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**Hyperreality and Emotional Intelligence in
The Sympathizer (2015) by Viet Thanh
Nguyen**

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
a Master Degree in English Literature and Civilization

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Abstract

Emotions tend to blind the human mind, confuse and distract it from reality, disturb its thoughts and influence its actions, or make it believe in simulated things and leave it in a delusional state. This dissertation identifies the Emotional Intelligence and Hyperreality in *The Sympathizer* (2015) by Viet Thanh Nguyen, a novel with a great psychological potential about the untold story of the Vietnam War. The author wanted to show an uncorrupted version of the war, and clarify the image created by the American movies and books that influenced the public opinion. Through the narrator, Nguyen was able to exteriorize the rage and trauma he kept inside of him since childhood. The novel is a confession from the unnamed narrator, who struggles with himself because of the duality of his mind making him unable to understand his own identity. As a sympathizer and a “man of two minds”, the narrator goes through different contradicting emotions leading him into a delusional state. This dissertation is examined on a psychoanalytic perspective and Postmodern theory.

Key words: Emotional Intelligence, Hyperreality, Duality, Identity, Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mother and my father, my sister who is always nagging at me, and my two brothers.

To my precious two best friends Iamarene Dihia and Kertous Assia, hopefully our friendship will stand sill against time and space.

The ones who supported me: Kasmi Soraya, Kerboub Wissem, and Kaci Lounis; I am very grateful for having you as my friends and may you have a bright future.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Postmodern literature is a vast world that challenges the reader's mind to think of infinite perspectives and possibilities. Postmodernism allows the world to look behind a particular thought, idea, fact, or reality. Postmodern fiction makes room to a wider and wilder understanding of literature, and makes people question their own truth and existence. The things that were once certainty may only be a possibility or a hypothesis, as Jean Baudrillard said (1987), "Nothing is wholly obvious without becoming enigmatic. Reality itself is too obvious to be true" (99). And according to Harold Pinter "There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true or what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false" (227). Thus, postmodernism is known for breaking the rules and ignoring the fixated limits created by Man.

Precisely Viet Thanh Nguyen, the Vietnamese-American author, allows us to discover more about this in *The Sympathizer*, adding some refreshing perspectives to see the world and analyze life. The novel makes the readers unsure of the unknown and even skeptical of the known to the point where they question their own selves. Viet Thanh Nguyen gives a great importance to the psyche as well, deepening the human's psychological knowledge on a wider scale. The author of *The Sympathizer* talks about various themes, but if we make the list short, the novel is about war, history, refugees, politics, ethnicity, racism, spies, and identity. However the most striking thing about the book is the psychological aspect that makes the reader's mind as a rollercoaster. Thus psychoanalysis is the first method that comes to mind when thinking of how to analyse the novel thoroughly.

Researchers require psychoanalysis as a method to learn more about the author and the characters in the novel, in order to have a better understanding of their thoughts and ideas. This approach focuses on the complex relation between knowing and not knowing, awareness and ignorance, the conscious

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and the unconscious, reality and fantasy, as well as the relation between the author and his work. Literature is closely related to the psyche just as much as a writer to his work, after all the psychological state of an artist is what influences his art either positively or negatively. The mental health of people plays an important role in their work, and many known artists show that through their creation. Whichever field it is, the influence of the psyche is not to be underestimated. This idea is well emphasized by Francisco De Goya, Louis Wain, Edgar Allan Poe, or Virginia Wolf; each one's psyche has a great impact on their career.

Furthermore, a writer always impregnates some of his inner thoughts, desires, or feelings into his characters either consciously or unconsciously. Thus Sigmund Freud, being the founder of psychoanalysis, introduced many Freudian concepts that demonstrate how thoughts and behaviors of fictional characters can be interpreted. Later new concepts arise with the development of psychoanalysis through the introduction of new psychologists and philosophers. In this research work, Sigmund Freud's *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1922) and *An Outline of psychoanalysis* (1955), co-written with James Strachey, will be of great help for a better understanding of the method used. These writings give a critical analysis of psychoanalysis and familiarize the readers with its characteristics and concepts.

Coming back to the main focus of this research, *The Sympathizer* is about the war of Vietnam and America which can be seen as a serious theme. Yet, some critics would go so far as to classify it as a comedy. That is to say, Viet Thanh Nguyen uses black humor and irony to lessen the seriousness of some facts and lighten the darkness of some truths. He has a very witty way of expressing thoughts, it would not make you laugh out loud but more like snickering; as described in Seattle Times, he is "wickedly funny". In April 2015, Philip Caputo mentioned in New York Times that *The Sympathizer* is "both thriller and social satire" for the ones who enjoy "humor written in charcoal".

