about them. They

threaten journalism's cultural authority by implying that the press is not at the centre of the universe – or that if it *is* (italics in original) at the centre, it should not be.
(2004, pp. 178-79)

My three texts threaten journalism's central authority by claiming that journalism, at least the type of war reporting or foreign corresponding on which the texts concentrate, cannot tell the stories that it claims to tell. This is a powerful critique because it focuses not on violations of journalistic ideals, such as Jayson Blair's. Rather, it attacks a defining element of journalism, the editing function. Ideally, editing advances the interests of the audience by confirming facts and eliminating unsupported opinions. But the editing function as depicted in these three fictions does the opposite. It eliminates awkward facts even though the reporter knows them to be true, and it substitutes an unsupported and unsupportable version of the reporter's account. Here, editing constitutes distortion. In this one-sided view of editing, the reporter's work is born in perfection and corrupted by contact with editors. Never does an editor make even the smallest change that improves a reporter's work – an absence that, in my view, greatly weakens the criticism of journalism made in these texts. The fictional reporters' resentment over the editing process is important because it kills their hopes that their stories will move some members of their audience to act against

wrongdoing. Left to take that action himself, each of these well-intentioned fictional reporters causes damage.

A somewhat different attack on the authority of journalism is launched in Anchorman, a recent Hollywood film that exposes and exaggerates the many failings of the local-news television anchors of the 1970s. The primary motif of this film is the journalist as hyperactive cretin. He may cause damage but it is trivial because his subjects are trivial. Here, the arrival of a young, attractive, female reporter brings out the misogyny in anchor Ron Burgundy and his on-air pals, while Burgundy tries to seduce her by showing off his muscles and hairy chest. The station's biggest stories consistently portray cute animals doing funny things. In the climax of the film, the reporters battle sleepy bears at the zoo.

In one way, this film's criticism of journalism is more serious than the criticism in my three texts, because it is directed at the structure of the business of journalism rather than the apparent mistreatment of individual reporters' work by individual editors. I agree with critic Frank Rich, who argues that this fiction highlights a real problem with television news: the 1970s notion, now nearly universally adopted, that the popularity of a news "personality" is more important than the story he or she is telling, for example the story of the American invasion of Iraq.

[W]e start wondering if TV news may be even more farcical now than it was then. But these days the farce isn't so funny. The worst damage committed by Ron Burgundy at the movie's mythical News Center 4 of San Diego is to overplay the pregnancy of a panda at the San Diego Zoo. Our news culture, and not just TV news, muffed the run-up to a war. (2004)

Also considering the connections between fiction and the real world, Richard Rorty highlights the importance of works of fiction in creating “moral progress ... in the direction of greater human solidarity” (1989, p. 192). He thinks of solidarity as viewing traditional differences such as race and religion as unimportant when compared to similarities in the way different peoples deal with pain and humiliation. Therefore, “detailed descriptions of particular varieties of pain and humiliation (in, e.g., novels or ethnographies), rather than philosophical or religious treatises, [are] the modern intellectual’s principal contributions to moral progress” (p. 192). My three target texts clearly contain such descriptions. In The Quiet American, for example, Fowler witnesses the carnage that results from the Americans’ arming of General Thé: “A woman sat on the ground with what was left of her baby in her lap. ... The legless torso at the edge of the garden still twitched” (p. 162). In Charlie Johnson in the Flames the journalist revisits the field hospital where he had interviewed Jordanian peacekeepers “who’d walked into a minefield and were being stitched back together there. The

ones who could talk, the ones who were more than bandaged stumps of meat held in this life by a breathing pump and a heart machine, had all told him that the doctors were the best” (p. 4). And in A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali a horrified Valcourt comes upon a roadblock where Hutus are massacring Tutsis. “The men were killed skillfully and accurately with a single shot or machete stroke, but the women didn’t have the right to a quick, clean death. They were mutilated, tortured, raped ... They were allowed to bleed to death” (p. 218). In Rorty’s terms, these three fictions take steps toward a goal that is not attainable by journalism itself: human solidarity. Certainly the three protagonists view themselves as seeking that goal. They believe that if only the world could see the atrocities that they have witnessed, a common humanity would dictate an immediate end to the horrors.

Since, as several critics have noted, the genre of journalistic fiction shows no signs of dying out, I want to move to the final section of this chapter, suggestions for further study. One such area is broadening the search for examples of the motif of the journalist who causes damage to include fiction from other countries and other languages.¹¹ On-line sources

¹¹ One example is the Australian Broadcasting Corp. television series Mercury, which is set in the newsroom of a fictional crusading Sunday newspaper. Advertising for the series claims that “The journalists who investigate the stories have almost as much to hide as their sources.” In the episode “Without Fear or Favour” the editor of the paper overrules

represent a growing source of material. In a way, the on-line world turns on its head the comment by Jacek in Charlie Johnson in the Flames that journalists suffer from too much experience. Today it may be the audience that has too much experience. Many of these consumers of fiction also consume a lot of information on line, where the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction are so blurred as to be frequently indistinguishable. This *caveat lector* environment creates skepticism about the sources and validity of information that is spreading, I believe, to more traditional media such as television and newspapers. Another area that invites further study deals with changing public views of journalism, and possible connections between those views and new fictions about journalism.

In closing, I agree with Ness that the continuing strength of the genre of fiction about journalism provides an indication of the significance of real-life journalists. "Whether viewing the press in a positive or a negative light, the genre continues to reflect the importance of the news media in society

his aggressive reporters on two stories. He decides not to invade the privacy of the birth mother of a psychiatric patient who has been killed by police, and he kills a story about a government scandal because the paper has not interviewed the minister involved. Unlike the faceless editors in my target texts who damage the reporters' work, this one applies traditional journalistic principles, even at the cost of being beaten to a story by the competition. A search for further fictional examples of upright journalistic character would be a worthy project.

and the impact the fourth estate has on that society. As long as this remains the case, there seems little possibility of the genre disappearing” (1997, p. 6). Despite the excesses and failures of many fictional reporters, journalism retains a central role in our concepts of ourselves as enlightened members of a democratic nation. If, as the three texts that I have examined here suggest, journalism has lost the ability to tell the important stories, that is a serious charge. But, based on the three texts that I have examined, I cannot agree that the business of journalism has been proven guilty as charged. However, it is not necessary to accept this viewpoint to agree with Ehrlich about the importance of all the works in this genre of fiction. “At best, they can help us think critically and conscientiously about the press’s role in democratic society and, in the spirit of All the President’s Men, remind us of what is at stake: not only freedom of the press but also the future of the country” (2004, p. 180). That is why these stories that we tell ourselves about journalism matter and why they will continue to matter.

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