Memorialization of the Vietnam War in the Modern English, French, and Vietnamese Novel

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Comparative Literature)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2019

Date of final oral examination: 09/16/2018

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Abstract

My dissertation poses and addresses the main question of how history is memorized and represented in literature. My case studies are five novels as illustrative of a range of perspectives on the war: *The Quiet American* by British writer Graham Greene, *Yellow Fever* by French journalist Jean Lartéguy, *In the Lake of the Woods* by American veteran Tim O'Brien, *The Sympathizer by* Vietnamese American writer Viet Thanh Nguyen, and *The Sorrow of War* by Vietnamese veteran Bảo Ninh. Seeking to shed light on how different human response to the same historical fact, I offer a unique way to come to term of the Vietnam War, an important chapter in American and Vietnamese history.

My dissertation is divided into three chapters:

Chapter 1: The Vietnam war from third party perspectives

Chapter 2: The Vietnam war from American perspectives

Chapter 3: The Vietnam war from Vietnamese perspective

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INTRODUCTION

> "No event in American history is more misunderstood than the Vietnam War. It was misreported then, and it is misremembered now."[1]

In spite of what might be the problematic origin of the insight, former President Richard M. Nixon's[2] *No More Vietnams* offers a point of departure for *Memorialization of the Vietnam War in the Modern English, French, and Vietnamese Novel.* What follows is an attempt to understand and remember an important chapter in American and Vietnamese history, the Vietnam War.

As a project in comparative literature, my dissertation examines the interrelation between history, memory and literature in a comparative study of English, French and Vietnamese fiction. The background of my research is the fact of the Vietnam War and the genre of the novel. Therefore, my dissertation will first look at the Vietnam War as both a historical fact and a literary object, then follow the history of the novel generally and war novel specifically. As part of this exploration, my dissertation will briefly investigate the theories of narrative, representation, trauma, memory, and history in relation to literature.

The Vietnam War: From History to Literature

Wars have occurred one after another in Vietnam over a long historical period. However, the Vietnam War, as it is popularly called, specifically refers to the U.S. war in Vietnam. The end of the Vietnam War can be definitively marked as April 30, 1975, though the beginning is much more controversial. Currently the official commencement is November 1, 1955. As George Mc Turnan writes in his book *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam,* "The American policies that so

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[1] Nixon, Richard M., *No More Vietnam,* Arbor House, New York: 1985, p.1

[2] He is a major figure in the Vietnam War. In spite of the many controversies surrounding his political career and presidency and his unprecedented resignation from the presidency, Nixon withdrew the U.S. from Vietnam in 1973-4, made a turning point in the war.

heavily shaped the course of Vietnamese history for three full decades after World War II were never intrinsically Vietnamese in orientation: they were always primarily directed by considerations transcending that country". [3] Thus, in reality, America had been concerned with this remote land even longer than the real time of the war.

In a broader historical map, the Vietnam War can be referred as the Second Indochina War. French Indochina, including Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, was founded in the latter half of the 1800s under French dominance. From that time to the first couple decades of the 1900s, many nationalist movements emerged in Vietnam, demanding independence from France. The most remarkable movement was led by Communist leader Ho Chi Minh, who founded the Indochina Communist Party in 1930 and the League for the Independence of Vietnam (*Việt Nam độc lập đồng minh*, abbreviated *Việt Minh* in Vietnamese) in 1941.

During World War II, France was occupied by Nazi Germany. Before that, beginning in 1931, Japan had invaded and occupied Manchuria and beyond and been officially at war with China since 1937. With the purpose of closing off China's southern border and cutting off its supplies, Japan encroached on France in Indochina, taking advantage of France's difficult circumstances. When Japan surrendered to the Allies in 1945, the Viet Minh took the opportunity to take control of the country. Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam to be an independent country on September 2, 1945 and founded the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

After the World War II, France returned to Vietnam to disarm Japan. In the First Indochina War, the Viet Minh fought against France for nine years. During this time, "At least as important to France's war effort in Indochina as the supply of military hardware was the substantial financial support the United

[3] Kahin, George McTurnan. *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam*. New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1986, p.3

States provided".[4] Finally, France was heavily defeated in the battle of Điện Biên Phủ on May 7, 1954, resulting in French withdrawals and the Geneva Accords that divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel. The North was governed by Ho Chi Minh and his communist party. The South was under a French-backed emperor. The Accords also determined that Vietnam would be reunified by a free election in 1956.

In 1954, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower outlined what he called "the domino theory," a Cold War policy that argued that Communists coming into power in one country would extend to neighboring states, like a row of dominos. Because of this theory/strategy/political position, the position of Vietnam in American political policies was dramatically changed. As Mark Atwood Lawrence observes in his *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History,*

> Before 1949 or so, governments around the world viewed political turmoils in Vietnam as a matter of minor significance. But the coming of the Cold War changed everything. As the globe split into rival blocs headed by Washington and Moscow, conflict in Vietnam increasingly appeared to be connected to the worldwide struggle between democratic capitalism and international communism. American, Soviet, and Chinese policymakers came to see Vietnam, a resource-rich nation occupying a vital geographic position, as crucial to their chances of prevailing in the global struggle.[5]

Based on this theory and for the purported purpose of preventing the tide of Communism from taking over the whole of Southeast Asia, the United States supported an anti-Communist politician, Ngô Đình Diệm, in establishing the first republic in the South Vietnam in 1955. Then the scheduled elections were canceled. Ngô Đình Diệm's Confucian and Catholic family background that would help to build up the ideology of his regime on the one hand, and later cause political and religious conflicts resulting in the collapse of his government on the other hand.

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[4] Kahin 8

[5] Lawrence, Mark Atwood. *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*. Oxford University Press, 2008

Aided by the North Vietnamese, the Communists in South Vietnam established the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (*Mặt trận Giải phóng miền Nam*, known as *Việt Cộng* in Vietnamese). Viet Cong has its own regular army units and guerilla to fight against the United States and South Vietnam in the Second Indochina War. In the meantime, the United States involvement escalated in the 1960s. Ngô Đình Diệm, his nationalism and his increasingly dictatorial rule was an impediment to the U.S. involvement. In 1963, three weeks after President Kennedy was shot, South Vietnam army made an uprising. The United States is believed to stand behind the coup. President Ngô Đình Diệm was assassinated. In response, the U.S. Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 to authorize President Lyndon B. Johnson to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression".[6] That resolution effectively launched America's full scale involvement in the war. The first large scale battle between American troops and the North Vietnamese Army was in 1965. In the meantime, in the U.S., the war protest movement began to increase in 1967. During the lunar New Year of 1968, the Viet Cong launched a large campaign of surprise attacks all over South Vietnam, called the Tet Offensive. Especially in the ancient imperial capital of Huế, thousands civilians were executed by Viet Cong. In March 1968, American soldiers massacred hundreds civilians in and around the hamlet of Mỹ Lai. By the end of 1968, Richard Nixon had been elected president and promised to end the war. He launched the new policy of Vietnamization, withdrawing U.S. troops and passing the responsibility of carrying on the war to the government of South Vietnam. The United States troops started to withdraw, but the war continued to expand. In October 1972, the U.S. and North Vietnam met in Paris to discuss a proposal to end the war. While both sides were still negotiating, President Nixon started Operation Linebacker II in December 1972 to destroy major targets in Hà Nội with B-52 bombs. Despite this operation, the Paris Peace Accords were signed in January 1973 between North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the U.S. In March 1973, the last U.S. combat troops left South Vietnam. After American withdrawal, the South Vietnamese government was short of war supplies and

[6] https://www.archivesfoundation.org/documents/tonkin-gulf-resolution/

funding. The Communists in the North launched a campaign to "liberate" the South in January 1975 and defeated the South Vietnam army, ending the war in April 30, 1975.

The war ended with a heavy consequence on all related sides. The Vietnam War and U.S. policies during and after the war resulted in a massive influx of between 750,000 to one million immigrants from South Vietnam to the United States. The Vietnamese Communist government was embargoed by the United States until 1994. Before that, 1986 was a milestone in Vietnamese history after the war when the *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) movement[7] raised, bringing a new freedom for all social aspects including literary creation.

The Vietnam War plays a significant role in American history. It is the second longest war fought by the U.S. and the only war America lost. It also happened in the age of television. The images broadcast from Vietnam caused strong reactions in American society. The televised accounts of the use and consequences of napalm and agent orange, as well as the civilian massacres, have been controversial for a long period of time. For both the United States and Vietnam, it has been an unending war. America miscalculated and made a "fatal error"....[the US] found it difficult to understand the total unyielding commitment of the enemy, the willingness to risk everything to achieve an objective". However, when the objective was finally reached, it did not seem worth the cost, "Even for the winners victory was a bittersweet price. For all Vietnamese the most pressing legacy of the war was grinding poverty and economic deprivation".[8]

The Vietnam War has inspired many writers, generating a prolific canon of Vietnam War literature. "One of the many ironies of the Vietnam War is that the one war America lost gave rise to

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[7] After controlling the whole country, the Vietnamese Communist government could not develop the country. In December 1986, the 6th National Convention of Vietnamese Communist Party accepted mistakes in policies, especially economic policies, starting a movement of renovation. The most remarkable achievement of *đổi mới* is market economy. *Đổi mới* is a milestone in Vietnamese development after the war.

[8] Herring, George C. "America and Vietnam: the Unending War", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 5, *America and the Pacific, 1941-1991* (Winter, 1991), pp. 104-119

more and better literature - collectively - than any of America's other twentieth century wars".[9] In addition to writers from America and Vietnam, writers from Australia, France, Japan and Korea created Vietnam War literature. Emerging in the 1950s during the Cold War and currently modifying, that literature includes various literary genres, but gains the highest achievement with the novel.

The Novel, the War Novel, and the Vietnam War Novel

The novel can be basically defined as a "fictitious prose narrative of book length portraying characters and actions credibly representative of real life in a continuous plot".[10] This definition sets the novel in opposition to earlier narratives of mythical or divine heroes, since the novel represents "real life" as it is lived by everyday people. However, in order to form an acceptable definition, scholars have compared the novel with other historical genres, basically the epic and the romance. But the hero of the epic, unlike that of the novel, is never an individual in the strict sense and the theme of the epic is not about personal destiny but the destiny of a community. Mikhail Bakhtin focuses on the level of the development of the genre. He contrasts the epic, a genre which has completed its development, with the novel which is "the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding".[11]

The genre of the novel developed dramatically in the age of nineteenth century realism. Realism is an aesthetic mode which purports to show life as it is instead of as it should be. Modernism, emerging roughly in the twentieth century, introduces new components such as the non-chronological plot, open ending, stream of consciousness, and fragmented forms. As Fredric Jameson argues,

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[9] Carpenter, Lucas. "It don't mean nothin': Vietnam War Fiction and Postmodernism". *College Literature*. Vol. 30, No. 2 (Spring, 2003), The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 30-50

[10] 'Novel,' *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Literature*. 2nd ed., revised by Dorothy Eagle. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

[11] Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Epic and Novel"

> [The] target of their [the modernists] attack becomes the very concept of reality itself ... The objection is thus, clearly, a critique of something like an ideology of realism, and charges that realism, by suggesting that representation is possible... tends to perpetuate a preconceived notion of some external reality to be imitated ... [12]

It is Fredric Jameson himself who later identifies the postmodern as "the cultural logic of late capitalism" in his *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*,[13] Arising after World War II, the postmodern novel gives absolute freedom to narrative, an idea that will be investigated in another part of this introduction.

As Bakhtin characterizes it in his "Epic and Novel," the most striking characteristic of the novel is that "the hero of a novel should not be heroic"; instead, "he should combine in himself negative as well as positive features." Essentially, he is a person who is "evolving and developing, a person who learns from life".[14] In other words, he is an ordinary person, someone like, Robinson Crusoe, the eponymous main character of one of the first English novels. On this ground of ordinary people and their everyday lives, are situated within the issues of trauma, memory, representation and narrative that are taken up here. The everyday reality of the war novel could focus on military or civilian life, on those directly involved with the war or on those whose lives were influenced by the aftermath of war.

The war novel came of age with the development of the realist novel in the nineteenth century. The most remarkable works are Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839) about the battle of Waterloo, Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869) about the Napoleonic Wars in Russia, and Stephen

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[12] Jameson, Fredric. "Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism", *Contemporary Marxist Literary Criticism*, Francis Mulhern ed., London and New York: Longman, 1992, p.174

[13] London New York: Verso, 1991

[14] Bakhtin. "Epic and Novel," p.50

Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) about the American Civil War. These works depict the horror of fighting and explore the question of the morality of war.

World War I offered a new brutal reality to novelists. There was a blossoming of war books in the 1920s. Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) could be mentioned among others. The conventional meaning of war novel was enlarged. Novelists in the 1920s began to write not only about the terrible scene of direct fighting but also the human psychological process in the context of war.

World War II then became a rich theme for novelists experimenting with their writing technique, leading to the postmodern novel, also called metafiction or surreal fiction. Noteworthy authors include the British author, Graham Greene; the Frenchman Jean-Paul Sartre; the Canadian Michael Ondaatje; and the Americans, Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon.

The Vietnam War novel continues the trajectory of the war novel. It centers around ordinary people in the extraordinary circumstances of the Vietnam War. Horizontally, the Vietnam War novel connects to other Vietnam War literary genres such as poetry and memoir, among which the novel remains central - perhaps because it is, in Bakhtin words, a "multilayered" and "dynamic" genre. "The novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding".[15] The novel is the most appropriate for such a complicated and conflicted reality as the Vietnam War. Each Vietnam War novel investigated in this dissertation is a slice of reality, an angle, a lens to view the war under the light of novelistic privacy.

Emerging in the 1950s during the Cold War, the Vietnam War novel has a global scope. The British novel *The Quiet American* by Graham Greene, published in 1955, is regarded as the first Vietnam War novel. American novels about the Vietnam War constitute the majority of this category, and in

[15] Bakhtin. "Epic and Novel", p.47

Vietnam, Vietnam War novels were published in significant numbers but many of them remain unknown outside the borders of the country. There is also a significant body of work written by authors outside of the United States and Vietnam - for example, *Yellow Fever* (1965) by French writer Jean Lartaguy, and *Into a Black Sun* (1968) and *Darkness in Summer* (1972) by Japanese writer Kaiko Ken.

According to Sandra Wittman's statistics,[16] up to 1989, there were more than five hundred novels written about the Vietnam War. In his work on young-adult literature and the Vietnam war, Larry Johannessen divides them into four categories:

1. The Vietnam Experience: This category deals with combat experiences. Some examples are James Webb's *Field of Fire* (1978), Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* (1978), and John M. Del Vecchio's *The Thirteenth Valley* (1982).
2. The War at Home: This category is based on events that took place in America during the war years. Meg Wolitzer's novel *Caribou* (1986), Cynthia Rylant's *A Blue-Eyed Daisy* (1987), and Paul Hoover's *Saigon Illinois* (1988) belong to this group.
3. The Refugee Experience: This category is about the new Vietnamese refugee community after the Fall of Saigon. It includes Maureen Crane Wartski's *A Boat to Nowhere* (1981), Jack Bennett's *The Voyage of Lucky Dragon* (1985), and Jamie Gilson's *Hello, My Name Is Scrambled Eggs* (1988) among others.
4. The Legacies of the Vietnam War: This category reflects how Americans memorialize and learn the lessons of the war. Some typical novels are Larry Bograd's *Travelers* (1986), Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* (1989), and Katherine Paterson's *Park's Quest* (1989) [17]

[16] Wittmen, S.M. *Writing about Vietnam: A Bibliography of the Literature of the Vietnam Conflict*. Boston: G.K.Hall, 1989

[17] Johannessen, L.R. "Young-adult Literature and the Vietnam War", *English Journal* Vol.82, No.5, 1993, pp. 43-49

It can be said that the Vietnam War novel blossoms in American literature in the late 1970s and the 1980s. After that, the number of novel published decreases, but the literary characteristics and experiments are more noticeable. The form of narrative and representation is more standout than the content of war story. We will investigate it in the next section. It's also worth mention that from the 1990s, a generation of Vietnamese American writers, who came to the country as children and so were better able to manage the English language, were recognized by a more mainstream readership. Those writers include Lan Cao with *Monkey Bridge* (1997), Le Thi Diem Thuy with *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (2003), and Viet Thanh Nguyen with *The Sympathizer* (2015).

In Vietnam, the war novel dominated the literary landscape from the war years until the end of the 1980s. Most of those novels were written to encourage people to fight in the war and to celebrate victory after the war. Only after the Renovation movement in 1986, explained above, is the war novel a more freely created and complexly constructed literary work. In the 1990s, Vietnam War novels from Vietnam were translated into English and start to be internationally recognized. Perhaps the most well-known works are *A Time Far Past* (1986) by Lê Lựu[18] and *The Sorrow of War* (1990) by Bảo Ninh.[19] Dương Thu Hương is another accomplished author. Her career has two periods, as a veteran writer in Vietnam and as a political refugee in France. Her novels, translated from Vietnamese, became known only after she escaped from Vietnam. They are *Beyond Illusions* (1987),[20] *Paradise of the Blind* (1988),[21] *Novel without a Name* (1995),[22] *No Man's Land* (2006),[23] and *The Zenith* (2013).[24] (The later three

[18] Translated by Ngo Vinh Hai, Nguyen Ba Chung and Kevin Bowen. University of Massachusetts Press 1997

[19] Translated by Phan Thanh Hao, edited by Frank Palmos, Pantheon Book, New York, 1995

[20] Translated by Phan Huy Duong and Nina McPherson, Hyperion, 2002

[21] Translated by Phan Huy Duong and Nina McPherson, William Morrow, 1993

[22] Translated by Phan Huy Duong and Nina McPherson, William Morrow, Penguin Books, 1995

[23] Translated by Phan Huy Duong and Nina McPherson, Hyperion Books, 2006

[24] Translated by Stephen B.Young & Hoa Pham Young, Penguin Books, 2013

novels were written and published outside Vietnam in English translation.) Her later novels are distinguished from her work published prior to 1986 by their realism and more complex narrative technique.[25]

Representation and Narrative in the Modern War Novel

Representation and narrative are two fundamental components of the modern war novel. The etymology of representation is the Latin verb, repraesentare— to place before, to exhibit. From the 14th century, representation comes to mean a likeness or an image. In the context of the Vietnam war novel, representation signals a textual and narrative "likeness" of the war in Vietnam, presumably what a writer or narrator or has seen, felt, or thought. Representation is the story to be told. And narrative, the art of storytelling, is the construction of a sequence of events and characters. Narrative, then, is both the form and structure of a literary work as well as the stories it encompasses.

In the post-WWII period, in Europe and the Anglophone world, Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946) become a classic comparative literary study of the work of representation and narrative in "western literature." Auerbach narrates the story of "how writers from Homer to Virginia Woolf have attempted to represent reality".[26] The scope of Auerbach's study reaches to the modernism of Virginia Woolf and its challenge to "the representation of reality". That challenge was subsequently extended and expanded with the emergence of what came to be called postmodernism, literary narratives that focus more on narrative technique than represented reality.

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[25] In addition, there is a minor category of Vietnamese literature from South Vietnam. These texts often focus on love stories and urban life rather than war reality.

[26] Ankersmit, Frank R. "Why Realism? Auerbach on the Representation of Reality", Poetics Today, Vol.20, N.1, Spring 1999, Duke University Press, pp. 53-75

Narrative is a foundation of human life. As Roland Barthes (1915-1980), one of the greatest narrative theorists, opens his "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative",

> There are countless forms of narrative in the world. First of all, there is a prodigious variety of genres, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man's stories… Moreover, in this infinite variety of forms, it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups, have their stories, and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds: narrative remains largely unconcerned with good or bad literature. Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural.[27]

With Barthes and others, the study of narrative is informed and redefined by structuralism. Vladmir Propp (1895-1970) notices that folktales are similar in different areas. He considers characters and actions as narrative functions. By analysis a hundred folktales, he identified seven types of character and thirty one functional actions. Roland Barthes divides texts into two categories of open and closed meaning. The first one leaves interpretation for the readers/audiences who can draw different meanings from their own experiences. The second one is produced with a single, definite meaning. Barthes also introduces five narrative codes that shape the meaning of a text: hermeneutic/enigma, proairetic/acti semantic, symbolic, and referential code. Another important theorist of narrative, Tzvetan Todorov (1939-2017) argues that most stories follow a five-step-path. The first is equilibrium when everything is as it should be. The second is a disruption with the emergence of a problem. The third is realization when the problem effects everything, causing chaos. The fourth is restored order with the characters' attempts to resolve the problem. The fifth is equilibrium again.

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[27] Originally published in Communications, 8 (1966), as Introduction A l'analyse structurale des récits. English translation "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," New Literary History, Vol.6, N.2, Winter 1975, pp. 237-272

However, postmodern narrative rebels against these narrative patterns. Postmodern writers often foreground techniques such as fragmentation, paradox, and the unreliable narrator. As Christopher Butler points out in his *Postmodernist, A Very Short Introduction*,

> . . . the basic attitude of the postmodernist was a skepticism about the claims of any kind of overall, totalizing, explanation…they could side with those who didn't fit into the larger stories - the subordinated and the marginalized - against those with the power to disseminate the master narratives.[28]

Thus far, we can see Johannessen's in previous section is just merely based on the *what* of the story. At this point, we should examine the *how*. In terms of representation, the Vietnam War novel can be divided into two categories. As Lucas Carpenter explains,

> One is through the precision lens of mainstream realism-naturalism, while the other is the kaleidoscope of simulacra associated with postmodernism. The former hinges on the meticulous mimesis of the human-as-animal experience of war as an intersubjective historical event, while the latter denies the possibility of such representation because it entails notions of objective truth and depends on Western historical metanarrative for its justification.[29]

The realist-naturalists follow the thread of traditional war stories. Most novels of this kind were published in the early phase of the Vietnam War novel, as soon as the war was over. They include novels such as *Fields of Fire* (1978) by James Webb, *Better Times Than These* (1978) by Winston Groom, and *The Thirteenth Valley* (1982) by John Del Vecchio, among others. The novels belonging to the second type of representation focus on perspective rather than story. Writers tend to *think* about the war rather than describe the war. War is not a common hell. Its cruelty is much more personal and specific. The

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[28] Butler, Christopher. Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press, 2002

[29] Carpenter, Lucas, "It don't mean nothin': Vietnam War Literature and Postmodernism", College Literature, Johns Hopkins University Press 30.2 Spring 2003, pp.30-50

subjectivity of the narrator is distinct in this kind of Vietnam War novel – for example, Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977) and Tim O'Brien's many published titles through three decades (1973-2002).

Corresponding to these two types of representation, there are two basic ways of constructing narratives. The classic way of constructing a narrative, which employs a chronological structure, reliable narrator and straightforward language, is no longer dictates the construction of these later narratives. For the Vietnam War as historical event(s) is already considered postmodern. A postmodern frame for the Vietnam War narrative is, then, not surprising. As Jameson notes about Michael Herr's *Dispatches*,

> . . . the war be told in any of the traditional paradigms of the war novel or movie - indeed, that breakdown of all previous narrative paradigms is, along with the breakdown of any shared language through which a veteran might convey such experience, among the principal subjects of the book and may be said to open up the place of a whole new reflexivity .[30]

Dispatches is not a novel; it is a work of journalism. However, Herr states that there are fictional aspects in his text.[31] The book is regarded as an example of new journalism, which crosses genres and blurs the border between fiction and nonfiction. Fragmentation is common throughout *Dispatches*—in the narrative, the stories, and the character/narrator. Stories are incomplete, similar to the way a soldier on patrol might die before he can tell what happened.

O'Brien's more numerous publications are each an experiment in narrative. *Going After Cacciato* (1978) plays with language starting from its very title. Cacciato is a character's name, but the word "cacciato" also means hunted or caught in Italian. "Going after Cacciato" is a fantasy trip running through the novel. In a different narrative experiment, *The Things They Carried* (1990) creates a confusion between the author and the narrator, who is also named Tim O'Brien in the novel. *In the Lake of the*

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[30] Jameson, Fredric. Postmodernism. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991, p.35

[31] http://articles.latimes.com/1990-04-15/magazine/tm-2121_1_michael-herr/4

Woods (1994) provides yet another twist on conventional narrative strategies on one hand and an absolutely open plot and the merging of literature and journalism on the other hand.

Though less well-known, the work of Vietnamese American authors also engage with the innovation of postmodern Vietnam War narratives. Le Thi Diem Thuy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* tells a fragmented story of an immigrant family in the U.S. The ambiguity of language is a frequent literary device in this novel. Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* offers the first time in American Vietnam War literature to Communist sympathizer's perspective. On the other side of the Pacific, a new perspective: the Vietnamese voices are the most valuable contribution offered by Vietnamese authors. In term of narrative, Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* is one of the most literarily accomplished novels, with the alternation chapters told by the first and the third person narratives, with a structure based on stream of consciousness.

In short, literary representation and narrative has been changed through history. They continue to develop further while conveying reality of the Vietnam War.

Trauma, Memory and Literature

Trauma is derived from the Greek word of "wound," "hurt." According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "trauma" (noun) refers to "a wound or external bodily injury in general; also the condition caused by this." Shifting from the physical to the psychological, "trauma" analogously denotes "a psychic injury, esp. one caused by emotional shock, the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed."

Psychological trauma is named as such after World War I when warfare put an enormous amount of pressure on a mass of people. In 1980, the term of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was first used officially by the American Psychiatric Association.[32] However, Sigmund Freud, through his clinical experiences, provided insight into trauma study much earlier with his two terms "acting out" and

[32] https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/ptsd-overview/ptsd-overview.asp

"working through." In his *Remembering, Repeating and Working Through* (1914), Freud states that instead of remembering past events, a patient will "act it out" unconsciously in a compulsive way by repetition. The acting out defends against the memory. He then explains that "working through" is a process of uncovering the resistance via interpretation in order to process the resistance and eventually remove it.

In the 1990s, academic scholarship began to take up trauma as an area of study. Literature is no exception. Trauma study in literary criticism drew wider attention with the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* in 1996. Taking Freud into account, Caruth states in her introduction:

> If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing, and it is at this specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience and the language of literature meet. Most literary critics employ psychoanalytic and semiotic theories to understand trauma's function in literature. The unspeakable void is a dominant concept in the study of trauma literature.

In Caruth's words, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it is precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4).

The research of trauma literature emerged strongly in the 1990s, but trauma literature itself existed much earlier. Scholars often cite Holocaust literature from the 1950s as some of the first trauma literature poses the question of testimony, taboo, and the reading (and writing) of unbearable experiences. As for America, the Vietnam War, the first "living room" war in U.S. history, leaves a legacy of not only trauma literature, but a kind of social consciousness of trauma. The Vietnam War is considered an American national trauma. If the war spurred intellectual reassessments of America's Cold War strategy,

its emotional repercussions were even more consequential. As ubiquitous descriptions of it affirm, the war was a national trauma, and it had profound and lasting effects on American self-perception.[33] The only other historical event causing a relatively similar social trauma would be the September 11 attacks.

In Vietnam, on the other hand, trauma of the war has been reshaped in a complicated configuration of pride in victory and disappointment in its aftermath. However, trauma has not been seriously considered in Vietnamese society. Traumatic signs are present in certain works, in which *The Sorrow of War* is the most typical, but these signs are do not occur regularly.

American society's greater interest in national trauma therefore leads to the trauma of Vietnam War being reflected in a significant number of American novels. There are two main tendencies in their depiction of trauma: one represents the combat trauma of individuals; the other represents cultural trauma in American life after the war. Combat trauma is the horror of various way of killing and dying. In *Paco's Story* (1987) by Larry Heinemann, for example, Paco is haunted by a cataclysmic Viet Cong which brought him close to death, and also by a rape scene he witnessed in the war. Numerous scars on his body becomes a haunted fantasy to represent his trauma. In a different vein, Tim O'Brien's stories attempt to reshape war experiences to make them "truer." They were both soldiers writing with their own experiences.

Cultural trauma is often represented by civilian writers as well. Bobbie Ann Mason's debut novel, *In Country* (1985), centers on a high school girl obsessed by her father's death in Vietnam. The novel is her journey to learn about her father, who married her mother only one month before leaving for Vietnam and whose face has been almost forgotten by her mother. Accompanying her is her uncle, another Vietnam veteran suffering from PTSD. The novel starts with the Vietnam War Memorial Wall, the state symbol of public war memory. Another writer, Le Thi Diem Thuy represents the trauma of a war refugee who flees by boat. She uses linguistic ambiguity to convey the loss between the two cultures of

[33] Keys, Barbara J. Reclaiming American Virtue, Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 51

newcomers to the U.S. For example, "palm" refers to a popular tree in California where is the setting of the novel and to the hand as well. "Nước" means water and also mean country or nation in Vietnamese.

Obviously, a noteworthy characteristic of trauma literature is the renovation of literary form. While numerous experimental forms are employed in order to represent the effects of trauma upon the individual, these experiments in form are produced by or respond to the traumatic content that is to be communicated. Form in these works is clearly subordinate to content.[34]

Trauma is a specific form of memory, the remembrance of the past. Understanding memory is a background to come to term with trauma. Concern with the work of memory is as classic as Plato's philosophy. In his Phaedrus, he characterizes memory as unreliable, and writing as a further weakening of human memory.

> If men learn this, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks. What you have discovered is a recipe not for memory, but for reminder.

Similarly, Aristotle, in his *On the Soul*, compares memory to making impression on wax. From Plato to Aristotle, two sorts of memory, natural memory and artificial memory (gained through training and practice) are already identified in antiquity.

By the 19th century, memory is approached scientifically, in neurology, psychology, and philosophy. The German philosopher Herman Ebbinghaus identifies three types of memory: sensory, short term and long term, a classification still relevant today. In *Diseases of Memory*[35], French psychologist Theodule Ribot states that memory is lodged in some particular part of the nervous system,

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[34] Gibbs, Alan. Contemporary American Trauma Narratives. Edinburgh University Press, 2014, p.46

[35] Ribot, Theodule *Diseases of Memory, an Essay in the Positive Psychology*, Forgotten Book, 2012

and thus it has a material nature. Then French-Jewish philosopher Henri Bergson claims in *Matter and Memory*[36] that memory has a spiritual nature. He distinguishes two forms of memory: habitual (automatic forming by repeating action) and pure memory (image-remembrance).

In the 20th and 21th century, our ideas of memory shift yet again, though never departing from the underlying question of its reliability (or something like this). In his monumental book, *Memory, History, and Forgetfulness*, Paul Ricoeur states that memory is the representation of something absent:

> If we can blame memory for lacking reliability, it is precisely because it is our only and unique resource to signify the past-character of what we claim to remember... To put it bluntly, we have nothing better than memory to signify that something has taken place, has happened, has happened before we claim to remember it.[37]

Ricoeur also considers memory and imagination as similar in their representation of absence. Memory is an agent and remembrance the object of that agent (one remembers something). It is important that "it has to do with the privilege given spontaneously to events among all the 'things' we remember".[38] Ricoeur distinguishes three levels of memory: repressed memory in pathologic-therapeutic level, manipulated memory in practical level, and forced memory in ethico-political level. He puts memory in dialectical connection with forgetfulness and forgiveness.

The deep psychological and psychoanalytic research on memory in the 19th century is a backdrop for the blossoming of modern notions of memory in literature. Jean Jacques Rousseau and Marcel Proust each meditate in their work on the memory of childhood in the Romantic tendency of nostalgia. Poets like Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud follow a sensory path to memory. In the 20th century, memory is

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[36] Bergson, Henri, Matter and Memory, Trans. Nancy Margeret Paul & W. Scott Palmer, The Macmillan Co., New York: 1913

[37] Reciour, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, p.26

[38] Ricoeur, p.29

approached by a new technique of modernity and modernism: the stream of consciousness in which memory is triggered by associationist contexts. Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Williams Faulkner are the writers who most effectively employed this technique in their works. Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, for example, is a story of memory in which the time of the narrative is only one day, but the story time stretches over ten years. The trip from the Ramsay's house to the lighthouse, planned ten years earlier, is finally carried out in the day of narrative time. In the novel, Lily's painting is a symbol of how the tension between reality and memory works in art. Lily paint a portrait of Mrs. Ramsay when she is sitting in front of her as a model. However, she finishes it ten years later when Mrs. Ramsay has already passed away. She draws on ten-years of experiences of the ups and downs of life, with her memory of Mrs. Ramsay. It works more successfully for her painting than having a material model in front of her eyes.

Memory plays an important role in war literature generally and in the Vietnam War novel particularly. Often those who write about the Vietnam War are military veterans or war correspondents. The memory of war is central in their works. For the foreign journalist, memory focuses on the testimony of others. The imaginative fiction of novels such as Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* or Jean Lartéguy's *Yellow Fever* is informed by that testimony intertwined with historical facts. For American writers, there are several levels of war memory – the first of which is the personal, individual memories of living and fighting. James Webb's *Field of Fire* focuses on the life of a U.S. Marine from a realist perspective on a long period from war to peace. More than thirty years later, *Matterhorn* (2010) by Karl Marlantes is based on a single momentous battle of the war, again for a U.S. Marine: the ambiguous battle of Khe Sanh.[39] On a more abstracted level, memory is mixed with imagination. Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* is a typical case with the main character, Paul Berlin, walking away from his platoon in the jungle to make a dreamy trip to Paris in his imagination. A shared memory of the jungle presents in

[39] The fire-support base located between Laos and the demilitarized zone where Vietnam is divided after the first Indochina war. The US Marine supported by the South Vietnam Army defended against the Viet Cong attack. Eventually, the US closed the base to avoid future battles. Both the US and the Viet Cong claimed victory there.

majority of U.S. narratives. The jungle used to be a strange natural environment which has haunted American young men as described in Michael Herr's *Dispatches* or Frederick Downs' *The Killing Zone* (1978). It is the unspeakable memory of the shameful massacre in John's mind in *In the Lake of the Woods* by O'Brien. More complexly, memory alternates with illusion and fantasy as in *Paco's Story* by Heinemann. As for narrators and characters who don't directly experience the war, their memory is fragmented, like in Mason's *In Country* or Le Thi Diem Thuy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*.

In Vietnam, war memory is often accompanied with the subordination of personal desires or rights in order to serve the cause of winning the war. In Lê Lựu's *A Time Far Past*, the main character confesses that he has to love what somebody else loves in the first half of his life, and love what he does not possess in the second half. Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* is haunted by the same jungle as in American novels. However, it's not a physical jungle with natural fears, but rather a symbolic jungle of the state of mind. In short, trauma and memory are important ways of transferring historical fact to literary narrative.

History and Literature

That history and literature are two close fields, even merging at some point is concerned all over the world. For example, British historian George Trevelyan states,

> The Bible and the Classics are history and literature in one, so closely intervolved that it is impossible to say where history ends and literature begins…. The history of mankind is a record of the heart, the soul, the mind, the customs of man, and these things have in civilized ages found their subtlest and noblest record very largely in literature.[40]

Confucian tradition, too, emphasizes the unification of literature, history and philosophy. History, even in its close relation to literature, is more factual than literature. On one hand, a historian's view of

[40] Trevelyan, George Macaulay. "History and Literature", History, New Series, Vol.9, N.34, July 1924, pp. 81-91

history always conveys a historian's bias. In that sense, historian Hayden White names one of his popular essays "Historical Text as Literary Artifact." On the other hand, literary critics search for historical facts in literature, such as customs or the idiosyncratic language of a certain author from a certain community in a certain time period.

The close relationship between history and literature poses a question about the literary representation of history. It is commonly assumed that literature represents some kind of reality while history represents a particular reality of the past. Hayden White clearly defines the object of history and literature as follows:

> Historians are concerned with events which can be assigned to specific time space locations, events which are (or were) in principle observable or perceivable, whereas imaginative writers – poets, novelists, playwrights – are concerned with both these kinds of events and imagined, hypothetical, or invented ones.[41]

Hayden White's work emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a critical theorization of the convergence between history and creative writing as two kinds of discourse to tell some sort of truth. His doubtfulness of the absolute truth in historical accounts and his belief in historical facts drawn from literary texts caused some strong reactions from historians and also shaped his important position in literary criticism.

Dominick LaCapra also works on the complex relation between history and literature, particularly in the novel. For example, he puts historian Saul Friedlander and novelist Jonathan Littell side by side and concludes "the former of which focuses on victims and the latter on perpetrators of the 'final solution'".[42] History represents the common, and literature has the potential – in its imaginative focus – to narrate stories of both victims and perpetrators as distinct individuals.

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[41] White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. p.121

[42] LaCapra, Dominick. *History, Literature, Critical Theory*. Cornell University Press, 2013. p.95

Representations of the Holocaust are also a major concern in LaCapra's work. Many of his essays explore the questions posed to historians and critics who attempt to write about these historical events. LaCapra employs Freudian theory to address these questions. He suggests that psychoanalysis not only works on individuals but also could be applied to sociocultural objects. We require a "working through" to overcome traumatic events before we can make sense of them.[43] Based on Freud's distinction between acting out and working through,[44] LaCapra argues that mourning is a form of working through, whereas melancholia is a form of acting out.[45]

The Vietnam War is such an essential collective traumatic event represented in literature over a long period of time and across a broad landscape. Not taking into account the work of propaganda, the majority of Vietnamese novel about the war conveys disappointment or sorrow. It is regret in *A Time Far Past*, and it is sorrow in *The Sorrow of War*, as its title indicates. As for American Vietnam War novels, they highlight survival and death, fear and courage, immoral and personal problems. The American Vietnam War novel seems to illustrate LaCapra's comparison above between a historical approach and a literary approach to the same event, since literature concerns the private, the personal, particular experience. Even in a novel directly telling a story of a political campaign like *In the Lake of the Woods* by Tim O'Brien, the main concern is not the campaign itself, but rather the main character's inner life and war trauma.