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Furthermore, *The Sympathizer* focuses on sympathy or empathy as called by many, as its title suggest. The novel is written in form of a confession addressed to “the commandant”, in which the protagonist narrates everything that happened in his life as a memoir or a diary. The narrator stands filter-free for others to see, mentioning the most insignificant details that bear too much meaning, or the most humiliating experiences that show how someone can wear his shame with pride. The author wanted to create a character as imperfect as a real person, with his own flaws and wrong doings. In “Dilemma of Sympathy: Cosmopolitan Ethics and Ironist Practice of The Sympathizer”, published in June 2017, L. Sun talks about the way Viet Thanh Nguyen gives each of The United States and Vietnam “their respective roles in the Vietnam War”. In his article, L. Sun goes in more details about the theme of “sympathy” in the novel; while Sean James Bosman argues in his article “Nguyen’s Ghosts in The Sympathizer: Collapsing Binaries and Signalling Just Memory”, published in January 2020, that “the indeterminacies associated with specters allow Nguyen to trouble the simple binaries between aggressor and victim”.

While the main theme of the novel was sympathy; there is a more suitable concept to describe the feelings of the narrator, which is the Emotional intelligence. First used by Joel Robert Davitz and Michael Beldoch after that it gained popularity and Daniel Goleman, an author and science journalist, wrote a book with the title of *Emotional Intelligence* in 1995. The term means the capacity of individuals to recognize their own emotions and those of others, and discern between different feelings. An emotional intelligent individual is able to “read the mood” in different situations, thus he uses this emotional information to take control over some events. The narrator in *The sympathizer* has this ability to see things from both sides, which helps him understand people better and also creates conflicts between his brain and heart; sometimes ignorance is a bliss.

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The Sympathizer can be considered as a revolution for many people and even countries, since its publication in 2015 it became quite famous, especially for the once colonized people. The funny thing is that after being refused multiple times, once published it was a whole new story. Many already consider the novel as a new classic, and multiple articles and reviews were written about it by writers, scholars, teachers, students...etc.

Lawrence Osborne wrote a review about *The Sympathizer*, in February 2016, discussing the historical events and the style used by the narrator to write his confession, “this is a fierce novel written in a refreshing high style and charged with intelligent rage”. When talking about the novel, people mostly mention the Vietnam War, the immigrants’ life (even when Viet Thanh Nguyen himself repeats time and time again that it is about refugees not immigrants), and the fact that *The Sympathizer* is the first English novel that gives a voice to the Vietnamese people.

Philip Caputo wrote an article in April 2015 for The New York Times, where he analyses Nguyen’s novel going behind the image of the war novel. He talked about the idea of Hollywood in the novel, since there is a segment where the narrator participates in the footage of a movie “The Hamlet” which is influenced by “Apocalypse Now”. “Hollywood has been still more Americentric”; because those movies tend to always show Americans as the heroes and the centre of the flashlight. Philip Caputo did not forget the duality of the narrator for being a half Vietnamese and half French being educated in the United States.

The Sympathizer is “Strikingly moving on every page ...detailed work of historical fiction...to understand the aftermath of the turbulent Vietnam War” (Cristal) another article about the historical side of *The Sympathizer*, by Viviane Cristal in August 2015. Considered as a historical novel principally, it is more than normal to analyze the events that happened in the novel concerning

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the war. Even if the book is fictional, the base of the story is still real while Viet Thanh Nguyen went as far as to read every book and watch every movie or documentary about the Vietnam War for his book to be as authentic as possible. The process of writing *The Sympathizer* was very traumatic in itself, because it revived the memories he once wanted to forget.

After an Interview with Viet Thanh Nguyen, Ruby Perlmutter, a PhD student in English at the University of Connecticut, wrote an article in February 2018. Perlmutter argues that the life of the narrator “bears little resemblance to the author’s actual life”, which is true in a sense but false in another. Even though Viet Thanh Nguyen and the narrator have two different lives, the duality that they feel is the same. While they live two different lives, they still have something in common that makes it hard to deny their similarity; after all they both claim to be “a man of two minds”.

