



The Third Man & The Fallen Idol

Graham Greene

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From Reader Review The Third Man & The Fallen Idol for online ebook

Judy says

I really like Greene and am not sure why I haven't read more of his work - it is something I must put right. After watching the film of 'The Third Man', I turned to this book which contains the original novella (amazingly, Greene wrote this just so that he could adapt it for the screenplay!) and another shorter story which was also adapted for a film directed by Carol Reed, 'The Fallen Idol'. I haven't seen the latter film as yet, but both stories are beautifully written with not a word wasted, and both are very bleak in different ways.

J. Watson (aka umberto) says

The first novella "The Third Man" originally meant to be seen rather than to be read was the 1949 British film while the second one "The Fallen Idol" first published as 'The Basement Room' in 1935, according to the author, was not intended to be the 1948 one (p. 101) and both directed by Carol Reed. I read them because its two-in-one copy was timely available; however, I found reading each a bit tough so, I think, we should read their synopses from Wikipedia, an introduction by Ian Thomson and the prefaces for some updated backgrounds. Reading Graham Greene essentially needs such information, therefore, we can find ourselves busy reading his works with arguable enjoyment and understanding.

Once in a while, we might have heard/read on a saying warning us not to judge a book by its cover. I think this could apply to these two titles, in other words, do not judge them by its lengths or be not complacent when you find these two novellas anywhere since their dimensions are something in disguise. As we can see from my brief survey: "The Third Man" a 17-chapter novella in its own right has 92 pages whereas "The Fallen Idol" a mini 5-chapter one has merely 28 pages. Which one seems easier to read?

In contrast, I've found reading "The Third Man" more enjoyable, more in-depth and more gripping in terms of its plot, characters and climax than "The Fallen Idol". A few of the reasons would be in terms of the different scenarios in that the first deals with a sort of illicit trade and betrayal amid the World War II aftermath in Vienna while the second explores human relationships between adults and youngsters, as we can see more details narrated in the first to the extent of powerful figurative narrative in which we could read and enjoy to follow the narration while the second written with relatively less powerful one. For instance, as focused on the physical setting description, the passages in questions are as follows:

Even this cemetery was zoned between the Powers: the Russian zone was marked by huge tasteless statues of armed men, the French by rows of anonymous wooden crosses and a torn tired tricolour flag. Then Martins remembered that Lime was a Catholic and was unlikely to be buried in the British zone for which they had been vainly searching. So back they drove through the heart of a forest where the graves lay like wolves under the trees, winking white eyes under the gloom of the evergreens. ... (p. 12)

As compared to this extract:

Through the drawing-room doorway on the first floor he saw the draped chairs; even the china clock on the mantel was covered like a canary's cage; ... On the nursery table he found his supper laid out: a glass of milk and a piece of bread and butter, a sweet biscuit, and a little old Queen's pudding without the meringue. He had no appetite; he strained his ears for Mrs Baines's coming, for the sound of voice, but the basement held its secrets; the green baize door shut off that world. ... (p. 112)

time I see it written. Interesting concept but fell a bit flat for this reader.

Megan Baxter says

This is a slim little book, but the two stories in it pack quite a wallop. One, is, of course, the more famous, the basis for The Third Man movie. The other was also made into a movie, but is not as well known.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision here.

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at Smorgasbook

Mark says

Graham Greene's Third Man was written as a movie script. The Fallen Idol, while having been made into a movie, was not written as such. In fact, there are numerous differences between the book and movie.

Obviously, the movies of these two books were made many years ago but to read The Third man you get a real feel of an old black and white movie. The book is set immediately after World War 2 in Vienna, the town still divided into four quadrants - Russian, American, British and French.

Rollo Martins, a second-rate author of Westerns who gives Zane Grey as his greatest influence, arrives in Vienna to see his longtime friend, Harry Lime. Just prior to Martins' arrival, Lime is tragically killed in an accident. It does not take long for Rollo to figure out that it was no accident and when rumours circulate that Harry was involved in a scam, Rollo takes it upon himself to find out what really happened.

Pushing things a little too far, Rollo gets caught up in the situation with the police, Russians, and Harry's ex-lover all pointing fingers in different directions. But who is the unknown Third man?

The Fallen Idol, originally called The Basement Room, is about a young boy, Philip who is left in the care of a Butler and his wife while his parents are away on a fortnight's holiday. The Butler's wife is a strict and somewhat scary woman and Philip finds himself enjoying the time that she is not at home. When she is gone he gets along really well with Baines, the butler.