Thus far, we have briefly summarized the history of the Vietnam War, the genre of the novel, the war novel, and the Vietnam War novel in particular. We also reviewed the selective theories of the novel, of narrative, of memory, and of historical representation.

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[43] LaCapra, Dominick. Representing the Holocaust. Ithaca London: Cornell University Press, 1994

[44] See above, p.

[45] LaCapra, Dominick. "Trauma, Absence, Loss", Critical Inquiry 25 A (1999), pp. 696-727

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My dissertation is set against the backdrop of the conceptual map outlined above. Seeking to make a contribution to the study of Vietnam War literature, I focus on the novel, a synthetic genre flexible enough to represent a complex historical event like the Vietnam War. By putting together the novels of five diverse authors (British, French, American, Vietnamese American and Vietnamese), I examine the Vietnam War novel in a transcultural context. Continuing to view literature as one way to narrate history, I focus on the difference in the perspectives of representation.

The central question running through the three chapters that follow is how the Vietnam War is conceptualized, memorialized and represented in each novel. The configuration of these five novels will comparatively illustrate a diversity of literary solutions to the same historical event and how narrative perspective shapes the narrative. For example, each writer's description of certain geographical locations or historical moments is different from the others. The Tân Sơn Nhất International Airport at the fall of Sai Gon in *The Sympathizer* is chaotic with the last evacuations. In *The Sorrow of War*, the same location is empty, with dead bodies scattered here and there. Hà Nội in *Yellow Fever* is melancholic, in *The Sorrow of War* is youthful. The jungle in *The Sorrow of War* symbolizes darkness and in *Yellow Fever* it represents the adventure of the same war.

The illustrative novels which I take up in this work are *The Quiet American* by the British journalist and novelist Graham Greene; *Yellow Fever* by the French journalist and writer Jean Lartéguy; *In the Lake of the Woods* by the American veteran Tim O'Brien; *The Sympathizer* by the Vietnamese refugee in America Viet Thanh Nguyen; and *The Sorrow of War* by the Vietnamese veteran Bảo Ninh. My work is divided into three main chapters:

Chapter 1: The Vietnam War from third party perspectives

Chapter 2: The Vietnam War from American perspective

Chapter 3: The Vietnam War from Vietnamese perspective

Writing about his new book on the Vietnam War, *Nothing Ever Dies*, Viet Thanh Nguyen notes that "all wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory…. Memory is haunted, not just by ghostly others but by the horrors we have done, seen, and condoned, or by the unspeakable things from which we have profited."[46]

"Nothing ever dies" but it can be transformed. Time passes, witnesses pass away. The tracks left behind are history, memory and literature. They will replace the war itself and keep stories of it still alive for the generations to come.

[46] Nguyen, Viet Thanh, *Nothing Ever Dies*, Harvard University Press, 2017

CHAPTER 1: THE VIETNAM WAR FROM THIRD PARTY PERSPECTIVES

As a matter of fact, there are not many literary works which represent the Vietnam War coming from somewhere other than America and Vietnam. That small number, however, is still noteworthy because of the uniqueness of those works in the way they conceptualize, memorialize, and represent the war. The sense of humor and romance which they exhibit only exists from a certain distance to the war. With third party novels of the Vietnam War ranging from more distant to more intimate, this chapter begins with a British text, and then, moves on to a French novel, both of which are situated in the early phases of the war. Our cases of study are *The Quiet American* by Graham Greene and *Yellow Fever* by Jean Lartéguy.

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The Quiet American by Graham Greene is definitely the most famous and controversial Vietnam War novel from a third party country. Technically, it is not a Vietnam War novel. *The Quiet American* was first published in the United Kingdom in 1955 and in the United States in 1956[47]. Although the time frame of the novel is the eve of the Vietnam War, it has always been included under the Western rubric of a Vietnam War novel. *The Quiet American* is regarded as an allegory of the American role in the Vietnam conflict and of the way it was perceived by the rest of the world. Greene's novel seemed to foresee U.S. involvement in Vietnam long before it came true, or more precisely, before it became publicly known. Even after half a century later, Greene's position has not been replaced in literary history yet, as an article on his centenary wrote, "Certainly one can imagine nobody who could better weave the complicated threads of war-torn Indochina into a novel as linear, as thematically compact and as enjoyable as *The Quiet American*". [48]

[47] William Heinemann LTD, Melbourne: London: Toronto, Windmill Press, 1956

[48] Smith, Zadie. "Shades of Greene". *The Guardian*. Friday 17 September 2004

The Quiet American's reception has a remarkable history on both sides of the war. When it was published in the United States, the novel was largely criticized as anti-American. Even fifty years later, the release of the second movie adapted from the novel, was postponed because of its putatively anti-Americanism in the sensitive period after the September 11.[49] Meanwhile, *The Quiet American* was translated into Vietnamese and published in Vietnam in the Cold War era. It might be what seemed to be the anti-American character of the novel caused *The Quiet American* to be dismissed in the United States and welcome in Vietnam. Moreover, Graham Greene is honored so highly that the room on the third floor of the Metropole hotel in Hà Nội[50] where he once stayed in 1951 has been named after him. In a country where "commemorative fever is threatening to blanket the Vietnamese landscape with monuments to the worship of the past. … rural roads bristle with signs pointing to historical sites,"[51] the "Graham Greene room" is a tourist attraction.

At first glance, *The Quiet American* is the story of a love triangle between a young Vietnamese woman, an old British journalist and the first person narrator of the novel, and a young American Economic Mission officer. The young Vietnamese woman is the journalist's mistress for several years. The officer appears and falls in love with her. He wins her from the journalist by his youth and his promise of marriage. On the other hand, he is an undercover CIA agent who is responsible for explosions planted in the streets of Sài Gòn[52] in collusion with General Thế, the leader of Cao Đài, a religious troop. Eventually, the British journalist helps a Vietnamese Communist to kill the CIA agent. The young Vietnamese woman returns to the journalist and the novel ends happily since his wife accepts his request for a divorce.

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[49] *The Quiet American* directed by Phillip Noyce, released in 2002

[50] The current capital of Vietnam

[51] Ho Tai, Hue Tam, *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, p.3

[52] The biggest city of Vietnam, old capital of the South in the war years

The prototype for "the quiet American" is General Edward Lansdale who served in the Office of Strategic Services and the CIA from World War II. He was also the prototype for "the ugly American" in the eponymous novel by William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick. Playing an important role in shaping U.S. policy in Southeast Asia during the 1950s and 1960s, Lansdale was an influential as well controversial historical figure.

However, the novel is almost always read as a political allegory. The story of a small country trapped in the political games of the superpowers, of the U.S. cultivating a third political force as a pro-American alternative to the French and the Vietminh are considered much more significant than the love story. Some scholars do not even regard *The Quiet American* as one of Greene's major literary works, because "it belongs more closely to political journalism, the main interest and the main impact of the novel being its scathing exposure of the machinations of the CIA and of the misconceptions dominating American foreign policy".[53]

1. Concept: The War of Confusion and Betrayal

Regardless of all controversy, *The Quiet American* conveys a message, a specific view on the war. The Vietnam War is shaped by confusion and betrayal. In a sense, it is an example of the term postmodern war, that comes into common usage by the end of the twentieth century. In another sense, it is characterized as the *yin* in the dual basic elements of Chinese traditional philosophy. It is a "female" war. The war processes under unclear scheme instead of the confrontation in specific battlefields, the competition of braveness and military skill. The ambiguity of this war is best described by Michael Herr, when he writes "even the most detailed maps didn't reveal much anymore; reading them was like trying to read the faces of the Vietnamese, and that was like trying to read the wind".[54]

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[53] Roston, Murray. *Graham Greene's Narrative Strategies*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006, p.14

[54] Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011, p.3

The concept of confusion is dominant in recent studies of Vietnam War literature. Most of the case studies are literary works from the nineteen eighties or later. However, even earlier than the real commencement of the war, the general idea of a war of confusion was presented in *The Quiet American*. Graham Greene's novel creates a confusion of the space, the time and even the identity of the Vietnam War. The novel characterizes the Vietnam War as "the Europe in the Middle Ages," (Greene 40)[55] "the war seemed medieval," (43) "in its strange medieval way." (53) What is implied by the Middle Ages here seems to be the centrality of religion. This is suggested in the very topography in which *The Quiet American* is set. In addition to the main setting of Sai Gon, the story takes place in another two towns, Phát Diệm and Tây Ninh. Phát Diệm is one of the main centers of Catholicism in Vietnam. And Tây Ninh is the main center of Caodaism, the third largest religion in Vietnam (after Buddhism and Catholicism). The references to the Middle Ages and the physical setting of the novel in Phát Diệm and Tây Ninh suggest *The Quiet American*'s insistence on a strong religious aspect to the war. Historically, of course, religion is not a central issue in the Vietnam War, even though the existence of religious groups and their conflicts with the government are crucial in the early phases of the war. Yet in 'the confusion of war' which characterizes many novels, Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* both includes religion as an element of that confusion and points to the author's identification as a Christian novelist. The element of religion distinguishes his novel from that of other novelists.

If the Vietnam War is clearly not one of religion, religion becomes a means to an end, though. In other words, the notions of politics and religion are joined together. The Colonel in charge of the French "had some sympathy with the Bishop, for to each of them his country was more important than Catholicism." (54) The United States provides explosives to the Caodaists to make bombs. A Communist

[55] Greene, Graham, *The Quiet American*, William Heinemann LTD, Melbourne: London: Toronto, Windmill Press, 1956

takes advantage of the crowd in a Catholic festival to send soldiers to attack the city. A church becomes a shelter from the fire:

> ….sat and lay the whole population of Phat Diem. Catholics, Buddhists, pagans, they had all packed their most value possessions – a cooking-stove, a lamp, a mirror wardrobe, some mats, a holy picture – and moved into the Cathedral precincts. (56)

People wish for safety through God's power, "somehow all the banned and incense-burners…would keep war from their homes." (54)

In addition to noting similarities, Greene's novel refers to the difference between the Vietnam War and medieval Europe as well. An obvious difference is the presence of the Vietnamese and the Americans.

> Two Vietnamese couples were dancing, small, neat, aloof, with an air of civilization we couldn't match…They never, one felt, dressed carelessly, said the wrong word, were a prey to untidy passion. If the war seemed medieval, they were like the eighteenth-century future. (43)

The narrator's characterization of the Vietnamese is noteworthy in a context in which western novels more typically note Vietnamese backwardness or inscrutable barbarity. Ironically, though, even the praiseworthiness of the two Vietnamese couples and their "air of civilization" only make them the "eighteenth century future". And, as for the Americans, their role is challenged in a humorously ironic way. "This was a land of rebellious barons. It was the Europe in the Middle Ages. But what were the Americans doing here? Columbus had not yet discovered their country." (40) The name of Columbus implies the short history of America. It's a look down from a European perspective. American presence in Vietnam is a mistake or, at least, a paradox. Pyle, "the quiet American", is a symbol of his country in the novel. Officially, Pyle "belongs to the American Economic Mission". The confusion of that mission is evident in their aid of "electrical sewing machines for starving seamstresses." (45) This introduction of Pyle and his presence in Vietnam foreshadows much more serious confusion in his actions – and that of

the country for which he is a representative -- which will be discussed later. Eventually, it is revealed that Pyle is a CIA agent. Confusion marks his identity as well. And, accordingly, he creates confusion. He stands behind the scene of a series of explosion carried out by the Caodaist and misreported as a Communist plant. “That day all over Saigon innocent bicycle-pumps had proved to be plastic bombs and gone off at the stroke of eleven.” (184) The civilians who died that day are characterized by the narrator, “in a way you could say they died for Democracy.” (234) The concept is used fraudulently – and certainly ironically. Those innocent civilians killed have no idea of democracy. Neither does General The[56], a military talent with no stable political position. His force struggles against both the French and the communist, but certainly not in the name of democracy. Democracy is too modern, too Western to be adapted into Confucian society. In reality, democracy as understood by Westerners has not existed in Vietnam even in this twenty first century.

For the narrator of *The Quiet American*, war generates confusion not only for individual characters and their perceptions, but also for states and their legal systems. “These were the open legal methods, but legality was not essential in a country at war.” (9) In such a mist, even the most common heroic action could not be appreciated. When Pyle tries to help Fowler to escape from a communist attack, Fowler responds, “You’ve been seeing war-films. We aren’t a couple of marines and you can’t win a war-medal.” (141)

The landscape itself looks confused in changing from liveliness in “its strange medieval way” to deathly abandonment after a fighting in a city where “day or night the street was packed and noisy. In its strange medieval way, under the shadow and protection of the Prince Bishop, it had been the most living

[56] General Thế, full name Trình Minh Thế (1920 - 1955), is a historical figure in Vietnamese history. He was the leader of Cao Dai troops, against both French and Viet Minh in the context of the ending the first and the beginning of the second Indochina war. His troops were supported by the US, first integrated into and then rebelled against the Southern Vietnam Army.

town in all the country, and now when I landed and walked up to the officers' quarters it was the most dead." (53)

However, the most important confusion of the Vietnam War is the failure of traditional concepts of war. Neither are there two opposite sides, nor official battlefields. The identity of the enemy is obscured; "everybody here goes in for Intelligence" (167). Because of the Viet Minh's policy of the war of people, every civilian, no exception for children and women, could be an agent to work for Viet Minh, even to be armed to fight alongside with the official troops. The indicator of opposing sides in this war is not a uniform but rather race. "An advantage of this war was that a European face proved in itself a passport on the field: a European could not be suspected of being an enemy agent." (59) The definitions of "regular war" and its soldier and civilian no longer hold. "A war of jungle and mountain and marsh, paddy fields where you wade shoulder-high and the enemy simply disappear, bury their arms, put on peasant dress." (22) Where fighting occurs and where the battlefield are unsolvable riddles, "The strange difficulty was to find them: there were a dozen narrow fronts, and between the canals, among the farm buildings and the paddy fields, innumerable opportunities for ambush." (55) Military strategy is apparently useless. "But in a war like this, I knew, there is no time to hesitate: one uses the weapon to hand – the French the napalm bomb, Mr. Heng the bullet or the knife." (233)

In such a war, there is neither glory nor suffering; the war itself seems meaningless. At the end of a battle, what remains are only strange bodies.

> ...that day I had seen too many bodies which belonged to no one, not even to themselves. (65)

> There had been something so shocking in our sudden fortuitous choice of a prey – we has just happened to be passing, one burst only was required, there was no one to return our fire, we were gone again, adding our little quota to the world's dead. (195)

It is this confusion of the traditional concepts of war that makes what is called the postmodern nature of the Vietnam War. Fredric Jameson notes the Vietnam War is "the first terrible postmodern war

be told in the traditional paradigms of the war novel or movie."[57] Many scholars agree that "the Vietnam War was a crucial turning point in the history of war, that it represents the development of postmodern war out of five hundred years of modern war."[58] The discussions of a postmodern war and its literary representation emerge in the criticism of the 1990s with the fiction of such American writers as Tim O'Brien and Michael Herr, one of whose novels will be investigated in the next chapter.

It can be said that a new concept of postmodern war was primarily noticed in the confusion of *The Quiet American*. Parallel to the confusion in the novel, another crucial notion is the betrayal. At the first glance, *The Quiet American* is a story of betrayal. All three main characters betray and are betrayed by each other. They are culprit and victim simultaneously. Fowler, the British journalist, betrays his wife, Helen, to fall in love with Phuong, a young Vietnamese woman. Phuong betrays him to pursue Pyle, the "quiet American" of the novel's title. Pyle betrays Fowler's friendship to "steal" Phuong. Fowler betrays Pyle's trust to give a hand to the communist to assassinate Pyle. Eventually, Phuong betrays Pyle to return to Fowler right after Pyle's death. If we interpret the novel as a political allegory as many scholars did, each character is a symbol of his or her country. And betrayal would, then, be the core of national relations. War becomes a game operating on the principle of betrayal.

The embodiment of betrayal is various. The soldier feels betrayed by the civilian, even by the rest of the world. "That there's no such thing as gratitude in politics." (230) More than once in the novel, soldiers experience a complex emotion after a fighting. They feel half guilty of what they cause and half angry at whoever make them to fight. In the disaster after an attack in Phat Diem, in the face of dead bodies everywhere, including many children and women, the French lieutenant gets angry with Fowler who reflects "almost as though I had been responsible for these deaths: perhaps to the soldier the civilian

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[57] Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press, 1984, p.38

[58] Bibby, Michael. *The Vietnam War and Postmodernity*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, p.174

is the man who employs him to kill, who includes the guilt of murder in the pay-envelope and escapes responsibility." (63) After a bombing near to the border with China, Fowler goes to the opium-house with the pilot, Captain Trouin. He is hopeless to recall what he did. "What I detest is napalm bombing. From 3,000 feet, in safety. … God knows what would see from the ground. The poor devils are burnt alive, the flames go over them like water. They are wet through with fire." (197) Captain Trouin just appears briefly in the novel, but his reaction offers a meditation on the way of postmodern war where the fighter is distant from what he causes. He takes it so easy to bomb, and he could not bare his easiness. He feels angry "against the whole world." "I'm not fighting a colonial war. Do you think I'd do these things for the planters of Terre Rouge? I'd rather be court-martialed. We are fighting all of your wars, but you leave us the guilt." (197)

In addition to the betrayal of one character by another, betrayal is also an internal process in Greene's novel. In the beginning, each character has his or her own mission in the war to which they try to be loyal. However, the pressure of reality impacts them. When the accumulation of external effect is enough, they unconsciously change. At that point, they betray themselves. In other words, their outcome of their deeds is quite different from their original intention.

As a war correspondent from a third party country, Fowler insistently declares that he has no position on the war. He keeps his writing objective. He just reports the truth, or at least the truth to the best of his knowledge. In some situations, no one needs his truth. For instance, when he finds out that General Thế's forces make the bicycle-bombs, he could not publish the information since everybody wants to excuse the communist. Even in that situation, he still can satisfy himself that he did all he could to keep his pen free of prejudice. On the way from Tây Ninh to Sài Gòn, facing the danger of a Viet Cong's attack, Fowler is still no more than an outsider. "It wasn't my war, but I wished those others in the dark knew that as well." (136) Of course, "those others in the dark" do not know what Fowler's position is. Moreover, they definitely would classify him as enemy by his race, the only believable indicator in a war of confusion. If he were unlucky, he could be killed. His dead body would be classified as a European

colonist. No one is concerned about his third party position. There is the betrayal of the other's perception to the self representation. But he is lucky. He lives to continue to confirm himself as an outsider. "That's no concern of mine. I'm not involved." (197) He wants to be absolutely outside – even of an opinion. "I preferred the title of reporter. I wrote what I saw: I took no action – even an opinion is a kind of action." (27) Finally, Captain Trouin is the one to point out the impossibility of keeping no stand in a war. In the opium-house, Fowler convinces Trouin that he has no stand. But the captain foresees otherwise, "You will all be. One day. .. One day something will happen. You will take a side." (197)

Eventually, that "one day" comes. In that "one day", Heng, the man working at the warehouse for junk metal, echoes Captain Trouin's words. "Sooner or later", Heng said, and I was reminded of Captain Trouin speaking in the opium-house, "one has to take sides. If one is to remain human." (227) That "something" that prompts Fowler to take a side is the hidden truth of who Pyle is. As a journalist with various sources of information, Fowler finds evidence of Pyle's involvement in the scene of two bombings in the street and thereby discovers the connection between Pyle and General The. The fact that many civilians are killed, the cruel scenes that Fowler witnesses, is unforgivable. Fowler acknowledges the necessity of stopping Pyle's plans. Heng, who is obviously a communist agent, speaks what Fowler thinks, "He has to be restrained." (227) Heng asks Fowler to invite Pyle to have dinner at a certain place, and his people would "talk to him on the way." (227) Both Fowler and Heng understand what "talk" means in this context but neither of them mentions it directly. Fowler hesitates. He seems to do everything reluctantly. He does not make a promise to Heng. He even hopes that Pyle has some last minute business that will prevent him from coming to the dinner.

On one hand, Fowler is motivated by the desire to stop Pyle's crime. On the other hand, he is motivated by jealousy. The tension between the first and the second reasons makes him hesitant. In a sense, Fowler engages in a double betrayal. Indirectly killing Pyle, Fowler betrays Pyle's friendship. Helping the communist to assassinate Pyle, Fowler betrays his declaration that he has no side in the war. From the position of non-intervention, he participates in murder. Fowler's betrayal has a presumably

more laudable motivation. More precisely, his plotting of Pyle's death is masked by a good intention: his desire to prevent the death of more innocent civilians. Yet Fowler still feels guilty. As a first person narrator, Fowler obviously wants to avoid responsibility for Pyle's murder. In a similar situation when facing the guilt of killing, a soldier such as Captain Trouin, gets angry; in contrast, Fowler does not feel guilty. While the soldier has to kill, Fowler chooses to commit to Pyle's murder. He justifies that murder by explaining that "… before he died he had been responsible for at least fifty deaths." (17)

No matter how many deaths he is responsible for, Pyle is the only character who never feels guilty. In this aspect, he is quite distinct from both Fowler and the soldier above. The nickname "the quiet American" is an ironic pun. On Fowler's view, Pyle is "A quiet American, I summed him precisely up as I might have said, 'a blue lizard', 'a white elephant'." (11) Due to its talent for camouflage and its ability to deceive its predators, the lizard symbolizes variation and adaptation. The white elephant is rare. As an idiomatic expression in English, it typically refers to an expensive but almost useless object, a possession which can not be discarded while its maintenance costs more than its value. However, there is a story that the Buddha's mother dreamed of a white elephant entering her womb through her side before she gave birth to the Buddha. Therefore, the white elephant has sacred attributes and spiritual powers in the Buddhist world. It symbolizes knowledge. "Quiet", "blue", and "white" share the common feature of *yin* elements: soft and peaceful. And yet, Pyle is the embodiment of opposition. He carries out a medical mission but he is "responsible for at least fifty deaths." He is quiet, in distinction from the noise of the American journalists, but he is the organizer of a series of deadly bombings in public places. He does not bring luck and property but rather bad fortune and destruction. He is adamantly consistent in his opinions without any ability to adjust to or adapt to the real situation. As soon as Fowler meets Pyle, Fowler ironically comments that,

> …he was absorbed already in the dilemmas of Democracy and the responsibilities of the West: he 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. (13)

Pyle's political opinions and positions derive from a fictional theorist named York Harding. Fowler, as a journalist, focuses on what he witnesses. In contrast, Pyle believes in books, "He never saw anything he hadn't heard in a lecture hall, and his writers and his lecturers made a fool of him." (32) Pyle is not wise enough to read the truth behind the letters in a book. Nor can he read the world around him unless it aligns with the books he has read. Fowler never reads Harding, but he knows Harding is not a good author basing on the fact that Harding does not know Vietnam that much and the outcome of Pyle's plants.

> Harding had been here once for a week on his way from Bangkok to Tokyo. Pyle made the mistake of putting his idea into practice. Harding wrote about a Third Force. Pyle formed one – a shoddy little bandit with two thousand men and a couple of tame tigers. He got mixed up. (218)

Pyle's ideas about war are abstract and not linked to the world around him. While staying together in the tower on the way from Tây Ninh to Sài Gòn, Fowler points out Pyle's unrealistic and impractical ideas in a long conversation. But Pyle can not accept Fowler's criticization. According to Fowler, Pyle's mistake is that he never puts himself in the shoes of the Asian who just "want enough rice," "one day to be must the same as another," and "don't want our white skins around telling them what they want." (119) Fowler criticizes Pyle for "mak[ing] a war with the help of people who just aren't interested" (119) and teaching them "dangerous games." (120) However, Pyle keeps thinking that "they'll be forced to believe what they are told, they won't be allowed to think for themselves." (119) He keeps going on to "win the East for democracy." (32) Pyle is a stereotypical Westerner who considers the East as the other who be understood. He doesn't see the real East in front of him but only the idea of the East he conceptualizes. In this, he exemplifies the object of critique of Edward Said's *Orientalism.* [59]

[59] Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978) considers Orientalism as the West's representation of the East.

Pyle's misunderstanding the Orient prompts his choice of General Thế's force as "the third force" (alongside the French and the Viet Minh as the two main forces in this period). The actual General Thế had military talent, but his political stand was unclear. Firstly, he struggled against both the French and the Viet Minh; later he supported the French. In the novel, General Thế is the rival of both the French and the Viet Minh. Pyle provides him with plastic explosives which are used in a series of bombings that kill numerous civilians. A war in the name of abstract democracy is in material fact a ferociously bloody one. In working with General Thế, Pyle betrays what he claims is his noble goal. Worse than that, Pyle is unmoved by the death and destruction he causes. Fowler believes that when Pyle's right shoe touches to the blood in a public place after a bombing, he is "seeing a real war for the first time." Fowler notes bitterly, "You've got the Third Force and National Democracy all over your right shoe…How many dead colonels justify a child's or a trishaw driver's death when you are building a national democratic front?" (213-214) As for Pyle, he can only say, "it's awful", and all he can do is "get them [his shoes] cleaned before I see the Minister." (212) Eventually, as Fowler comments, "they killed him because he was too innocent to live." (32) Pyle has to pay for his illusion with his life.

Pyle is killed, but he is not a victim. In the context of war, a visual manifestation of evil is the killing of innocent people. In the discussion of guilt, or its absence, in the last section, Pyle does not feel remorse for his deeds. Murder is a universal evil, regardless of its social and cultural context. In this regard, Pyle is a personification of evil in the novel. And Fowler is the character who fights against evil. The complex relationship between Pyle and Fowler - friends, rivals in love, an embodiment of evil and a fighter against evil– is shaped by the context of the Vietnam War. From a certain standpoint, *The Quiet American* can be framed as a traditional Western story of a knight winning over evil to gain a beautiful woman. Paradoxically, Pyle is much fitter to serve as the figure of a knight than Fowler. A young man engages in an adventure in a remote land, at least rhetorically in pursuit of a supreme goal of democracy and of an ideal love with a local woman. However, the knight gradually turns to evil. The traditional adventure is transformed into something distinctly modern.

2. Memory: Obsession of Death and Remembrance the Good Old Days

Thus Fowler battles with evil in his own way, but evil is not his fundamental concern. Rather, Fowler often meditates upon death and loneliness. In the context of war, people face death every day. That is why the phenomenon of death is easily evoked. But for Fowler, the obsession with death is not caused by the cruel reality of war. It is rooted in an obsession with uncertainty from his childhood, "From childhood I had never believed in permanence, and yet I had longed for it [meaning death]." (49-50) In the war years, Phuong embodies Fowler's obsession of uncertainty. He foresees her leaving him some day. He is afraid of the day when she will not sleep beside him any longer. The obsession over the eventual loss of his temporary happiness makes him think of the permanence of death.

> Death was the only absolute value in my world. Lose life and one would lose nothing again for ever…I could never have been a pacifist. To kill a man was surely to grant him an immeasurable benefit. Oh yes, people always, everywhere, love their enemies. It was their friends they preserved for pain and vacuity. (50)

The desire for certainty overwhelms the fear of death. The moment that Fowler faces death most directly is when he and Pyle are stuck in a tower on the way from Tây Ninh to Sài Gòn because their vehicle runs out of gas, "Of course I am [scared]. Will all my instincts. But with my reason I know it's better to die like this. That's why I came east. Death stays with you." (133) Before reaching the absolute state of death, the desire for certainty is a dialectical opposition to a war experienced both materially and conceptually as confusion and betrayal.

In addition to death, loneliness is a relative 'certainty' for Fowler:

> Wouldn't we all do better to trying to understand, accepting the fact that no human being will ever understand another, not a wife a husband, a lover a mistress, nor a parent a child? Perhaps that's why men have invented God – a being capable of understanding. Perhaps if I wanted to be

> understood or to understand I would bamboozle myself into belief, but I am a reporter. God exists only for leader-writers. (72)

To love is a common way to overcome loneliness. *"Aimer et mourir"* means to love and to die. Fowler quotes this line from *L'Invitation au Voyage* (Invitation to the Voyage) by Baudelaire[60]. The poem is an invitation to a lover to go to a dreamy place to love until death. Love is located in relation to death as something infinite. The mysterious place is not specific, but described as the "there," the other. For Fowler, that dreamy land is very likely the remote Orient where he is living. Pyle and Fowler have an interesting debate about the concept of love when they are stuck in an attack and death seems to be very close. For Pyle, love is an ideal, while for Fowler it is practical. Pyle stands on Phuong's interest, on the fact that he is the one who could give Phuong the title of legal wife and the happiness of motherhood, to compromise with Fowler. From the day Pyle first meets Phuong, Fowler feels unsafe, but he accepts his shortcoming in a different way. Pyle is single and younger than him. Pyle could give Phuong more than he could in sexual and material life.

> I don't care for her interests. You can have her interests. I only want her body. I want her in bed with me. I'd rather ruin her and sled with her than, than…look after her damned interests… If it's only her interests you care about, for God's sake leave Phuong alone. Like any other woman she'd rather have a good… (70 – 71)

In fact, Fowler does love Phuong, and he intends to marry her after his divorce. However, he looks down on her. For the colonial man, a local woman is no more than a body. She is also one of the offerings from the mysterious land to the colonist. She can be present in his bed, but she is absent elsewhere, "One always spoke of her like that in the third person as though she were not there. Sometimes she seemed invisible like peace." (50) The simile of peace and a woman is common because of her gentle and calmness, not her invisibility. This is an ironic statement, implying the derision of the colonizer. He

[60] Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), French poet.

believes that Asians do not have the same human sentiment as people from the West, "'Love's a Western word,' I said. We use it for sentimental reasons or to cover up an obsession with one woman. These people don't suffer from obsession." (172) Love is an obsession rather than sentiment. It sounds like a jaded and perhaps condescending comment on his "own people" yet it also speaks to his ideas about the Vietnamese.

In the novel, this debate around the notion of love occurs while Pyle and Fowler are sitting together during a night in Phát Diệm. Later on, they have another debate about the notion of war as they spend the night hiding in the tower on the way from Tây Ninh to Sài Gòn. The circumstances are similar since in both instances there are fires outside where they are hiding, thereby connecting the two topics. The way by which Fowler and Pyle conceptualize the two notions is the same as well. For Fowler, practically, Asian people simply want "enough rice", and Asian woman just want pleasure and safety. For Pyle, the 'idealist,' Asian people need democracy, and Asian woman need happiness. The structural recurrence in the narrative suggests a kind of similarity between war and love. The woman becomes a symbol of her nation. As depicted in the novel, the woman here, Phuong, is so simple that such a notion of love is too complicated for her to understand. Phuong, and especially her elder sister, are just trying to find a foreign husband for her. They only think of the ability to be married and acquire money. Love is a luxury for them.

Love in the novel is even more luxurious under the umbrella of remembering the good old days. *The Quiet American* does not follow chronological order of time. The novel begins at the ending point of the story when Pyle is dead. At that point, Fowler remembers back to the time of Pyle's arrival. Most parts of the novel take place in the past. Only a few chapters take place in the narrative present. Generally, the novel is Fowler's memory of a short period in his life. Being a story of memory, the novel leans on emotion rather than action.

As R.W.B. Lewis describes,

> in *The Quiet American* it [the narrative] tends to produce not a clear and unprejudiced impression of life but an intricate plot with very little action: sensational doings wrapped in perfunctory attitudes which point towards a moral-this time in the field of international emotions-which the novel has scarcely attempted to beget.[61]

Within the matrix of emotion, memory in the novel is represented as the nostalgic remembering of the past, "The true paradises are the paradises that we have lost." The feeling of lost paradises – of a homeland in which one was born and raised - is evoked frequently in the modern novel. Modernization, industrialization, and welfare have caused an incredible amount of societal changes. In Greene's novel, the Westerners move to a remote Asian country where their nostalgia for what they have left behind is palpable. When they first arrive, they can't decide "what to observe in a scene so unfamiliar." For Fowler, it is "the shop with the Guerlain perfume." For Pyle, the milk-bar looks like "a good soda fountain." (21) In Fowler's view, Pyle always belongs "to the sky-scraper and the express elevator, the ice-cream and the dry Martinis, milk and lunch, and chicken sandwiches on the Merchant Limited." (16) Europe is a recurrent reference in the novel: the war is like the European Middle Ages; the landscape looks like Holland; the canvas curtain at a base in Phát Diệm seems to hide Polonius.

If the lost paradise is geographically or spatially a distant Europe, in terms of time, the lost paradise is the past. While sitting for the first time in a plane to engage in bombing, Fowler recalls such the first events in his life:

> I had that loosening of the bowels as we came in position for the dive that accompanies any new experience – the first dance, the first dinner-party, the first love…. For forty seconds, Pyle had not existed; even loneliness hadn't existed. (194)

[61]Lewis, R. W. B. 'The Fiction of Graham Greene: Between the Horror and the Glory," *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Winter, 1957), pp. 56-75.

As Fowler describes it, one remembers every first experience when one was young, but one forgets his own immature youth. The good old days are more worth of remembering than the bad present days. When Pyle confuses the sound of a grenade with the sound of a car's exhausts system, Fowler recalls his own confusion in the past. He says, "One forgets so quickly one's own youth: once I was interested myself in what for want of a better term they call news." (12)

However, as Proust reminds us, the "remembrance of things past is not necessarily the remembrance of things as they were," an experience Fowler eventually gains. At one point, Fowler comes to a garage and discovers the relationship between Mr. Muoi, who is working there, and General Thế. When he comes back there to investigate after a bombing, he imagines Mr. Muoi on the way to General Thế's headquarter in Tây Ninh, where he has spent a night alongside to Pyle facing a Viet Cong's attack, "When now at last I raised my voice and called 'Monsieur Muoi!' I could imagine I was away from the garage and the boulevard and barbers, back among those fields where I had taken refuge on the road to Tây Ninh. 'Monsieur Muoi!' I could see a man turn his head among the stake of rice." (188) The scene in his mind at that moment is the merging of his experience of "those fields" and his information of the connection between Mr. Muoi and General Thế. This is the alternation of memory and imagination.

After all his experiences in Asia, when Fowler leaves, he would look back at the land. Fowler's memory of the Indochina War is evoked by two images: a woman's dress and a pair of dice.

> Up the street came the lovely flat figures – the white silk trousers, the long tight jackets in pink and mauve patterns slit up the thigh: I watched them with the nostalgia I knew I would feel when I had left these regions forever. (12-13)

> I took out my dice for the ritual game of Quatre Vingt-et-un. How those figures and the sight of dice bring back to mind the war-years in Indo-China. Anywhere in the world when I see two men dicing, I am back in the streets of Hanoi or Saigon or among the blasted buildings of Phat Diem, I

> see the parachutists, protected like caterpillars by their strange markings, patrolling by the canals, I hear the sound of the mortars closing in, and perhaps I see a dead child. (177)

The "dead child" interrupts the vaguely eroticized memory with a callous lack of realization on the character's part, but it must be irony on the part of the novel, the narrator. The dice with its risk and unpredictable outcome shapes a certain opinion of the war. The white *ao dai* of Vietnamese women is an iconic image of the country.

However, Fowler's most profound memory is the memory of Phuong, his mistress. In the dedication of the novel, Greene said that he had borrowed the name of a certain Phuong for his character "for the convenience of readers because it is simple, beautiful and easy to pronounce." More than that, as is shown in the text, Fowler pays attention to the semantic feature of the name as well. He notices right in the first page that her name "means Phoenix[62], but nothing nowadays is fabulous and nothing rises from its ashes." (3) Her name implies the regret for the nostalgically remembered past when something was fabulous and something could rise from its ashes. Greene obviously refers to the phoenix in the European tradition. The definition of phoenix is "a mythical bird of great beauty fabled to live 500 or 600 years in the Arabian wilderness, to burn itself on a funeral pyre, and to rise from its ashes in the freshness of youth and live through another cycle of years: often an emblem of immortality or of reborn idealism or hope."[63] Meanwhile, the Vietnamese name Phuong is more likely to refer to the Chinese phoenix. Indeed, the European phoenix does not exist in Vietnamese culture. In East Asian culture, the Chinese phoenix (*fenghuang*) is a mythological bird that is often paired with the Chinese dragon. The Chinese phoenix symbolizes classical female beauty and elegance. In Vietnam, the same as in China, the image of the phoenix along with the Chinese dragon symbolizes the harmony between husband and wife. Dragon and

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[62] It should be *Phượng* (phoenix). The printing book spells as Phuong (without accent). The spelling Phuong does not exist in Vietnamese.

[63] http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/phoenix

phoenix are also a common metaphor of yin and yang. In Vietnamese consciousness, the phoenix immediately recalls the present or the absence of the dragon.

In addition, another homonym of *phuong* is the name of a plant with red flowers. In Vietnamese popular culture, the *phuong* flower is a reference to student life because the blossom season indicates the end of the school year. The last summer, the last *phuong* blossom season implies the farewell to the student life, the innocent period. Phuong is a popular girl's name in either meaning. The bird conveys classical beauty, the past of a nation, a cultural tradition. The flower memorializes the past, the youthful years of every life. Whichever meaning attributed to the name of Phuong, it evokes the same remembering of a distant past.