Yu-Yen Liu explains how Viet Thanh Nguyen tried to voice out people’s different standings in relation to the Vietnam war especially, in an article entitled “Gesturing beyond the frames: Post-apocalyptic sentiments in Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer*” published in October 2019. She says that Nguyen tried to create “a critical reflection on the knowledge production regarding the Vietnam War in particular”. That is to say, the author wanted to stitch all the precedent information and facts about this historical event and make out a new one that would at least seem less incomplete, for we can never have the complete truth about anything.

Another review article by Hai-Dang Phan and Hao Phan in February 2018 published in the University of California Press, about the different thoughts and ideas the narrator went through in *The Sympathizer*. They state in this article that the novel should be renamed “The Synthesizer” for bringing together various and often competing intellectual and literary

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traditions”. The idea is not out of place because Viet Thanh Nguyen talks about many contradicting things in his novel indeed, but it is also what make the narrator a sympathizer; the fact that he can accept different cultures that do not go together. It is also the reason for his duality, where he can see that others are different from him, yet he sees himself in them; “Dr Hedd was not speaking of me...and yet he was speaking of me” (Nguyen 328).

Ron Charles, the lead reviewer for the Washington post, who said in his article published in March 2015, that *The Sympathizer* is “a new classic of war fiction”. Charles talks about the refreshing style of the author, and his way of narrating the events as it makes the reader feel through Nguyen’s words. As mentioned by many, he also praises the black humour in the novel that makes the reader less tense. Another shout out for *Apocalypse Now* in relation to “The Hamlet”; where the author gives a very precise image of how Hollywood movies work. In the novel, the narrator took the role of an advisor for “The Hamlet”, a movie about the Vietnam and American war; however the story and plot’s objective was to make Americans stand out.

Adding to that, in the article “A Fresh Take on the Vietnam War”, published in December 2017, Bill Gates acknowledged how American movies distorted his perspective of the Vietnam War and *The Sympathizer* was the first book he read from the “Vietnamese perspective on the war”. Gate was amazed, saying that “Most War stories are clear about which side you should root for”, whereas Nguyen does not “pass judgment about where his narrator’s loyalties should lie”. The narrator “sympathizes” with both parties even when he does not believe in their cause. Gate mentioned the relation between “The Hamlet” and *Apocalypse* as well, saying that there is “more than a passing resemblance”. His statement cannot sound truer, for Viet Thanh Nguyen himself explained in an interview about how the

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movie changed his own perspective on the world. That was the time where all his beliefs, motivation, and dreams crushed down making him unable to decide where to stand.

Viet Thanh Nguyen's life influences his first novel to a great extent. Similarly to the author, the protagonist of *The Sympathizer* has psychological difficulties to identify his identity. In other words, we will be using both Postmodern and psychoanalytic approach, however this research study will deal with the psychological aspect of the book. Since we already referred to Emotional Intelligence previously, we have another term left which is hyperreality. The concept was first introduced in *Simulacra and Simulation*, a book written in 1994 by the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. Hyperreality is a way to say that people live in a fake world perceived as a real one, where illusion and truth are combined to create a new truth. More specifically a world where we are confused of whether the truth we believed in is real itself.

Accordingly, we decided to divide this research work into two chapters; the first chapter on itself will be composed of two sections. The first section will be devoted to the explanation of the two theories that will be used; giving a general overview about Psychoanalysis and Postmodernism; in addition to emotional intelligence and hyperreality. The second section will be exclusively reserved for *The Sympathizer* and its author; Viet Thanh Nguyen. A short biography of the author is needed to have a better view of his work, as well as a short summary (or synopsis) of the novel in order to have a better idea about the whole research process. This chapter plays the main role in this research, since it provides the needed information to understand the development of the study.

The second chapter will also be divided into two sections; the first one will be an analysis of *The Sympathizer* based on the psychological theory. We will try to provide more information about the *Emotional Intelligence* in the novel and make use of the characters and

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the author's way of thinking. We will try to see through the narrator as well, to confirm whether or not he is a sympathizer. Furthermore we will discuss the duality and the identity of the narrator, followed by a comparison between him and the author through their differences and similarities. The second section will be under the postmodern theory, but still within the psychological aspect. Thus, we will find a way to decipher the novel and find where the hyperreal or the truth lies. We will pay more attention to the narrator and see how much of his words can be trusted, or what are his real thoughts that cannot be vocalized. Next, it will be the study of delusions and hallucinations in *The Sympathizer*; by always taking the narrator as the experiment test, we will look more into his mind and find out his reliability. The purpose is to see if the narrator is really an emotional intelligent individual or a sympathizer, and how much such a person can be trusted.