When he finds out Baines' biggest secret he promises he won't tell but as Mrs. Baines tries to get information from him he finds himself keeping her secret too. This is all too much for young Philip to handle and circumstances spiral out of control.

Both The Third Man and The Fallen Idol are really short and quick reads - 130 pages for the two together but Greene packs a punch. Clever writing coupled with well-drawn characters and a real sense of the time (WW2 Vienna in Third Man's case) make compelling reading. The kind of book that makes you concerned that the movies just cannot do justice.

Lorenzo Berardi says

There seems to be a whole business about "The Third Man" which is still going on in Vienna long after the release of Carol Reed's movie based on a script by Graham Greene. A very peculiar sort of script: this novella.

If you walk around the majestic Viennese Ring or through the polished, Charlotte Russe-like Innere Stadt of today, you will come across a "Third Man Museum", could join a "Third Man Tour - in the footsteps of Harry Lime", get the chance of watching the actual movie at the Burg Kino and will certainly meet a busker guitarist, playing the Harry Lime Theme at some corner. Not to mention the merchandising of t-shirts, teacups, dishes, key-rings with the face of Orson Welles or his silhouette at the end of a dark tunnel printed on them popping up from many souvenirs shops.

I've been there myself quite recently and somehow managed to resist to The Third Man's call. The greatest temptation I renounced to was the purchase of dusty old copy of "The Dritte Man", the German translation of what Graham Greene wrote. I don't read German and I guess I will never do it. But, look, a dusty old, apparently neglected book to nurse and cradle in my hands is always a stroke of love.

Anyway, a few months later this last Viennese trip and back to the UK, I bought a copy of "The Third Man / The Fallen Idol" in one of those ubiquitous charity shop of Oxford and surroundings. May Calliope, Clio and Erato bless them! And here we are with this Third Man (I'm sorry for you fans of "The Fallen Idol", but there is no room in this review for it).

Graham Greene wrote a brilliant spy story with a perceivable coldness and discomfort feeling in it. Vienna looks stunning here in a way that is completely forgotten nowadays. It's a grim, hunger-stricken Vienna still divided into four powers: Britain, France, the US and the Soviet Union. It's a Vienna where it's easier (and cheaper) spending half an hour with a tart than with a slice of Sachertorte, a dark town where everything felt apart, rubble fills the streets and the blackened tumbledown façades of the Augsburg-age palaces hang on the bystanders and the racketeers.

To put into Greene's words:

"The Danube was a grey flat muddy river a long way across the Second Bezirk, the Russian zone where the Prater lay smashed and desolate and full of weeds, only the Great Wheel revolving slowly over the foundations of merry-go-round like abandoned millstones, the rusting iron of smashed tanks which nobody had cleared away, the frost-nipped weeds where the snow was thin".

Well, what a contrast with contemporary wealthy and greeny Vienna, I say!

This is a Vienna caught at the end of World War Two and looking like London during the Blitz (a beloved novel set for Greene) or Berlin during the same period: a town on its knees where the local currency has no value and only foreigners can get goods and commodities thanks to their status.

The mysterious disappearance of Harry Lime - a British spy - and his chasing through Vienna by a childhood friend, Rollo Martins (Holly in the movie) makes a good plot with a pleasantly noir touch, but what I liked and sympathised with here is actually the city of Vienna rather than the characters.

Personally, I do think that Greene was far more talented a novelist than a screenplay writer (all the things he changed from the original novel for the first movie adaptation of "Brighton Rock" are a black spot in his literary career) and although "The Third Man" is technically a novella, there is something missing here. However, this book stands out as an important and clever one among its author huge literary production.

I would just say that there are better examples of Greene's mastery around.

K.E. Coles says

Love the way Graham Greene writes. He tells the story - no fuss, no nonsense - and tells it so well that you're there, in that time and place. Two very different stories in this volume, but both excellent.

Michael Perkins says

First, if you have not seen the classic film noir, "The Third Man," with its amazing cinematography of mystery and suspense and iconic performance by Orson Welles, then read no further. Do yourself a favor and rent it and treat yourself to one of the greatest films of all time.

If you have at least seen the movie, and preferably also read the novella (which was published a year after the film was released), then treat yourself to this brilliant analysis below comparing the two. I was attempting to look up a quote and stumbled across this excellent article. I recently saw the film again for the first time in 20 years and wanted to read the novella for additional detail. The book did not disappoint in that regard. I've known a real Harry Lime for a long time and have seen his ability to bamboozle others who did not understand who he was, or had become, at his core. Both the film and novella provided excellent insights into the Lime I know.