Phuong herself often lives with regret for the past. She keeps a picture book of European royalty. She opens it to look at the pictures when she has nothing to do. She likes a certain "elaborate hairdressing which she thought became the daughter of a mandarin." (5) Certainly, Phuong does not know what European nobility or the daughter of a mandarin looks like. She dreams of a western life and imitates the daughter of a mandarin. She has no memory of those things but she participates in a collective memory of a nostalgic past.

Phuong herself becomes Fowler's nostalgic past. Fowler misses her constantly, even when she is beside him. When she is living with him, he is afraid of her leaving some day. After she left him for Pyle, Fowler feels lonely. He goes to the North, intending to move to another house. He tries but fails to escape from memories of Phuong. "…I had still somehow to live and to remember memories in order somehow to eliminate them. Happy memories are the worst, and I tried to remember the unhappy. I was practiced. I had lived all this before." (189) When Phuong stops by his room to ask for Pyle, Fowler sees her in duplicate. One Phuong is the present version, his friend's fiancée. The other Phuong is the past version, his own mistress - "I shut my eyes and she was again the same as she used to be: she was the hiss of

steam, the clink of a cup, she was a certain hour of the night and the promise of rest." (5). She is close to and distant from him simultaneously.

Fowler's memory of Phuong is something which be captured or fixed. It exists, but it is too fragile to be held. In that confusion, consciousness exists between past and present,

> When she bent over the flame the poem of Baudelaire's came into my mind, "Mon enfant, ma soeur…" How did it go on?
>
> "Aimer à loisir,
>
> Aimer et mourir
>
> Au pays qui te ressemble." [64]

Again, the reference here is the poem "*L'Invitation au voyage" ("The Invitation to the Voyage)* in the famous collection *Fleurs du mal* (*Flowers of Evil*) by Baudelaire. Within the poems of misery, sickness, and death, Invitation to the Voyage is an uncommonly optimistic poem in which the love for a woman is merged into the love of universe. The extract in the novel is the very beginning lines of the poem which includes the verb "mourir" (to die). If the whole poem seems cheerful, the verb mourir is a crucial clue that links the poem to the others in the collection, and is characteristic of Baudelaire's style. "Aimer et mourir" (to love and to die) is what Baudelaire praises, the sublime of the extremely negative status (such as death, depression,…). Moreover, the extract is presented in original French without a translation provided. It interrupts the novel's coherence, situates something different – foreign, unexplained -- in the middle of the English language text. It suggests the sweet suffering and alienation of Fowler's love for Phuong. In Fowler's words, "To take an Annamite to bed with you is like taking a bird: they twitter and sing on your pillow. There had been a time when I thought none of their voices sang like Phuong's. I put

[64] Roughly meaning, "My child sister, my dear. To love at leisure. To love and to die. At the country that resemble you."

out my hand and touched her arm - their bones too were as fragile as a bird's." (5) Only in this paragraph, Phuong's appearance is described. Remembering Phuong, what impresses Fowler most is the sounds she makes, not the beauty of her appearance.

3. Representation: The Vitality of Unofficial Sources and the Politics of War Representation

The alternation of the softness of memory and the sharpness of critical thinking is one reason for the novel's attraction for readers. Graham Greene himself was a war correspondent. As mentioned above, the novel is narrated by Thomas Fowler, a war correspondent. In fact, we can understand *The Quiet American* as a deep meditation on how to represent war. Alongside the official media representations of war, Fowler also sharply captures the unofficial transmission of the news of war.

Firstly, the labor of a war correspondent like Fowler is sometimes considered to be akin to that of a gossip collector by outsiders, as a man at the American Legion makes clear when he greets Fowler. He says, "What's the gossip of the market, Tom? You fellows certainly do keep your ears to the ground." (190) However, Fowler himself knows that he can never get into the world of the gossip. "This was the level of life where everything was known, but you couldn't step down to that level as you could step into the street." (187) The transmitters of gossip, that unofficial channel of news, are a girl "carrying two baskets slung on a pole," a "fortune teller squatting against the wall of Simon Freres," and "the old women gossiping" downstairs in Fowler's home. "The police had no key which would unlock their confidence," and Fowler, a journalist, "didn't know what they knew." (186-187) The war archives of common people are inaccessible to the upper social class. Their collective memory remains distant and inexplicable to outsiders.

But there is another representation of war which is easily legible: the reaction of the masses to what happens. On the way from Sai Gon to Cho Lon after a bombing, Fowler interprets how far the news is transmitted by reading the faces of the mass, "One could almost reckon the pace of rumor from the expression of the faces in the street which at first turned on someone like myself come from the direction

of the Place with look of expectancy and speculation. By the time I entered Cho Lon, I had outstripped the news: life was busy, normal uninterrupted: nobody knew." (224)

However, Fowler is a man of the official media. Therefore, the issue of official representations of the war is mentioned in detail from multiple perspectives. Before a discussion of the representation of war, Fowler, the narrator, identifies himself very clearly, "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." (27) Choosing the name of reporter, Fowler emphasizes his position as an objective observer. He really believes in the objectivity of his career. As Fowler explains, "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." (110)

Both in his reporting and in his everyday life, Fowler acts in accordance with his professional beliefs. He does not know how to tell the news of Pyle's death to Phuong. "I was a correspondent: I thought in headlines. "American official murdered in Saigon." Working a newspaper one does not learn the way to break bad news…" (17)

The title of war correspondent is the same, but it does not mean all war correspondents act in the same way in the reality of war. Fowler, a British man, does not like the American correspondents. They are completely different in their approach to the war. On the one hand, Fowler goes to the battlefield because "if one writes about war, self-respect demands that occasionally one share the risks." Even though "it was of no more value to my paper than had been my excursion to Phat Diem," Fowler still goes to the front (192). On the other hand, American correspondents never take any risks. In contrast, they enjoy their job in such the same way that young students enjoy school field trip:

> Periodically after an engagement had been tidily finished and the casualties removed from the scene, they would be summoned to Hanoi, nearly four hours' flight away, addressed by the Commander-in-Chief, lodged for one night in a Press Camp where they boasted that the barman

> was the best in Indo-China, flown over the late battlefield at a height of 3,000 feet (the limit of a heavy machine-gun's range) and they were delivered safely and noisily back, like a school-treat to the Continental Hotel in Saigon. (20)

Against the backdrop of noisy American journalists, Pyle is a remarkably quiet person. That is also the reason why he draws Fowler's attention. However, either noisy or quiet, they are both American. In Fowler's perception, American intervention is impractical in nature. The journalists write about the war from a safe and relaxed position. Pyle brings abstract democracy to a poor nation and causes "all the trouble" with the best motives. In other words, the American way does not realistic. Being a superior power, they do not put themselves in another's shoes. The journalists never experience the risk of war that they are writing about. Pyle sees blood the first time after a bombing that he causes. The novel implicity criticizes American bloody involvement to the war.

The war from three thousand feet above speaks to the issue of the relation between perspective and representation. As Fowler describes it, "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… The war was very tidy and clean in that distance." (52) In this quotation, there are two references associated with Europe. The Boer War is either one of the two wars in which the South African Boers rebelled against Britain. The kernel of the comparison is the rebellion of local people against the colonial regime. The Illustrated London News is the first illustrated newspaper published weekly in the world. From the bell tower, Fowler makes European sense of the Vietnam War. In addition, if the war from the bell tower is "very tidy and clean," the height of three thousand feet from which the Americans view the war provides yet another version of the conflict.

That European sense has a certain effect on the representation of the war. The European Press represents the concerns of the European people rather than the whole process of the war. The grenades "never made the European Press" since there were always "so many last night in Sai Gon, so many in Cho

Lon." (12) A Viet Minh attack on Phat Diem is not "a newspaper scoop," "not in those days when all the world wanted to read about was Korea." (49)

Making sense of the same war in different ways, or providing different stories about the war based on one's perspective is to begin to create propaganda. Fowler wants to report simply what happened, but his supervisors would not allow that kind of objectivity, "for the papers must carry only victories." In the aftermath of a defeat by the Viet Minh, like that at Phát Diệm, "no journalists were allowed, no cables could be sent". Regardless of the prohibition, Fowler goes to the battlefield of Phát Diệm, and "when you come within range of the enemy's fire, you are a welcome guest – what has been a menace for the Etat Major in Hanoi, a worry for the full colonel in Nam Đinh, to the lieutenant in the field is a joke, a distraction, a mark of interest from the outer world, so that for a few blessed hours he can dramatise himself a little and see in a false heroic light even his own wounded and dead." (55) Propaganda is not only a great issue for a nation state, but also a private desire for an individual directly involved in the war. Even "a false heroic light" for "a few blessed hours" can "dramatise" wounded and dead. In other words, the representation of war for the soldier himself is not quite bare truth.

Beyond the different intentions that inevitably shape the representation of war, even the war reality could be made up somehow. Mr. Heng, the man working at the warehouse for junk metal, who shows to Fowler the evidence of Pyle's plastic explosive, might have contacts in the Surete[65]. Fowler infers that he might let the police know the truth about a series of bombings in the street. He also believes that "it was unlikely that the police would act. It was better from their point of view to let people assume that the bombs were Communist." (186) In that context, revealing the truth is not a mission of war correspondents any longer. Fowler goes to the site, witnesses the evidences, and concludes who had caused the bombings. However, the truth is not what everybody wants to hear, "All of them blamed the Communists. I was the only one to write that the bombs were a demonstration on the part of General Thế,

[65] Sûreté: the French police department of criminal investigation.

and my account was altered in the office. The General wasn't news. You couldn't waste space by identifying him." (184 – 185)

Both who is excused and who is killed are important questions in war reports. According to Pyle, he plans to bomb a military parade. That the parade is canceled and civilians become the unexpected target is incidental. But Fowler comes to the conclusion that General Thế would not have stopped the bomb even if he had known about the cancelation. As he states, "Do you expect General Thế to lose his demonstration? This is better than a parade. Women and children are news, and soldiers aren't, in a war. This will hit the world's Press. You're put General The on the map allright, Pyle." (213) Fowler's account is true, but that is not what the readers expect. The truth is not the best in war representation, since Fowler's article is not published.

The key problem on which the narrator meditates is the tension between the truth of war and its representation. Forty years later, this meditation would echo in the works of Tim O'Brien. Sixty years later, Viet Thanh Nguyen would extend it much further. Both will be discussed in the next chapter. In other words, written on the eve of the Vietnam War, *The Quiet American* shapes some important issues that continued to be problematized in fiction until many years after the war was over, such as the confusion of postmodern war, the unofficial and official representations of war, and the true war experience and war story. Furthermore, it conveys some other issues that emerged only in those early years, such as morality, death, and nostalgia for the good old days. While the war continuing, later on immorality is normal, death is easier than life, and no one recalls the good old days anymore. Newer literary accounts will take on newer dimensions.

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If *The Quiet American* is one of the most popular titles in the category of the Vietnam War novel, *Yellow Fever (La mal jaune)* by Jean Lartéguy is perhaps one of the least well-known.[66] *Yellow Fever* is one of a limited number of French novels that directly represent the Vietnam War, which is somewhat surprising, given the fact that France played an undoubtedly significant role in the beginning phase of the Vietnam War. No discussion about the memorialization of the Vietnam War in the modern novel is complete without consideration of a French representative. My selection of *Yellow Fever* takes all these factors into account.

To begin with the title, yellow fever is a disease. According to the definition provided by the World Health Organization, "Yellow fever is an acute viral haemorrhagic disease transmitted by infected mosquitoes. The 'yellow' in the name refers to the jaundice that affects some patients."[67]As the book's title, yellow fever is turned into a literary metaphor which refers to the French "fever" with "yellow" Vietnam and her people. The title already suggests a closer position to the war than *The Quiet American*. "The quiet American" is an objective, neutral observation. Meanwhile, "fever" is a passion or a dedication, and "yellow" sets local people at the center of the title[68].

Yellow Fever is not a typical novel in Lartéguy's long career as a writer. But it still retains typical characteristics of his writing. Being a journalist himself and committed to bearing witness to the political currents of his time, most of his novels were based on what he saw. *Le Mal jaune* was published by Presses de la Cite in 1962. The novel was later published in English translation as *Yellow Fever* in 1965.[69]

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[66] Although *Yellow Fever* is a lesser known Vietnam War novel, its author Jean Lartéguy was actually one of the most widely read novelists in France in the nineteen sixties. At least the sheer volume of his works made him popular.

[67] http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs100/en/

[68] The expression of yellow fever as the fascination of Westerners for Asian women is recurrented in Viet Thanh Nguyen's novel examined in the next chapter.

[69] Xan Fielding trans. New York: E.P.Dutton & Company, Inc., 1965

Yellow Fever tells the story of a group of French journalists, Jérôme, Julien among others. The novel is divided into three sections, the first two of which were originally stand-alone pieces published separately. The first part, "Hanoi or the Strangled City," was based on a 1954 report by Lartéguy as a war correspondent. In it, the French journalists experience the last minutes of colonial Ha Noi as the French are about to withdraw. They attend an exchange of prisoners and witness the Viet Minh taking over the city day by day. The second part, "Saigon or the Lost Souls," was published in 1955. In the second part, some of the journalists continue their mission in Sai Gon. They follow the rebellions of the "sects"[70], the intervention of the French, and the internal conflicts of the South Vietnam Republic government. They also experience opium and brothels, love and betrayal, danger and even death. However, in this part, the journalists step backward to the background against which standouts a newcomer from France with the mission to unify the sects, Résengier. In the third part, "A Dinner for the Shades," the journalists gather in Paris for a dinner to celebrate the lunar New Year and recall the memory of Vietnam. Parallel to them, there are many political figures (in different levels of fiction) from all sides, local prostitutes, soldiers and civilians. Bringing together the original two pieces and adding a short last part, Lartéguy made a best selling novel, though its structure retains the marks of its production, and the arrangement of the three chapters maps the war as it moves from the north to the south of Vietnam and eventually to France.

1. Concept: White Parallel to Yellow and a Splendid Adventure into a Mysterious Land

Yellow Fever takes a different perspective on the Vietnam War in comparison with *The Quiet American.* The Vietnam War through the British lens is essentially a game between the superpowers that happens to take place in Vietnam and involves local people. From the French perspective, the war goes on with the parallel between the "white" and the "yellow", Westerners and Vietnamese, the superpowers and the actual fighting. The *yin* war of confusion and betrayal in *The Quiet American* turns into a *yang* war, a "male" war as a splendid adventure into a mysterious land.

[70] Indicating the religious forces in South Vietnam in the transitional period between the two Indochina wars.

Yellow Fever takes place in Vietnam and begins on the day immediately following the battle of Điên Biên Phủ [71] in early May of 1954, which marked the end of French colonial rule in Vietnam. Lartéguy's novel focuses on the historical process of the transition from the French Indochina War into the U.S. Vietnam War. The novel is set in the time frame from late September 1954 to February 1956: the first pages open with a Ha Noi autumn scene of "these late September days" (of 1954) and a party to celebrate the lunar New Year 1956 closes the novel. In terms of history, the start date of the Vietnam War is controversial. From the American point of view, the years 1954-1956 could be the transitional period, a pause between the wars. U.S. government reports currently cite November 1, 1955 as the date that the Vietnam War began. From the Vietnamese standpoint, all historical curriculums state that the Vietnam War began right after the Geneva Accords in 1954. As a matter of fact, to give a precise date to the beginning of the war is difficult. Although the French withdrew from Vietnam in 1954, they still backed the religious forces in the South. At the same time, the communists occupied the North and controlled an underground force in the South while the regime of the South Vietnam Republic was founded and aided by the United States. This is a complicated phase without any large and open fighting on real battlefields but with regular assassinations and uprisings.

Such a transitional time seems appropriate as a literary setting that allows the characters to reflect on the situation. Western history sees the Vietnam War as part of a larger 'cold war' in which the United States, the leading power of the Western world, attempted to prevent the spread of communism in Southeast Asia and around the world. Vietnamese history, on the other hand, labels it a war of national salvation against the United States. However, each fictional character in Lartéguy's novel has his or her own war, which will be discussed in detail later. *Yellow Fever* identifies the war from these personal

[71] Điện Biên Phủ in Vietnamese, meaning Dien Bien profecture, is a city in northwestern region of Vietnam, in which occured the climactic battle between the French Far East Expeditionary Corps and the Viet Minh communist-nationalist revolutionaries between March and May 1954. The French defeat led to the end of the First Indochina War.

lenses of its characters in addition to the narrator's point of view. Lartéguy's novel uses a traditional third person narrator. This narrator often presents apparently neutral observations.

When the war moved from the North to the South, as it does in Lartéguy's novel, its nature transformed from a war of decolonization into more of a 'civil war' between Western powers, France and the United States, rather than a cold war that seeks to stem the tide of communism. In this "civil war", colonized Vietnamese people, paradoxically, are considered to be allies of the French. On one hand, referring to a Chinese belief in the vitality of youth curing the person who is disgusted with life, France needs its Vietnamese allies, as the narrator of *Yellow Fever* explains, "Europe is disgusted with life; she needs to have yellow children playing at the foot of her bed." (56) On the other hand, due to almost a century of colonization, French culture has been absorbed profoundly into Vietnamese society. Even the apparent differences of skin color are not clear any longer. The two main characters in the novel, who serve as symbols for the two biggest cities, Ha Noi and Sai Gon, are of mixed blood. So is Ngoc, a French General. Yet he is raised as a Frenchman in France. Sometimes, he is surprised to see his own slanting eyes in the mirror.

Not only the people, but also the landscape is mixed blood, too, as Kieu, one of the crucial female characters, imagines:

> She felt that Hanoi, like herself, was made up of a mixture of blood, with its quarters for the white men: the Rue Paul-Bert, the big tree-lined avenues, the Hotel Metropole and the Taverne Royale. Its yellow skin was the network of little lanes by the station or at the far end of the Pont Dourner, its slanting eyes all the little alleyways round the Big Market, with their warm smells, lively colours and clamorous life. (71-72)

The two concepts of white and yellow intertwining back and forth in the novel emphasize difference and compromise simultaneously. At the first glance, the title is *Yellow Fever*. At a physical level, the white and the yellow are neighbors although their circumstances might be different from each

other, "…Saigon, the city of the white men, symmetrical squares of apartment blocks and warehouses; Cholon[72], the city of the yellow men, a swarm of junks and thatch huts." (274)

On a personal level, Jérôme, a senior French journalist, and Doctor Tuan Van Le, the leader of Vietnam National Party, are close friends. Not only Tuan but all important Vietnamese political figures relate to France. They might benefit from French education, they could speak the language and understand the culture for instance.

> No less than Ho Chi Minh was he [Tuan Van Le] responsible for the big revolt of the Indochinese against the French and of the yellow race against the white. But like Nguyen, like Ho Chi Minh, like Giap and most of the Party leaders, he was at the same time very close to white man against whom he was fighting. (93)

On a more abstract level, to be a soldier means the same for all regardless of race. "He abided by our laws. We don't know exactly what these laws are, but we are certain they exist and that they pay no heed to the colour of a man's skin or to any sort of hierarchy." (250)

Switching languages between Vietnamese and French has a special power that links French and Vietnamese people. Nguyen, a communist leader, has a habit of using language. "Nguyen was talking in French. He always expressed himself in this language when he had a theory to expound, Vietnamese being too imprecise for the purpose." (146) In contrast, Résengier, a French man, relies on his command of Vietnamese to be successful, "Résengier had to fight with words and memories against dollars." (224) Taking advantage of a former French major who knows the language and has a deep relationship with many Vietnamese religious leaders, Résengier has a plan to use the Sects (the religious groups) as French forces to deal with the Viet Minh, the South Republic government and its American alliance.

[72] Chợ Lớn in Vietnamese, meaning big market, long inhabited by Chinese. After the Vietnam War, Chợ Lớn has been combined with Sài Gòn and Gia Định to form current Ho Chi Minh City.

The parallel between the white and the yellow could be summarized by a Vietminh cadre, "…if we were fighting the Americans or any other country it would be simple; it would merely be war. Against the French it's civil war." (309) The brotherhood between the French and the Vietnamese is remarkable. Vietnam fighting against France is somehow similar to facing to China. Both were invaders whose occupation lasted long enough to assimilate to local culture, and so local people simultaneously struggle against and accept their domination.

There are other concepts of war from Vietnamese side, different between an intellectual, an illiterate, and a religious leader. Tuan Van Le is a doctor, but he still believes in superstition. The Pagoda of the Single Pillar[73] is said to be the seal of the union of the whole Vietnamese territory including three *Ky* (roughly means region). For that reason, he plants an explosion there, "…since the North was going to be abandoned to the communists, he was breaking the sacred union of the three *Kys*." (38)

His bodyguard, Trieu, is a peasant. His concept of war is very simple, as the following quotation demonstrates. "… Trieu the man of fire, in whose mind revolution and terrorism were intermingled with ancient superstitions." (44)

Trinh Sat, a Caodist leader, another fictional version of Trình Minh Thế besides General Thế in *The Quiet American*, believes in terrorism as a means to his own ends, "Trinh Sat killed because he believed in the value of terrorism. He hated the French because they still represented an established organization and power. To him independence meant disorder and revolution, until the time came when he could impose his own order." (200)

Trinh Sat is connected to Colonel Lionel Teryman, the President's American advisor. Teryman is the only American character in the novel, and only a supporting character. However, he is representative enough for an American philosophy of war. Officially, he backs the President, but he also has a "plan B". "But Lionel Teryman was keeping Trinh Sat in reserve. It was his secret card in the event of the President

[73] A historic Buddhist temple in Hà Nội.

abandoning him and coming to some agreement with the French." (199) Teryman implies some claim that the American plan is practical and terrorist. If the President does not obey, he could kill him in the worst situation. It is worthy to mention that the first President of the South Vietnam regime was assassinated in 1963 with America was behind the scene. At this point, Teryman is somehow similar to Pyle in *The Quiet American*. The novels by the two European authors, Graham Greene and Jean Lartéguy, converge in their identification of the American strategy for war in Vietnam, in that both novels see American actions in Vietnam as terrorist. Teryman and Résengier represent two ways of intervention from American and French directions. Teryman thinks of Trinh Sat as "…that harsh pitiless man who had the making of a dictator. And what the South Vietnam needed was a dictatorship" (199) to bring its people together to control the whole of Vietnam. In the meantime, Résengier's strategy is separation.

> The French had encouraged the development of the Sects to the point of making them states within the State, because in their own zones these sects could oppose the Viet Minh guerrilla bands. … These sects would also enable the French administration to keep a firm hand on the Vietnamese government which was in too much of a hurry to demand the independence which it had, however, been promised. (222)

As a matter of fact, the French prefers separation. The French colonial government applied the strategy of "divide and conquer". Vietnam had been divided into three parts under three different political regimes. In the novel, Résengier's idea is opposed by the sects. Le Son, the Hoa Hao[74] leader, says that,

> The French want to overthrow the President and don't care about anything else. But I want to liberate the peasants of Cochin-China and also those of the Center and the North, and turn them into a great army which will sweep aside everything in its path. (336)

Eventually, the American way proves more effective. Vietnamese culture has never adopted Western democracy. In reality, the first regime of the South Vietnam Republic is the best one. The

[74] Hòa Hảo is a lay-Buddhist organization founded in 1939

President Ngô Đình Diệm, named President Dinh Tu in *Yellow Fever*, becomes a dictator, putting many family members in important positions. Finally, the President was assassinated in 1963, as mentioned above, with the Americans pulling the strings behind the scene because Diệm did not want to be an American puppet and instead praised national independence. What had been only a hypothesis by Teryman in *Yellow Fever* (published in 1962) came true a year later. President Diệm, put into power by the United States, became an object of assassination because of his challenge to the American plan. Again, similarly to *The Quiet American*, the novel appears to predict historical events.

In the novel, Trinh Sat comes to end with an assassination too. "He was doing a Bonaparte act, observing the operations against the 'rebels' through his binoculars." (308) "Bonaparte act" surely means watching the battle from afar, protecting his own position. The reference is to Napoleon Bonaparte, arguably at the Battle of Waterloo which saw the end of his empire and his reign.

In more generous sense, the war seems meaningless in *Yellow Fever*. Without a cause, it is like a farce on a stage.

> No one's got his heart in it. The President's paratroops and Le Dao's Binh Xuyen would much prefer to go home or be left in peace where they are. Résengier's backing Le Dao, whom he despises; Teryman's behind the President, whom he can't bear. (243)

Thus far, *Yellow Fever* conceptualizes war in many ways: a "civil war" between two Western states, at a certain level between the French and the Vietnamese, given their long colonial (and assimilated) history, a war of local superstition, a practical and terrorist war, and a war of liberation. That range of understandings of war is like a backdrop against which exists, for the novel, a splendid adventure into a mysterious land. The war is regarded as an adventure by many characters no matter on which side they locate themselves or are located by the novel. Lieutenant Yves Kervallé comes into the war with the illusion of a medieval knight, "…that silly little chump of a lieutenant who strutted about so proudly in his camouflage uniform and regarded himself as a knight clothed in armour."(39) The young journalist

Julien never has enough inspiration in his career. He takes the war as a chance to escape from the boring days of youth in France. As the narrator describes him late in the novel,

> He had fled to this country at war to escape from the boredom which would have been the death of him, for he was at the intermediary age when a man abandons his childhood games without having yet discovered those of maturity. He had come in quest of adventure (303-304)

Jérôme is a senior journalist. In contrast to Julien, he really loves his career. But he has the same opinion about the adventure of war, "…this war which had not only been a confrontation between two ideologies but had also enabled two totally different races to discover they had several points in common, and enabled a few men on both sides to enjoy a splendid adventure." (11, emphasis mine) Even Juny, a Chinese servant woman in Sai Gon, dreams of the war in a romantic way. "She would follow Résengier into battle and be by his side when he made the heads fall." (228)

Among others, Résengier is craziest about the adventure of war. Résengier is a major in the first Indochina war. He comes back to France, gets married and has children. But he is tired of the boredom of everyday life, and searches for a new adventure; "…he belongs to a past that's dead and gone. He wanted to continue in Indochina the romantic adventure which began at the end of the 1914 war with the Russian Revolution and ended with the Spanish Civil War." (222) The events the narrator uses to describe Rénsegnier here make for an interesting "timeline". Both the Russian Revolution and the Spanish Civil War are left-wing battles, against an imperial monarchy in the first instance and a fascist militia in the second. In Rénsegier's mind, no matter what the cause, taking part in a war has the same attraction of a new adventure. With the same inspiration, Résengier comes to Vietnam with a new mission. Throughout the novel, his characteristic is often given a romantic interpretation. That is why women knew him only briefly before are suddenly longing for him. Almost the entire second part of the novel is devoted to Résengier's adventure. He presents in battles between the sects, and he moves from the zone of one sect to another. He confers with their leaders to unite them. And he is accompanied by a female companion no

matter how dangerous the circumstance is. One typical companion is “Perle whom he confused in his mind with the adventure that he had come back to experience in Indochina.” (296)

The theme of war as an adventure is very familiar in Western tradition. The story of an ancient warrior or a middle age knight experiencing adventure has been told as long ago as the time of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the early modern period, Don Quixote tried to follow in the footsteps of those knights and warriors. Coming from such a tradition, modern European and American men try to do the same. Résengier’s journey here is somehow similar to that of “the quiet American,” Alden Pyle. Leaving behind a civil Occident, both of them go to the remote Orient, accepting all kinds of challenges in order to accomplish the supreme goal of maintaining the intervention of their own countries in Vietnam. Eventually, both of them end up dead for a national mission without honor or glory. However, it’s unclear whether or not they would regret their end. Pyle is too young to be wise enough; he is willing to sacrifice himself for an idea of “democracy.” As for Résengier, he is old enough to have foreseen his end. In fact, in Doctor Souilhac’s words, his friend, Résengier comes back to Vietnam to die.

> He realised that the days of free man are over, in Europe as well as in Asia, that one will soon have to live packed together like sardines, without being able to move one’s elbow for fear of digging it into one’s neighbour’s belly, nor one’s foot in case one steps on his toe…a world of ruminants with fences as far as the eye can see, and barriers and censorship and barracks and police. (303-304)

While Pyle dedicates his life to his illusive democracy, Résengier serves his own will and attempts to escape from social bonds. In this sense, the Frenchman is the more realistic of the two and the American is the more romantic.

The “splendid adventure” of foreign war goes along with the notion of a mysterious land. According to Edward Said, the Orient is the other which is represented by the Occident as incomprehensible. In this conception of the impossibility of understanding, the difference begins with the

very nature of the Orient. It is a strange land situated in a terrifying land of jungles, humidity, darkness, and disease. Most Western literary works concerning the Vietnam War identify the Vietnamese nature as something terrifying. Those works are more or less engaged in the felling of a cosmic terror, an endless fear of the secret power of nature.

This terror is implied in the very title of the novel. Yellow fever is a tropical disease transmitted by Aedes mosquitoes. Its use in the title could refer to the fact that over twenty thousand of Napoleon's troops perished of yellow fever in 1801 after they landed in Haiti. Napoleon then lost interest in a New World Empire and sold New Orleans and Louisiana territory to the United States for a much cheaper price than the Americans anticipated. Yellow fever can also be interpreted as a symbol of another dangerous land and a reference to French failure. Finally, Résengier, the representative of French intervention in the early phase of the Vietnam War, dies of yellow fever. The puzzle is that the disease has never been reported in Asia despite the presence of the Aedes mosquito there.

The theme of cosmic terror is also embodied in the setting of the novel. Except for the very short last part that serves as an epilogue, almost the entire novel takes place in the two largest cities of Vietnam. Paradoxically, the main setting is not city-like at all. Ha Noi was famous for its thirty-six crowded streets. Sai Gon was named "the pearl of the Far East" for the number of its fine colonial buildings and electric lights. But in *Yellow Fever*, we see only a gloomy Ha Noi and a chaotic Sai Gon in a period of violent historical change. Ha Noi is immersed in the darkness of brothels and the blur of opium smoke. The streets of Sai Gon become a battlefield. Even though the second part of the novel references Sai Gon in its title, the setting expands into the Mekong delta[75]. The main settings in this part of the novel are the Arroyo Bridge[76], the Plain of Reeds, and the submerged forest where Résengier comes over to carry out

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[75] The Mekong delta is the region in Southwestern of Vietnam where the Mekong river approaches to the sea.

[76] The Arroyo Bridge (called the Y Bridge in Vietnamese) is about 2 kilometers from Ho Chi Minh City downtown, where occured many battles in order to handle the main road to the city between different army forces in the Vietnam War.

the mission of uniting the sects. The Arroyo Bridge is occupied by the rebellion. The Plain of Reeds is the potential site of the transmission of disease, as Résengier shows, "You've never lived in the Plain of Reeds, have you? There are more mosquitoes there than bugs in an Orthodox monastery, and they're all malarial!" (297)

Moreover, the landscape is more ghostly with the *ignis fatuus*[77] and the legend of the lost soul. "In the distance, on the dark waters, she saw a flickering blue light that seemed to be following them; the light kept flashing on and off, appearing only to disappear again." (299) Scientifically, the blue light is "marsh gas" from "a rotting body, the body of a soldier or someone who's been assassinated." (299) Superstitiously, Vietnamese people believe that the flickering blue light is the souls of dead children. Because children are not old enough to carry much *karma,* they do not have to go to hell. Waiting for reincarnation into another life, they wander around and tease passers-by. In *Yellow Fever,* the flickering blue light is "the lost souls",

> …the souls of all those who have no grave because they transgressed the strict laws decreed by old Asia on the conduct of mankind. The worst punishment it has pronounced against them is to allow them to remain at large even after their death because they had committed the most heinous crime by trying to break free from ritual and the laws. (299 -300)

A Western adventure into a mysterious eastern land is not complete without the presence of women. In both Western and Eastern narrative traditions, war is typically a man world. In the context of this martial masculinity, a woman is regarded as a trophy of war. In the first meeting between Résengier and Le Dao, the Binh Xuyen[78] leader, they refer to Perle as a mean to verify one's power over others when Le Dao says, "…that red-headed girl was nothing but a whore and I didn't really want her. It was

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[77] A will-o'-the-wisp. Recorded in English from the mid 16th century, the phrase is modern Latin, literally 'foolish fire' (because of its erratic movement) (http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095957220)

[78] Bình Xuyên was an independent military force, living outside the law, once sided with the Viet Minh. It was active from 1945 to 1960.

just to show Résengier that I'm now the master." (302) As for Julien, his war is a double quest for adventure and for a woman.

> He had come in quest of adventure, 'the extravagant and pathetic', as he had told Résengier, but also in quest of the woman who would be at one and the same time his sister, his accomplice and enemy, his double, whom he would be able to love without becoming a Narcissus, to hurt without hurting himself too much, who would help him to know himself without being overwhelmed by fear or disgust. (304)

The constant shifting between war and love is clearest in the character of Résengier. As mentioned above, Résengier is not lonely in his adventure through the challenge of natural threats. Perle is his companion and she herself is his other adventure. The adventures of war and of love are transformed into one another, "… he wondered if he had come back to Vietnam merely for this red-headed girl who had belonged to all sorts of men; she perhaps was his adventure." (291) Only pages later, Rénsengier clearly conflates his two adventures, "…Perle whom he confused in his mind with the adventure that he had come back to experience in Indochina." (296)

As for Perle, she falls in love with Résengier even before she encounters him. She is attracted by his reputation as the man of the Sects. Résengier comes back to Indochina with the mission of keeping a French influence in the Vietnam War. All the French in Vietnam look forwards to meeting with Résengier because of his political mission. But Perle unconsciously transfers a political attraction into a sexual attraction. When she encounters him in person, his appearance is clearly unappealing, "She found him ugly with his large mouth, his locks of grey hair and his hard calloused garage-mechanic's hands with their broken nails. He just a soldier, she reflected, nothing more." (264) Despite his ugliness, she is not disappointed. The narrator observes, "Women are curious creatures. Because they kiss or make love with a man who has fought, suffered, or done more than the others, they believe that some of the merit of this glory and suffering rubs off on them." (267)

For *Yellow Fever*, if men experience war, women's experience of men affords them a second hand experience of war. Résengier, however, does not believe in such an argument, as he states at one point, "That's a man's observation. Women kiss and make love without thinking at all." (267) Résengier himself confuses the adventure of war and sex, though he does not accept the same confusion from Perle. He denies any implied significance of a woman's sexual life. Between Résengier and Perle, the novel's understanding of gendered difference is enacted. Even the little servant, Juny, who dreams of her presence in Résengier's dream, is also a feminist. In the meantime, in the same way that Fowler does, Résengier looks down on local women. As for colonial men, local women are merely sexual or decorative objects. They need rice and safety rather than happiness. They might have some skills to sell, such as singing or dancing, rather than a mind or a spirit to share.

2. Memory: Songs and Necessary Forgetfulness

In the novel, folk songs are a remarkable part of the narrative. In part one of *Yellow Fever*, each of the first three chapters opens with a Vietnamese folk song. The first song praises numerous beautiful girls, who are "as slender as young willows," with "brows arched like the moon," but "they have a disdainful air" and "will be the death of us." (11) The much shorter second one is a prostitute's words asking to sell "any amount" of sorrow when "night has fallen." (33) The third and longest song represents the pursuit of a beloved by a lover through the thirty six streets of Ha Noi. What is shared among those three opening folk songs is the figure of a woman as a marker of death, of sorrow, of loss. Yet those three songs are not the most typical folk songs of Ha Noi. The choice of those three shapes the narrator's view of the city. This is the colonist's view of his colony, a humble place with a different kind of woman as a figure of disdainful beauty, of sorrowful sexual work, and of the absence of the beloved.

The fourth through the twelfth chapters of part one open with the day-by-day report of "the death of Ha Noi," the process of French withdrawal reported by French journalists. There are two little pieces of folk song within the reports. One is the song of the paddy-field coolies, "I have no hat…May the sun

spare me heat, May the clouds spare me rain…" (114) The other is from a young female student, "…all withered are the laurels…" Obviously, they are quite different from the opening folk song in the first three chapters; the subject of memory is shifted from the colonist to the ordinary everyday people of the colony.

There is another folk song in the middle of a chapter, a song asking for rain. When the Vietminh is about to take Ha Noi from the French, a soldier named Vong is homesick. He wonders if he could go home, but he could not speak out due to the military discipline. He recalls the song asking for rain which he used to hear in the rice-fields of Ninh Binh[79]. This is a very popular folk song in Vietnam.

Heaven, send down some rain,

That I may have water to drink,

That I may have my paddy-field to plant,

That I may have a bowl of rice,

That I may have big slices of fish… (50)

It conveys the cultural memory of an agricultural nation. The less familiar or less popular songs bespeak the narrator, while the popular songs speak the situation of specific everyday Vietnamese characters. This use of songs and song fragments illustrates one of the problems of memory: the one who is doing the remembering determines what is remembered.

In the novel, songs are most associated with Kieu, a famous prostitute. In a dinner with a group of French journalists, Kieu sings the song of a beautiful woman who "seeks in her heart memories of love" on a summer moony night. (157) She sings a song to bewitch men with her performance. When she is alone, Kieu sings another kind of song, the one that is used at the beginning of chapter three.

[79] Ninh Binh Province is roughly 100 kilometers south of Ha Noi.

In the city of Hanoi there are thirty six streets.

They told me, beloved,

That you lived in the Street of the Veil.

I hasten there but do not see you.

Then they told me to go to the street called Straight.

You are not there either, so I go to the Street of the Knives.

Alas, you are not in the Street of Knives.

I rush along the Street of the Silversmiths

And enquire after you in the street of Pepper.

They send me to the Street of Nettles.

I did not see you in the Street of Lacquer.