Last but not least, the General conclusion discusses the results of the previous analysis and identifies the motivation of Viet Thanh Nguyen for writing *The Sympathizer*. We will find out whether the narrator is a sympathizer or not, and explain the complicated yet simple thoughts of a person with "two minds" and double identity. Furthermore, we will discuss the effects of emotional intelligence (sympathy) in the narrator's life, emotionally or physically.

Chapter One

Theoretical and Literary Backgrounds

The present chapter is an introduction to the key terms and concepts that will be mentioned throughout this research work. This theoretical foundation encompasses the context of the novel with a brief biography of the author, along with a general introduction of psychoanalytic and postmodern theories. The most essential concepts will be defined in more details, in order to highlight the structure of the work. This is a key section to the research work that is necessary for the reader in order to assimilate and comprehend the subject matter.

As starters in the first chapter we will attempt to define the two theories that will be used in this research; *Psychoanalysis* and *Postmodernism*. Just to have a general idea, we will try to explain briefly the development they had gone through from the moment they evolved till the recent days. Psychoanalysis and Postmodernism might be two different theories, but they are still intertwined together. Both theories are related to the psychological field, thus we will use this similarity to identify the key concepts to be used in the analysis of the novel. The objective is to put emphasis on the psychological aspect of the novel and try to identify the relationship between the key words as the research goes on.

After the introduction to the first section of this chapter which is the theoretical parts, we will move to the second section that is about the novel that will be used in this research and its author. *The Sympathizer* (2015) is a postmodern novel, it makes most people hear about it so much that they become curious about its content. The book received too many awards; it would literally take two pages to cite them all if not more. Viet Thanh Nguyen, the author of the novel, is a multitalented person himself which explain the fame of his debut novel *The Sympathizer*. The second section of this chapter will provide the reader with more information about the biography of the author and the synopsis of the book. This will help

with the familiarization with the plot and characters to avoid ambiguities as the research work goes on.

1. Theoretical and Literary Backgrounds

1.1. Psychoanalysis

Psychology has always been intertwined with literature, because of its influence on any piece of art be it poetry, paintings, architecture, or the creation of a melody. More than the art work the change happens within the artist himself. Psychoanalysis is founded by Sigmund Freud in the end of the nineteenth century from (1885-1939), as a theory in the field of medicine. Yet, it did not take long for researchers to use it in the field of literature. If in the medical domain Psychoanalysis is used to help with mental health, in literature it is used to study the psychology of the characters, the plot, or even the author himself. Psychoanalytic literary criticism is used to explore the psyche of the author and characters; however through time, the concept has developed and got more complex variations. Freud, being the founder of Psychoanalysis, has always been the first reference when the concept is mentioned, but he is not often the one in the right as many others disagree with his theory and the way he approaches things. Thus, his followers started to contradict his early theory, refuted some Freudian concepts related to sexuality, and introduced new theories and structures (Brandell).

According to Charles Mauron (1963), a literary work is like a day dream representing the innate desire of the author through symbols and metaphors; linking his creation to his own personal life. This theory is reliable to most and had been agreed upon by many researchers for its simplicity. Mauron emphasizes that every author has a secret desire that he hides from the world just like any ordinary person, but the difference is that he exteriorizes it through his art. Other than a particular obsession, the author may also relate his work to a certain traumatic experience that can be on his conscious as well as his unconscious self. The whole

process is seen as a sane and safe acting out of the mind that helps the author's mental health. It does not endanger anyone as its only purpose is to help a person liberate himself from his internal demons, while bringing to life an artist who entertain others.

Later, Heinz Kohut introduced the psychology of the self that focuses on the development of someone's personality. This technique deals with the role of empathy in human evolvment, and how one can be immersed into the experience of another. The psychology of the self is a symbol of humanity where people understand and acknowledge the other's feelings. This method that places a great deal of empathy in human development, for it facilitates people's interactions between each other and creates less ambiguities and misunderstandings. The psychology of the self helps to strengthen people's bonds, and create a world where people are more tolerating and empathizing between each other.

Speaking of empathy there is another more imposing term that evolved from it, which is "Emotional intelligence"- (EI) - which is the ability to understand emotions that are not only related to us but to others as well. It is said to have the ability to put under control people's feelings as impulse, anger, and frustration in order to achieve a peaceful environment. Before the introduction of the concept, theorists were studying the history of human intelligence for most part of the 21st century. While analyzing different kinds of intelligence researchers used to study the social intelligence that has come to be known as Emotional Intelligence (Brackett, Mayer, Warner 1394).