<http://www.avclub.com/article/third-m...>

Dillwynia Peter says

The Third Man & The Fallen Idol (formerly The Basement Room) share in common theme - being the basis for films directed by Carol Reed. Greene had to write a "story" before he wrote a script & this is the case of The Third Man. It was never meant to be published; therefore, there are interesting differences by the time the film was made. Our lead changes from English to American, the love interest from bland to beautiful and the end is much more dramatic and black under Reed's minor change (also more realistic, considering the events of the film).

Carol Reed was an important film director & sadly is now very much forgotten except by English Noir Film buffs. Much is made that this is Orson Welles' film, but that is nonsense, the film is Reed's. The famous Harry Lime theme was discovered by Reed during his visit with Greene to Vienna when developing the plot. And regardless how Welles could act, if Reed was a poor director, this film would never have gotten the recognition it has. Reed was of theatre nobility - his father was the famous Victorian actor & director Herbert Tree (as mentioned in Eliot's Old Possum Book of Cats - "He acted with Irving, he has acted with Tree") and his nephew was Oliver Reed.

The story reflects an ugly time in modern Europe. Vienna, a dead city in a dead country, with the victors still growling & picking over the spoils. It is hard to imagine the Vienna now being a one where everyone racketeers just to survive; where everyone lives in fear of their past, and depending on the occupied zone they live in, their future. Greene could always describe this type of situation perfectly & the story is fast paced and natural and ugly.

The Fallen Idol (a title I do prefer) was written in the steamer on Greene's return from Liberia in the mid 30s. As both Reed & Greene recognised, the world of a wealthy London family with servants had disappeared after the War, so they moved the scene to an Embassy. It still works. This is very much in the ilk of James' What Maise Knew, and again explores the innocence of childhood and the impacts the adult world can have on said innocence. Philip is given adult secrets. At 1st they appear to be golden globes, but they actually are tawdry baubles & he says clearly towards the end of the story: I don't want your secrets! He desperately wants to retain his childhood, but sadly, events now have changed that forever. There is even a chance that in later life Philip will be a slightly damaged adult. You feel nothing but compassion for Philip & his loss of childlike innocence.

The title "Fallen Idol" is actually appropriate to both stories. In each case, a hero is shown to be of clay feet, and in fact, once the glow is scrapped away, to actually be not very nice people at all. Both hero men are loved and worshiped and ultimately they both prey, exploit, and destroy this love. This love is innocent and deep adoration - the heroes they have loved have never disappointed. Our heroes know this & exploit it. As I said, they are actually ugly people. The outcomes are the same - both main characters ultimately "destroy" their hero. Again, this is a typical Greene theme.

Both novellas are tight, fast paced and full of pathos. I happily recommend them to friends for a stimulating holiday or relaxing day's read.

Martine says

Carol Reed's *The Third Man* ranks among my favourite noir films. To a large extent, this is because of its stunningly atmospheric black-and-white cinematography (I just love those ruins and shadows...), but it's also because there's something quite compelling about the story about a Brit who is invited to post-war Vienna by a friend, only to discover that said friend is dead and may have been involved in a rather nasty racket. That story was written by Graham Greene, and was published by Penguin along with another Greene story adapted for the screen by Reed, 'The Fallen Idol'.

The Third Man is unlike other Greene books. As Greene himself points out in the preface, 'it was never written to be read but only to be seen'. In other words, while it's not exactly a film script, *The Third Man* was written to be turned into one, and it shows. By Greene's standards, the story is light on characterisation and heavy on descriptions of actions and situations. This is bad news for those of us who like Greene precisely for his characterisation, but it's not necessarily a bad thing per se, as for one thing, what little characterisation there is is solid and original (I love Rollo Martins' semi-split personality) and for another, both the plot and the atmosphere are great. Post-war Vienna (carved up into four spheres of influence by the Americans, British, French and Russians) makes for a wonderfully tense setting, and involuntary detective Rollo Martins' journey from indignation to disbelief to disillusionment to acceptance makes for compulsive reading, featuring as it does dramatic plot twists, some dark humour and a healthy dose of cynicism. In short, it's a fairly strong novella, even if it doesn't match up with Greene's longer works. Even so, I'm going to defer to the author's own assessment, which is that the film is better than the story (and not just because the story lacks the famous cuckoo clock line, which was written by Orson Welles). It's simply because the film (on which Greene closely collaborated with Reed) is, as Greene points out in his preface, 'in this case the finished state of the story', whereas the book version is merely an earlier draft -- a solid draft, but an unfinished one nonetheless.