Perhaps you are in the Street of the Sculptors

Or in the Street of the Engravers…

Most of the folk songs about the thirty six streets of Ha Noi describe popular gatherings, telling of the joy of masses. In contrast, this song represents a lover's pursuit of his beloved. It suggests confusion in a maze. The song is sung four times in different phases in Kieu's life. The song generally signals her memory of Ha Noi, and that memory is evoked every time she feels lost or uncertain. When she is hesitating to move to Hai Phong[80] before the Viet Minh's coming, she hears the children singing the opening part of that song by a lake. She continues to sing the rest. She meets Lieutenant Yves Kervallé,

[80] Hai Phong is a big port city roughly 100 kilometers southeastern of Ha Noi.

the only man with whom she falls in love, later that day. In a more chaotic day close to the point of French withdrawal, Kieu runs all over the city to look for some familiar journalists. When she catches them, she sings a revised version of the song modified by their names. The first one who greets her on that chaotic day later marries her and she follows him to Sai Gon. In Sai Gon, she sings after the meeting with Jérôme, recalling the peaceful days in her Ha Noi brothel when she sleep one night. Finally, Kieu is brought to France. She again sings the song after a dinner with the old fellows coming back from Vietnam during another sleepless night, and the novel ends with her lyrics.

It seems paradoxical that Kieu's memory of Ha Noi is a feeling of being lost. Kieu grows up in Ha Noi. She is very likely familiar with every corner of the city. The feeling of being lost is evoked by the confusion of her identity and position. As the narrator describes her position,"Claire or Kieu, she was both at the same time, for she was born of the hasty union of a little peasant girl from the Delta with a French soldier." (28) The dual identity of Kieu is a significant symbol. She consistently refuses her Vietnamese origin. She wants to be Claire, not Kieu. She falls in love with Lieutenant Yves Kervallé because he likes her to wear Western dress instead of Vietnamese traditional *áo dài*; when she wears Western dress, he seems accept that she is as French as he is. In all her relationships with French men, she is always in pursuit of a ticket to France. Finally, when her dream comes true, she feels lost in Paris. She is indeed more Vietnamese than she realizes. Frightened and cold, now she sings the old folk song of the thirty six streets of Ha Noi and dreams of returning to the Far East. In France, she is, not surprisingly, regarded as Vietnamese. Kieu is not only a symbol of Ha Noi; her ambiguity and complexity is a marker for Vietnamese modernization as well.

Kieu's name itself is a crucial marker of national memory. Kieu (*Kiều)* is a central female figure in Vietnamese classical literature. Vương Thúy Kiều is the heroine in *The Tale of Kieu* by Nguyen Du[81].

[81] *Truyện Kiều* written by Nguyen Du (1766-1820) is a 3254-line-epic poem. It is largely considered the greatest Vietnamese literary work. Its English scholarly annotated blank verse version by Huỳnh Sanh Thông (1926–2008) was published in the US in 1983.

She is extremely beautiful and has a great talent in music and poetry. Her father is sent to prison due to a calumniation. She has to go to work in a brothel in order to earn the necessary money to ransom her father. Kieu is always a classical reference for the conflict between the beauty and the destiny of a woman. Many Vietnamese avoid naming their daughter Kieu. Some believe that the name Kieu foretells an unhappy marriage. The symbol of the classical Kieu implies the involuntariness of being occupied and so Kieu is also regarded as a symbol for the nation in term of being occupied by powerful nations through the length of history. At the same time, the symbol of the mixed-blood-Kieu implies a compromise in the process of colonization.

The outcome of that process is the brotherhood between the French and the Vietnamese mentioned above. Even when the Viet Minh won the battle of Dien Bien Phu and took over the city government, they could not change colonial Ha Noi immediately. Their new presence was just as foreign as that of the French, "The Vietminhs were greeted everywhere with distant courtesy, like guests whom it would be difficult to refuse." (175); "Soldiers moved into the ruins of Hanoi and, to the sound of bugles and drums, proceeded to banish a memory from every street and every house. It was the memory of a strangled city, born of clashes and mixtures, of the love and hatred of the French and the Vietnamese, of the white and yellow race." (186) Memory here is a nostalgia of the good old days. Perle, as well, holds onto a nostalgia about the country of Vietnam, the country of her birth. Perle, when she was still called Maria, has also tried to escape, by changing her name and her country.

> But no one could escape any longer; the world had become a vast prison. Perle was of the same breed, haunted, as he [Résengier] was, by an unhappy childhood. But she had had the good fortune to preserve nostalgia for the exotic country in which she was born and to have a few drops of foreign blood in her veins, which had enabled her to preserve in France the freedom and hope which are the characteristics of every exile. (323)

Memory in *Yellow Fever* is presented in a dialectical relation with forgetting. Forgetting in the novel is often experienced by its characters as an attack on the reliability of memory. Forgetting can be the active refusal of keeping memory at the forefront or the use of memory for alternative purposes. Forgetting may also be the willful and deliberate effort to imagine a different future as Paul Ricouer reminds us in *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

On one hand, due to the necessity of keeping their activities secret, every Viet Minh cadre could have many identities. The past has to be situated in a deliberate forgetting so as to function effectively in the present. On the other hand, the cadres want to move out of the darkness of the past for the sake of a better future. Colonel Phang is a typical example of this in *Yellow Fever*. His previous name is Ké and his aunt is a brothel owner who gave him money to study in Paris. Ké was helped by a French journalist, Jérôme. The man named Ké hid the truth about his aunt from Jérôme because of his shame. Now being a member of the Viet Minh, he wants to forget both his aunt and his past in France. Ké is "the man he had tried to forget and destroy" (51). When he was reading the list of foreign journalists coming to witness the exchange of prisoners, he saw "One name had been added in ink: Jérôme," and he attempts to avoid that memory from his past, "Phang crossed it out with his fountain-pen as though by this gesture he hoped to prevent Jérôme from being there within a few hours." (51) Encountering Jérôme later, Phang ignores him until he has permission from his supervisor to recognize Jérôme, "Forgive me for just now; I pretended not to recognize you… but it was pointless to make an exhibition of ourselves, wasn't it?" (65) After all, her aunt, "Lien was dead and he, Phang, had no more family, no more past…at last!" (166). The process of Phang's forgetting is simultaneously the effort at shaping memory for the benefit of the future.

Like Phang, Résengier also puts the past into the future with different purpose. "Résengier had to fight with words and memories against dollars." (224) In contrast, some others put the present back into the past, such as Lieutenant Kervallé, who "had left his body behind with those of his Dien Bien Phu comrades" while "Jérôme was leaving his youth, his illusions and dreams behind with Le's sickly body." (128)

The forgetting could be reluctant, as is the case with Phang and Jérôme:

> …both of them had been created to further the friendly relations of the white and yellow races; but their existence had been marked by bloodshed, defilement and hatred. They had died together, abandoned, with no one to follow their funeral except the faithful and doleful dog of the sad chronicles of this day and age, an elderly journalist. (171)

Later in the novel, Phang also talks to himself,

> Living is an illness for which sleep brings comfort every sixteen hours; sleep is a palliative; death is the remedy. The remedy would soon be upon him and, like Tuan Van Le, like Ma Lien, he would deteriorate in the memory that his friends would preserve of him, then disappear completely, his life having been nothing but a ripple that had barely troubled the face of the waters (286).

Finally, the forgetting could be absolute and complete in the case of Perle. “I’ll never mention him again…never. Another woman was born, thanks to this love; her name was not Perle. She will stay and rot beside Paul Résengier, under this sand-dune. Now take me back to Phnom-Penh. I want to look beautiful and get drunk.” (351) In the past she had such a love with Résengier. She traveled with him in difficult trips across the dangerous zones of the sects. Thach, a Binh Xuyen soldier, admires her bravery. Julien, for whom she used to be a mistress, is jealous of Résengier. When Résengier dies, she deliberately erases the memory of her life with him. She will no longer bear an inconvenient life and leaves for the city as soon as she can.

3. Representation: The Fault of Representation and the Buddhist Symbols

The Vietnam War has been considered to be the first war publicized to a popular audience due to the technological developments of mass media. Television as well as photography brought images of the Vietnam War to many audiences in the U.S. and elsewhere. However, the representation of the war

reflected in *Yellow Fever* is different from what we might expect. The Press Camp is one of the main settings in the first part of the novel. As a center of media communication, the Press Camp should be excited in the historical moment as the colonial regime winds down to its end in Ha Noi. In contrast, however, exhaustion blankets the Press Camp. The journalists are busier planning their own personal futures than focusing on their present work. That work becomes as boring and burdensome for them as it does for their readers:

> With a few items of gossip and an official handout or two, which were worth even less than the gossip, he began to draft his daily cable. He would have liked to describe in every detail the end of this city, the disruption that would follow, the centuries-old bonds which were to be broken in a few days. But who in France would be interested in this?... (21)

On the one hand, good and dedicated journalists, like Jérôme, are fed up with providing useless information. On the other hand, opportunists, like Julien, ask to be paid for each piece of information they know. And so the Press Camp proves to be a place to reconcile different career goals.

When the war moves South, the journalists work more actively. It is in the South that the tragedy of Holden occurs. Holden was an American photographer who had been the first to enter Hiroshima. He left his Japanese wife and two children behind for Vietnam. The novel doesn't account for this relationship, but it is interesting that Holden, a representative of US journalism, is married to a Japanese woman. Marriage between Americans and Japanese is highly regulated. When he receives a letter from his wife informing him that their second son is ill and needs an extremely expensive treatment, Holden decides to get the money by selling a great war picture for *Life* magazine. In search of the great war photograph, Péladon, a pilot, takes Holden in an aircraft over the Arroyo Bridge occupied by the Binh Xuyen. Unfortunately, it is a peaceful and quiet day. Holden needs the picture so badly that he decides to fake the appearance of war with the use of smoke bombs. He tells Péladon, "We'll fly back over the

bridge. We'll pitch all the smoke bombs on to it. There'll at least be some smoke. War is largely a matter of smoke! Then I'll be able to get my pictures." (274)

Smoke is his primary representation of war, somewhere between reality and illusion, and smoke as a representation of war implies distance. Smoke is used across cultures as a mean to communicate with God and the Heaven. From Christian to Taoist, the smoke of burning incense brings our prayers to God. The innocent dropping of smoke bombs in the attempt to capture a great war photograph quickly becomes tragic. When the Binh Xuyen soldiers, who are hiding from the plane, see the dropping smoke containers, they mistake them for bombs and fire at the aircraft. Holden and Péladon die at the moment "while the bridge, which was now engulfed in thick blue smoke, at last assumed the classic appearance of a redoubt under siege." (275) Ironically, only one hour later, the bridge really becomes a battlefield with collapsing into flames, a perfect scene for Holden's great war picture.

The reference to *Life* magazine, a popular, mainstream magazine with a wide circulation that brought the war home for Americans over several decades, is somewhat ironic. Images are more trustworthy than words and analysis, but the incident with Holden proves that the visual news Life magazine provides (through photographs) is not creditable after all.

In addition to narrating the way media and journalists work in the context of war, Jean Lartéguy has his own way to represent the war in words and metaphors, making particular use of pagoda, water, and the lotus. The circle of the pagoda, water, and the lotus in *Yellow Fever* might appear to be a random formation but it is actually closely tied to the East Asian Buddhist tradition. The pagoda is intertwined with the image of traditional Ha Noi, a city was founded at the high point of the development of Buddhism, and so the history of the pagoda is parallel to the history of the city itself. In the novel, on his way to the Press Camp, Jérôme stops by a pagoda which is represented as a perfect scene of traditional culture -- a red pagoda by a small lake and a pretty young woman crouching beside a fortune teller, "One of the flaps of her silk *ao dai* brushed against Jérôme before she disappeared behind a tree, as graceful

and elegant as a flower in an old Chinese painting" (16) Actually, the appearance is quite opposite to the truth. The pretty young woman is not an innocent girl curious about her future love life at all. She is a prostitute who was passed from the Governor to the General, from several journalists to a defeated Dien Bien Phu soldier, and many others. However, Jérôme does not really care about that.

Another day, Jérôme hears of the explosion in the Pagoda of the Single Pillar. "The little pagoda stood on a stone base in the middle of a small lake. The plastic charge had gutted it completely and decapitated the gilt Buddha inside." (37) Here the headless Buddha becomes a perfect symbol for the cruelty of war.

Another time, Jérôme comes to the Pagoda of the Ravens[82] in order to meet Tuan Van Le, the leader of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party, who was being tracked by both the Viet Minh and French police. The Pagoda of the Ravens is the largest and the most important temple complex in Ha Noi. Its Vietnamese name is Van Mieu, meaning Temple of Literature. It was called the Pagoda of the Ravens (Pagode des Corbeaux) in the records of French Indochina. The coolie who drives Jérôme in a cycle-rickshaw to the pagoda is Ga, a secret agent of the French police. He spies on Jérôme and Tuan Van Le's conversation, and is then killed by Trieu, Le's bodyguard. So the pagoda is no longer what it traditionally symbolized: a peaceful place of refuge. The pagoda becomes a street or a public square where a kind of grotesque Bakhtinian carnival takes place. All values are subverted. The Western name, the Pagoda of the Ravens, erases the semantic feature of the original Vietnamese name with its intellectual and literary reference. In the radically redefined space in which the Temple of Literature becomes the Pagoda of the Ravens, the prostitute and the murderer gain access to its interior.

More than pagoda, though, the settings of *Yellow Fever* are dominated by water -- the Red River, the lakes in Ha Noi, the Sai Gon River, and the submerged forest in the Mekong delta. The ferocity of the

[82] An ancient temple in Ha Noi dated in 1074

Red River is a force of its own as the journalists travel to Viet Tri by boat to witness the prisoner exchange,

> The current of the Red River, which was extremely strong at the end of the rainy season, kept their speed down to three knots. From time to time a tree-trunk or piece of driftwood thumped against the side of the boat, making it shudder and vibrate. It was difficult to discern the banks, for they were the same tooth-paste-pink colour as the water. (45)

And the same Red River is dirty and polluted when Jérôme passes by on the way from the Gia Lam airport to the Press Camp, "The muddy waters of the Red River were full of drifting tree-trunks, dead animals and tufts of vegetation." (13-14) As Jérôme proceeds on that same journey, he comes across another melancholy body of water, the lake. The narrator's description of it highlights the tranquility of the lake, "The little lake came into view with its grey waters, in which were reflected some bridges, a red pagoda and the stalls of the flower girls with blackened teeth who sold gladioli. Some children were fishing with makeshift lines, and the leaves of a weeping willow sighed in the breeze." (15) The sight of the lake becomes the pretext for an unhappy memory of a purposeless war for Jérôme, "He hated the lake because it reminded him of the day when the paratroops had paraded along the banks in columns of six. (…) they had never hoped to win a war in which they could see no purpose." (72)

If water is a common image in literature, often referring to life, vitality, and purity, in *Yellow Fever* the image of water often evokes negative meanings like death, pollution, and danger. And water is, of course, a breeding ground for the mosquitoes which spread "yellow fever." In addition to the polluted force of the Red River or the dirty lakes, water in Ma Lien's thoughts and feelings is also negative. It is the water of unconsciousness and death. While using her intoxicating drugs, Ma Lien often has the feeling of floating on dark water, "Nothing mattered anymore. She was floating in a dead calm, on waters as black and shiny as lacquer. Around her there was neither sound nor smell and the only colour was the pearl-grey of a patch of sky." (85) Again, elsewhere in the novel, "Ma Lien was floating gently on her

dark waters." (113) Finally, in her final experience of intoxicating drugs, when she decides to commit suicide, she passes away into the water, "Once more the black shiny waters submerged her and this time she let herself slowly sink." (159)

And in another turn on water as a symbol, here implicitly Freudian, Perle longs for Résengier, their sexual encounter transformed into the images of rain and the earth,

> At night she tossed and turned under the sheets, unable to get to sleep. Like earth, she wanted to be fertilized by water. If she knew where to find Résengier she would have gone and joined him, for little by little the man for whom everyone was waiting had become confused in her mind with the rains, for which the earth with its cracked and parched paddy-fields was calling. (222)

The third symbol is this circle is differently present. Unlike the pagoda and water, the lotus does not recur repeatedly. Instead it is an ironic name for one of the novel's main characters, Ma Lien. "Ma" preceding the proper name is the way to call an (female) owner of a brothel or a (female) leader of a sex - trafficking ring in Vietnam. In Vietnamese, "ma" (*má*) means "mother." In Vietnam, all the prostitutes in a brothel address the owner (who often is a retired prostitute) as "*má*." There is a shift from a positive feature to a negative one when the word "*má*" addresses this derivative meaning instead of the original one. "Lien" (*Liên*) in this instance is the proper name[83]. *Liên* is the classical Chinese word for "lotus." In Vietnamese culture, the lotus is a metaphor for pureness. In Vietnamese folk songs, the lotus is praised for rising out of mud but not smelling of mud. Moreover, the lotus is also one of the most poignant representations of Buddhist teaching, a popular symbol in all pagodas. According to the Lalitavistara (a biography of Gautama Buddha), "the spirit of the best of men is spotless, like the lotus in the muddy

[83] Most Vietnamese proper names are derived from classical Chinese vocabulary and convey a specific meaning. For instance, a girl can be named after a flower, such as cherry, daisy or rose. A boy can be named after a Confucian quality such as benevolence, wisdom or trust. The choice of a name often indicates what the parents expect for their child.

water which does not adhere to it." The name, then, of Ma Lien for a prostitute is a strong and obvious irony.

If, conventionally the pagoda, the water, and the lotus belong to the conceptual realm of Buddhism, in *Yellow Fever* such these indicators are distinctly transformed. The pagoda, the water, and the lotus are no longer Buddhist concepts or images but rather a parody of their conventional meanings.

In another different set of conventional understandings, war is a world of men. The presence of women is like a backdrop. In the world of war in *Yellow Fever*, there are only six female characters. Two are French women, the wives of General de Langles and Résengier. Their appearance is nothing more than a proper name and a faded image in their husbands' memory. Another female figure is a Viet Minh cadre. She has no name and presents in only a few paragraphs. But she is worthy to be mentioned because of her almost machine like quality rather than her humanness, "This girl's a human dictaphone. You press a button, it begins to talk; it also records in the same way. The Vietminhs must be short of office equipment, so they trundle along the girl-dictaphone, the sergeant-typewriter, the sergeant-major-filing cabinet…" (65) She is noteworthy to the narrator of *Yellow Fever* only as an object. The other three female characters are equally objects, although their functions are different from those of the "human dictaphone." The other three female characters – the most significant in *Yellow Fever* – are prostitutes. Rather than being objectified as office machines, the prostitutes are sexual objects. Women are fundamentally, then, non or lesser human beings.

Ma Lien and Kieu are "professional" prostitutes in Ha Noi. They are traditional prostitutes selling not only their bodies but also their skills. Perle is not really a prostitute. She has never lived in a brothel, but the number of men with whom she has slept is not less than any other real prostitute. She is also of mixed-blood. Perle is half-French and half-Chinese, though she was born in Cho Lon, a city that neighbors Sai Gon. Perle is a mixture of the white and the yellow – though non-Vietnamese. Indeed, Kieu and Perle resemble one another on many aspects. Both of them know clearly how to satisfy men and how

to make men pay for them. Kieu thinks only of pretty clothes, going out, and one day being taken to Paris; according to the narrator, “Kieu has never loved anything but her pleasure and her clothes.” (87). Perle completely acknowledges her gain from each relationship. In other words, Kieu and Perle, like Ma Lien, “never did anything for nothing.” (23) They use their bodies as goods to exchange. The “dictaphone” is reduced to equipment. The prostitutes are no more than bodies. Differently from the classical Kieu, the Kieu of *Yellow Fever* is not aware of her situation at all. She accepts her identity as a prostitute.

From another perspective the prostitutes are genderless – though, of course, not without sex. They are represented as having the female qualities necessary to being a wife or a mother. Kieu used to think that she could learn how to be a good household wife for Yves Kervallé, but she actually does not try to fulfill that role when Rovignon offers her a chance. Moreover, she does not show a will to become a wife to put family first. She still spends a lot of money and needs to go out to a cinema or a night-club. When Kieu finds out that she is pregnant, she does not want the child at all because she wants to keep her figure. And Perle repeatedly betrays her husband. Neither woman is able to fulfill the traditional female roles of wife or mother.

But if these three women in the novel are presented as incapable of offering anything other than their sexuality, the men consider Asian women as nothing more than bodies. Julien seems love Kieu and later Perle, but after all, “To him all women had remained so much human flesh, much to his distress, for he felt an unutterable tenderness and longing for them.” (32) Kieu loves Yves Kervallé “stupidly” (in Ma Lien’s words), but he just makes use of her body, “When he left he would give her a few piastres. She had no place either in his life or in his memory.” (81)

Obviously, there is a distinction between “yellow women” and “white women” in *Yellow Fever*. If the French wives of the two French officers are nothing more than a name and a vague memory, they are still not dictaphones or simply warm flesh. In a familiar scenario, Asian women can be sexual objects to the French men in a way that their own women can’t be.

In general, the colonial point of view in *Yellow Fever* is clearer than in *The Quiet American*. The main characters in the two novels are both journalists, but the French journalists are more involved in the war. If Fowler tries to objectively observe the war, the French journalists' war is the twist between the white and the yellow, a dedicated trip to discover and enjoy. The more deeply involved in the war the characters become, the more complicated their war memories are. There is a layer of collective and cultural memory, the tension between remembrance and forgetfulness. The fake representation is also concerned. Last but not least, the backdrops of all war stories is a purely peaceful Buddhist picture and the lovely simple lyric of folk songs. If *The Quiet American* is more analytic, *Yellow Fever* is more emotional.

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In spite of their differences, both *The Quiet American* and *Yellow Fever* share the perspective of an outsider representing a war that others fight. The novels' distance from the brutality of the war is remarkable. The violence of war is only suggested by images like a headless statue of the Buddha, a dead body of a child. Neither novel directly represents the violence of war in either words or images. The further distance created by its ironic tone stands out especially in *The Quiet American*.

Their representations of women are something else the two novels share. The war stories intertwine with the love stories between white men and yellow women. War and love, violence and lust, white men and super powers, yellow women and Asian countries are shifted back and forth. The narrator, even in the third person, is a colonizer looking down on local women who have nothing but beautiful bodies.

CHAPTER 2: THE VIETNAM WAR FROM AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

This chapter will take a closer look at the Vietnam War novel through an investigation of the texts of two American writers. The case studies in this chapter are *In the Lake of the Woods* by Tim O'Brien and *The Sympathizer* by Viet Thanh Nguyen. The two authors come from distinctly different perspectives: O'Brien is a veteran who fought directly in Vietnam. Meanwhile, Nguyen was a child who fled to the United States with his parents right after the war. The novels in Chapter 1 were published during the war years. Chapter 2, as well as chapter 3, will focus on works written after the war. This provides an interesting perspective. On one hand, both authors were more immediately involved in the war. On the other hand, they are distant from the war in terms of time. This distance shapes their unique way of conceptualizing, memorializing and representing the Vietnam War.

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It is appropriate to choose Tim O'Brien as a representative of American writers who write about the Vietnam War. He is the one who has published the most works and, moreover, has the most recognized works over a significant period of time. *Going after Cacciato* won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1979. *The Things They Carried* won the French *Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger* (Best Foreign Book Award) in 1990. *In the Lake of the Woods* won the James Fenimore Cooper Prize for Best Historical Fiction in 1995. If one has to pick only one work to discuss O'Brien's writing, most literary critics would pick *The Things They Carried*, which addresses directly the writer's dogmatics of writing a war story. However, *In the Lake of the Woods,* which is a more typical exploration of the issues of memory and representation of the Vietnam War is a more appropriate choice for this study.

In the Lake of the Woods begins at the moment when John Wade, the lieutenant governor of Minnesota, loses the election for the United States Senate because his participation in a civilian massacre during the Vietnam War was revealed. He and his wife, Kathy, intentionally choose a cottage "in the lake of the woods", Minnesota, for a rest to forget the stress and emotion of the failed election. One morning,

John discovers that his wife is missing. In the search for Kathy, the whole story of John's childhood, his college years, his Vietnam experiences and his advancement in his political career is shown through a series of flashbacks. In addition, the novel also displays testimony and evidence from related people in order to propose some possible reasons for Kathy's disappearance. However, the final explanation is left open to the readers. At the end of the novel, John rides a boat out onto the lake of the woods and disappears as well.

The key event around which the novel turns is the revelation and the memory of the massacre. And some ten years after *In the Lake of the Woods* was published (1994), the novel's account of a political career overshadowed by war crimes, he revelations about the war record of Senator Bob Kerrey bore out O'Brien's novel in historical fact.[84]

1. Concept: The Manipulation of Politics and a Massacre

What makes *In the Lake of the Woods* different from other Vietnam War novels is the way Tim O'Brien conceptualizes the war. He does not focus on the fighting of the Vietnam War specifically but rather puts the war in a broader political context. As a matter of fact, the intervention of the United States into Vietnam had a particular political strategy. Its primary purpose was identified as preventing the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. In later phases, the war caused social conflicts in the United States and divided the nation. The war overshadowed the protest movements of the 1960s, such as the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation movements. The former President John F. Kennedy declared, "Now we have a problem in making our power credible, and Vietnam is the place."[85] And later the civil right leader Martin Luther King concluded, "One of the greatest casualties of the war in Vietnam is the Great Society. This confused war has played havoc with our domestic destinies. Despite feeble protests to

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[84] Though in April of 1971, a recently discharged Navy officer and future senator, John Kerry, had testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about the massacres and brutal violence of American troops in Vietnam.

[85] President Kennedy s *The New York Times*'s James Reston late in 1961 after the failure to invade Cuba and the erection of the Berlin Wall.

the contrary, the promises of the Great Society have been shot down on the battlefield of Vietnam."[86] Kennedy is referring to the United States' efforts to prove US global power as "credible" through the war in Vietnam, a foreign relation. Martin Luther King Jr. is referring to the effect of the war on US society and its social programs, a domestic issue. In both cases, the implication is that the war story has not been wrapped up in Vietnam but rather extended into American politics, even many years later. In other words, the Vietnam War was and is a part of American political life. The connection between war and politics is specified in an individual life, that of John Wade. He envisions his life as a politician from a very young age. Possessing an almost magical talent, John defines politics as "manipulation. Like a magic show: invisible wires and secret trap doors. He imagined placing a city in the palm of his hand, making his hand into a fist, making the city into a happier place. Manipulation, that was the fun of it." (35) At the beginning of his life, John is confident in his goals of creating a "happier place" and having "fun" there. He manipulates his own life rather than simply live. It is ironic that his slogan is "Start fresh" while the instinct of political campaign is manipulation. Thinking of political manipulation, one often concerns what politicians do in order to implicitly control the masses, or more specifically, to gain voters. In William Riker's words, "… politicians [are] continually poking and pushing the world to get the results they want. The reason they do this is they believe (and rightly so) that they can change outcomes by their efforts."[87] In other words, political manipulation is generally directed at the actions of others. Tim O'Brien converts the point of view. Political manipulation is performed by the politician himself. The politician manipulates and is manipulated simultaneously.

Describing John Wade, the narrator explains that "He moved with determination across the surface of his life, attending to a marriage and a career. He performed the necessary tricks, dreamed the

[86] Quoted from Dr Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech addressing 125,000 protesters in New York City on April 15, 1967. In this context, the "Great Society" refers to President Johnson's "War on Poverty and its large-scale domestic investment in education, infrastructure, housing, medical care, job training.

[87] Riker, William H. *The Art of Political Manipulation*. Yale University Press, 1986, p. 142

necessary dreams." (76) John does not really "do" anything; instead, he "performs" the action, "We're performers. We get up on stage and sing and dance and do our little show, anything to please folks, anything for applause." (99) Later, John feels, "…it was a surprise to find that the applause seemed to fill up the empty spaces inside him…He liked being up on stage… Down inside, of course, he was still a loner, still empty, but at least the magic made it a respectable sort of emptiness." (213)

Politics as a stage, a performance, is a familiar metaphor. Most of what John does is for the sake of the performance. He went to the war "not to hurt or be hurt, not to be a good citizen or a hero or a moral man" (59); he rather thinks of how his parents could be proud of him. However, the war is real, can not be over after several hours as a show, "there was a war in progress, which was beyond manipulation" (36). The facts that his company is involved to the My Lai massacre is out of his control, but he controls the way he will be portrayed after the war. Taking advantage of a desk position, he erases all records concerning his presence at the massacre. As he does so, he thinks, "The real war had ended. The trick now was to devise a future for himself." (271)

On one hand, John can manipulate everything with his tricks. On the other hand, he realizes the falsity of everything, "None of it seemed real. Like riding through someone else's life: the car and the road and the oncoming darkness." (88) He devotes his life to "Ambush politics. Poison politics." (49) He never knows the comfort that comes when you "say what you mean, mean what you say." (93) Even his loud yelling in his sleep frightens his wife because "It wasn't even your *voice*. It wasn't even *you.*" (original emphasis) (76) According to Freud, dreams provide an important key to the dreamer's subconscious. John's yelling while asleep might be the transformation of forbidden thoughts or unconscious desires. At that point, he is completely different from himself while awake.

No matter how well John manipulates his life (or his performance), he is not able to reach the outcome he wants. At one point in his campaign, he thinks, "At times it seemed as if they were making their way up a huge white mountain, always struggling, sometimes just hanging on, and for both of them

the trick was to remain patient, to keep their eyes fixed on the summit where all the prizes were." (156) The better he manipulates, the more disappointed he feel in facing to failure.

Because of his magic talent, or other word, talent of manipulation, he is called Sorcerer. He considers it is a risk. "You had to live inside your tricks. You had to be Sorcerer. Believe or fail. And for twenty years he had believed." (238) Eventually, the fact that John was involved in the My Lai massacre is revealed. He loses the election for United States Senate. The world seems to end for him, "Ex-sorcerer, ex-candidate for the United States Senate. Now a poor hung-over putz without a trick in his bag." (191) Elsewhere, he thinks "…they didn't have a damn thing to come *back* to – reputation shot, no more career, bills up the gazoo." (299)

The one sharing the manipulated life with John is his wife, also his teenage sweetheart, Kathy Wade. While John was a lonely child whose talent in magic was his only confidence and the fun of magic was his only joy, differently, Kathy "liked unlocking things, finding solutions…Even as a kid she'd lived in a puzzle world, where surfaces were like masks, where the most ordinary objects seemed fiercely alive with their own sorrows and desires." (170) Paradoxically, John uses a vague means (magic) to obtain a specific goal (successful politician). He loves Kathy but he can not be honest with her. Kathy likes reasonable means but eventually she just gains something vague, like her marriage life with John which is controlled by his political ambition. Once she warns John, "Be careful with the tricks. One of these days you'll make *me* disappear." (38) (original emphasis)

In response to Kathy's eventual physical disappearance, the narrator cites an account of Arvonne Fraser, the wife of former congressman Don Fraser to generalize the way that politicians' wives often disappear metaphorically They have no life of their own and wonder, who am I? Am I just somebody's wife? Or is there something more?" (266) As Kathy's sister blames John *"*...she almost *lost* herself in you. Your career, your problems." (187) (original emphasis)

Kathy is pulled into John's performance. Although he marries Kathy, they never really belong to each other. Both of them become pretenders. Facing each other at the table, they talk about meaningless subjects and they hide what they want to say. Sometimes, Kathy discovers that her husband is a complete stranger. He walks in his sleep and curses "Kill Jesus" in a quite different manner from his usual self. She recognizes that he is withdrawing into a shell that she penetrate, but she has to play the role of John's happy wife in public, "Sometimes it feels like I'm living with this *door*. I keep trying to get in, I keep pushing, but the damn thing's stuck shut and I just can't budge it." (156) (original emphasis) Once Kathy feels tired and she has an affair with a dentist named Harmon. Even in that moment, however, she is not truly happy. She does not love the dentist, so "…in a curious way it was not really Harmon in her arms, it was the idea of happiness, the possibility, the temptation, a slow, tantalizing waltz with some handsome future." (255) Therefore "she'd never looked happier" (206) when John lost the election. However, there is no way to come back. "The water beneath her had the feel of something static and purposeless, like her marriage, with no reality beyond its own vague alliance with everything else." (170)

Not only do John and Kathy live a life of manipulation, but most of the soldiers in Vietnam do as well. Because of John's skill with magic, he is called Sorcerer and is believed to ward off death in combat.

> In Vietnam, where superstition governed, there was the fundamental need to believe – believing just to believe – and over time the men came to trust in Sorcerer's power…At night, before heading out in ambush, the men would go through the ritual of lining up to touch Sorcerer's helmet, filing by as if at Communion, the faces dark and young and solemn. (37-38)

Generally speaking, the Vietnam War is a link in the political chain. From a figure like Minnesota Governor John Wade to an ordinary soldier, both manipulate and deceive themselves. Within it all, the worst fraud is the My Lai[88] massacre. In *In the Lake of the Woods*, the Vietnam War is almost

[88] A small village located in Quảng Ngãi Province, middle Vietnam, also called Thuận Yến or Pinkvielle.

synonymous with the My Lai massacre. This is an unspeakable part of that war. The historical fact is that soldiers from the United States Army murdered hundreds of unarmed civilians in the hamlet of My Lai, South Vietnam, during the morning of March 16, 1968. Most of the victims were the elderly, women, and children. This is a shame on a national scale. The My Lai massacre is a traumatic event which is not popularly represented in literature. The tensions between speaking about it and not speaking about it, between fact and fiction, are a significant challenge. In other words, the question of the moral limitation of representation is posed. As historian Hayden White said of the Holocaust, "In a word, does the nature of Nazism and the Final Solution set absolute limits on what can be truthfully said about them? Does it set limits on the uses that can be made of them by writers of fiction or poetry? Do they lend themselves to employment in any number of ways, or are they, like other historical events, infinitely interpretable and ultimately undecidable as to their specific meaning?[89]" More generally, as a philosopher, Theodor Adorno emphasizes the conflict between the barbarity of the fact and the aesthetics in nature of literature. "When even genocide becomes cultural property in committed literature, it becomes easier to continue complying with the culture that gave rise to the murder."[90]

Either more specifically or more generally, both White and Adorno speak from the viewpoint of the victim. The survivors alone are often the ones authorized to represent traumatic events. No one expects a SS officer to represent the horror of Auschwitz or an American pilot to represent the bombing of Hiroshima.

However, Tim O'Brien does the unexpected. The My Lai massacre is represented from John Wade's perspective. The description is very detailed in an indirectly way. He circles around the

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[89] White, Hayden. *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. p. 28

[90] Adorno, Theodor W. *Can One Live After Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader*. Rolf Tiedemann ed., Rodney Livingstone et al trans., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. p. 252-253

surrounding setting quite long to delay the central fact. The savage massacre emerges in an insignificant war.

> The war was aimless. No targets, no visible enemy. There was nothing to shoot back at. Men were hurt and then more men were hurt and nothing was ever gained by it. The ambushes never worked. The patrols turned up nothing but women and kids and old men… In the dark someone did witch imitations. Someone else laughed. For Sorcerer, who sat listening at his foxhole, the war had become a state of mind. (104)

The war is abnormal. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Fredric Jameson describes the Vietnam War as "the first terrible postmodern war."[91] There is no declaration of war, no clear battlefront. Everything is vague. There is no fact but rather a state of mind. The state of mind is a thread going through the narrative. The war, the massacre, and its temporary and long term effects on the soldiers are all coded by the state of mind. Even the landscape conveys the mood in O'Brien's novel, "It was spook country. The geography of evil: tunnels and bamboo thickets and mud huts and graves." (105)

Not only does the geography of the landscape speak to the ambiguity of the Vietnam War, but the narrator also expresses the common Western view of an oriental landscape. Pinkville in *In the Lake of the Woods* is something similar to the plain of reeds in *Yellow Fever* or the fields outside of Sai Gon in *The Quiet American*. All are remotely gloomy lands in colonial narratives. However, *In the Lake of the Woods* does not appeal to the sense of adventurous journey present in the other novels at all. "The geography of evil" turns out to be the setting of real evil. The notion of evil is first used as a metaphor to address the gloomy landscape. Then it switches back to its primarily religious meaning of something immoral. The evil is described firstly in the level of sensation. In sight, the scene is described emotionlessly. The description is merely a series of objective facts.

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[91] Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism*

> Something was wrong. The sunlight or the morning air. All around him there was machine-gun fire, a machine-gun fire, a machine-gun wind, and the wind seemed to pick him up and blow him from place to place. He found a young woman laid open without a chest or lungs. He found dead cattle. There were fires, too. The trees and hootches and clouds were burning. (63)

In that scene, what John does is an automatic reaction.

> Sorcerer didn't know where to shoot. He didn't know what to shoot. So he shot the burning trees and burning hootches. He shot the hedges. He shot the smoke, which shot back, then he took refuge behind a pile of stones. If a thing moved, he shot it. If a thing did not move, he shot it. There was no enemy to shoot, nothing he could see, so he shot without aim and without any desire except to make the terrible morning go away. (64)

There is only one adjective, "terrible", showing the feeling of the narrator is put at the end of an emotionlessly descriptive paragraph. In contrast, the adjective comes first in the description of death, "The noise was fierce. No one was dying quietly. There were squeaking and chicken-house sounds." (109) "The place was dead – a loud, living deadness." (214) The "squeaking and chicken-house sounds" is a double metaphor. On the surface, the sounds of dying people are like "the squeaking and chicken-house sounds." More subtly, the dying people are also like animals. The "living deadness" of the second quotation implies a voicelessness on the part of the massacred villagers. The contradictory expression "a loud, living deadness" focuses on the moment, the turning point from life to death, the loud beginning of the endless quiet of death. The already death is actually voiceless, but the switching from life to death is the most terrible moment.