The term was first mentioned formally by Lenuner (1966) cited in *Mathews, Zeinder, and Roberts* (2002) in the article "*Emotional Intelligence and Emancipation*" published in German journal. The concept has not been used in English literature until Payne wrote a dissertation where he defines vaguely the term. The latter published neither his theory nor his work, thus Salovey and Mayer's article published in 1990 is considered to be the birth of the

theory of *Emotional Intelligence*. Salovey and Mayer were the first to utilize the term in scientific literature and drew the first comprehensive model of *Emotional Intelligence*. (Murphy)

Even though Mayer and Solovey are the two researchers who introduced the construct of *Emotional Intelligence* to the scientific world, Goleman is the one who is recognized for the term's popularization. Goleman wrote a book entitled "*Emotional Intelligence*" in 1995; in which he provides us with more information in order to broaden this field. To date, much of the research on *Emotional Intelligence* has been conducted within the health and well-being perspective for obvious reasons; having a high level of social intelligence makes people's life easier. This theory focuses on the importance and antecedent of health and/or moderating the relationship between various organizational or individual variables and well-being indicators. In literature, many mechanisms have been hypothesized to account for the bond and relationship between *Emotional Intelligence* and one's sense of well-being and positive mental health.

Emotionally intelligent individuals create a less stressful environment for themselves by conducting their personal and social lives in ways that produce fewer frustrating or distressing events. Being able to see through people by reading their body language, or understanding them after being in the same situation makes them able to feel one's pain, joy, helplessness, distress...etc (Epstein 17-19). They have rich social networks and are able to utilize these networks to provide them with an emotional buffer against negative life events. The ability to understand is the key to prevent negative consequences.

Emotional intelligent individuals are more aware of their own emotions and have more capacity to manage them effectively. Therefore, they experience lower levels of distress, have a stronger awareness of the mood in their surroundings, thus elicit and maintain a better

mood. They are less likely to experience negative emotions, and concomitantly, more likely to experience positive emotions, having a tendency to interpret stressful situations in more benign and less stressful way, viewing them more as challenge rather than threats (Eipstein 17-19).

According to Goleman emotionally intelligent individuals are more likely to experience lower levels of distress and stress-related emotions, and concomitantly experience higher levels of well-being. Those people have the ability to bear more empathy for others and are more human; which brings us to the main theme in *The Sympathizer* where the narrator can understand others' feelings and emotions. He does not condemn those who are supposed to be the enemy, but he feels for them and understands them.

Numerous researchers indicate that cultural differences exist across a wide range of emotion-related skills, abilities, or traits that essentially comprise the construct of the Emotional Intelligence tapped by several of its instruments. For example, compared to collectivists, individualists are more effective in recognizing and understanding emotions, as they do not suppress their emotions, are more assertive are less impulsive, tend to view and present themselves positively are more happy, tend to be more optimistic, demonstrate higher ability to cope with stress, have greater social skills, and are more self-motivated.

Thus, *Emotional Intelligence* is all about the psychology of the individual and his capacity to be more human. It is about the person and the way he views the outside world, either he is in or out. Furthermore, it is about the perspective of individual on himself and how much he can see in otherness.

1.1. Postmodernism

The term Postmodernism was first used in 1947 in reference to architecture; later in 1960s literary critics began to use the term to distinguish post-World War II experimental

fiction from the classics of high modernism. The term came into widespread use since the early nineteen-eighties.

As a movement, Postmodernism has influenced many spheres of human life including art, society, or philosophy. The term itself does not have a unified definition; there are as many theories of postmodernism as are branches of science. However the main focus in this study is in relation to literature, which is going to be the main focus.

The term postmodernism rejects many, if not most, cultural beliefs. It deconstructs the meaning to dig deeper, and argues the truth claiming it to be relative. It is a reaction against enlightenment ideas implicit in modern literature. Postmodernism is hard to define , however unifying some features from researchers and theorists permitted a more clear idea about the term; for instance the concept of “metanarrative” and “little narrative” of Jean-Francois, “play” of Jacque Derrida , or “simulacra” by Jean Beaudrillard.