As for the second, much shorter story in the book, 'The Fallen Idol', this is a tragedy about an innocent child who gets caught up in the nasty games adults play and ends up accidentally handing his best friend over to the police. As an exploration of the innocence-versus-guilt theme, it's rather interesting, especially since it is

(unusually for Greene) told from the child's point of view. Due to the childish perspective, Greene doesn't get to indulge in his trademark cynicism (which is what I love best about him), but still, it's a well-told, well-observed story with great characters, some menace, several 'Oh, no!' moments and an abrupt but effective ending. It's not brilliant, but it's decent story-telling -- more proof (if any were needed) that Greene didn't need many words to tell a powerful story.

All in all, I'd say this is a solid 3.5-star book. Since it's closer to four stars than to three, I'll be generous and give it four.

Gary says

The story was written as a premise to the screenplay for the movie, and the movie came out before the book....both are excellent. See the film, and then read it.....Also enjoyed THE FALLEN IDOL.

I am a Graham Greene fan!

Supratim says

The Vintage Classics features the two brilliant stories!

The edition I read had an introduction by Ian Thompson. This introduction is insightful but it revealed the plot and climax of both the stories as did the respective prefaces by the author, so I strongly suggest that you come back to these after reading the stories.

The Third Man

The Third Man was not supposed to be published as a book; Greene wanted to write a screenplay for a movie. The author wrote the story to create characterization, mood and atmosphere before he got to the screenplay. In the preface Greene mentions that the movie is actually better than the story.

The story is narrated by Col. Calloway of the British security police posted in Vienna. He is a pretty decent man.

Rollo Martins – writer of cheap westerns, almost a pauper, a harmless drunk with some women problems but overall a good man arrives at post WWII Vienna on the invitation of his childhood hero and friend Harry Lime.

Greene's depiction of Vienna – dreary, destroyed and as an occupied territory is indeed praiseworthy and the author's skill in using the elements of weather to convey meaning is also wonderful.

Needless to say, the writing is excellent and the characterization is brilliant. I liked the way the character of Martins is influenced by Rollo and Martins.

Rollo Martins arrives at Vienna to find that his hero, Harry has died in an accident and also learns that he might have been involved in some racketeering. Determined to know what had happened to his friend, Martins continues to investigate Harry's death and as expected people die such that certain secrets are not revealed.

Human beings can do anything to further their vested interests. Do we really know a person whom we regard as our friend! Conflict between justice & morality on one hand and friendship on the other is brilliantly portrayed. Like most of his novels, the author's Catholic belief also makes an appearance in the story.

The suspense would keep you turning the pages, some of the dialogues would strike a chord and the climax, in my humble opinion the most satisfying. The mood of the novel is dark and dreary, but a case of mistaken identity would provide some light-hearted moments as well.

I would recommend this story to lovers of mystery and suspense.

The story appears in both the lists of top 100 crime novels published by the British-based Crime Writers' Association and the Mystery Writers of America in the nineteen nineties. The lists can be found here - [Link](#)

The Fallen Idol

It is a short and dark story about the destruction of a child's innocence. The traumatic events would keep haunting him years later until his very last breath.

Master Phillips is a little boy who has been left in the care of the family butler Mr. Baines and his wife, while his parents are out enjoying a vacation.

Mr. Baines is a decent man, he is kind to Phillips and is in turn loved by the child. Mrs. Baines is a different person altogether – sour and unpleasant, domineering and yet servile when she wants to be.

Poor Phillips gets caught up in the world of adults where lies and deception are normal. Certain events terrify Phillips and he desperately wants to withdraw from the world of adults. His predicament – running away from home, crying on the roads, his desperate desire to be rescued by the police and his insistence that a “male” constable should escort him home as his child's mind believed that only a policeman could “impress” the formidable Mrs. Baines – would strike a chord.

Even in such a dreary setting, Greene's description of a policeman is sort of humorous – not the laugh out loud type but somewhat subtle, and it bears testimony to the author's wit.

I won't elaborate more as I don't want to give away the plot.

I don't know if my review has done justice to this brilliant story, but if you like chilling stories then please give it a reading.

Jonfaith says

It is no surprise that *The Third Man* as a novel remains inchoate. It is a signpost, a germinating seed carelessly pitched in frustrated haste. Where does it lead, what will grow? The film's images travel in any reader's bloodstream. Cotten, Howard and Welles occupy the dialogue. Greene's descriptions are wan and undeveloped. What then can possibly pierce a contemporary reader? The crux of *The Third Man* is the death of loyalty. Reason and Ideology may trade blows in a makeshift ring, governed in an incomprehensible language, what matters is friendship, right? Even loyalties forged over a lifetime become suspect in the murky reality of postwar Vienna.