From the level of sensation, John goes to the level of generalization. In the hell of My Lai, John comes to term with the war. During the massacre, he recognizes the immorality of the war, "This was not madness, Sorcerer understood. This was sin" (110), and "He thought about the difference between murder and war." (217) Madness is in the sphere of psychology while sin is considered a religious concept. In

this circumstance, the idea of sin speaks to a broader sense of morality rather than a narrow religious sense. Murder is illegal killing although killing in war is somehow authorized. However, if the action of killing is so cruel that it is against morality, it could be murder even in wartime. In these moments, John tries to define his war from psychological and moral perspectives, popular means to understanding the war.

Elsewhere, however, John has a unique way to recognize the war. The war is symbolized by a magic show. One certain evening, his Charlie Company goes to a fishing village and leads people to watch his performance.

> There was much chattering, much consternation as the villagers were ushered down to the beach for a magic show. With the South China Sea at his back, Sorcerer performed card tricks and rope tricks. He pulled a lighted cigar from his ear. He transformed a pear into an orange. He displayed an ordinary military radio and whispered a few words and made their village disappear. There was a trick to it, which involved artillery and white phosphorus, but the overall effect was spectacular. (65)

Most of the audiences are elders, women, and children. Later, most of the victims in the massacre are the same. The show creates the illusion of the disappearance of their village. The massacre literally erases it . It is obvious that the magic show is a symbol or figure of the massacre. What is shared between the magic show and the war is something surreal and unexplainable, but the two outcomes are completely different. The magic show is spectacular, but the massacre is fierce.

When the massacre is over, it influences the perpetrators as well. They need to find some way to deal with the fact of their role in My Lai. Imagining the war as a magic show, they follow the way of self deception. Right after the massacre, they try to find some communists hiding in the village. If they could get some communists, they would have an acceptable explanation, and yet “There was nothing to find, they all knew that, but the search went on all afternoon.” (216) Recognizing the futility of their search, the

object of their pretending is switched from the existence of an acceptable reason to the existence of the fact itself:

> He pretended he wasn't responsible; he pretended he couldn't have done it and therefore hadn't; he pretended it didn't matter much; he pretended that if the secret stayed inside him, with all the other secrets, he could fool the world himself too. (68)

Pretending is not a lie any longer. The connotation of trick is transformed into positive meaning as a relief. John uses his trick again, this time not in a stage performance but in real life. "The trick is to think positive." (86) "You *know* it's a trick. It's *supposed* to be a trick." (228) In these lines, the trick is addressed not only to the other but also to the self. John Wade convinces himself that "This could not have happened. Therefore, it did not. Already he felt better." (111)

However, pretending that the massacre did not happen is only a temporary solution. The soldiers know that. On one side, to pretend lessens the horror. On the other side, the pretending multiplies the horror, "The horror was partly Thuan Yen, partly secrecy itself, the silence and betrayal." (275) In the following passage, the secrecy, the silence, and the betrayal are symbolized by the dark.

> They were young, all of them…- young and scared and almost always lost. The war is a maze…The days were difficult, the nights were impossible…The dark was their shame. It was also their future. They tried not to talk about it, but sometimes they couldn't help themselves… Thinbill talked about the flies. T'Souvas talked about the smell. Their voices would seem to flow away for a time and then return to them from somewhere beyond the swaying fields of rice. It was an echo, partly. But inside the echo were sounds not quite their own – a kind of threnody, a weeping, something melodic and sad. They would sometimes stop to listen, but the sound was never there when listened for. It mixed with the night. There were stirrings all around them, things seen, things not seen, which was in the nature of the dark. (270-271)

"The nature of the dark" is the title of the entire twenty-sixth chapter. The first half describes the dark covering the Charlie Company after the massacre. The second half reports in detail how John Wade erases his records. Because of the way this chapter is structured, the dark can be interpreted both literally and figuratively—the physical presence of the darkness of night and the blacking out of the massacre both from the minds of the soldiers, as they try to forget, and John Wade's records, as he corrects them. As an attempt to compensate for erasing his role in the massacre, John extends his tour of duty in Vietnam. "He tried to lose himself in the war. He took uncommon risks, performed unlikely deeds. He was wounded twice, once badly, but in a peculiar way the pain was all that kept body and soul together." (271) At the end of the war, he is still alive, and so he offers no compensation. He has to keep going on with the burden of his memories of war on his shoulders.

2. Memory: An Unhappy Marriage and an Unspeakable Truth

The issue of memory in *In the Lake of the Wood* can be interpreted by psychoanalysis. When something horrible happens, the reaction is to try to forget it. According to Freud, forgetting prevents the traumatic event from becoming conscious. What is remembered, what the subject is conscious of, is merely mysterious fragments. However, what is experienced once in the past is indestructible in the unconscious. Trauma still remains even though it is inaccessible and unavailable. The undeniable existence of trauma under the depression of consciousness is a key discovery of Freud's. As soon as the whole depressed secret is revealed, mental illness can be treated.

From that common psychoanalytic path, three clues can be picked out to investigate how memory is shaped in the novel. There are the effort to forget, fragments of memory, and the secret truth. Let's imagine those three clues forming a circle of memory. There are two such circles centered on the disappearance of Kathy and the My Lai massacre in *In the Lake of the Woods*.

On the surface, the narrative starts and ends with Kathy's disappearance. The reader never knows what really happens with Kathy Wade, the heroine of the novel. One morning, John wakes up and finds

that Kathy is no longer in the cottage with him. No trace of her has been left behind; it is as if she evaporated. All John knows about the last moments of her presence is unclear, such as a seemly meaningless gesture like “a movement at her jaw, a locking motion.” (18) He remembers all that happened before that moment though. He knows that he “unplugged the telephone, carried it into the kitchen, tossed it in a cupboard under the sink” (19) in the afternoon. He knows that he woke up during the night, went to the kitchen to boil some water, poured boiled water out into a teakettle and then watered the plants in the living room. He also remembers that Kathy was still sleeping at that time. He doesn’t find anything else remarkable in his memories of that day, even with abnormal actions like tossing the telephone in the sink and watering the plants with boiling water. The next day, the telephone in the sink and the dead plants prove what he remembers. But he has no idea of what happened between the time he woke up during the night and the time he woke up in the next morning, in other words, when and how Kathy was gone.

> Even now it was hard to come up with a neat chronology of those last hours together. The images did not connect – the darkness, the teakettle, the way he’d glided from spot to spot as if gravity were no longer a factor. He remembered the sound of mice beneath the porch. He remembered the rich forest smells and the fog and the curious motion Kathy sometimes made with her fingers, a slight fluttering, as if to dispel all the things that were wrong in their lives. Other things, though, he remembered only dimly. (133)

He is so confused between what he “remember it and not remember it”. His last contact with Kathy in her last night is a feeling of his body, not a visual image.

> A mind trick, for sure, but he could not ignore the pressure of Kathy’s fingertips against the lids of his eyes. The surface tension was real. He heard her footsteps. He heard the low voice that could be only Kathy’s voice. “So stupid,” she said, “you could’ve *tried* me,” and then came a

> fearful silence as she moved away, a drop in the temperature, a subtle relaxation in the magnetic force that one human body exerts upon another. (81, emphasis in the original).

He does not consciously know that Kathy leaves but rather *feels* it through his senses (hearing and touch). From the moment when Kathy is sleeping, his memory jumps to the moment he finds himself waist-deep in the lake. The blank between those two moments is a mystery of the novel, not only for the readers, but also for John himself. He tries to investigate his mind to search for the mystery.

> These were not memories. These were sub-memories. Images from a place beneath the waking world, deeper than dream, a place where logic dissolved. It was beyond remembering. It was knowing. The steady lap of waves against his chest, how cold he was, and how eventually he let himself go under – not a dive, just sinking – and how his mouth filled with the taste of fish and algae, how his legs scraped against something sharp – a terrible heaviness pressing through his lungs and arms – and how he was finally caught up in layers of forgetfulness. (134)

The lake here has a double reference: the real lake of the woods and the symbolic lake of the mind. John stands in the real lake, his body struggles against the waves and the cold, and his toes touch the muddy bottom. He goes through many layers of truth, memory, and sub-memory before he can get where he wants, the comfortably silken layers of forgetfulness. He does not "dive" actively but "just sink[s]," passively. In *Yellow Fever*, this specific state of sinking is also used when talking about Lien's drug intoxication. In her usual drug intoxication, she "floats" over the water of unconsciousness. In her last intoxication when she decides to commit suicide, she lets herself "slowly sink" in the water and unconsciously comes into forgetfulness.

After a long day trying to contact anyone who can help search for Kathy, John is exhausted and he spends the night half-asleep and half-awake. "It was a bad night. Too much vodka. He kept tumbling inside himself, half asleep, half awake, his dreams folding around the theme of depravity – things he remembered and things he could not remember." (191) According to Freud, the materials of dreams are

not drawn from what has just happened, but rather what is likely forgotten. So “the theme of depravity” should not be interpreted in connection with Kathy’s disappearance but rather with the massacre, “things he could not remember” but paradoxically “things he remembered” nonetheless.

However, the confusion of his memory began long before Kathy’s disappearance. John’s memories of the Vietnam War set up an unbridgeable distance between the couple. During the war, John write down what really happens in his letter to Kathy. In the same way, post-war, John speak about what he remembers. Kathy , and in truth she does not want to, access to John’s memory. Her experiences and memories are completely different from his. As the narrator describes,

> Her memories were indoor memory, fixed by ceilings and plastered white walls. Her whole life had been locked to geometries: suburban rectangles, city squares. First the house she’d grown up in, then dorms and apartments. The open air had been nothing but a medium of transit, a place for rooms to exist. (173)

In the meantime, John’s memories of war are not only outdoor but also wild. As we see in chapter one, Vietnam is a remote land for American soldiers like John. The difference is that the remote land in O’Brien’s novel does not appeal to any sense of adventure and discovery. One might recall “The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong,” an important chapter in *The Things They Carried.* Mary Anne Bell comes to Vietnam to share the experience of war with her lover. In the end, she breaks up with her lover and pursues her own adventure. Even living in the same reality of war, the lovers sympathize with the other’s experience because they react to reality differently. Returning to *In the Lake of the Woods*, John chooses not to tell Kathy about the massacre and his experience of the war in general because he believes that Kathy could not understand. Recognizing his reluctance, Kathy “rarely mentioned the war” (36). As time passes, they do not realize that they have gradually become strangers; they have nothing to talk about:

> Which was one of the problems – they never talked anymore. They never communicated, they never made love. …What they needed, she thought, was to be honest. Talk about everything they'd never talked about – trust and love and hurt, their truest feelings. (114-115)

In their hard reality, Kathy is the one who faces facts and wants to improve the situation. More than once, she begins to speak out but she has never successfully made John talk about the war or their relationship. He was no longer, in her mind, "the man she'd known, or thought she'd known. She had loved him extravagantly – the kind of love she'd always wanted – but more and more it was like living with a stranger. Too many mysteries. Too much walled-up history." (54)

There is similarity between Mary Anne in "The Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong" and Kathy, the suggestion that women are more sincere than men. Mary Anne quickly adapts to the Vietnamese environment and culture while her boyfriend ignores them. She devotes herself fully to the reality of war while her boyfriend feels like an outsider. In the same way, Kathy wants she and her husband to show "their truest feelings". Even in her short affair with the dentist, she is still sincere with her feelings while she coming to him to avoid her tragic marriage and leaving him because she doesn't love him. There is a citation in O'Brien's novel from *The Lady with the Dog* by Anton Chekhov used to illuminate the relationship between men and women, "He had two lives: one, open, seen and known by all who cared to know…and another life running its course in secret." (195) In *The Lady with the Dog*, a woman is seduced by a man who pretends to be what he is not. In Chekov's story, the one to play tricks is the man. Similarly, in *In the Lake of the Woods*, John also performs his magic tricks to transform himself into something he is not. Instead of talking directly to Kathy, John keeps secrets. One time in Pinkville, he witnesses two snakes eating each other, each biting the other's tail. He always dreams of that scene happening to him and Kathy, "…both of them finally disappearing forever inside each other. Not a footprint, not a single clue. Purely gone – the trick of his life. The burdens of secrecy would be lifted. Memory would be null." (76)

The *ouruboros* (meaning tail-eating-snake in Greek) is an ancient symbol representing constantly renewed cycles, and eternal return. While Freud interprets the snake as a symbol of male sexuality, Carl Jung, Freud's younger colleague, says dreams about snakes reflect an inner conflict. Jung's interpretation is probably closer to the snake symbol in the novel. John often dreams of the two snakes when he is stuck in the complicated conflict between the consciousness of morality and the memory of his action. His dream is a way to escape from the unsolvable problems in his marriage with Kathy. However, the difference is that there are two snakes in O'Brien's version. These two snakes symbolize a desire of eternal unification.

John's fuzzy memory about Kathy's disappearance seems to echo his memory of the massacre. On a deeper layer of the narrative, the novel is a story of how the massacre is remembered and how it influences the subjectivity of the main character. As stated in the previous section, John erases the records of his participation in the massacre. He tries to apply the same trick to his memory. "Long ago, as a kid, he'd learned the secret of making his mind into a blackboard. Erase the bad stuff. Draw in pretty new pictures." (135) For many years, John makes a concerted effort to forget; he "tried not to remember the things he was remembering" (220). He begins using this trick right after the massacre. "Over the next months John Wade did his best to apply the trick of forgetfulness…At times he went out of his way to confront hazard, walking point or leading night patrols, which were acts of erasure, a means of burying one great horror under the weight of many smaller horrors. Sometimes the trick almost worked. Sometimes he almost forgot." (150-151)

However, he never goes over the last seemly short distance between "almost" and absolutely. Even though John can't erase the fact, he can erase the horror, "Thuan Yen was still there, of course, and always would be, but the horror was now outside him…. Once you're found out, you don't tremble at being found out." (251) After a while, he seems to escape from his dark past, "Gradually a nice calm came over him, the chemical somersaults, and for a considerable time he permitted himself the luxury of forgetfulness, no lists, no future at all, just the glide, exploring the void." Years later, when the truth is

revealed, he looks back, and the events of the past "Look real black and white now – very clear – but back then everything came at you in these bright colors. No sharp edges. Lots of glare. A nightmare like that, all you want is to forget. None of it ever seemed real in the first place." (189)

After time, John becomes "a good chivalrous forgetter." (245) The code of chivalry is conventionally associated with the knights of the European Middle Ages. The association here with forgetting a horrific massacre is inappropriate. The opposition between the conventional meaning and contextual meaning causes irony.

However, John does not easily enjoy "the luxury of forgetfulness," chivalrous or not. His memory always returns. Forgetfulness is always in a struggle with remembrance. There is no point in the novel when John remembers coherently what happened that morning at Thuan Yen. His memory is fragments, as seen in this description of that morning, "He remembered the sunlight. He remembered a long, bleached-out emptiness, and how later he'd found himself standing at the lip of an irrigation ditch packed tight with women and kids and old men." (218) The evil deeds should be set in the dark. John's first impression in that horrible morning is the sunlight. When a crime happens in the sunlight, all its horror is displayed, and therefore, is multiplied.

Elsewhere, John's memory is merged with imagination, as in the following passage.

> On ambush sometimes, in the paddies outside a sleeping village, Sorcerer would crouch low and watch the moon and listen to the many voices of the dark, the ghosts and gremlins, his father, all the late-night visitors. The trees talked. The bamboo, and the rocks. He heard people pleading for their lives. He heard things breathing, things not breathing. It was entirely in his head, like midnight telepathy, but now and then he'd look up to see a procession of corpses bearing lighted candles through the dark – women and children, PFC Weatherby, an old man with bony shins and a small wooden hoe.
>
> "Go away," he'd murmur, and sometimes they would. (271)

The setting is real, a night in paddies, but John's head is full of imaginative images and sounds of ghosts. On one hand, ghosts are familiar troops in war stories. On the other hand, the Oriental landscape from a Western perspective is ghostly. The last part in *Yellow Fever* is titled "The Lost Soul." The *ignis fatuus* at night is interpreted as the souls of the ones to be punished because they to broke rituals and laws. As analyzed in chapter 1, these lost souls are more elements of imagination than actual memory. While seeing the *ignis fatuus*, the characters in *Yellow Fever* do not actually refer to any specific person. In contrast, the ghosts in *In the Lake of the Woods* come more from John's memory than his imagination. John can easily track the reference of the ghostly sounds to his father and to the innocent people murdered in the My Lai massacre. The line, "He heard things breathing, things not breathing," is like an echo of the fact of killing anything that moves in the massacre. What he hears are sounds from his memory. What he sees, however, is a mixture of memory and imagination. "A procession of corpses" is just an illusory vision, something he never could have actually seen, but the scene of "bearing lighted candles through the dark" comes from his memory. The corpses are Vietnamese people, and they would not traditionally light candles for the dead. (They would burn incense instead). Therefore, it can be interpreted that the lighted candles are a Western reference to death and funeral. John must have that scene in his experiences, at his father's funeral for instance. The procession of ghosts is John's imaginary vision situated in a Vietnamese context.

All John's memory and imagination after the massacre is surrounding a central image of the specific man he killed, as becomes clear in the following passage

> He would not remember raising his weapon, nor rolling away from the bamboo fence, but would remember forever how he turned and shot down an old man with a wispy beard and wire glasses and what looked to be a rifle. It was not a rifle; it was a small wooden hoe. The hoe he would always remember. In the ordinary hours after the war, at the breakfast table or in the babble of some dreary statehouse hearing, John Wade would sometimes look up to see the wooden hoe spinning like a baton in the morning sunlight. He would see the old man shuffling past the

> bamboo fence, the skinny legs, the erect posture and the wire glasses, the hoe suddenly sailing up high and doing its quick twinkling spin and coming down uncaught. (111)

Again, this passage brings to mind another chapter from *The Things They Carried*, "The Man I Killed." The situation in both narratives is the same: a killer meditates on the person he has killed. In "The Man I Killed," the killer, who is also the narrator, imagines the whole life of the victim. The fantasy of that personal narrative just lasts for a moment on the battlefield. Meanwhile, in *In the Lake of the Woods*, the image of the hoe is recurs for many years. The hoe, a normal farming tool, is a detail to address the civil identity of the victim. Therefore, memory of the hoe just more emphasizes on the feeling of guilty, the cruel nature of reality. From another perspective, the hoe can be compared with the dice in *The Quiet American*. For the journalist Thomas Fowler, "anywhere in the world when I see two men dicing I am back in the streets of Hanoi or Saigon or among the blasted buildings of Phat Diem" (177). As for the Governor John Wade, the image of a hoe comes back "in the ordinary hours after the war, at the breakfast table or in the babble of some dreary statehouse hearing". The war is evoked by a humble farming tool, non violent and non military.

> After years have passed, his Vietnam War memory is condensed in a world of impossibility. Here, he reasoned, was the most majestic trick of all. In the months and years ahead, John Wade would remember Thuan Yen the way chemical nightmares are remembered, impossible combinations, impossible events, and over time the impossibility itself would become the richest and deepest and most profound memory. (111)

Even though it is impossible, it becomes the most believable, the most ingrained memory from which the subjectivity tries to run away. At some points, he seems to be successful in his effort to forget. "The secret would remain secret – the things he'd seen, the things he'd done. He would repair what he could, he would endure, he would go from year to year without letting on that there were tricks." (46) The trick of

forgetfulness almost completely works. “You go about your business. You carry the burdens, entomb yourself in silence, conceal demon-history from all others and most times from yourself.” (245)

The same as the erased records, John believes that “over time, he trusted, memory itself would be erased,” (272) and after all, “truth is not accessible.” (294) However, this does not mean truth can be erased. The inaccessible truth can be understood in term of Freudian depression. The continuous depression that is never worked through can cause a violent explosion. Violence moves through time and space, from the past to the present, from “over there” in Vietnam to “here” in the United States. John’s memories of the war, focused on the My Lai massacre, parallels the memory of a disappearance, very likely a murder. So this memory of the Vietnam War becomes a cycle from which one escape. Memory is also the essential approach which makes the representation in the novel truly unique.

3. Representation: The Uncertainty of Form / the Uncertainty of War, and the Symbol of the Mirror

The uncertainty of war is an important theme in Tim O’Brien’s writing. “Maybe so” is a common claim in his war stories. The war of uncertainty in O’Brien’s narratives is quite different from the war of confusion in *The Quiet American. The Quiet American* takes up the confusion *between* categories, though the categories themselves remain recognizable. In *In the Lake of the Woods*, on the other hand, there is uncertainty about the very categories themselves. The only certainty is that nothing is certain, and this fundamental inability to decide distinguishes Tim O’Brien’s style. In this novel in particular, uncertainty informs the very heart of the novel.

It is rather difficult to summarize the plot of *In the Lake of the Woods*. The narrative opens with Kathy’s disappearance, the novel concludes with five hypotheses about what happened. The only certainty in the novel is that Kathy has vanished. She might have run away with a secret lover, run away to escape from John, commit suicide, be reunited with John in a remote and secret place, or, most likely, she might have been murdered. The hypothesis of murder is the most possible because it links to the past

story of the My Lai massacre, a connection that is heightened when one looks at the way that the narration of both of those stories is made up of broken pieces of memory and amnesia. And yet, we say with any certainty what took place. The conventional plot with a beginning that draws to closure at the end is not available in this novel. In the pages and chapters between the certainty of Kathy's disappearance which opens the novel and the uncertainty of what has happened to her that closes the novel, the narrative tells the story of John's life.

This unconventional narrative structure turns on the narrator's struggle of how to represent his experiences in Vietnam. How to tell rather than what should be told is the novel's central question. One of the most remarkable chapters in *The Things They Carried* is titled "How to Tell a True War Story." The ultimate point of the story is that a true war story might not be the truth. As the narrator of that shorter piece explains, "In any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. (…) In many cases a true war story be believed" (*The Things They Carried* 71). That chapter ends with a seemingly contradictory conclusion. "What I have never told is the full truth." (46) "And in the end, of course, a true war story is never about war…. It's about love and memory. It's about sorrow." (91) War stories about sorrow are a shared feature in the works of many veteran writers on both sides of the war. We will examine one of those stories of sorrow in the next chapter. As for Tim O'Brien, each novel is an experiment on the way to tell a war story. *Going after Cacciaco* relies heavily on fantasy. *The Things They Carried* blurs the literary categories of fiction and memoir and the identification of narrator and character. *In the Lake of the Woods* completely changes the structure of the novel.

In the Lake of the Woods is not traditional fiction. The totality of thirty one chapters are not put together chronologically. According to their titles, there are four types of chapter. Seven "Evidence" chapters collect both fictional evidence from the characters in the novel and non-fictional evidence extracted from real literary, historical, psychological, and political accounts. Eight "Hypothesis" chapters suggest five possible accounts of Kathy's disappearance. Eight "The Nature of..." chapters investigate the

nature of loss, marriage, love, the beast, politics, the spirit, the dark, and the angel. Eight question-word-chapters begin with “how” (“How unhappy,” ”How the night passed,” “How he went away”), what (“What he remembered,” “What he did next,” “What was found,” “What the questions were”), and where (“Where they looked”). These various chapter types all mixed together with one another in a seemingly random order.

Narrative innovation is found in the “evidence” chapters in which there is a double layer of narration. On the surface, a journalistic style dominates the storytelling. The narrator is completely excluded. However, the story is still advancing under the evidence, implied but not directly stated. The kind of evidence being collected, the sources they come from, and the way they are compiled, rather than the direct narration of a third person narrator, continues to tell the story. These chapters and the evidence they present seem to position the readers at a different distance from the story than a third person narrator would. The tone of what is told is less emotional and more apparently objective as well. At the same time, the novel enlarges the complexity of narration by creating a response between the quotations and footnotes in the “evidence” chapters. For example, there is a correspondence between what Wade’s campaign manager says and what is quoted from the Magician’s Handbook. The manager addresses “You know, I think politics and magic were almost the same thing for him. Transformations -- that's part of it -- trying to change things. When you think about it, magicians and politicians are basically control freaks.- Anthony L. (Tony) Carbo” Meanwhile, the citation from the handbook is, “The capacity to appear to do what is manifestly impossible will give you a considerable feeling of personal power and can help make you a fascinating and amusing personality.- Robert Parrish (The Magician's Handbook)” (27-28) The first one compares the politician with the magician, the second one analyzes a magician’s capacity.

Moreover, there are so many footnotes included in the text that they become the first person narrator’s voice within the flow of the major third person narrator. For instance,

> …The enemy was invisible. They were ghosts. They killed us with land mines and booby traps; they disappeared into the night, or into tunnels, or into the deep misted-over paddies and bamboo and elephant grass. But it went beyond that. Something more mysterious. The smell of incense, maybe. The unknown, the unknowable… (23)

This footnote is kind of some private experience of the narrator. Actually, the narrator gives an exact account of the My Lai massacre. On one hand, the My Lai massacre is barbaric because most of the victims are the old men, women and children. On the other hand, all of them *were* potential fighters. Maybe that point is the most unknowable for American military invasion. For a small nation which is always faced to an ambitious neighbor, Vietnamese tradition is that if the invader appears, everybody would fight. There is a legend of a three-year-old-boy growing up very fast to becoming a leader in the battle field. Now there is a temple in his home province of Vĩnh Phú and a statue of him in the central square of Sai Gon, the Vietnamese biggest city. There are some woman generals in Vietnamese history. Today, all Vietnamese students have to study military education in the university. That is quite understandable that all people in My Lai can potentially be "enemies" opposing the U.S. military forces.

Another typical footnote is the one on page 301. It takes the space of almost the whole page. The narrator comments on John's forgetting trick. He understands John's characteristic because they have a shared experience of war rather than in vague sympathy, as revealed in a short excerpt from a much longer footnote.

> Yes, and these too were atrocities – the dirty secrets that live forever inside all of us. I have my own PFC Weatherby. My own old man with a hoe. And yet a quality of abstraction makes reality unreal. All these years later, like John Wade, I remember much, I feel much. Maybe erasure is necessary. (301)

In this way, there is another story, the first person narrator's story, underlying John Wade's story, scattered here and there in footnotes. The first person narrator's story is a kind of war memoir. According

to Bakhtin, the novel is a mixed genre including within it one or more sub-genres. Therefore, the novel is dialogic in nature. It can be said that Tim O'Brien's dialogism is even more open than Bakhtin's sense since it crosses the border of literary category. As a novel, *In the Lake of the Woods* includes many kinds of text, from personal memoir to historical narrative, from the documents of martial court to books of criticism, from the books of popular culture to, of course, other literary works, and so on. *In the Lake of the Woods*, and later on *The Things They Carried*, is a successful experiment of form. The form is also Tim O'Brien's best achievement which has allowed him to leave his mark not only on Vietnam War literature but also on American literature in broader sense.

Alongside the odd narrative structure of the novel that creates a sense of uncertainty, uncertainty is further represented in John Wade's desire to spy on others. Spying often aims to discover some sort of secret, to reveal a covered truth. In other words, it proves that what we think we know or what we see is uncertain. The game of spying starts when John is just a little boy. "By eighth grade John had come to realize that secrecy carried its own special entitlements. Which was how the spying started." (213) His father is an alcoholic. His father treats him gently sometimes and angrily the other times. He loves his father but he does not feel close enough to him. He takes spying as a way to understand his father. John used to search in the garage to find out where his father hid his bottles of alcohol. Furthermore, he wants to spy on his father's mind.

> Everybody had secrets, obviously, including his father, and for John Wade the spying was like an elaborate detective game, a way of crawling into his father's mind and spending some time there. He'd inspect the scenery, poke around for clues. Where did the anger come from? What *was* it exactly? And why didn't anything ever please him, or make him smile, or stop the drinking? Nothing ever got solved – no answers at all – but still the spying made things better. It brought him close to his father. It was a bond. It was something they shared, something intimate and loving. (214)

When he falls in love with Kathy, he put aside the temptation of spying on her. He starts to do so just a few months after their first meeting. He follows her around campus for the whole day. When he comes back from Vietnam, the first person he wants to see is Kathy. However, he does not show up in front of her. He secretly follows her instead.

> The issue wasn't trust or distrust. The whole world worked by subterfuge and the will to believe. (…) In a way, almost, he loved her best when he was spying; it opened up a hidden world, new angles and new perspectives, new things to admire. (33)

Spying is a way to respond to and control the unsafe mood of uncertainty. By spying on his loved ones, John keeps a distance from them. Meanwhile, what he wants the most is an absolute understanding of the other yet he has never reached, and never will reach, that absoluteness, a fact he recognizes, "Nothing could ever be sure, not if he spied forever, because there was always the threat of tomorrow's treachery, or next year's treachery, or the treachery implicit in all the tomorrows beyond that." (43-44)

Like John Wade, Thomas Fowler in *The Quiet American* has the same obsession with being betrayed. However, Fowler recognizes the possible means of betrayal. He clearly understands the age gap between him and Phuong and the threat of the appearance of a young man. In contrast, John Wade has no reasonable threat, but he still feels uncertainty about the future. Sometimes he wants he and Kathy to eat each other up like a pair of snakes, as mentioned above. Other times he wants to disappear into Kathy and lose himself entirely,

> There were times when John Wade wanted to open up Kathy's belly and crawl inside and stay there forever. He wanted to swim through her blood and climb up and down her spine and drink from her ovaries and press his gum against the firm red muscle of her heart. He wanted to suture their lives together. It was terror, mostly. He was afraid of losing her. He had his secrets, she had hers. (71)

Going inside a woman's belly is returning to the primacy of life. This grotesque desire represents John's wish of complete unification on one hand and of renewing his own life by coming back to the primary beginning moment on the other.

Alongside with the uncertainty, the symbol of the mirror is an important literary device used to represent the war in O'Brien's novel.

> ...the big lake opened northward into Canada, where the water was everything, vast and very cold, and where there were secret channels and portages and bays and tangled forests and islands without names. Everywhere, for many thousands of miles, the wilderness was all one thing, like a great curving mirror, infinitely blue and beautiful, always the same. (1)

This passage is from the very first page of the novel. Throughout the book, water and mirror are two intertwined images. In the previous chapter, we analyzed the image of water in *Yellow Fever* as a representation of darkness and a symbol of libido. In *In the Lake of the Woods*, as cited above, water is transformed into a mirror. Water as a mirror can be understood in terms of a surface of reflection.

At a very first glance, water comes from the setting. The novel is set in Minnesota. Since that is where Tim O'Brien was born and grew up, he also uses Minnesota as the main setting of some other works. The state of Minnesota is, famously, the home to ten thousand lakes. Fishing, boating, water sports mark the environment. It can be said that Minnesota and the Midwest in general is something most different from Vietnam. Cold is different from hot, immense lakes are different from sandy mountains, peace is different from war. The opposition in nature and in weather between Minnesota and Vietnam can be regarded as the symbol of two isolated worlds. The novel's setting in Minnesota adds literary value and further conveys the idea of the fiction.

Framed by the setting of Minnesota, the lake is the most important metaphor in Tim O'Brien's fiction generally. O'Brien focuses on the lake in the post-war life rather than in the pre-war life. Actually, a lake is something that is exactly the same after the war. Different from river or ocean, lake water is

relatively still. Therefore, lakes are symbols of a sure and cyclical world. The veterans seem neither belong to nor penetrate into that world. They are always outsiders because they lived through different experiences and they return to their old own way of thinking and living. In O'Brien's fictions, there is a typical scene of meditation on the war when facing a lake. The everlasting nature of lakes highlights the changes in the characters. The most famous of such a scene is in *The Things They Carried*. In the chapter "Speaking of Courage", the main character goes around and around the lake while having imaginative dialogues with his father, with a woman he has loved once, and with a dead friend.

More than a symbol of a certain, steady life in *The Things They Carried*, the lake in *In the Lake of the Woods* forms an important part of the plot, and the lake is where the story, and also the existence of two main characters, ends. The lake is regarded under the rule of circulation[jet79]. It is the symbol of the world, the impermanence of life.

> It is by nature of the angle, sun to earth, that the seasons are made, and that the waters of the lake change color by the season, blue going to gray and then to white and then back again to blue. The water receives color. The water returns it. The angle shapes reality. Winter ice becomes the steam of summer as flesh becomes spirit. Partly window, partly mirror, the angle is where memory dissolves. (291)

The lake is a witness and a reflection of memory. The lake is compared with an eye, or a mirror, whose main characteristic is reflection, "And in the deep unbroken solitude, age to age, Lake of the Woods gazes back on itself like a great liquid eye. Nothing adds or subtracts. Everything is present, everything is missing." (289-290) At that point, the metaphor of lake meets another important metaphor in this novel: the mirror. More than once, the lake, essentially the water's surface, is compared with a mirror. The water takes its figurative meaning in the semantic relationship with the mirror. In his theory, Carl Jung notices this relationship.

> Whoever looks into the mirror of the water will see first of all his own face. Whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself. The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it; namely, the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the persona, the mask of the actor. But the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face.

Marie-Louise von Franz, a Jungian psychologist, also discusses the symbol of the surface of water and its connection to the mirror:

> The symbolization of the unconscious by water with its mirror-like surface is of course based…on a projection. Nevertheless, the analogies are astonishingly meaningful. Just as we "see" into the depths of the waters, the deeper areas of the unconscious are also invisible to us… But on the surface, on the threshold area between consciousness and unconsciousness, dream images appear spontaneously, not only seeming to give us information about the depths but also mirroring our conscious personality…The mirroring is always by way of the symbolic image that has a place in both worlds.[92]

According to Lacan, in his reformulation of Sigmund Freud's theories, the mirror stage is a phase in which an infant establishes her ego. The reflection of the body causes a psychic response from which emerges the consciousness of the self in infants and young adults. The "other" shapes the "ego" through their interrelation within the social and linguistic frameworks. To sum up, taking a psychoanalytic account, the water's surface, with its mirror-like qualities, and the mirror generally are means for the establishment of the self and the confrontation with the self in the threshold between consciousness and unconsciousness.

In other cultural traditions, the mirror is an equally fascinating symbol. It is an object of power and miracle. The most famous example might be the magic mirror in Goethe's *Faust*. That mirror reflects

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[92] von Franz, Marie-Louise. *Projection and Re-collection in Jungian Psychology: Reflections of the Soul,* William H. Kennedy trans., Open Court Publishing Company, 1985,

one's unconsciousness. The image in the mirror is the opposite of Faust's conscious personality. Faust is driven by what he sees in the mirror and eventually his life is transformed.

In *In the Lake of the Woods*, the mirror is a central symbol. John Wade always has a mirror with him. He seems to look constantly into the mirror as long as he lives. In the novel, there are two types of mirror: a material one in reality and an abstract one in the mind. As mentioned above, John is a gifted magician. In his childhood, he used to stand for hours in front of the mirror in his basement to practice his tricks. He loved to see the magic reflected in the mirror. He gradually forms a superstition that everything can be changed and turned from bad to good in a mirror, "In the mirror, where miracles happened, John was no longer a lonely little kid. Everything was possible, even happiness. The mirror made things better." (65-66) Looking at the mirror, John seems to see a smile and hear some comforting words from his father. That which could not happen in reality would come true in the mirror. In a common sense of reflecting what is invisible, Faust's mirror reflects his unconsciousness, while John's mirror reflects his imagination and desires.

Following up with such a specific and material mirror in his childhood, John makes for himself an imaginary mirror in his mind. It is like "a glass box" installed in his mind. Within it, he can hide from bad things and live with his illusion of good things.

> he secretly kept the old stand-up mirror in his head. Pretending, of course – he understood that – but he felt calm and safe with the big mirror behind his eyes, where he could slide away behind the glass, where he could turn bad things into good things and just be happy. (66)

The mirror, in its turn, becomes "another trick", one of his own secrets - a secret of illusion along with the other secrets of reality. Even the mirror eventually becomes one more burden. Thinking about his relationship with Kathy, he realizes that "He should've done it. He should've told her about the mirrors in his head. He should've talked about the special burden of villainy, the ghosts at Thuan Yen, the strain on his dreams." (50)

Later on, the imaginary mirror in his mind is embodied in the water surface of the lake. As John stands on the edge of the lake and stares out across its surface, he thinks,

> The water here was the water there. Nothing in particular, all in general. Forests folded into forests, sky swallowed sky. The solitude bent back on itself. Everywhere was nowhere. It was perfect unity, perfect oneness, the flat mirroring waters giving off exact copies of other copies, everything in multiples, everything hypnotic and blue and meaningless, always the same. (243)

The landscape is arranged by the rule of a maze, a haunted house where the mirroring wall multiplies everything. The "exact copies of other copies," but not of the real, sounds like a Platonic metaphor which understands the reflection as an imitation, an illusion or a distorted version of reality. So many copies reflect each other that one can not track where the real one can be found. In other words, the reflection replaces to the real. At that point, memory can be erased.

> Partly window, partly mirror, the angle is where memory dissolves ... And here in a corner of John Wade's imagination, where things neither live nor die, Kathy stares up at him from beneath the surface of the silvered lake… Not quite present, not quite gone, she swims in the blending twilight of in between. (291)

Not only can memory be erased, but also does the image of Kathy in the mirror of the lake. The transformation of the mirror is something noticeable. The real object (in his basement) is shifted into an abstract idea in his mind and then is shifted again into the real lake. The image of Kathy beneath the surface of the water is probably a clue to the mystery of her disappearance. She might have committed suicide or been murdered in the lake. The fact that he sees her staring at him is another clue. One often sees the ghost of "the man I killed" rather than the man I loved. Moreover, the next morning of her missing, he found the dead plant which he watered with boiled water during the night. The dead plant probably is an indicator of Kathy's same fate, being harmed by him. "Maybe...so".