Postmodern texts embody skepticism towards the ideas and ideals of the modern era, especially the ones of progress, objectivity, reason certainty, and personal identity. Postmodernism favors “mini narratives” explaining small practices and local event without pretending rational universality and finality; It does not believe in stable or permanent reality (Voss and Schütze 120-122) in 1989.

There were many debates among theorists regarding postmodern literature, for example Jean Baudrillard's infamous declaration that the Gulf War did not take place, and Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon's debate on whether or not parody can be considered postmodern. Unknowingly those disagreements illustrated its key mantra: “the death of the truth”, even if the interpretation of this mantra is still not agreed upon.

Irony, along with black humor, and the general concept of “play” are among the most recognizable aspects of postmodernism even if the idea of using them in literature is not originally from postmodernists. Furthermore, some postmodern novelists like John Barth, Joseph Heller, William Gaddis, Kurt Vonnegut, and Bruce Jay Friedman were labeled black humorist.

It is very common for Postmodernist writers to use humour even when treating serious subjects. While Frederic Jameson called postmodernism the “cultural logic of late capitalism”, Jean Baudrillard claimed postmodernity was defined by a shift into hyperreality; saying the real is no more, for it was replaced by simulations (Simulacra, 1994).

When the term postmodernism came into widespread use it has been employed to describe everything from television commercials and technology. The media and all the different information we receive from different sources lead us to confuse simulations for reality, believing in a false reality.

Hyperreality is a sign-value system that is generated by the market industry; the hyper-consumerism which creates a passive/active subject who fakes a desire to fit to the hyperreality or simulacra. (Timothy B. Industrial-individual) It sings the loss of reality leaving room for fake truth, making the postmodern world an artificial one.

Jean Baudrillard, the French philosopher, wrote a book *Simulation and Simulacra* (1994) in which he elaborates the concepts of hyperreality and simulacra. He believes that today the surface culture is a virtual or fake reality simulated by the media or other ideological apparatuses. In discussing simulacra and hyperreality, Baudrillard points out Borges fable and suggests that simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation of a hyperreal; a model to replace the real (Baudrillard 117-118).

The term hyperreality came from a movement in modern art; Baudrillard identified the dissolution of relations between subject and object, real and fake, true and false, in the triumph of consumer capitalism. The contemporary world is a simulacrum, where people have lost the ability to discriminate between the real and the artificial (119).

2. The Biography of the Author & Synopsis of the Novel

2.1. Biography

Viet Thanh Nguyen is a university professor, born in Vietnam, he came to the United State as a refugee in 1975 with his family settling in a camps for Vietnamese refugees. Later his parents opened the first Vietnamese grocery store in San Jose in California, a very rough place to live in at that time, and Viet wrote about it in his short story “The War Years”.

Viet Thanh Nguyen graduated with English and ethnic studies degree in UC Berkeley, where he stayed for a Ph.D in English to be a teacher at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. His first novel is *The Sympathizer* written in 2015, a New York Times best seller that won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Including many other awards as: Dayton Literary peace Prize, the Edgar Award for best first novel from the Mystery writers of America, Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature.

Viet Thanh Nguyen wrote many short stories and novels, as I can notice each work of his has a particular relation to his personal life. For instance *The Sympathizer* is the key that opens a door for him to be able to write more freely as he said. The novel itself cannot be qualified in a specific genre, for it is considered to be a spy novel, war novel, an immigrant novel, or a campus novel.

Even though Viet Thanh Nguyen said that the book is not near a semi biography, we can clearly see some similarities, if not many, between him and the narrator. When I asked him if he can see himself in the narrator, he said that he always felt like living as a spy, “if I am home I would feel that I spy on my family, and the same goes whenever I go outside. I always feel like I don’t belong wherever I am”. (He also said that just like the narrator he can understand the feelings and emotions of others, “I always think that I am a sympathizer myself” (Covey).

2.2. Synopsis of *The Sympathizer*

“Beautifully written and meaty [...] really compelling. I had that kid-like feeling of being inside the book” (Claire Messud, Boston Globe, 2015). *The Sympathizer* has the ability to connect to different readers in a way where they would feel that empathy the author is talking about. ‘A dark and exciting debut novel [...] Black humor seeps through these pages’, Wall Street Journal. While critics claimed the novel as a way to humanize people, Viet Thanh Nguyen contradicted the thought saying that people are already human hence his will is to remind us of a more positive humanity.