In comparison with the previous novels, *In the Lake of the Woods* goes more deeply into an individual's destiny in and after war. The broad scene of the war is reflected through the lens of a single person's fate. Through John Wade's talent for magic, we see the manipulation of the representation of the war. From the obsession and failure of a veteran, we recall the massacre. In addition, the innovative form and the metaphor of the mirror are important impressions left by the novel. Moving on to *The Sympathizer*, we will find another perspective from a younger author.

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Chronologically, *The Sympathizer* by Viet Thanh Nguyen is the most recent of the five novels studied here. Published in 2015, and winning a 2016 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, *The Sympathizer* has become a marker of the integration of Vietnamese American literature into the mainstream as a minor literature.

The Sympathizer tells a life story of a Captain in the South Vietnamese Army[93], who also serves the Communists as a spy. He flees to the United Stated at the Fall of Sai Gon[94]. He becomes a clerk in a secret army disguised as a charity organization. Following this, he flies back to Thailand where he crosses the border to Laos and then to Vietnam with the mission to overthrow the Communist regime. He is arrested and tortured by his close friend, also the agent transmitting his spy mission, and now the commissar at his reeducation camp. Predicting a dark future waiting for him, that close friend arranges another escape, this time by the sea. The novel ends when the spy is among other boat people in a boat floating in the ocean.

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[93] Officially Army of the Republic of Vietnam, existing from 1955 to 1975, closely affiliated with the United States during the Vietnam War.

[94] The Fall of Sai Gon, in the records of South Vietnam, or the Liberation of Sai Gon in the records of North Vietnam, refers to the fact that Sai Gon, the capital of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) was captured by the People's Army of Vietnam (North Vietnamese Army) and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (also known as Viet Cong) on 04/30/1975, ending the Vietnam War.

Viet Thanh Nguyen is the only author out of those discussed here who did not directly participate in the Vietnam War. He was born in Vietnam in the last years of the war and grew up in United States. He doesn't tell a story of his own experiences, but a story of a previous generation of his Vietnamese American community in the 1980s[95]. Because of his distance from the war, his works are often more objective and critical than the ones by former war correspondents or veterans. In addition, Nguyen is not merely a writer. He is also a professor of literature. The fact that creation and research are somehow intertwined in his writing is shown by a rare, rich bibliography. Because of all of these aspects, *The Sympathizer* is a unique version of Vietnam War literature.

1. Concept: From Sympathy to Nothingness

As the title implies, sympathy is the main theme of the novel which begins with a self-introduction of the main character. As the first-person narrator of the novel, he begins, "I am a spy, a sleeper, a spook, a man of two faces. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I am also a man of two minds... I am simply able to see any issue from both sides." (1) This is the way that the theme of sympathy is interpreted throughout the novel. Sympathy doesn't mean to stand between two sides in a middle position but rather to belong to both sides simultaneously. If one does so, the self is stretched in a bipolar system. The career of the main character is affirmed in the first sentence by three synonyms, "spy," "sleeper," "spook," and one more expression, "a man of two faces." Underlying the repetition is a strong desire to express a job being covered too long to bear. "Two faces" concerns the appearance, the body; "two minds" relates to the spirit, the soul. In this instance, the subject is considered as a whole body and mind. The preposition "from" moves that subjectivity into the position of different, even opposite, objectivity of "both sides". Starting from these opening lines, the narrative is a process of the division of the "I" character to the point that he becomes the "we" character. It is a challenging process lasting almost the whole length of the

[95] At that time, Vietnamese Americans were all Communist refugees. Later on, Vietnamese immigrants from different sources come. The community is no longer homogenous.

novel, since the “we” only appears in the last two thirds of the last chapter. The war is the context, the cause of this process of division.

The division of the first person narrator starts with some general contradictory emotions and feelings in the last days of the republic regime in South Vietnam. He is “feeling a need both to mourn and to celebrate” (13) as “Their beloved city was about to fall, but mine was soon to be liberated. It was the end of their world, but only a shifting of worlds for me.” (17) Individually, his complicated thoughts might be unique because of his specific identity as a spy who belongs to both sides. However, this division is also collective:

> This was common enough when many a family was divided against itself, some fighting for the north and some fighting for the south, some fighting for communism and some fighting for nationalism. Still, no matter how divided, all saw themselves as patriots fighting for a country to which they belonged. (29-30)

Here is an effort to distinguish general patriotism from political cause, the country from the regime that governs it. The sympathy is based on the nature of humankind. Every individual could be a good human being, but together they might become a dark force, as the narrator describes in the following lines:

> Our air force had bombed the presidential palace, our army had shot and stabbed to death our first president and his brother, and our bickering generals had fomented more coups d’etat than I could count. After the tenth putsch, I accepted the absurd state of our state with a mix of despair and anger, along with a dash of humor, a cocktail under whose influence I renewed my revolutionary vows. (25)

The death of the first president, as mentioned in chapter 1, is a popular reference to American intervention in South Vietnam. He was chosen since he had studied in America, being a Western intellectual. However, born in a Confucian elite family, following Confucian spirit, he supported nationalism against American influence. The CIA was believed to have backed his assassination. The first president somehow

was a man of two sides, where Eastern tradition met Western democracy. His figure foreshadows the fate of the two-faced-man.

Besides the underlying critique of the I character in the reference to the first president's assassination, the novel also explicitly critiques the intervention of superpowers in small countries. In many cases, religion, generally in the form of Christian missionaries, plays an avant-garde role in civilizing undeveloped countries - "But the Church torturing, murdering, crusading against, or infecting with disease millions of people in the name of our Lord the Savior, from Arabia to the Americas?" (77-78) - and then governmental domination follows, "a democracy destroying another country in order to save it." (61)

The expedition is mentioned in two different lights, good in theory but bad in reality. There is something in common with what Pyle does in *The Quiet American*, building a democratic force by killing civilians. Sadly, people from small countries believe in good causes rather than understand the underlying motivations behind the actions of an intervening country. The relationship between superpowers and small countries is reflected lively in the relationship between the narrator's parents. His father was a French priest, his mother was a poor Vietnamese maid in his father's church. His father taught his mother how to read and write, and she admired his knowledge. Eventually, she bore a mix race son and was discriminated against in every aspect of her life because of that. In the same way, her country is no more than a pawn in the war game between superpowers, as a veteran makes clear when he says in a speech in America, "Gentlemen, we did not fight the Vietnam war. We did not fight alone. We only fought the Vietnam battle in the Cold War between liberty and tyranny." (257)

Aware of the influence of superpowers, the narrator chooses to become a revolutionary and use that influence against the Americans; "I'd have an American degree, the best education the world could offer. I'd use that knowledge and help our people liberate themselves from the Americans." (216) Seeing things from both sides, he is self-contradiction not only in thought but also, and more importantly, in

action. There are four times when other people face deadly situations and he can only watch from a completely helpless position. This happens twice in Sai Gon during the war years, and twice in his postwar life in the United States.

The first time is when a female Communist agent is arrested. The narrator, as an officer in the Special Branch of the Southern police, witnesses the arrest, as "the policemen wrestled her to the ground." (9) He is also present in the room when she is raped by four policemen. He does nothing to save her because "I could not have risked my cover by telling her that I was on her side. I knew what fate awaited her," (9) but he keeps her file in his draw as a reminder of his failure.

The second time comes when he, in a similar position, meets an engineer, nicknamed the Watchman, who specializes in the adaptation of wristwatches as triggering devices for improvised bombs. While the Watchman is in prison, the narrator is in training to be an interrogative specialist with an American advisor. The Watchman becomes his practice case and, yet again, the narrator help him, "Otherwise I would have been sweating, trying to figure out how to be both enemy and friend to the Watchman." (189) Out of the four, the Watchman has the most in common with the first person narrator. They are both Catholic and high educated. As he interrogates the Watchman, the narrator recognizes their similarities but finds himself siding with the Americans in this moment. He thinks, speaking about the Watchman, "He had learned what the Americans taught, but he had rejected those teachings outright. I was more sympathetic to the thinking of Americans, and I confess that I could not help but see myself in their place as I broke the Watchman." (192) Both the narrator and the Watchman seem follow the same track: learning about America to use that information against America. The difference between them is in terms of the span of time during which they will use that knowledge. While the Watchman reacts "outright," and immediately, the narrator chooses a long-term plan of "help[ing] our people liberate themselves." We will discuss in more detail the issue of time posed in this novel later on. But to return to the Watchman, he is tortured by an advanced American technique which can abuse victim without using violence. In the end, he commits suicide.

The third time the narrator finds himself helpless as another faces to death is when the narrator murders the crapulent major. The two are old acquaintances from Sai Gon during the war years, and both have fled to the United States. The general, who used to be the narrator's supervisor in Sai Gon, doubts whether there is a Communist spy in the Vietnamese immigrant community. When the narrator randomly names the major, the general orders him to kill that poor suspect. It is a difficult decision. He suffers from the immoral nature of his deed, but he is encouraged by his close friend Bon, who says, "Innocent people get killed. It's only murder if you know they're innocent. Even so, that's a tragedy, not a crime." (Finally, he and Bon carry out a perfect plan to kill the major, but ultimately Bon is the one who shoots him.)

The fourth time the narrator finds himself in a similar predicament, his victim is Son Do, or Sonny, an undergraduate classmate. Sonny is a journalist. In the Vietnamese American community's plan to return to Vietnam to overthrow the Communist regime, Sonny writes some articles to state that the community should accept the fact that the war was over and stop planning to take back the country. The general decides that such arguments harm the movement. Once again, Bon suggests the plan and its necessity, "It just had to be done, and we're the ones who have to live with it." (279) The difference is that the narrator is the shooter this time.

All four times, the narrator does not, or is unable to, do anything to avoid the tragedies. In contrast, he even increases his participation in these situations that could be moral dilemmas. He just witnesses what happens to the female agent, directly interrogates the Watchman, plans to murder the crapulent major, and finally kills Sonny himself. In each instance, the relationship between the narrator and his victims is closer and closer as well. The agent is a stranger, the Watchman shares religion and education with him, he knows the major, and Sonny is his friend. On one hand, his increasing intervention and his increasingly intimate relationships with the victims indicate how deeply he has his roots on the side of the republic, although the narrator always reminds himself that he is a communist under cover. Communist is his real person, his face; republican is the role he plays, his mask. However, he also

confesses, “But most actors spent more time with their masks off than on, whereas in my case it was the reverse. No surprise, then, that sometimes I dreamed of trying to pull a mask off my face, only to realize that the mask was my face.” (136) On the other hand, the fact that he get involved deeper and deeper addresses that the war has its own force to control everyone. It is not easy to get off the role one plays in the war. The narrator thinks that he sees things from both sides, but he acts as if he is merely a republican. There is an unconscious shift between underlying nature and appearance, with time as its catalyst. The mask has been worn long enough to become a real face. It is quite reasonable that his communist comrades conclude later on that he is contaminated by the West.

The reunion with these comrades finalizes the process which turns the singular first person narrator into a plural first person narrator. During this reunion in the reeducation camp, where the narrator is prisoner, he is tortured by the methods that he used on the Watchman, the instructions from his own American manual, which falls into the commissar’s hand. His Communist comrades treat him no differently from the other prisoners. He is divided in his suffering, as the following lines show. “I was divided, tormented body below, placid consciousness floating high above, beyond the illuminated ceiling, buffered from my agony through an invisible gyroscopic mechanism.” (355)

The division at first comes horizontally between the mind and the body. Then when the “I” becomes the “we”, the division is vertical between his “two minds”. The narrator now acknowledges that his two sides can not be reconciled with each other. “No place exists for us in this revolutionary society, even for those who think of ourselves as revolutionaries. We be represented here, and this knowledge hurts more than anything done to me in my examination.” (369)

Because of their friendship, the commissar tells him the truth about why he can not be accepted, “You are nothing but a shadow standing at the mouth of his cave, some strange creature that sees things from two sides. People like you must be purged because you bear the contamination that can destroy the revolution’s purity.” (335) It’s obvious that the reference here is the Platonic cave. When the Communists

grow scared of his presence, they start to see things from two sides too. They know some "strange creature" exists, and they are not sure that they would effectively resist contamination. On one hand, the first person narrator has two minds due to his career as a spy. On the other hand, he sees being divided is human nature. "I am one but I am also two, made from an egg and a sperm." (367) In addition, his identity is unique:

> My weakness for sympathizing with others has much to do with my status as a bastard, which is not to say that being a bastard naturally predisposes one to sympathy…. After all, if she [my mother] had not blurred the lines between maid and priest, or allowed them to be blurred, I would not exist. (3)

At this point, the narrator can be read as an allegory for Vietnam in the interaction between Western civilization and native tradition. Vietnam has tried to preserve Confucian culture in family bonds, in valuation spirit over material life, and so on. The West has brought the priority individual, advance technology and convenient life. In such a tension and historical situation, the West has the power to force and Vietnam accepts in a certain level, like the narrator's mother obeys to the French priest voluntarily and quietly for her whole life. The active and passive roles of the West and Vietnam in this interaction implies a conventional literary symbol of the nation of Vietnam is often a female character. A male character as the narrator is an exception.

Though it is not as obvious as the narrator's case, his mother and Lana, the eldest daughter of a republican general under whom the narrator serves, could be such a symbol of Vietnam as well. The mother is an illiterate maid bewitched by a French priest, but she never blames him for anything. She considers her child to be a special gift that God sends to her. Against her parents' desire, Lana follows an American lifestyle. However, the East-West encounter reaches the most tension in the narrator. The conflict is inside his body rather than coming from an outside influence. He is a mixed race "bastard" who has a foot in both places without really belonging to either one. He is discriminated by both sides. Such a

choice, to use the male narrator as a symbol for Vietnam, speaks to a broader context in the novel, the way that *The Sympathizer* emphasizes the manhood of war, since all female characters are just faded shadows beside male characters. The shift of the national symbol from woman to man shows the more active role the nation plays in modernization.

The idea of a war of sympathy is highlighted by the friendship between a triad of characters: Man, Bon, and the narrator. They are middle school classmates who have promised an oath to be blood brothers. Growing up, they follow different roads. Man is a communist, the narrator is an undercover communist, which means that he is "contaminated" and becomes partially republican, and Bon is a republican. Both Man and Bon are extreme in their causes. Man eventually tortures his close friend, and Bon just wants to kill communists. However, the three always maintain their friendship. This three-person brotherhood refers to the most famous one in East Asian history and popular culture represented in the medieval historical novel, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms.* In the first chapter of this text, three future heroes, Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, swear an oath of allegiance in a peach garden. From that opening scene, the novel follows friendship in harsh challenge of war and power. In contrast to the close friendship between Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, the triad in *The Sympathizer* stand side by side for a common purpose. The war interrupts their friendship, and their friendship in turn offers a glimpse of the possibility of sympathy between different sides in the war. In other words, the war of sympathy blurs the lines between the two opposing sides in the fighting. All wars aim to resolve conflict. When the conflict is in a relief, it consequently makes the war less reasonable. The purposelessness of the war is approached from two perspectives. The republican side acknowledges that a small country is nothing more than a puppet controlled by superpowers. In the meantime, the communist side faces the dark reality of the postwar period.

Unfortunately, the purposelessness of the war is only discovered in the final phases of the war and its aftermath. In the last days of the Southern regime, the leaders realize the betrayal of the Americans:

> ...the America had promised us salvation from Communism if we only did as we were told. They started this war, and now that they're tired of it, they've sold us out.... Not who is there to blame but ourselves? We were foolish enough to think they would keep their word. (11)

However, the American has its own difficulties, its own internal opposition, "The Democrats. The media. The antiwar movement. The hippies. The college students. The radicals. America was weakened by its own internal divisions." (119) There is a civil war not only between the North and the South of Vietnam, but also within a diverse American society. Even when the war is considered to be over, another war of fratricide – to use a Vietnamese expression - is still going on in reeducation camps where Vietnamese people abuse each other. Even in that postwar period, the superpowers' hands and influence are still present. When he returns to Vietnam in later part of the novel, the narrator is tortured using American technique supported by a serum to compel people to tell the truth,

> ...a gift from the KGB, although we both know what the great powers expect for their gifts. They have tested their techniques, their weapons, and their ideas on our small country… These lightbulbs? Manufactured in the USA, and the generator that powers them as well, although the gasoline is a Soviet import. (344-345)

This is a critical view of the superpowers who treat small countries as their laboratory under the guise of goodwill, salvation and gifts. This argument is fully developed in a lengthy soliloquy from the narrator in the last chapter of the novel,

> ... if history's ship had taken a different tack, … if we acknowledged that we are all puppets in someone else's play, if we had not fought a war against each other,....if the Americans hadn't come to save us from ourselves, … if the Japanese hadn't taught us the superiority of the yellow race, if the French had never sought to civilize us, if Ho Chi Minh had not been dialectical and Karl Marx not analytical,.... (353)

The soliloquy is full of unreal assumptions about milestones in the history of the Westernization of Vietnam. The repetition of assumptions not only expresses the reevaluation of history but also reexamines the war in a larger context. This is not an isolated war but rather it is connected to colonialism and modernization, which are too big to be solved by a small country. The war therefore is meaningless. Although the republicans realize that they are only a means to serve superpowers' purpose, they do not accept that the war is over, a sentiment the narrator expresses in a conversation with Ms. Mori, who once is his mistress, "Wars never die, I said. They just go to sleep." (225)

The Vietnamese republicans then devise a plan to take over the country from communist regime. With the support from a congress candidate who is a Vietnam War veteran, under the guise of a nonprofit organization to help immigrants, they attempt to raise funds to train an army to send back to Vietnam. All these events actually happened in the 1980s but have never been represented in either a literary or an official historical account.[96] For the first time, then, this new revolution is represented in *The Sympathizer*, with an ironic tone. The fundraising starts with the open of a chain of restaurants to sell *pho*, a traditional Vietnamese soup. As one character frames this action, "It's a secret, but an open secret. People come here and their soup is spiced with the idea they're helping the revolution." (197) The narrator also comes to term with revolution in general, "Revolutions begin this way, with men willing to fight no matter what the odds, volunteering to give up everything because they had nothing… If they fail, call them fools. But if they do not fail, they are heroes and visionaries, whether alive or dead." (221-222) At the beginning, the revolutionaries do not have a belief in their cause. Revolution is meaningless for them as soon as they join it, an idea best understood by what Bon says about his participation, an idea he likely holds in common

[96] The National United Front for the Freedom of Vietnam (The Front, for short) was founded on September 10, 1982 with Hoang Co Minh, a former South Vietnam vice admiral, elected as chairman. He left Washington DC for Thailand where he would connect with activists in Vietnam to build up a movement on the ground, aiming to overthrow the Communist regime by popular uprising. In 1987, Hoang Co Minh was ambushed and killed by Communist troops while he was leading a group of 200 people from Thailand to Vietnam. This was a big case with hundreds imprisoned in Vietnam. The successor of The Front, Vietnam Reform Revolutionary Party, which still exists, aims to establish democracy and reform the country by peaceful means.

with many of his comrades. He says to the narrator, “I’m dying because this world I’m living in isn’t worth dying for! If something is worth dying for, then you’re got a reason to live.” (224)

The ironic climax comes in the observation of the similarity between the new revolutionary base and the communist base in the war, the way that the admiral, the leader of the new base, is an “uncanny look-alike” for Ho Chi Minh, “Welcome, men, the admiral said, and even in the gentle intonation of his voice I heard echoes of the newsreel on which Ho Chi Minh’s cultivated and calm voice was recorded.” (292-293) From the observations of a third party, the reversal of the situation of the two forces, between official regime and secret revolutionary army, reflects a view of history as circular movement. However, the admiral himself does not consider his organization to be in the position of the communists during the war years. He instead chooses a religious reference,

> My child, he said, still stroking the goatee, remember Jesus and how Christianity began with just him, his apostles, their faith, and the Word of God. We are like those true believers. We have two hundred apostles in this camp, a radio station broadcasting the word of freedom into our enslaved homeland, and guns. We have things Jesus and his apostles never had, but we have their faith, too, and not least - furthest from least - God is on our side. (294)

Through his use of simile, political content is squeezed into a religious form. The difference between politics and religion is violence. Revolution is identified as a combination of religious faith and violence.

On the other side of the war, the victors seem confused about what to do next, “What do those who struggle against power do when they seize power? What does the revolutionary do when the revolution triumphs?” (381) After all, while the Americans betrayed the Vietnamese republicans, the communists betrayed the people. The communists “promise freedom and independence, but deliver only poverty and enslavement.” (220)

Freedom and independence are words you can read everywhere in Vietnam, on every piece of letter head, on banners, on public buildings. These words “freedom and independence” are posed at the

very beginning of the novel as the narrator witnesses the Fall of Saigon, meaning that the victory of the North comes closer and closer. As the narrator states, "'Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom.' There were words we are willing to die for." (27) It is not until the very end of the novel, while being imprisoned by his communist comrades, that the narrator gains enlightenment. He realizes, "... that Man meant freedom for classes and collectivities. He did not necessary mean that individuals would be freed." (327) A significant number of pages in the last three chapters are reserved for meditation on the idea of freedom and independence. Man asks the first person narrator again and again, "What is more precious than independence and freedom?" while the narrator is in torture under high voltage bulbs. The narrator keeps saying "Nothing" until his moment of enlightenment, "How could I forget that every truth meant at least two things, that slogans were empty suits draped on the corpse of an idea? The suits depended on how one wore them, and this suit was now worn out." (371) "This suit," one popular understanding of the slogan, fits during the war when everyone is fighting for the collective freedom and independence of their country. In peace, "this suit" seems to be worn out, "...while nothing is more precious than independence and freedom, *nothing is also more precious than independence and freedom*! These two slogans are almost the same, but not quite." (375) The author plays with the word "nothing," which is associated with the concept of emptiness and the void in Buddhist philosophy. On further examination, it also recalls the emptiness in Laozi's theory. The meaning of the second slogan separates it from Marxism, turning it back to the origin of East Asian philosophy.

In *The Sympathizer*, there are two characters can be seen as an embodiment of the Vietnam War. The narrator, a man of two minds, symbolizes the war of sympathy. He was born half Western and half Vietnamese. He works for both sides in the war. His close friend, Man, whose face was destroyed by napalm in the very last days of the war, symbolizes for the war for nothingness. In the torture, while Man keeps repeating "What is more precious than independence and freedom?", he is wondering himself as well. He might probably come up with the same answer of nothingness, as the narrator thinks "When he looked into the mirror and saw the void he understood the meaning of nothing." (375) It could be inferred

that Man is an example victim of the pilot, who is in torment after hitting the button to drop a napalm in *The Quiet American*. The napalm in *The Quiet American* is dropped in the 1950s, Man's incident happened in 1975. The napalm is still there through a long term in history, as a maltreatment from super power to small country. Only hitting a button from height is very easy, but it causes a horrible effect on the ground where is completely invisible to the pilot. Such victims like Man seems be exiled from humankind since he doesn't want anybody, including his loved ones, see his destroyed face. Man and the narrator, who is exiled from his country, are losers even though their side won the war. "Besides a man with no face, only a man of two minds could get this joke, about how a revolution fought for independence and freedom could make those things *worth less than nothing*." (376)

After all, the most valuable thing is that the I, at this point becoming the we, character is always optimistic even in his second trip to exile, "Despite it all - yes, despite everything, in the face of *nothing* - we still consider ourselves revolutionary. We remain that most hopeful of creature, a revolutionary in search of a revolution, although we will not dispute being called a dreamer doped by an illusion." (382)

2. Memory: Exile and Guilty

In *The Sympathizer*, Viet Thanh Nguyen defines an exile as a "displaced person" (199). At its most basic level, the novel is "a rambling history of the exiles since their departure from camp, told from their teary-eyed point of view, the telling of which stirred tears in me as well." (68) Memories, illusions, and confusion between the old and new land often come to characters' mind, as they, in imagination, travel back to the days when they still lived in Sai Gon, in the "Saigonese streets they called by their old French names." (20) In their domination, the French named Saigonese streets based on their own memory of their remote country France. Then the French names seem to push local people away from their native land, make them feel strange in their fatherland. In turn, those local Vietnamese become exiles. The feeling of here and there, strange and alien are always mixed together whenever they remind their Sai Gon streets. On the way of exile, the narrator also thinks about America differently in every phase of his

journey. Before his arrival, American is something "super", "America, land of super markets and superhighways, of supersonic jets and Superman, of supercarriers and the Super Bowl!" (29) All kinds of "super" things, from the economy to transportation, from technology to sports, become the backdrop from which stands out a Superman, who is considered to be an icon of American values: fighting for truth, justice, and the American way. Perhaps more importantly, Superman is somehow an "immigrant" from another planet, who then becomes a typical American. He symbolizes for the newcomers' hope of acceptance. After the narrator's arrival in the United States, he recalls another American characteristic he learned about during the war years while he was a student in America, "*Ho Ho Ho* was not the signature call of Santa Claus, but was instead the beginning of a popular chant that went *Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh, the NLF is gonna win*!" (61) The association between Santa's call and the song encouraging Ho Chi Minh in the war is ironic by opposition. Santa's call implies joy and happiness. War call suggests blood and suffering. Such the same core of opposition, social movements go against governmental strategy. While the American government supports South Vietnam, a certain portion of the U.S. population praises the North with Santa's melody or whatsoever else. On one side, the divergence addresses American democracy. On the other, it weakens American force.

When the narrator returns to Asia, crossing the border between Thailand and Laos, he encounters America again, this time as a mark on the landscape, "The bomb crater was an American footprint, a sign that we had entered Laos." (298) The footprint can be interpreted in several ways. A bomb represents American technology, global power, and war strategy. A footprint can be a remnant of memory, like the way we often take the tiny footprint of a newborn baby. The bomb crater is what America left behind in Indochina after its withdrawal and how Indochina remembers America.

On his way through Laos, the narrator confuses between his actual place and America. "I nodded, concentrating on the fireflies, their collective signal outlining the shapes of the bamboo trees in a wilderness Christmas." (300) Night time, the jungle, and fireflies all suggest a ghostly appearance. The sudden association of that setting with a Christmas tree alters that initial atmosphere. Negative becomes

positive. Horror becomes miracle. The two places, Asia and the United States or the West, become conflated. Bamboo is different from pine. A Vietnamese local plant is seen as a Christmas tree. The narrator seems to be on a trip back home for a Christmas reunion. In reality, he is going back home, not for a happy reunion but to start a new war. Moreover, Christmas is not an official holiday in Vietnam. Vietnamese family reunions happen on the Lunar New Year instead. An American tradition of homecoming is applied in Vietnamese territory. The idea of place is disordered.

The confusion of places leads to the disorder of cultural identity. As usual, cultural convention affects women and the way women are treated more than men. The shift between Eastern and Western culture in the novel is conveyed in two female figures: Lana and Ms. Mori. Both are the narrator's lovers by different ways and at different times.

Ms. Mori is a Japanese American. She is a colleague of the narrator at the university. She does not feel comfortable when everybody references to her Asian origin. "So why are we supposed to not forget *our* culture? Isn't my culture right here since I was born here?" (75, original emphasis) At the beginning of their relationship, she proposes an agreement that their love is free from all ties of responsibility. Sometimes, the narrator feels as though he is really in love with her, but she always reminds him of their agreement. When he leaves for the Philippines for a job after a month or so, he does not contact her. Then she falls into Sonny's arms. Unlike with the narrator, she wants a commitment in the relationship with Sonny. The narrator loses her because he takes her agreement of free love seriously. He gives her complete freedom just to push her to another loving embrace. She might reject Asian culture in words but still follows it in deeds. She has a traditional Asian love with Sonny, a serious relationship towards a family bond. The department chair where Ms. Mori and the narrator serve once concludes, "Is the Oriental in the West to feel forever homeless, a stranger, a foreigner, no matter how many generations lived on the soil of Judeo-Christian culture, never able to do away with the Confucian residue of his ancient, noble heritage?" (64-65)

Lana is a different case. Born as Lan[97]to an elite Southern family, she has a wish to rebel against Confucian convention which determines that woman depends on her father, her husband, and then her son, and her position is taking care the family. She commits suicide when her parents refuse to grant her permission to study in the United States. When their family moves to the States, her parents are impotent to prevent her from changing completely. She becomes a singer whose performance attracts the narrator when she covers *Bang Bang*, "the most memorable, masterfully weaving together of love and violence in the enigmatic story of two lovers." (238)

More than once, Viet Thanh Nguyen uses music as a catalyst of memory. *Bang Bang* is analyzed the most profoundly in the novel. "*Bang bang* was the sound of memory's pistol firming into our heads, for we could not forget love, we could not forget war, we could not forget lovers, we could not forget enemies, we could not forget home, and we could not forget Saigon." (238) Being a popular foreign song during the war years, *Bang Bang* becomes an expression of love and hate simultaneously. When a song moves in space and time, it can adopt new content from specific context, as we see when the narrator expresses his perception of different versions of the song, "What did Nancy Sinatra know when she sang *bang bang*? To her, those were bubble-gum pop lyrics. *Bang bang* was the soundtrack of our lives." (238) Lana's voice and their sharing memory in *Bang bang* appeals the narrator. However, the narrator's feeling for Lana has its roots in his secret desire to possess her when she was a teenager as he lived in her parents' mansion. When the narrator sees Lana, he thinks about "the school girl white *ao dai* that had sent many a Western writer into near-pederastic fantasies about the nubile bodies whose every curve was revealed without displaying an inch of flesh." (114) When the narrator lives in the family's mansion, he and Lana are physically close, in the same home, but distant in terms of social class. Lana is the daughter of his supervisor. He has no right to approach her. When they meet again in the United States, the material distance is further but the class difference is erased. The narrator does not fall in love with a

[97] Lan means orchard, a popular Vietnamese woman's name that expresses the Confucian opinion of woman's position as a man's dependent.

specific Lana. In fact, he loves a symbol of his culture and his youth. Lana does not love the captain under her father's leadership either. He, in turn, is a symbol of her past as well, a reminder of the peaceful and youthful days under her parents' care, the safety and happiness which she has since tried to reject. He approaches Lana's new look with the feeling for Lan's appearance in the past, "she returned in my fantasies many times over the subsequent weeks. Regardless of what I wanted or deserved, she inevitably appeared in a white *ao dai*…. Even in my somnambulant state I knew that white was not only the color of purity and innocence. It was also the sign of mourning and death." (124)

The white color is a sign of mourning and death in Confucian culture. People wear white instead of black at Vietnamese funerals. In this image of Lana, the narrator, in exile, is mourning for the republic of Vietnam and his remote past. All of the young and Western educated characters—the narrator, Lana, Ms. Mori and Sonny—unconsciously share a collective culture. That is why they feel "forever homeless" in the West. They lose their culture on one hand and their social position on the other. Therefore, they organize the secret army in the hope of taking back their country and regaining their honor. They fight "to resist being forgotten." (138)

Yet even worse than being forgotten is ignorance, having never been known at all, "Americans [were] so tall they neither looked through nor looked down on these newcomers. They simply looked over them." (94)

Displacement from the exile's viewpoint is a loss. From an American standpoint, the Vietnamese exiles are useless extras, as the following quotation shows; "We threatened the sanctity and symmetry of a white and black America whose yin and yang racial politics left no room for any other color, particularly that of pathetic little yellow skinned people pickpocketing the American purse." (117) Displacement then moves from a spatial to a temporal dimension.

> We were displaced persons, but it was time more than space that defined us. While the distance to return to our lost country was far but finite, the number of years it would take to close that

> distance was potentially infinite. Thus, for displaced people, the first question was always about time: When can I return?.....Displaced people also lived in two time zones, the here and the there, the present and the past, being as we were reluctant time travelers. But while science fiction imagined time travelers as moving forward or backward in time, this timepiece demonstrated a different chronology. The open secret of the clock, naked for all to see, was that we were only going in circles. (199)

"The here and the there" of exile is transformed from the spatial to the temporal. The displaced people always keep two clocks at their homes or offices; one shows the time where they live and the other shows Sai Gon time. In fact, Sai Gon is fourteen or fifteen hours ahead of California, in the summer and winter, respectively, where the story happens. In order words, day and night are opposite while the time on the clock is pretty close. This fact causes an illusion of the mixture between "the here and the there". The "time travelers" are actually time zone travelers, like normal place travelers. The impossibility of normal travel between places deepens the bitterness of exile.

In exile, the memories of loved ones often stand out the most. The narrator thinks about his mother frequently. He remembers many things: how poor she is, how she is discriminated against by her relatives because of she gave birth to a mix race child, how she expects his success, the comfort of her chest, the tastiness of her food, and so on. The most touching moment comes in Philippines. The narrator is working as a special advisor to the filming of a Vietnam war movie there. He puts his mother's picture and writes her name on a fake grave in a simulative cemetery made for the filming. The names on the other graves are copied from the California phone book. Of course, they are all still alive. His mother's grave is the only "real" one belonging to a dead person. He talks to the grave, prays for his mother the whole time he works with the crew in the illusion that he is by his mother's actual grave in Vietnam. When the film ends, the cemetery is destroyed by an explosion in the last scene, and that destruction deeply affects the narrator, "It was only a fake cemetery with its fake tomb of my mother, but the eradication of this creation, in its wantonness and its whimsy, hurt me with unexpected severity." (180)

The narrator's memory of his mother is switched from an abstract state of mind to a fake yet material tomb. The setting is fake but the memory is true, the feeling is very sincere. In a sense, the tomb is no longer a fake one since it bears the real records. In a normal situation, the tomb evokes the memory of the dead. In this circumstance, memory makes the tomb alive.

As much as the narrator loves his mother, he hates his father, a French priest who reluctantly fathers a child in an affair with a local Vietnamese maid. The memories of the narrator's mother are warm while those of his father are cold. He remembers the moral and biblical lectures, the same kind of cookie sent every new year, and the only brief letter to inform him of his mother's death. Of course, he does not think about his father much. He remembers the most about his mother's living moments, in contrast to his primary memories of his father: his father's image of death. In the death of a country man, killed by a mine while the renaissance army is crossing the border from Laos to Vietnam, the narrator makes some remarkable connections with his father.

> I carried his leg as far away from me as possible, its weight growing more and more like the Bible my father made me hold in front of the classroom as punishment for some transgression, my arm outstretched with the book on the scale of my hand. I carried that memory still, along with the memory of my father in his coffin, corpse as white as the affectless lieutenant's protruding bone…. We ended our forced march after two hours, the same amount of time devoted to my father's funeral Mass. (302-303)

The parallels here are striking -- the leg and the Bible in weight, the father's skin and the bone of the leg in color, the march and the funeral in length of time. His mother died while he was studying abroad, and so he never sees her final moments. His father sends him a message, asking him to come before he dies. That last moment with his father haunts him long after. The narrator used to long for his father's death because of all suffering he brought to his mother and himself. When it really happens, he feels no satisfaction. His father never accepts him as a son but asks for him on this dead bed, an act many people

take with their children. It can be said that only his father's death brings them together in a real father-son relationship, if only for the briefest of moments.

In a broader setting, the march of the new formed army unit carrying the body of the unlucky countryman is like a negative version of Rabelais' world from Bakhtinian perspective. In *Rabelais and His World*, published in 1965, Mikhail Bakhtin points out two important subtexts of carnival and grotesque realism. At carnival time and place, individuals feel they are part of collectivity. Through custom and masking, they exchange bodies and are renewed. During the march, however, that exchange, the leg, leads not to renewal but to the terminal of life. In that march, there were

> human ghosts and beast ghosts, plant ghosts and insect ghosts, the spirits of dead tigers and bats and cycads and hobgoblins, vegetable world and animal world heaving with claims to the afterlife as well. The entire forest shimmered with the antics of death, the comedian, and life, the straight man, a duo that would never break up. To live was to be haunted by the inevitability of one's own decay, and to be dead was to be haunted by the memory of living…. Dozens of insane, murderous fireflies flickered on and off on the forest, only they were muzzle flashes. (305-306)

The city square of Rabelais's carnival is replaced by the night forest. The fireflies' light replaces music and performance in a carnival. The attendees are all kinds of ghosts that form a collectivity. There is no separation between human and beast, strong tiger and weak bat. The body in focus is the leg. In addition, the last couple chapters in the novel emphasize the foot as a mean of torture as well (Man's foot keep kicking the narrator to keep him awake). Both the leg and the foot are closed parts of the body, as opposed to the open orifices, like the mouth, that Bakhtin describes. There is not any exchange among grotesque and open bodies. The leg and foot are related to transportation and movement. The end of a leg is immobility and death.

If memory of exile exists unconsciously, memory of guilt is always there in consciousness. In the following passage, we can see the continual presence of guilt in the narrator's mind.

> These situations were so unpleasant that the memories of those whom I had seen interrogated continued to hijack me with fanatic persistence: the wiry Montagnard with a wire twisted around his neck and a twisted grimace on his face; the stubborn terrorist in his white room and with his purple face, impervious to everything except the one thing; the communist agent with the papier-mâché evidence of her espionage crammed into her mouth, our sour name literally on the tip of her tongue. These captured subversives had only one destination, but there were many unpleasant side roads to get there. (80)

The white color surfaces many times in the novel: the white skin of superior Westerners, the white traditional dress of Vietnamese women, the white of the hospital, the white of movie screen, and the white of the two interrogation rooms, the first one where the narrator is the interrogator and the second one where he is interrogated. Among all these white things, the white rooms are described in the most detail. The white rooms is the application of American research on how color affects human psychology and brain processes, with the goal of putting the mind in unbearable tension. The same white color can be interpreted many, even contradictory, ways, such as the purity of white *ao dai* and the mourning of white fabric mentioned above. After all, there is the white of "mourning and death" with "only one destination, but there were many unpleasant side roads to get there." It parodies the popular expression that all roads lead to Rome, though the destination is not a glorious place, just a nothingness of death.

The large number of people whom the narrator had seen interrogated are just a backdrop against which stand out the crapulent major and Sonny, who are his direct victims. He remembers those he interrogated alive, though suffering. Only the crapulent major and Sonny appear in his memory as dead. In other words, they are ghosts, one of the few things the narrator fears, "Although I did not believe in God, I believed in ghosts. I knew this to be true because while I did not fear God, I feared ghosts." (204) He should have believed in God since he was raised as a Catholic. His disappointment in his father, a representative of religion, causes his disbelief in God. His father is kind of memory of guilt as well, the guilt of an undisciplined priest. The ghosts are the hauntings of his own guilt. This is a two-way haunting.

Victims haunt the culprit and vice versa. Not only does the narrator not want to meet Sonny, but neither does Sonny want to see the narrator. The narrator wishes he could see the spirit of his mother instead, as he states at one point, “I remember the injustice of how my mother never came to visit me after her death no matter how many times I cried out for her, unlike Sonny and the crapulent major, whom I would carry with me forever.” (305) Similarly, Sonny wishes that Ms. Mori, rather than the narrator, could see him, “I’ve tried to visit her and put her at peace but she can’t see me. Whereas you, who I would rather not see at all, can see me all the time.” (326)

The last moments between the narrator and both of his victims relate to the eye. The bullet makes a hole on the crapulent major’s forehead like a third eye, “No matter whether my eyes were open or shut, I could still see it, the crapulent major’s third eye, weeping because of what he could see about me.” (110) After shooting Sonny, the first person narrator touches to his eyes to make sure he is dead. The eye at the last moment is like a window closing on life and opening to an afterlife. The eye relates to a look, to vision. The interaction with the eyes foresees the fact that dead will follow to, always look at the narrator. At first, the crapulent major “was ringing me up a few times a day, tenacious as a debt collector.” (140) When Sonny joins the “group” and the narrator leaves for Asia, from the moment he boards in the airplane, the crapulent major and Sonny accompany him constantly, all the time and everywhere, “I was in a daze and terribly uncomfortable, sharing my seat as I was with the crapulent major on one side and Sonny on the other.” (280)

As a matter of fact, the presence of these two ghosts is a mixture of memory and imagination. The narrator forget the fact that he has committed murder, therefore the crapulent major and Sonny are unforgettable images. But their appearance neither reveals some secret in the past nor serves as revenge for their deaths as ghosts usually do in literature. In contrast, they somehow continue to intervene in the narrator’s present life with their observations and comments. The fact that they neither blame the narrator nor question their own deaths implies that they accept the political game. They know the war did not cease after the Fall of Sai Gon. They continue their lives after their deaths. They laugh on the march with

the narrator crossing through Laos, they swing above the narrator while he falls asleep. Most importantly, in the most concise part of the whole novel, chapters 21 and 22, they witness the narrator being interrogated by Communist cadres and join in the conversation sometimes. These chapters are partly dialogues among the narrator, the commissar, the commandant, the doctor, and the two ghosts. The ghosts show their attention and interest in the argument of living people. They do not talk much, but their conversations are clearly personalized. Sonny's ghost, for example, still possesses the sharp mind of a journalist.

The main character in *In the Lake of the Woods* also remembers his war crime, which is not his alone but a collective war crime. And that war crime is absolutely over. The narrator here remembers his individual murders under orders during the war. And everything is still continuing, all the killing, fighting, and torture. Even the ghosts seem to actively join to this endless circle.

The Sympathizer opens with friendship among the trio of the narrator, Man and Bon and it ends with the trio of the narrator, the crapulent major's ghost and Sonny's ghost. The first trio represents a human relationship over political opinion and war. The second trio is a fatal combination caused by political conflict and war.

3. Representation: A Confession and a Hollywood movie

Memory of guilty can be relieved partly at least in a confession at the church. The Communist government makes writing confession popular in order to control people rather than to help them to relieve themselves. "Despite the chronic shortages of almost every good and commodity, there was no shortage of paper, since everyone in the neighborhood was required to write confessions on a periodic basis." (380) It sounds ironic but it's true. Writing confessions happens everywhere in Southern Vietnam during the early post war years. People have to tell the new government their own war stories. As a basic rule of writing, the readers should be concerned first.

The novel itself is written in the form of a confession lasting eighteen out of twenty three chapters or 307 pages. The last five chapters address what happens to the narrator once the confession is finished and submitted to the commandant. It is likely that the length of the first eighteen chapters randomly falls in the number of 307, but 307 is not a random number. The total of the three digits is 10. In Vietnamese belief, the bigger the total of the digits, the better and luckier the number. The possible biggest total is 9, 10 is counted as 0. People always try to avoid such numbers in their address or on their license plate. The digit total 10 of 307 suggests the nothingness of the war discussed above.

In the story, the narrator spends an entire year writing and rewriting this 307-page confession. Within this narrative, there is another sub narrative: the letters he writes to Man's aunt in Paris, who is actually another North Vietnamese agent, to report on immigrant life. As a spy, he writes reports all the time. We are not given chance to read his reports from his time in Sai Gon, though the reports from the US are copied fully in his confession. The difference is that the reports from Sai Gon are objective records of others' activities, while the reports from the US are his self representation, his own stories and tears.

Although the narrator opens his confession with "I am a spy," (1) the novel be categorized as a spy novel that focuses on difficult missions and praises the spy's cleverness. *The Sympathizer* does not otherwise describe spy activities except for writing and sending letters and a trick of invisible ink. The confession tells of a serious South Vietnamese officer before the end of the war and a typical immigrant after. He claims, but does not show, that he is a communist or revolutionary. Yes, he devotes his youth, even sacrifices his right to love and to marriage, in order to work for the North. However, unconsciously, he does not think like someone from North Vietnam. The book he reads, the music he listens to, the wine he drinks, all his habits belong to the West, to America, to a Southern republican. Originally, the narrator is elite because of his American education. He believes that he belongs to both sides, but his writing represents just one side. Therefore, he frequently gets in trouble with his confession and the commandant

makes him to write the confession over and over. The narrator ignores the readers. That weakness causes all the consequences on him in the last five chapters.

> You, on the other hand, won't tell me what I want to hear. Does that make you very smart or very stupid?.... Even in this latest revision, you quote Uncle Ho only once. This is but one symptom, among many in your confession, that you prefer foreign intellectuals and culture over our native traditions. (311-312)

His confession should put the reader at the center. What the reader wants to hear wins over the truth. It echoes Tim O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story," the complex relationship between the experience of war and the art of storytelling. In this case, not the art but the viewpoint of the storyteller is matter. As the commandant comments, "It is the language of the elite. You must write for the people." (319)

The commandant, the commissar and their comrades blame him for not doing anything to save the female North Vietnamese agent and the Watchman. Even though the confession lasts 307 pages, what the readers focus on is beyond the text. They infer what is not confessed, and punish the narrator for what he does not do. On the other front, the crapulent major is sentenced for what he does not do either, or more precisely, for what the narrator does, being a Communist spy.

According to Viet Thanh Nguyen, the narrator is a fictional character. However, anyone who is familiar with that historical period can loosely see the prototypes of the narrator in some famous Communist agents who were from intellectual backgrounds. Even though they went through the war, they never had a happy ending when the Communist government rose to power. It is said that a spy be trusted because spies are always suspected of working as double agents. *The Sympathizer* offers another account. Because of their origins and the length of time they live with the other side, spies' masks become undetachable. That is the real reason that separates them from Communists. Fowler in *The Quiet American* has to choose a stance one day. He is unable to keep his outsider position in the middle. In

much the same way, the narrator is unable to belong to both sides. The war has its own force drawing each and all into its spin.

The confession is written reluctantly, but it in turn becomes the only legacy the narrator leaves behind, as he explains when he says, “We have nothing to leave to anyone except these words, our best attempt to represent ourselves against all those who sought to represent us.” (380) This is valuable since it’s a self representation, a rare version against numerous versions written by the other outsiders. And yet, even a confession is not pure self representation, a realization the narrator himself makes after he has to revise his confession many times on the sake of the readers:

> I spent the entire trip brooding over the problem of representation. Not to own the means of production can lead to premature death, but not to own the means of representation is also a kind of death. For if we are represented by others, might they not, one day, hose our deaths off memory’s laminated floor? Still smarting from my wounds even now, I help but wonder, writing this confession, whether I own my own representation or whether you, my confessor, do. (189)

Posing that question, the narrator shows the impotence of his own words and that the final purpose of the representation he has created is not being forgotten. The acknowledgement of this misrepresentation hurts the narrator the most, even more than the wounds of torture, a feeling he expresses near the end of the novel when he says, “No place exists for us in this revolutionary society, even for those who think of ourselves as revolutionaries. We be represented here, and this knowledge hurts more than anything done to me in my examination.” (369)

Following Man’s plan, the narrator flees once more, by boat this time, “Tomorrow we will join those tens of thousands who have taken to the sea, refugees from a revolution.” (380) In dictionary, a refugee is a person who is forced to leave her country in order to escape war, persecution or natural disaster. The positive meaning of revolution is shifted to negative in this statement from the narrator. The journey to the sea, or the whole journey in *The Sympathizer*, expresses the deadlock of a generation of

South Vietnamese. The first-person narrator is a spy. He has to undertake his own professional tragedy. But the Southern people around him are trapped in a deadlock as well. A large portion of the Southern army fled from Sai Gon through the danger of the last chaotic day at the airport. Some of them, like Bon, even lost their loved ones as they arrived in the United States. However, after settling in the States, they always look back to their hometown and to their past, likely living in the two time zones described above. Eventually, they return to Vietnam as a newly formed army with the ambition of defeating the Communists to take the country back. They fly to Thailand and march through Laos to penetrate illegally into Vietnam. Again, they face fatal danger and some die. Their lives are too dramatic to be represented. However, they are minority in the United States and on the losing side in Vietnam, and history is written by those in power. Most of the time, they do not have the right to represent themselves. That is the reason why the narrator often recalls Karl Marx's famous quotation in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, "'They represent themselves; they must be represented.' Isn't that what's happening here? Marx refers to peasants but he may as well refer to us." (144)

In this important text, Marx analyses the nature of peasants' political consciousness. Edward Said quotes this sentence as an epigraph to his *Orientalism*. In Said's account, Westerners maintain the authority to represent – to narrate and to govern -- the East. It is very likely that the narrator applies Said's context rather than the original Marx's contest, since the issue of representation relates to governance. As the narrator describes it at one point, "Western media had given it a new name, the boat people, an epithet one might think referred to a newly discovered tribe of the Amazon river on a mysterious, extinguished prehistoric population whose only surviving trace was their watercraft." (151) The tone in these lines shows that the Vietnamese refugees do not like the name "boat people." As stated in the above lines, it sounds like something that already exists but has only just recently been discovered. The situation of boat people, indeed, emerges right at that moment, and they do not want to be pushed into the past, the area of forgetfulness.

Media is a way to represent the present, but art is another way to represent the future as well. *The Sympathizer* gives an account of typical artistic representation in detail. The first person narrator works as local advisor for a film about the Vietnam War for a while. The Hollywood film set is one of the main settings in the novel. Hollywood, like the *Life* magazine in *Yellow Fever* is typical for media, is a perfect reference of art production. Hollywood is a symbol of American popular culture. The politics of Hollywood representation is discussed at length in the novel. For instance, "We represent ourselves, Hollywood represents us. So we must do what we can to ensure that we are represented well." (144) That is what the narrator keeps in mind as he works on the film crew. As for the Hollywood staff, they hire him for a "human touch" for their film. They do not want him to give them "anything we could find in a book. But we'll need that human touch you can provide." (139)

At the beginning, both Hollywood film crew and the narrator want to achieve the most realistic representation. The narrator tries his best to do so. He does not accept a film about the Vietnam War without a dialogue between Vietnamese characters. He corrects the way the Vietnamese scream. The director edits the script according to his advice. However, the final product is no more than "a medical school training film in anatomical dissection" (287). The film is successful in its representation of blood and horror, the material side of a war. But it fails to convey the soul, the spirit of war generally and the Vietnam War specifically. As the narrator recognizes, "The swing of a dialect and the trim of a costume had to be real, but the truly important things in such a movie, like emotions or ideas, could be fake." (179)

Nevertheless, this is clearly the viewpoint of the narrator and other people directly involved in the war like him. Unfortunately (or fortunately enough?), they are not Hollywood's major audience. That shortcoming of "truly important things", "like emotions or ideas" will not set a limit for the success of the film. Otherwise, the film could even be considered to be the equivalent of the war itself:

> making this movie was going to war itself. When your grandchildren ask you what you did during the war, you can say, I made this movie... A great work of art is something as real as reality itself,

> and sometimes even more real than the real. Long after this war is forgotten, when its existence is a paragraph in a schoolbook students won't even bother to read, and everyone who survived it is dead, their bodies dust, their memories atoms, their emotions no longer in motion, this work of art will still shine so brightly it will not just be about the war but it will be the war. (178)

This is the power of artistic representation over reality and historical account. The necessary and sufficient condition to give rise to that power is the distance in both dimensions of time and space. The narrative mentions the term of time, how reality can transform into art after time passes. The story tells about space. The Vietnamese film set is located in the Philippines, a Vietnam War film made by an American crew in Philippines, screening in Thailand. All are the issues of space.

No matter how much the narrator contributes to the film, his name is erased from it. He does not have even the most modest credit line on the screen, "Failing to do away with me in real life, he had succeeded in murdering me in fiction, obliterating me utterly in a way that I was becoming more and more acquainted with." (289) This elimination fulfills the meaning of a group without ability to represent themselves, as Bon's concludes in a conversation with the narrator, "You tried to play their game, okay? But they run the game. You don't run anything." (289)

Through the story of making a specific Vietnam War film, *The Sympathizer* also generalizes the nature of artistic representation in a comparison between China and America:

> And yet at Yan'an, Mao said that art and literature were crucial to revolution. Conversely, he warned, art and literature could also be tools of domination. Art could not be separated from politics, and politics needed art in order to reach the people where they lived, through entertaining them. (172-173)

Meanwhile,

> Movies were America's way of softening up the rest of the world, Hollywood relentlessly assaulting the mental defenses of audiences with the hit, the smash, the spectacle, the blockbuster, and yes, even the box office bomb. It mattered not what story these audiences watched. The point was that it was the American story they watched and loved, up until the day that they themselves might be bombed by the planes they had seen in American movies…. Hollywood's function as the launcher of the intercontinental ballistic missile of Americanization. (172)

In short, Chinese art dominates her own people, while American art influences the whole world. What is common between them is the use of art as a political tool. The simile of Hollywood films as intercontinental ballistic missiles is a provocative simile in literature. The intercontinental ballistic missile is too high tech to appear in a literary text. It is always in ready status but has never been in use. Hollywood, on the other hand, produces all the time.

According to the bibliography, *Apocalypse Now* released in 1979 serves as the inspiration for the fictional movie in *The Sympathizer*. *Apocalypse Now* won many prizes and has always been named in the list of Best Vietnam War Film, Best War Films, 100 Best Films in 100 years Hollywood, and so on. This is really an American production for American audiences. This is a significant reference to compare the way to represent the Vietnam War. *Apocalypse Now* focuses on the broad horror and crisis, the collapse of civilization. Meanwhile, *The Sympathizer* represents the war from individual's lens. A famous quotation in *Apocalypse Now* is about napalm stated by the character Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore

> I love the smell of napalm in the morning. You know, one time we had a hill bombed, for 12 hours. When it was all over, I walked up. We didn't find one of 'em, not one stinkin' dink body. The smell, you know that gasoline smell, the whole hill. Smelled like ... victory.[98]

[98] https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078788/quotes

It could be linked to the fact that Man's face was destroyed by napalm. It's for sure not what Kilgore wants to see. War and its effects are differently on different point of view.

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Both labeled as American writers, one veteran and one from new generation, Tim O'Brien and Viet Thanh Nguyen look at the war differently. In *In the Lake of the Woods*, objective observation stands out, like a reporter's style. In *The Sympathizer,* first-person narration covers a significant number of pages. Thus far, chapter 2 sheds a light on the visions of the post war lives of the characters on the American side. Chapter 3 will investigate the post war experiences of the other side, the Vietnamese.

CHAPTER 3: THE VIETNAM WAR FROM VIETNAMESE PERSPECTIVE

Nỗi buồn chiến tranh (The Sorrow of War), by Bảo Ninh, is certainly the most well-known Vietnam War novel by a Vietnamese writer, both for a Vietnamese and a foreign readership. Its author, Bảo Ninh, has had a long career as a writer and though he has published many other works both before and after, *The Sorrow of War* is a masterpiece whose accomplishment he has never reached again.

Bảo Ninh's novel can be considered as a kind of response to the novels of Tim O'Brien. Both authors, one Vietnamese and one American, took a part in the same war but from opposite sides. Although they share the perspective of veterans, their ways into and out of the war are not quite the same. Bảo Ninh joined the army at a younger age and stayed in the war much longer than Tim O'Brien. The war has somehow haunted the Vietnamese writer more than the American author. After the war, both of them returned to the university and got degrees, and then Bảo Ninh became a literary editor and Tim O'Brien worked as a reporter. On one hand, war experiences play an essential part in their writing. On the other hand, the career each of them chose still affects and influences their literary work. That might be one reason why Bảo Ninh's fiction seem sink in emotion, meanwhile Tim O'Brien's is more analytic.

The Sorrow of War was first published in 1990[99]. As a matter of fact, *The Sorrow of War* won its fame primarily because it was completely different from any other Vietnamese novel representing the war at that time. The move beyond pride and praise just emerging in some previously published short stories and novels is fully developed in *The Sorrow of War*. Thus the novel is more concerned with literary quality than political position. Therefore, its reputation rises and falls in Vietnamese literary circulation. It won the most honorable literary award and was once banned as well. However, it received its warmest

[99] This novel was written during the *Đổi mới* (Renovation) period, in which the Vietnamese Communist Party allowed more freedom for artists and their creative works, several Vietnamese writers turned from "socialist realism," and tried to look at "reality" (especially, the Vietnam War) from a new perspective. The novel was, in fact, Bao Ninh's graduation work from the Writers' School Nguyen Du. Bao Ninh was writing it under the advisership of Professor Hoang Ngoc Hien, who was well read in Western literary theory and one of the leading figures of Vietnamese literature in the Renovation period. The novel went through various drafts before coming to this present version.

welcome in America[100] first and other countries later on. It is used as teaching material in some programs that study Vietnamese literature, as well as history, all over the world. *The Sorrow of War* has been translated into almost twenty different languages. It is considered as a typical Vietnamese voice from the war.

1. Concept: the Sorrow and the Loss

The Vietnamese perspective in the novel is really unique from the perspective of those who approach it from a distance, those not immediately involved in the U.S. war in Vietnam. With an insider like Tim O'Brien, the war is a complicated manipulation, an unspeakable truth. Bảo Ninh is also an insider himself, but his concept of war is simpler than O'Brien's. As titled, war is sorrow. The feeling of sorrow comes from the author, the narrator, and the main character, all from the side of those who consider themselves as the winners of the war.

Let us begin from the title. In formal Vietnamese, the Vietnam War has been never called simply "war." It is instead labeled specifically with more detail, as the anti-America/anti-imperialism war or the saving-nation war. Using merely the word "war" implies the author's perspective. He refuses his position on a particular side, simplifying the Vietnam War into a neutral meaning of solving the conflicts by the way of fighting. It is important to mention that the novel was not published at one time due to the implication of its title. On its first publication in 1990, the novel was renamed *Thân phận của tình yêu* (*The Destiny of Love)*. Upon the annual credit award from the Vietnamese Writer Society in 1991 and strong support from public readership, the second publication one year later was under the original title *The Sorrow of War*. The implication of the title is expanded through the novel. A mechanical statistic can provide some good evidence. In the original Vietnamese version, the word *"chiến tranh"* (war) appears

[100] Phan Thanh Hao trans., Frank Palmos ed., New York Pantheon Book, 1995

one hundred and fifty five times. In comparison, *"chiến đấu"* (struggle) is used twenty two times, and *"chống"* (anti) is used only four times; this is, then, a novel about "war."

Continuing within this statistical framework, the word "*nỗi buồn*" (sorrow) is directly mentioned one hundred and eighty-three times. Sometimes, the sorrow of war is generalized by the main character, as well as the novel's first-person narrator at some point (the other alternative narrator is the third person. "From the horizon of the distant past an immense sad wind, like an endless sorrow, gusts and blows through the cities, through the villages, and through my life." (48) The wind is something common in perceptions of the Vietnam War. Michael Herr, a remarkable Vietnam War author, has a famous line in his *Dispatches*, in which he states that "reading the faces of the Vietnamese was like trying to read the wind." Wind is what we can feel but we can neither touch nor hold. Through the cities and the villages, the specific wind blows in space. Through his life the abstract wind blows in time. Putting together the two axes of time and space, the wind of sorrow absolutely dominates. The endless sorrow is caused by the once endless war. In term of space, the war is like an eternal circle, "Victory after victory, withdrawal after withdrawal. The path of war seemed endless, desperate, and leading nowhere." (15)

It does not matter that you gain victory or are forced to withdraw as you are still engulfed / swept along by war. In terms of time, what the war destroyed can never been recovered. "That was the dry season when the sun burned harshly, the wind blew fiercely, and the enemy sent napalm spraying through the jungle and a sea of fire enveloped them, spreading like the fires of hell…No jungle grew again in this clearing. No grass. No plants." (5)

Facing the damage of nature, the popular reaction is to wonder what the jungle used to look like before American bombing. Looking back with a sense of nostalgia is familiar in literature. However, Bảo Ninh just focuses on the present reality of the damaged nature and briefly looks ahead at the permanent damage. The perception of something endless is highlighted here.

Other times, the endless war is represented by specific events rather than abstract generalization, as with the wind. The main character, Kien, is chosen to go north for a training offered to a few standout soldiers who are called "seeds". Going north means escaping from the hell of war. It would likely be a dream of many other soldiers. One of Kien's fellows, Can, even says it aloud. However, Kien does not want it at all. As the narrator describes, "He did not want to go north to do the course, and he felt certain he would never join them, become a seed for successive war harvests. He just wanted to be safe, to die quietly, sharing the fate of an insect or an ant in the war." (18) As for Can and others, going north is safety. For Kien, on the other hand, he would rather sacrifice his own safety. He bear the mission to be the one to keep the war going.

When peace finally comes, the soldiers are not ready at all. "Peace had rushed in brutally, leaving them dazed and staggering in its wake. They were more amazed than happy with the peace." (107) On one hand, that state of mind might be understood by Freudian theories. If one has been longing for something so long and so much, one could be devastated at the moment that something finally occurs. On the other hand, after such a long time, fighting gradually became habitual. The soldiers do not know what to do in peace. This is completely different from the short tour of duty of American soldiers[101]. Many years later, Kien is still surprised by the representation of the end of the war on the screen, "He and his friends had not felt that soaring, brilliant happiness he saw on film." (107)

The habitual state of war causes confusion for the soldiers as well, "Ages and times were mixed in confusion, as were peace and war." (109) In that feeling of confusion, the proper situations of war and peace are kind of switched with each other when Hien says goodbye to Kien after their trip returning north together. Kien wants a chance to see each other again, but Hien refuses just because "in peacetime anything can happen" (81). In Hien's mind, the mind of a soldier, peace rather than war is risky. When the war is over, what they have is neither peace nor happiness. They just have sorrow, as the narrator

[101] American tour of duty in Vietnam was typically 12 months, 13 months for the Marines.

states, “What remained of war was sorrow, the immense sorrow, the sorrow of having survived. The sorrow of war.” (192) This sorrow takes root in their minds, causing a pessimistic view of everything. “The spirit of Hanoi is strongest by night, even stronger in the rain. Like now, when the whole town seems deserted, wet, lonely, cold, and deeply sad.” (68)

Alongside the primary emotion of sorrow from both the narrator and the main character, there are two kinds of functional characters who directly address their conceptualization of the war. The first one is the truck driver in the MIA (Missing in Action Remains-Gathering) team. He was a long-term soldier, but he is not haunted by the war as Kien is. His thought is clear and sharp. “I am Tran Son, a soldier. That’s why I’m a bit of a philosopher.” (43) He should be considered as a functional in Propp’s sense rather than a character in a novel in modern sense[102]. Tran Son does not appreciate peace. “What? Peace? Damn it, peace is a tree that thrives only on blood and bones of fallen comrades. The ones left behind in the Screaming Souls battlegrounds were the most honorable people.” (42) The war is thus meaningless in his eyes, as he explains “People in hell don’t give a damn about wars. They don’t remember killing. Killing is a career for the living, not the dead.” (41-42) The notion of killing as a career is suggested once in *The Quiet American* when a French lieutenant blames the civilian who pays the soldiers to kill and who abandons his guilt about the murders he orders. In Vietnam, soldiers are rarely concerned about making their career as a killer. Fighting is always attached to a noble cause and then becomes a mission or a duty at least, but never a career. Mentioning killing as a career simplifies the war to its simple and literal meaning of attempting to solve problem through fighting.

The second functional character is Kien’s step-father, who is a poet. The truck driver gains knowledge through his experiences during the war, meanwhile the poet has intellectual knowledge at the beginning. He affirms that “a human being’s duty in this earth is to live, not to kill…. Don’t turn your

[102] Vladimir Propp (1895-1970) analyzed one hundred Russian folk tales to identify their simplest narrative elements. He categorized all characters in folktales into seven broad character functions. Modern fiction mobilizes characters who are unique and individual. The two functional characters here bear a resemblance to the dispatcher – the character who sends the hero on the mission -- in Propp’s classification.

back on life" (58). He even foresees the meaninglessness of the war by the time Kien joins it voluntarily. "It is not that I advise you to respect your life more than anything else, but not to die uselessly for the needs of others." (58-59)

In short, from any viewpoint in this novel, there is no gain only pain. The useless pain and the loss cause the sorrow of war. Youth, love, and art lose the most in the context of war. It is probably for this reason that some Vietnamese literary editors renamed the novel as *The Destiny of Love* for its first publication. Most people coming to the war are very young. They have almost no chance to enjoy their youth. In the original version of the novel in Vietnamese, the tone of the writing about lost youth is not pitiful but rather respectful. Can, Kien's younger comrade, is exhausted by the endlessness of war, "I'm not afraid of dying, but this killing and shooting just goes on forever. I'm dying inside, bit by bit. Every night I have the same dream, of me being dead." (20) As for Kien, what Can says is a discovery, "But it was curious that after fighting alongside Can for so long Kien had never heard him go on like this. He had seen Can only as a trusty farmer who'd gradually adjusted to the hell of battlefield." (21) No matter what social class you come from, war is a burden for youth. At one point, Kien exclaims "Oh, my lost years and months and days! My lost era! My lost generation!" (45) Kien estimates that he has lost fourteen years of which ten years were spent in fighting, one year in the MIA team and the rest in obsession. That is why the truck driver comments. "After this hard-won victory fighters like you, Kien, will never be normal again. You won't even speak with your normal voice, in the normal way again. (42)

In other words, "the psychological scars of the war will remain forever" (193). Kien has lost fourteen years, but it is very likely that the rest of his years are lost as well. "The hope is contained in the beautiful prewar past." (47) There is nothing to expect in the years to come.

At this point, *The Sorrow of War*, and Vietnamese literature generally, is different from *In the Lake of the Woods* and American literature. American soldiers also came to the war at a very young age. However, American authors writing about the war do not focus on the loss of youth. On one hand, it is

probable that the American tour of duty is too short to evoke the feeling of lost time. On the other hand, a nostalgia for the past dominates Vietnamese literature more than American literature. The focus on the loss of youth is primarily connected with female characters. East Asian literary traditions have been inspired by the short youthful years in a woman's life. The loss of youth reaches climax with woman characters. The main female figure in *The Sorrow of War*, Phuong will be discussed below because she is an expression of love and art rather than mere youth. The other female characters who do speak to the loss of youth are three girls in the prosperous farm by a waterfall, the veteran Hien, the widow of a soldier Lan, and the female soldier killed in action, Hoa.

The three girls live in an abandoned farm house close to where Kien's B3 scout platoon is stationed and men visit them regularly. In the farm house, there is a "moment of love which was strange and fascinating, fueled by a passion both wanton and unique, born of a magical meeting." (26) And yet, the girls never appear physically in the narrative. They are all names, shadows, and sounds of laughing. Night after night, the young soldiers make dangerous journeys to the farm to see the girls. Neither the entire platoon of thirteen nor the three certain persons are involved. Kien, a commander then, is worried about the safety of his soldiers and quietly follows their return night after night. He never disciplines them because he understands their need, "What else could they do? They were powerless against the frenzied forces of youth love which now controlled their bodies." (29-30) Eventually, the three girls are killed by the Southern army. It is unlikely that the connection between the young soldiers and the girls is love. They even clearly see the faces of each other in their "magical meeting" at night. Those meeting are rather the rebellion of abandoned youth in the context of war than real love.

Hien is an invalid female soldier who meets Kien by chance on the train as they return north after the war. The narrator's description of their time together points again to the loss of youth, "…they hugged each other and slept together, awakened together, dreamed together, and hugged some more. They kissed hurriedly, sharing the last moments of their uniformed lives, the last kilometers of their battlefield of youth, in passionate embrace." (81) Once again, there is not any sign of love in their interactions. The

young soldiers and the farm girls rebel against the loss of their youth. Kien and Hien want to retain their youth which is lost already indeed. We do not know much about Hien, but Kien is in his late twenties. In the novel, youth is not measured by time but rather by space. The shift from the period of ten years to the distance of the last kilometers is remarkable. Time is an everlasting flow, meanwhile space always has a limit. That youth the space of the battlefield is clear after the war. There is neither any echo nor epilogue once the war is over. It is for that reason that Hien refuses to allow Kien to take her home.

Lan's appearance in the novel is as short as Hien's, but her story is much longer. Lan was born, grew up and lived all her life in a solitary mountain area, Doi Mo (*Đồi Mơ*). In Vietnamese, the literal meaning of Doi Mo is Dreamy Hill. A sense of illusion is implied in that name. As for Lan, youth, love, happiness are all an illusory dream. Her house was where new troops were stationed before they went to the front. Since her teenage years, she has experienced momentary meetings with numerous novice soldiers when troops kept coming, one after another. One of them became her husband, gave her a child, but both died during the war. After the war, Lan is a young widow living alone in Doi Mo. Kien, who was also stationed at her home, comes back to visit as a compensation for Lan's loneliness. In a conversation with Kien, she tells him about that loneliness and loss, "I just wait and wait, without knowing what I'm waiting for. Or for whom. Perhaps I've been waiting for you." (54) She offers him her own vague hope of happiness, "A home, a woman, a friend. Doi Mo hamlet was where you started this war. You can make it your point of return, if you want to." (55)

Lan and Hien are two different fates, one of a civilian and one of a soldier, but both in the context of war. They both lose their youth, but their reactions are not the same. Lan tries to see promise in the future, while Hien completely refuses to look forward. However, there is no more certainty in Lan's future than in Hien's. The last scene of the meeting between Kien and Lan is meaningful. The narrator describes it thus. "When he turned he saw his long shadow reaching back, pointing to Lan in the distance. She had not moved." (55) The image of a shadow is a familiar literary device. In Confucian tradition, the duality of substance and shadow represents the opposition between reality, material life and fame or

illusion. In this scene, the proper characteristics of substance and shadow are switched with each other since the shadow is actively "reaching back," while Lan, reality and substance, remains passive and does not move. The illusion wins over material life. As for Kien, all his love is consciously devoted to Phuong. However, under certain circumstances, he is unconsciously pulled toward another women with kind of shadowy love. He recognizes that his shadow is pointing to Lan through the incident of his turning back. His emotion comes naturally out of his intention. His feeling for Lan seems be not enough to repay for her wasted youth.

Both Lan and Hien lost their youth, but they are still alive to witness the outcome of the war. Hoa does not share the same fortunate (or unfortunate) destiny. Hoa appears the least in the novel but her appearance is the most significant. Between all the supporting female characters, Hoa's story is the most unspeakable. It is not told as straight as Hien's and Lan's stories are told. Hoa's story is taken up little by little, here and there, in the narrative. The reader needs to put the scattered pieces together to read Hoa's story. Ultimately, Hoa sacrifices herself to relieve Kien in the war. While she was raped and then killed by a group of American troops, Kien had enough time to escape. His life is saved but he forgive himself for letting her be tortured to death. He tries to avoid recalling her last scene. Gradually, he reaxlly leaves her behind in the dark of the past, "…he too began to forget about her. Was it that such sacrifices were now an everyday occurrence? Or that they were expected, even of such young people?" (192) Hoa's story evokes the tension between remembrance and forgetting. Both actions produce feelings of shame for Kien. Sacrifice is just another word for loss.

As for the soldiers, what is lost is so much that the war becomes everything to them, as this description of Kien shows. "It was the one which determined all events in his life: the happiness, the unhappiness, the joys, the sorrows, the loves, the hatreds." (75) In other words, the war pushes everything to the margins; it leaves a soldier with nothing. "But war was a world with no home, no roof, no comforts. A miserable journey, of endless drifting. War was a world without real men, without real women, without

feeling. War was also a world without romance." (31) Such a direct indictment of war is shared with many famous war novels[103].

At the same time, Tim O'Brien claims that "a true war story is never about war". If that observation underlies each of the novels investigated here, so too does another statement of O'Brien's in *In the Lake of the Woods*, "The war is a maze. Both observations point to the lack of clarity generated by war and stories about war. If O'Brien's observations offer a definition of war as unknowable, the definition offered in *The Sorrow of War* is a cluster of negations expressed by the repetition of "no" and "without." "Without real men" is an unconventional understanding of war. War is often interpreted as a world of manhood characterized by strength and violence. In the traditional context, manhood is understood in terms of its relationship to womanhood and a world of feeling and romance. Such "real men" and "real women" have been completely excluded from Vietnamese war literature until the publication of *The Sorrow of War*. In much the same way, the idea of love is excluded from Kien's mind. "His soldier's self-defense mechanisms were working well for him in those days, especially when he was in the Central Highlands." (138)

The same "self-defense mechanism" seems be a dominant trend, a prevailing ideology, a familiar literary stance of Vietnamese writers. Vietnamese writers often describe ideal love instead of tragic romance. Love in most war novels is not a private feeling but is instead connected to love for the country. *The Sorrow of War* follows a rather different outline of love. Love is thrown into the cruelty of war, tortured and ends up in suffering. Kien and Phuong are childhood sweethearts. Coming from intellectual families, young and beautiful, they used to be a perfect couple in their high school years. In the story, they are perfect together; but in the narrative, they are pitted against each other. Kien follows the path of an ideal character, fitting the frame of a typical hero in Vietnamese war literature. He is an outstanding

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[103] For example, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1928, German original); Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* (1969), Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun* (1938), *The Good Soldier Švejk* (1921, original in Czech), Stratis Myrivilis' *Life in a Tomb* (1924/1930, Greek original), Ooka Shohei's *Fires on the Plain* (Japanese original)…

young man who volunteers to join the army with an absolute belief in the cause. Meanwhile, Phuong does not fit the frame of a typical heroine in Vietnamese war literature at all. She is the most beautiful girl in the school and neighborhood who is full of passionate love. She wants to live for herself rather than to sacrifice for her country. She is one of the very few characters in Vietnamese literature controlled by female instinct. Her usual utterance is, "Don't care!" One afternoon, she escapes from political class to swim with Kien, and almost lets him take her in that late afternoon by the lake (but he, as an idol, never goes over the limit). She gets in the train to follow Kien to the front and is raped in the dark wagon after a bombing. She lives with one man after another during the ten years that Kien is on the battlefield. She reunites with Kien after the war yet she ends up leaving him after all. She does all of this actively, following her principle of "don't care!". She is not a fragile victim of her situation. She accepts the consequences of what she does of her own free will.

In contrast, Kien is controlled by the situation. He volunteers to go to the front following the larger social movement rather than by his own choice. That is why his step-father warns him "not to die uselessly for the needs of others." (59) He reluctantly takes Phuong with him on the train and helplessly tries to protect her. He passively falls back into her arms after the war, and after a while he silently accepts her leaving. Kien and Phuong, each in their specific way, push their love to a dead end. The interspersion between the correspondence (at the story level) and the difference (at the narrative level) between the two main character make the narration flexible. While Phuong is different from most of the Vietnamese heroines, she seems similar to Phuong in *The Quiet American* and Kieu in *Yellow Fever*. The events in their lives are similar—they are all passed from one man to another—but the implied forces that motivate their lives are quite different. Neither Phuong in *The Quiet American* nor Kieu truly loves anybody. In their relationships with (foreign) men, they only chase an opportunity to change their lives. They will prefer the man who offers them the better life. Meanwhile, Phuong in *The Sorrow of War* loves only one man, Kien, throughout her entire life, no matter how her life proceeds. Thus it is not surprising that the editors of the first publication of the novel renamed it *The Destiny of Love*. For love is present

throughout the novel, but, paradoxically, it seems as though it never exists. Before the war, in their late teenage years, Kien and Phuong have never enjoyed love in its wholeness. Happiness is still in the eventual future. After the war, they live together only to make each other suffer. Happiness then belongs to the past. It can be said that their time of happiness is stolen, replaced by the war. As a tragic war love story, *The Sorrow of War* is similar to *In the Lake of the Woods*. Both are stories of great lives and lasting love destroyed by the war. Both couples are reunited after the war, and both are then split up with the disappearance of the woman. Yet the ending of physical love causes the revival of eternally ideal love in the souls. “He had had only two loves in his entire life. Phuong at seventeen in the prewar days, and Phuong now, after war.” (146)

Within the same frame of the war, each story of the destiny of love has its specific details because of the different perspectives of each writer. As stated, in *The Sorrow of War*, Phuong always plays an active role in her relationship with Kien. In contrast, in O’Brien’s novel, Kathy does everything upon John’s demand. John and Kathy suffer from what John, the man, did in the war. Kien and Phuong suffer from what Phuong, the woman, experiences during war time. The postwar life of the American couple is overburdened by the silence of the secret war crime John committed. The Vietnamese couple is disturbed by gossip and the noise of Kien’s fighting against Phuong’s old lovers. In the end, Phuong actively escapes from Kien, but Kathy seems to passively disappear. No matter how, love in both novels is abandoned, as is youth.