The Sympathizer is a written confession of a political prisoner, a half-Vietnamese half-French undercover communist agent, who is the unnamed narrator. The story is about the South Vietnamese government and the events in the American exile in Los Angeles in 1975, starting from the fall of Saigon following the events to Los Angeles and ending it in Vietnam’s prison.

The narrator has to overcome many difficulties throughout the book, but his biggest fight is still within himself. Being a mixed blood descent, having a Vietnamese mother and a French Catholic priest father, raised in Vietnam but attended college in the US, being a mole

from the North Vietnamese yet a friend to south Vietnamese military officials and soldiers, and CIA agent in the United States; this double life of his creates the duality in his mind and the uncertainty of his own identity, “I am... a man of two minds”, (Nguyen1). However it also has a part to do with his peculiar way of perceiving things; whatever the situation is he finds himself in between able to understand both sides.

During the fall of Saigon, the narrator, as an aide-de-camp, arranges the last minute flight for him, his best friend Bon and the general. Many of their followers died before leaving, adding his friend’s wife and child. Arriving in Los Angeles, the status of the general as well as his illusions to live with honor does not last long, resulting him to plan a rebellion against the North.

On the other hand, the narrator takes a clerical position at Occidental College where he meets a Japanese-American colleague Ms. Moris with whom he starts an affair to later have another one with the general’s daughter Lana. While helping the general with his plans, he also sends letters in invisible ink to Man, his other best friend narrating the general’s every move to his other best friend and also a North Vietnamese revolutionary and handler.

The next important event is the offer from a Hollywood director to help in the production of *The Hamlet*, a Hollywood film about the Vietnamese War. His high expectations of showing a new side of the history of the Vietnam War turn to dust in no time, for the working set being in Philippines with non- Vietnamese actors with a plot that beautifies the Americans can only create a misleading interpretation of reality. At the same time the narrator encounters an explosion that was “miscalculated” living him in despicable state, in which the director might have a hand in.

After his recovery the protagonist ignores Man's advice to stay in the US and decides to return to Vietnam with the exiled troops, but not before executing a left-leaning Vietnamese newspaper editor, Sonny, who is also his rival for the affection of Ms Moris. Taking someone's life did not stand well with him, hence he can see the ones that he killed mocking his every move.

In Vietnam, our protagonist was able to save his best friend's life, but the price is their imprisonment. Treated differently from other prisoners, the narrator has to write his confession over and over again, for he does not write what he does not believe in. Hence the communists think of him as a traitor seeing as he is not capable of confessing his wrong doings. Rather than showing hatred and animosity against their "enemy", he is more likely sympathizing with them which make his confession quite complex. Being able to say lies with his mouth, yet his hand refuses to give form to other things than his true feelings; reciting even the most humiliating experiences he lived.

The narrator eventually faces the commissar with no face, none other than his best friend Man. With no other way to help his friend, Man takes the initiative to subject him to torture in the name of re-education. During that hell time where he suffers all kind of torture, Man asks questions that will make the narrator understand his own self in a better way and understand that all he has been through during his life is for nothingness. The end of the novel is with him accompanied with Bon in a boat among others.

The novel was influenced by many other works as stated by the author himself like: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Alfred W. Mc Coy's *A Question of Torture*, And *Apocalypse Now...etc.* The author claimed having read and watched many works related to the war of Vietnam, "a process that I don't recommend to anyone" , he said. Noticing no English work explaining that history, apart from the American point of view, he made it his mission to try

and go through those traumatic memories that he blocked long ago. Reviving those events that he tried all his life to forget left him with an unenviable state of mind; nonetheless, it untied the knot that kept weighing on his being and made him able to express his feelings and thoughts more freely via his writing.

The book encompasses many different themes and topics, be it its structure, characters, plot, language, history, or the story itself. However the main subject that is treated in this research work is the psychological side of the novel, for there are many different topics about psychology that can be analysed in *The Sympathizer*.

Chapter Two

Psychological and Postmodernist Perspectives

To sum up the content of the second chapter, we will analyze *The Sympathizer* under the psychoanalysis and postmodern theories. As mentioned in the general introduction, the second chapter has two sections, each of which will be using the psychoanalytic and postmodern perspective respectively. The first section will talk about the Emotional Intelligence in the novel, more specifically to study the duality of the narrator as well as discern the relationship between him and the author.

The second section will be reserved for the postmodern perspective, where discuss the real and hyperreal in *The Sympathizer* according to Jean Baudrillard. In this section we will put emphasis on the psyche of the narrator in order to have a better understanding of his “minds”, and decipher the real from the fake or the truth from the delusion.