Besides love, *The Sorrow of War* also figures the fate of art. It is almost erased in war reality. In classical Greek philosophy, Plato wanted to ban poets from his ideal city because the poet makes things that are removed from the truth. In war time, the possibilities of poetic expression might be an issue under ideological pressure. But in reality, art develops even more strongly in war time. For example, in World War I and its aftermath, combat experience produced a whole new reality which could not be conveyed in a traditional form. Art saw the creation of many experimental forms (Dadaism and visual poetry, for instance) post-World War I. In other words, war motivated artistic development.

In Vietnamese society, the case has been quite different. In the context of the Confucian tradition, the concept of a kind of pure art for the sake of beauty has not really existed. It is often merged into ideology. In the conditions of war, art needs to be even more connected to ideological propaganda. Somehow similar to the Platonic injunction against representation, art has been censored when it is not helpful for war.

There are three representatives of art in *The Sorrow of War*: Kien's father – a painter, Kien's step father – a poet, and Phuong. The first two are artists, and the last one is a symbol of beauty. The two artists have no names. Their appearances in the story are only as relations of Kien, the main character. Soldiers occupy center stage; artists are located to the side. However, both artists are fathers. In Confucian society, the father plays a key role. Even though fathers stand in the shadows, they are still important. As mentioned above, Kien's step-father, the poet, is a kind of functional character as a dispatcher. He appears for less than one page in the entire novel. What he leaves behind is some wise advice for Kien. All we know about him is that he is an anonymous prewar poet. Conventionally, the prewar period is one of rich blossoming in Vietnamese artistic history. But most of the prewar artists suffered from the war. Some bent their pen, writing under the pressure of ideology, others did not write anymore, while still others were banned or even imprisoned because of their art. Kien's step-father very likely belongs to those poets who did not write during the war. His character implies the fate of art in the war.

In contrast, Kien's father is represented in more detail. He sleepwalks every night. In a Freudian context, the unconscious fights against conscious repression. The movement in sleep is in some ways the expression of that effort. And sleepwalking is a recurring phenomenon in Vietnam War novels by American authors. In *In the Lake of the Woods*, for example, John's sleepwalking is a consequence of his haunted memory of the war. and he often does something violent during his sleepwalking while Kien's father just wanders peacefully in his sleep. In *The Sorrow of War*, the world of the sleepwalkers is not the

violent past but rather another present, a present of dreams and freedom, removed from the reality of war. It can be interpreted as the world of artistic creation which has its roots in but escapes from everyday life.

In the artistic world of Kien's father, men always have long yellow faces. For *The Sorrow of War,* yellow is the color of fadedness. If green is the symbol of vitality, growth, and development, in the novel yellow is explicitly the color of sickness and decay. However, yellow can also convey something else. In the Confucian theory of five elements, the earth is the center of the universe. Yellow is the proper color of the earth. That is why yellow is the royal color in Confucian culture. The dominance of yellow could be understood as an artistic comment on something glorious in the past but currently "faded" or "sickly." In *The Sorrow of War*, that is what happens to / the condition or fate or situation of art in war time. So, for example, he painter burns all of his paintings in order to release the characters they depict. And, on the one hand, fire is a symbol of war, destruction, or a power to change. The paintings, the existing material art objects, are destroyed. The characters, the soul of art, are released. The war can burn down the material art, but its soul still exists.

On the other hand, fire recalls the fiery emotion which is wholly embodied in the character of Phuong. Not only her beauty but also her fiery emotion suggests her as a representative of art. She lives as fierily as an artist creates. From foreign perspectives, the Vietnamese female characters in *Yellow Fever* and *The Quiet American* symbolize the nation to be passed from one power to another. From the Vietnamese perspective, Phuong in *The Sorrow of War* symbolizes beauty. Kieu and Phuong in *The Quiet American* passively accept their lives as a kind of prostitute. Neither shame nor suffering is in their vocabulary. Phuong is different. She is fully conscious of morality and purity. Her journey to the war recalls Mary Anne Bell in *The Things They Carried*. While Mary Anne leaves normal life behind to pursue a war adventure, Phuong wants to keep the values of normal life in her journey to the war. This is impossible, paradoxical. Beauty, as represented in Phuong, is even-minded, blossoming innocently, but challenging as well.

Such a sorrowful war left a burden of memory behind. In a sense, *The Sorrow of War* is a novel of memory. Memory is what makes this novel different. In Phuong's words, the characters are "prisoners" to memory. Memory is like a closed circle surrounding their life. They have no way to escape. There are many layers of memory: memory of family, memory of love, memory of the hometown, and essentially, memory of war. Memory is represented either separately from or interacting with reality.

2. Memory: Dream, Hallucination, and Ghosts

Beside the three main tenses of past, present, and future, there is another temporal tense in *The Sorrow of War*, the "memory tense." Memory is understood as something completely isolated from reality, out of the time frame of past, present and future. That memory tense is variously "conjugated." The novel seems to ask a unique question about memory: where is memory stored before it is recalled by our mental processes?

The perception of an isolated world of memory is represented most clearly in the reunion and the subsequent separation of the two main characters, Kien and Phuong. On one hand, Kien considers Phuong "his only hope of staying in rhythm with normal life." (173) This must be a Phuong in present time, since Kien is thinking toward the future. On the other hand, however, he treats Phuong as if she were a teenage sweetheart in the past, as she points out, "You still think I'm seventeen, that's your problem. You've never adjusted." (145) In traditional Vietnamese thought, the human body grows fastest and strongest at the age of seventeen. In an idiom, someone at seventeen can break a buffalo horn. At seventeen, prewar Phuong is pure and her love for Kien is wholeness. Postwar Phuong is around twenty eight, the age where a woman body reaches the fullness of beauty in classic Confucian thought. Perfect love is replaced by a physical perfection, which is not what Kien has longed for. The tragedy of love here echoes the deadlocked marriage in *In the Lake of the Woods*. The husband's unspeakable war crime cuts off their tranquil prewar life. In contrast, the woman's betrayal during wartime creates a gap between the couple. "We're prisoners to our shared memories of wonderful times together. Those memories won't release us.

But we've made a big mistake. I thought we would face just a few small hurdles. But they aren't small, they're as big as mountains." (85)

In fact, Kien and Phuong are prisoners to both beautiful and painful memories. The prior pulls them back together and the latter pushes them away from each other. They are tortured by the fighting between the two forces. And finally, the memories of war win over the memories of peace. Phuong leaves secretly but asks Kien to "Forgive me, and now forget me." (145)

One way to see the distance of memory from reality is in the act of forgetting. In a certain difficult moment during the war, Kien wants to find his motivation in his memory of prewar life, but he can not. "To buoy himself up, Kien sometimes tried to concentrate on uplifting memories. But no matter how hard he tried to revive the scene, they wouldn't stay. It was hopeless. His whole life from the very beginning, from childhood to the army, seemed detached and apart from him, floating in a void." (16) Kien's status recalls Freud's concept of repressed memory, but in an opposite sense. Freud argued that our brain automatically blocks traumatic memories. The fact that John Wade in *In the Lake of the Woods* forgets the My Lai massacre could be considered a Freudian repressed memory. However, Kien's forgetfulness is kind of an inverted process in which the present trauma blocks the beautiful memory from the past. Traumatic memory is inaccessible while the beautiful memory here becomes unbelievable, "floating in a void." The state of "floating" is improper in reference to memory. Memory is imprinted on the brain. Imprinting is a deep mark on the body, meanwhile to float is to only touch the surface of something. However, there is not even any surface to touch in the "void". "Floating" also recalls Ma Lien's feeling in *Yellow Fever*. In her drug-induced state, Ma Lien feels her own body "floating in the water," and it is a physical sensation of touch. Kien's lost memory in the void, in contrast, is completely abstract.

In another instance, there is a double process of collective forgetfulness and personal remembrance. When Can, Kien's younger companion, escapes from the unit and is then found dead,

> No one spoke of Can again. No one bothered to find out why he had died, whether he was killed or had just exhausted himself in the jungle, or whether he'd committed suicide. No one accused him, either. The name, age, and image of someone who'd been every bit as brave under fire as his comrades, who had set a fine example, suddenly disappeared without trace. Except within the mind of Kien. Can's image haunted him every night. (24)

The collective forgetfulness here can be interpreted as kind of forcibly repressed memory, repressed because of ideology. On a difficult journey, the troops need to ignore whoever escapes from the war, and so Can is excluded from memory at the collective level. However, at an individual level, he still exists as a person with his own destiny in the war and his relation to still-living soldiers. It is probably not only Kien but also many others who remember him. No one mentions him but his memory remains in their mind. The question "why he had died" could be a common thought, a kind of silently shared memory.

There are also cases in which forgetfulness comes so silently that nobody knows they have forgotten. In the war, so many dead soldiers were forgotten. Not only their bodies, but also the memories of them are gone. The awareness of the disappearance causes a deep sorrow when Kien comes back to the old battlefield to collect their remains: "Now they were merely names and remains. For some of the other dead, not even that. Some had been totally vaporized, or blasted into such small pieces that their remains had long since been liquidized into mud." (25) Kien is aware of their disappearance, but unlike other people, he feels differently. The dead soldiers seem to still exist in another world, the world of wandering souls of ghosts.

Haunting memories are familiar in postwar literature. John Wade in *In the Lake of the Wood* and Kien in *The Sorrow of War* share such haunting memories. John is haunted by the specific event of the My Lai massacre, while Kien is haunted by the war as a whole. As a politician, John is well aware of the need to control his memory, and so dreams rarely disturb him. In contrast, Kien is often haunted by dream. Dreams often come to him on rainy nights, no matter where he is, in the jungle during the war or

in Hanoi in the postwar years. The rain here is a metaphor for tears, crying, and sorrow. Sorrow defines Kien's memory of war, different from John's horror. Kien only dreams of his past experiences, and none of his dreams have any content that points toward the future. Kien's memories of war return continually in his dreams. Even though time passes, the war can not be pushed back to the past. If war does not specifically affect the veteran's present life as in John's case, it causes an unbalance in the present mind at least.

The jungle and Hanoi are switched as the place where Kien dreams and of which dreams, as the following passage shows:

> When they slept in the jungle the rain fell on forest canopies, and Kien would dream of Hanoi in the rain, Hanoi with leaves falling. Now, as he watched the leaves falling, he remembered the jungle rains and the dream of Hanoi. (68)

There is the real jungle in the past and the memory of the jungle in present, Hanoi in the past dream and the real Hanoi in the present. The repetition and alternation of the two places become the main axis around which his dreams are built. Kien dreams the most in two moments: when he joins the MIA team to return to the jungle and after Phuong leaves him behind in his Hanoi apartment. Kien's dreams, in fact, are not represented as isolated from reality. More precisely, he likely experiences his past life again rather than just dreams of it. For anybody else, a dream is often a fragmented memory which is not easily recalled. However, Kien's dream is as specific as pages of a book. "The whole night long I reviewed the life of my scout platoon. Each day, each memory, each person, appeared on a separate page of the dream." (45) Following a dream-filled night is always an exhausted day. "When I awoke it was almost dawn, yet the dream images were then transferred to my walking hours." (46) Not only abstract images, memory also can be felt in the flesh, as the narrator describes it, "The painful memory of the dream throbbed against his temples." (40) The pain of memory overcomes its original area of thought, becoming a feeling "against his temples". One further step, the dream seems visible, assimilated to reality. "But

strangely, Kien now feels another presence, feels someone is watching him. Is the final scene, the unfinished, bloody dream of this morning, about to intrude itself in his mind?" (43)

Besides his frequent dreams of war, sometimes Kien dreams of Phuong, "During those rainy nights she would come to him from the back door of his memory, stepping lightly like a sprite."(30) If the front door of his memory is dedicated to the war, love has a modest position in "the back door." In Vietnamese culture, the back door relates to something unofficial, under the table. Kien belongs to a generation living and dying for the cause of the war. Anything else is marginal. In contrast, Phuong is a girl "out of time," in the words with which Kien's father addresses her. While the dead soldiers seem to still be alive in Kien's dream, the living Phuong becomes "a sprite." This inversion speaks to the mixture of past and present, dream and reality in the disorder of Kien's post war life.

As mentioned above, Kien dreams the most after the war. During the war years, his unit once tries to make "artificial" dreams by smoking rosa canina. Indeed, the translators render the original *hồng ma* as rosa canina in the English version of the novel, which is not, in fact, an accurate translation, since rosa canina is a different plant. *Hồng ma* literally means ghostly rose. The name alone suggests a symbolic combination of evil and beauty. It can be said that *hồng ma* is fictional since there is no record of this name in either scientific account or literary text aside from *The Sorrow of War*. From the description in the novel, this legendary plant is similar to rosa canina in appearance but to opium or marijuana in its effects. The rumour says that the plant grows fastest where many people died. A blood thirsty plant gives bloom to fragrant flowers that cause a collective miracle dream for the whole military unit. What is called a miracle is actually only normal everyday life, normality that is completely erased in the circumstance of war. They dream to avoid that brutal reality of their current situation, "With canina one smoked to forget the daily hell of the soldier's life, smoked to forget hunger and suffering. Also, to forget death. And totally, but totally, to forget tomorrow." (12) In order to forget reality, they recall their prewar memories. They immerse themselves in hallucinations of happiness. They meet their loved ones, return to their hometowns, or, most simply and most instinctually, eat a delicious meal and have sex. That normal

everyday events become something glorious that is only possible in a dream emphasizes the abnormal brutality of war. The opposition and alternation between evil and beauty, bloody and fragrant, miracle and normal, reality and memory make a memorable narrative of the war.

Hồng ma is a catalyst for a hallucination of peace during war. Then in peace, a hallucination of war is triggered suddenly and naturally without catalyst in Kien's experience, "…everything around him became meaningless and he had difficulty separating reality from hallucinations." (154) Moreover, the hallucination of peace comes only in a dream, while the hallucinations of war come anytime and anywhere while Kien is awake, "Besides, pacing the streets occasionally brought him flashbacks by association." (147) Association is what Kien has to face many time in his postwar life. Association often starts with a random image that is somehow similar to something from Kien's past, and then a memory of war is triggered. Moreover, the random image could reactivate a memory that has been blocked for a long time, as it happens in the following passage:

> Later, many years later, while watching a pantomime where an artist bent over, writhing his body in agonized desperation, by magical association Kien recalled the moments when Thinh had similarly crouched in sobbing despair, praying for Ho Bia. The audience around him in the theater had seen Kien suddenly sit bolt upright, remembering the war scene clearly... How deeply moved he was, and how he trembled at the joy and the pain the memories brought. He wanted to etch into his heart these memories, and wondered how he could have forgotten this tragedy for so many years. (35)

There is a conflict between consciousness and unconsciousness in Kien's psychology. He wants to remember, but he unintentionally forgets the past. He is caught between joy at being able to recall his war experiences and, simultaneously, pain about what is recalled. The trauma here is not a moment of killing, blood, death or any sort of the brutal consequences of war. Instead, it is the moment when Thinh responses to missing Ho Bia and the girls living in the abandoned farm by the mountain. Except for Kien,

the eldest one, the rest of his unit, “not a certain three” have dreamy loving nights with those three girls who suddenly disappear without a trace (it is later revealed that they were killed by the Southern Army). What traumatizes Kien is the absence, the emptiness left behind after a horrific scene rather than the scene itself. Moreover, this memory is of shameful collective love between a group of men and a group of women. That is probably why it is censored and blocked from memory.

Beyond that reactivated repressed memory, a “magical association” can make the past events seem to happen again.

> The air in his room felt strange, vibrating with images of the past. Then it shoot, shuddering under waves of hundreds of artillery shells pouring into the Screaming Souls Jungle, and the walls of the room shook noisily as the jets howled in on their bombing run. Startled, Kien jumped back from the window…The memories flared up, again and again. He lurched over to his desk and picked up his pen, then almost mechanically began to write. (86)

Memory often accompanies an image yet Kien’s memory here is full of sound. The hallucination bridges past and present in time, the jungle and Ha Noi in space. And memory inspires Kien’s writing.

In war literature, ghosts are often somehow present. Often, the ghost is a dead comrade. In *The Sorrow of War*, there is also a ghost from the enemy. Phan, a soldier in the same unit with Kien, once happens to share a bomb shelter with a Southern soldier. Phan stabs him in self-defense before figuring out that he is already injured. Phan then climbs out to find the first aid kit for the injured enemy soldier. Phan is lost in heavy rain and even though he searches for the whole night, he could not track the injured enemy soldier. Phan blames himself for making the pitiful enemy be tortured to death while the rain fills up the shelter bit by bit. He cannot resist recalling him every time he sees rain and flood. “After many years of peace Phan was still tormented by the memory. Would the drowned man ever stop floating through his mind?” (94)

The encounter represents the senselessness of the war. Their armies fight against each other, then one individual relies on another. There is no dividing line between the two armies in Phan's memory. He remembers the other soldier as a man like himself. Certainly, many ghosts in *The Sorrow of War* come from Kien's side in the war. The novel opens with a ghostly setting.

> The stream moans, a desperate complaint mixing with distant faint jungle sounds, like an echo from another world… From then on it was called the Jungle of Screaming Souls. Just hearing the name whispered was enough to send chills down the spine... The sobbing whispers were heard deep in the jungle at night, the howls carried on the wind. Perhaps they really were the voices of the wandering souls of dead soldiers. (4-6)

The ghostly feeling in this description comes from sounds, though those sounds are often accompanied by images. Moreover, verbs (moan, echo, whisper) rather than adjectives are used to create a ghostly area. That ghostly world is vivid and lively. It does not merely belong to the past, silently going backward. It somehow exists parallel to the present. One familiar bridge between past and present, fact and fiction, ghost and human beings is myth, which comes through in narrator's description of one such legend

> Kien was told that passing this area at night one could hear birds crying like human beings. They never flew, they only cried among the branches. And nowhere else in these Central Highlands could one find bamboo shoots of such a horrible color, with infected weals like bleeding pieces of meat. As for the fireflies, they were huge. Some said they'd seen firefly lights rise before them as big as a steel helmet— some said bigger than helmets. (6)

There are three legends Kien heard one year after the war, the legends of crying birds, red bamboo shoots and big fireflies. No one can see the birds, since they never fly out of their hiding places in the branches. They are invisible and, in fact, immobile too. Again, sound is the only trace of their existence. The ghosts are not shown as quiet shadows; they have their own voices.

It is very likely that the crying birds are fictional. There is no record of such a bird in any Vietnamese archives. However, the bamboo shoots and fireflies are real, though their color and size are overstated. Bamboo is an iconic Vietnamese tree. Bamboo grows everywhere in the country and is very popular in language and literature. Talking about the replacement of generations, a Vietnamese idiom says that as bamboos grow old, young shoots spring up. A bamboo shoot always symbolizes youth, the coming generation which needs to be taken care of, pampered, and educated. A bamboo shoot is generally light yellow in color, but depending on the species, some have some light pink spots. It is definitely not blood red, however. The image of red bamboo shoots implies that the cruelty of war is passed on to future generations. Blood from the dead soldiers melted into the ground and then transformed into the red of rosa canina and the bamboo shoots. Repetition and reincarnation make the war an endless event.

The firefly image recalls the *ignis fatuus* and the legend of the lost souls in *Yellow Fever*. However, while the *ignis fatuus* directly relates to death, the fireflies are alive. In East Asian popular culture, fireflies are attached to childhood memory. The light of fireflies is like a miracle in childish dreams. It calls up folk stories about poor children who trap fireflies inside an egg shell to make a lamp to study by at night. Yet in the above passage, a romantic firefly is transformed into a ghostly image with an abnormally huge halo of light. Similarly to the blood absorbed by the bamboo shoots, the ghost embodies the firefly's light, another symbol of youthful days.

Besides those two legends relating to images, ghosts constantly appear in sound. Some of those waiting found they were hearing a musical air in their heads, the sound of guitars rising and falling with the sounds of the Kontum[104] carnage. Soldiers of that year 1974 sang:

> Oh, this is war without end,
> War without end.
> Tomorrow or today,

[104] A town in the central highland region of Vietnam.

Today or tomorrow.

Tell me my fate,

When will I die… (15)

Even though time passes and the war is over, the musical air is still heard blending in with the sound of Kontum carnage. The song is simple: it is just a repeated idea of endless war. The time of the war stretches to eternity, but the time of each individual is very limited, only today and tomorrow remain. The ultimate question of "When will I die?" represents the absolute disappointment of the war. The soldier lives to wait for death.

The most impressive ghost represented in the novel is the collective ghost of the 27th battalion. The whole battalion, except for Kien, was killed in a "deadly defeat" and, as with Can, they are quickly forgotten, "After that battle no one mentioned the 27th Battalion anymore, though numerous souls of ghosts and devils were born in that deadly defeat. They were still loose, wandering in every corner and bush in the jungle, drifting along the stream, refusing to depart for the Other World." (6) In Vietnamese belief, whoever dies unjustly depart for the other world. They become wandering souls. The 27th battalion is erased in present life, but Kien still carries its physical existence in his backpack: a set of cards.

Besides smoking rosa canina, playing cards is another way for the soldiers to escape war reality. At one point, the soldiers sing a song that speaks to this means of escape:

They had bastardized the regimental marching song and made it a humorous card players' song:

We'll all be jokers in the pack,

Just go harder in attack.

Dealing is fun, so hurry back,

Enjoy the game, avoid the flak. (9)

In comparison with the song sung by the soldiers of 1974 mentioned above, the card players' song is much more lively. We can see the will to live to "enjoy the game, avoid the flak" rather than the pessimistic waiting of the lines, "when will I die".

In such a card game, one of Kien's comrade feels his approaching death. He passes the set to Kien, saying, "I'll go in this fight. You keep them. If you live on, gamble with life. Deuces, treys, and fours all carry the sacred spirit of our whole platoon. We'll bring you permanent luck."(11) The card game here recalls the 421 dice game in *The Quiet American*. The dice is one of the journalist Fowler's central images in his representation of his war years. It's all about the past. Fowler never says that he continues to play the game in his postwar life. In *The Sorrow of War*, Kien's comrade encourages him to use his card set to "gamble with life." He seems to forsee the boredom and disappointment of war will last into a postwar life. At that point, the sacred spirit is no longer something abstract; it is as physical as the fingerprints left on the cards, "Now only the torn, dirty set of cards, fingerprinted by the dead ones, remained." (9) The fingerprints are a remarkable detail. They are a perfectly implied reference for the ghost: an invisible existence—they leave fingerprints every where but we rarely see them. In reality, however, the most useful function of fingerprints is tracking crime, discovering hidden truth through forensic science. A fingerprint also implies a unique identity. The dead soldiers are remembered as an identical individual in the collective 27th battalion by their remaining material fingerprints.

Even many years later, the ghosts never cease to haunt Kien, though they never do anything harmful. They are always just there, "They moved into his sleep as though they were mirrors surrounding him." (70) It sounds like the formation of a haunted house where countless mirrors multiply every object. As analyzed in the previous chapter, the nature of a mirror is to reflect. According to psychoanalytic accounts, the mirror concerns the establishment of and the confrontation with the self. By using simile, the ghosts in the jungle of Screaming Souls become mirrors. Kien looks at ghosts, who serve as mirrors, to see himself. He is identified in this interaction with his dead comrades. The memory of war, no matter how it is manifested, is not only passively stored in the past, but also rises and interrupts the present and

even the future. Surrounded by the ghosts, Kien wants to pay them back. These dead soldiers represent themselves; they need to be represented by another. How to represent them is an urgency in Kien's will. Both Kien, on the story level, and the implied author, on the narrative level, make a significant effort to offer a precise view of the war in their writing.

3. Representation: The Failure to Represent War

This attempt at representing war is exactly what the plot is about. *The Sorrow of War* is the story of how Kien, as a veteran and a writer, tries to write about his war experiences. No matter how hard he tries, he is never satisfied. He always feels that what he writes is not an acceptable account of the war. Eventually, he gives up his manuscript, throws it away and leaves his apartment. Nobody knows where he goes. His neighbor, a mute woman, collects and keeps his manuscript for him.

In other words, the plot is an unfinished journey to write a story of war. It is evocative of Tim O'Brien's question in *The Things They Carried*: how to tell a true war story. Tim O'Brien's novels always struggle to narrate the truth. His stories often blur the border between what happens and what seems to happen. He questions his readers' perceptions. *The Sorrow of War*, on the other hand, questions the writer's representation, the input. The writer struggles against the action of writing itself rather than the truth of writing.

This journey starts with Kien's consciousness of his responsibility, his mission of writing about the war. The ghosts in the jungle of Screaming Souls and scattered elsewhere refuse to depart for the other world but are unable to do anything in the present world. Kien wants to offer compensation for the ones who sacrificed their lives, "It would be tragic and unjust in the extreme if he were to pass away, to be buried deep in the wet earth, carrying with him the history of his generation." (122)

He is concerned about history not only from a personal point of view, but perhaps also from the collective point of view of his particular generation. The nation will write another history popularized in history books, especially textbooks. National history will exist, but personal history is easy to forget,

similar "to be[ing] buried deep in the wet earth". However, personal history still has its own way of reaching the audience:

> It seemed to the soldiers talking about these mystical happenings that intense physical pain could mingle with the earth and grow into the trees in the jungle. Such desperate tragedies might create those ghostly sounds, sounds that would be heard forever, re-creating the agonies of the past. (98)

There is a parallel here with the Greek myth of King Midas with his donkey ears[105]. And there are also similar myths in other cultures. The shameful secret becomes an everlasting agony. The shameful secret is actively sent to the earth by a human, but the agony is transformed into nature. This automatic storytelling is the first level of war representation.

The next level would be oral history, in contrast with national history. "Sing and tell stories. 'Gentlemen, brothers and sisters, please listen to my painful story, then I'll sing you a horror song of our times.'… But how can we forget? We'll never forget any of it, never. Admit it. Go on, admit it." (43-44)

Thus Kien experiences an internal conflict. On the one hand, he wants to sing and tell stories orally, which means that he has to remember well and often. On the other hand, he sounds reluctant to accept his memories, since they are so "painful" and full of "horror." Ultimately, he always remembers, but only in fragments. He is unable to recall the past coherently. At this point, he shares the same skepticism as *The Things They Carried*, "Despite his conviction, his dedication, he also sometimes suspects his recall of certain events. Is there a force at work within him creates this suspicion… He alone must meet this writing challenge, his last duty as a soldier." (50) The fact that he is alone makes a difference in his desire to write these stories. He always had his comrades in any other previous duties. Luckily (or unluckily?), he is the only survivor from his unit. He has to deal with this last duty by himself,

[105] King Midas is punished by Apollo with donkey ears. The king's barber is the only one to know this secret. The barber relieves his burden by making a hole and whisper into there "The king has donkey's ears". A bunch of reeds grow from the hole. Whenever the wind blows, it sings "The king has donkey's ears".

alone, but he wants to write a perfect work. He writes under the driving of his memory, sometimes as if in a trance.

> The air in his room felt strange, vibrating with images of the past. Then it shook, shuddering under waves of hundreds of artillery shells pouring into the Screaming Souls Jungle, and the walls of the room shook noisily as the jets howled in on their bombing run. Startled, Kien jumped back from the window…The memories flared up, again and again. He lurched over to his desk and picked up his pen, then almost mechanically began to write. (86)

In this moment, the past interrupts the present, the door in Ha Noi is shaken by the bomb in the jungle. Kien's writing is successful at some level — "Kien's deaths had more shapes, colors, and reality of atmosphere than anyone else's war stories. Kien's soldiers' stories came from beyond the grave and told their lives beyond death." (90) But he never can chase his success until the end,

> So bitter is his frustration that he feels his pen takes him closer to at first and then more distant from what he wishes to say…But the act of writing blurs his neat designs, finally washing them away altogether, or blurs them so the lines become intermixed and sequences lose their order. (48)

Kien asks a special neighbor, a mute young woman, for help. He tells her, "I've got you in my novel. Understand? You've helped me remember. Right now. I need to remember. Everything." (111)

The mute woman is a unique character. In the novel, she is the only one whose presence is neatly organized by linear time. She plays an important role in Kien's writing. She lives in the attic that used to be the studio of Kien's father. Rumor says that many ghosts were released from the canvases when Kien's father burned all his paintings, and so nobody dares to live there but her. Kien comes to her place for the first time on a "warm summer night," a rare occurrence among successive rainy nights, and "She had become his sounding board. He was greedily demanding of her that she listen to what he had written, even though he knew she could not understand fully what he related." (112) He never knows who she is,

or even her name. He mistakes her for the women in his past life, one or the other. He also mistakes her for his male comrades sometimes. He addresses her with many different names of his acquaintance in the past. And she is as silent as the past, the ghosts, the absence. Kien wishes that Phuong could be his connection to the present. Eventually, however, the anonymous mute woman is the one who serves that purpose. She is the only person in his postwar life who absolutely sympathizes with Kien. She doesn't understand all the stories Kien tells her, but she gets the main point, "Kien had written for the sake of writing, not to publish." (114)

Kien is happy to find her as his only audience. She is Kien's confidant, similar to way that Phuong is the confidant of Kien's father. Both confidants are present when the artists burn their work, but Phuong just keeps silent, while the mute woman saves Kien's manuscript. The idea that every artist needs a confidant who completely enjoys his creation is a popular one in East Asian culture. There are many stories about how, if the listener died, the musician would break his instrument since he no longer has anyone who understands his music.

This understanding often comes from something in common. At the first glance, the mute woman shares nothing with Kien. The situation resembles *The Things They Carried*. A true war stories is not accepted because the reader has a different experience than the soldier writer. As a matter of fact, both Kien and the woman live outside of a normal state, "one dumb and one crazy." She does not understand Kien's stories, but she does understand his narrative. She knows the feeling of being marginalized. Their common feature is their loneliness. She considers preserving his manuscript to be her mission, just as his mission is writing it. The relationship between Kien and the mute woman is a metaphor for the author-reader relationship: familiar and strange, trusting and loyal.

In Kien's own words, the book is written by the "inspiration of confusion." The story about a failed representation is actually a successful representation of war itself. A foreign readership, and particularly a Western one, welcomes a Northern Vietnamese voice to be heard for the first time, free of

propaganda and outside influences. Vietnamese readership celebrates the first critical version of the glorious war. Almost three decades have passed since the novel's publication but *The Sorrow of War* is seen as a turning point and the height of war narrative in Vietnamese literature ever since.

The Sorrow of War is two novels in one. The first is the one written by Kien about his war experience, and the second, narrated by a third person narrator, is about the progress of the first one. Basically, there are two narrators, Kien addresses him as the first person narrator and the third person one. On one hand, the shift between these two narrators and their points of view creates multiple voices in the Bakhtinian sense. On the other hand, these voices are not in conflict with each other as Bakhtin argues in his analysis. All three author figures—Bảo Ninh, Kien, and the I character—are veteran writers. They speak the same language. The connection of multiple voices is vertical, like an echo, rather than horizontal, as in a conversation. The repetition of the same language from different narrators creates the effect of a wave-like movement reaching the sand of the reader's perception of war.

The novel has a complex structure and plot. The story starts when the war has been over for a year. Kien makes a number of trips back to his old battlefields to collect the remains of soldiers' bodies, and as he does so, he remembers each landscape, each dead comrade, and each random war story. Following Kien's memory, the narration moves back and forth between the prewar past and present. The narrative mode is a semi-stream of consciousness. Bảo Ninh's narration can be recognized as stream of consciousness since it follows the main character's thoughts and memories rather than factual events in chronological order. What is highlighted is how one's situation, war in this instance, drives the self. In other words, the narration in *The Sorrow of War* aims to discover the effect of war on the self rather than to discover or tell the story of the self itself.

The main setting of the novel is rain. It is not, however water of refreshment or purification. There is always too much water, and rain turns to floods. It rains in the jungle during the gloomy days of the war, in the last day of war when victory comes in the modern Sai Gon airport, as well as in the

postwar days in a taciturn Ha Noi. The water across a vast space evokes doomsday. War is presented as a termination of an era, after which there will be a new unpredictable era.

In the mist of confusion, the war is represented clearly. This is an unhappy but unavoidable time. It is the fate of a certain generation. They have to accept their fate, neither fame nor cause. That is why they are always surprised at representations of the happiness of the last day of the war that they watch on television. They do not experience anything like that. This is also why Bảo Ninh did not agree with an American adaptation of his novel as a screenplay written ten years ago by Nicholas Simon, since he did not see the soul of his war in the script. That soul has never again been recorded to this degree in Vietnamese literature.

CONCLUSION

> May our children learn from us that good people, through respectful dialogue, can discover and rediscover their common humanity, and that a painful, painful past can be redeemed in a peaceful and prosperous future. [106]

Many efforts have followed on the path former President Bill Clinton started in the first U.S. official visit to Vietnam after the conclusion of war. Dialogue has bridged the gap between the two nations, perhaps even healing war wounds. My effort in the preceding pages, taking up Vietnam War literature and different perspectives on that war, is a small contribution to President Clinton's grand mission.

The Quiet American is considered one of the first novels written about the Vietnam War. Generally, Vietnam War novels from countries other than America and Vietnam have often been written in the early phases of the war. They wrote about what was happening. In other words, they somehow parallel to history. Graham Greene and Jean Larteguy, authors of *The Quiet* American and *Yellow Fever* respectively, were reporters and correspondents, first hand witnesses to the war but also outsiders. That outsider's point of view is reflected in their novels where the war is a world of confusion, betrayal, and adventure. Memory of the war is fixed to images of local women. Local women appear as beautiful cold blooded creatures who always find some way to trap Western men. Obviously, it is the perspective of a colonist. Both *The Quiet American* and *Yellow Fever* are novels focused on the experiences of a journalist. It's understandable why these novels were written in the war years. The reason why these authors presented in the war is a writing mission.

Novels about the Vietnam War by American and Vietnamese writers largely emerge in the 1980s. Their authors are often veterans, recounting – in imaginative fiction and non-fiction – first hand

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[106] President Clinton's speech at Hanoi National University in November 17, 2000. Full text is available at http://patrick.guenin2.free.fr/cantho/vnnews/bclint14.htm

experiences of war. Their first relation to the war was as fighters, not as writers. It takes more time for them to absorb war experiences and then to translate them in writing. From first hand experiences, the war is conceptualized by distance. *In the Lake of the Woods* by Tim O'Brien views the war as a great manipulation; The Sorrow of War by Bảo Ninh meditates on the bitter reality of post war life and the lively memory of war. The American veteran remembering the Vietnam war is distant in both time and space; the Vietnamese veteran is distant in time but *not* space. He still lives in the same space. The war can never be an absolute separation from the present. However, it doesn't matter what side the soldier belongs to, his war memory haunts him in post war life. Memory, association, hallucination, forgetting are merged together. In those novels, how to represent the war is the key question. There seems be no way, in Tim O'Brien's words, to tell a "true" war story.

Viet Thanh Nguyen, the author of *The Sympathizer*, represents a specific group of American writers, belonging to a young generation born as Vietnamese and raised as American. They have second-hand experiences of the war. Their novels are somehow more distanced, calm, less obviously partisan. They can view the war differently. For this group of writers, even some in mainstream literature, exile is always a major concern. Their war reality is second hand, but their memories of the aftermath of war is definitely first hand. They grow up alongside their parents' struggle to exist and adapt to a new land. They share the collective memory of exile. With more distance from direct experience of the war, they think about social rather than personal ways to represent the war. If the third party country writers mention to media representation, *The Sympathizer* tends to artistic representation, which would last, even longer than the first experience war memory.

Although the concept, the memory and the representation of the Vietnam War is different from one vantage point to another, what is common is that the Vietnam War is a major, unforgettable event.

Memorialization of the Vietnam War in the Modern English, French, and Vietnamese Novel offers an analysis of literary war. Understanding of the diverse memories and representations of the Vietnam War contributes to bridging gap between the US and Vietnam.

As a project in comparative literature, my dissertation also contributes to the understanding of Paul Ricoeur's theory of the intertwining of history, memory and forgetfulness, of Sigmund Freud's notion of working through and acting out, of Hayden White and Dominique La Capra's theories of historical representation. And my dissertation as a whole turns on the fundamental gap between experience and representation.

While working on memory and representation of the Vietnam War in novels by Vietnamese American authors, I realized a hidden dimension of cultural conflict, an underlying force of loosened family ties. My dissertation leads me to pursue common questions of contemporary warfare, gender, migration and exile, identity and globalization.

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