During an interview with *New York Times Magazine*, Jacques Derrida once said that “Psychoanalysis has taught that the dead—a dead parent, for example—can be more alive for us, more powerful, scarier, than the living. It is the question of ghosts.”(1994) after all, the unconscious is more dangerous than the consciousness, for the individual’s mind is under the control of the unconscious. If awareness is not always good, unawareness is worse; not knowing what you might do in a particular situation even when you think you know because your mind could take action on its own.

Derrida talked about ghosts because we all have something that haunts us, either we are aware of it or not; and that something can be a person, an experience, a thought, or maybe an illusion. The thing becomes a part of our personality creating our own identity, the same way it takes over our feelings and emotions without our knowledge. Some would perceive it negatively and be pessimistic about it, however the past influences our future thus it makes who we are at the present. The past allows the individual to grow and have a sense of identity,

and identity is essential for human existence; as it gives enough confidence to the mind to overcome and control those feelings and emotions that once were in control.

When someone overcomes their ghosts, they open their eyes to see the world differently and have a kind of connection towards other people. They could feel sympathy when seeing someone else's struggles, and understand others better. That is how we reach Emotional Intelligence which leads to improving someone's personal effectiveness, dealing with impulses, and managing self-awareness. Still, that does not mean that it is a battle between the conscious and unconscious, the head and the heart, or the mind and psyche; but rather a reunion for the complementary sides, "It is very important to understand that Emotional Intelligence is not the opposite of intelligence, it is not the triumph of heart over head—it is the unique intersection of both" (Caruso 394-402). Thus, Emotional intelligence is about combining the heart and the head, or in other words logic and emotions. It is about being able to understand real life situations from different perspectives.

1. Emotional Intelligence

The ability to analyze an event, a situation, or an issue in one's everyday life from both sides, as if experiencing it from both perspectives is not something that everyone can do. Hence it is quite peculiar for the protagonist in *The Sympathizer* to have such ability. Even if empathy is a human feeling and emotion, it still not given to everyone or rather people are unconscious of it. In fact even if there are some people who claim to be emotionally intelligent individuals, deep down they cannot be fully aware of others' feelings and if they were then they would not completely understand them. You can never be sure of something that is not confirmed.

Emotional Intelligence can be summarized with few terms: "Self-Awareness", "Self-Management", "social Awareness", and "Social Skills"; so doubt is understandable.

How can someone have such self-control over his emotions, even if he can it must be draining. In order to achieve such level of awareness and control, the person has to go through as many emotions and feelings as possible which is not a piece of cake. As a reminder, there are as many, if not more, painful emotions as joyful; so it cannot be seen as a heavenly process. This conclusion can make people wonder if the person who manages his emotions so well is in a good mental health. How can someone be psychologically fine if he has to deal with so many feelings? This can be quite misleading for people who overthink things.

However Emotional Intelligence can help humanity to live in a better world and create peace among people. As an example it plays a great role in the protagonist of *The Sympathizer's* life as well as his surrounding a way or another. Be it a blessing or a curse, seeing it in a positive or a negative way is up to the concerned person to identify it. However, the narrator is in a dilemma since his empathy or, as Viet Thanh Nguyen prefers referring to it, sympathy, plays with his own mind and identity.

1.1. Duality Vs. Identity

Viet Thanh Nguyen said once that “it’s a natural humanity to think and feel for people who we think are like us, and this is both very human and also very disastrous...” (Nguyen. *Terry Gross, Fresh Air*). The incapacity to imagine the perspective of other people is a sad truth for almost everyone, for it is not common to think and feel from the position of a person who is not like them. The Captain, as addressed to the narrator, in *The Sympathizer* is a man who can understand and feel others’ situations; “I am a spy, a sleeper, a spook, a man of two faces . . . a man of two minds. I am simply able to see any issue from both sides”, (Nguyen01). This was how the captain starts his confession (the novel itself) which is strongly

influenced by Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. He is already aware of the duality of his mind, thus confesses earnestly.

“Duality is literally in the protagonist's blood”, (New York Times); that is to say the term Dual is a part of his identity. The narrator has to suffer from some pains to live with his complicated identity that can be both his strength and weakness. While he was lost and struggling to find a place where he could fit in, the love of his mother and her words kept him in check and made him able to move forward. Whenever he felt lonely and doubted himself, he would think about the words of his mother; “remember you are not a half of anything, you are twice of everything.” (Nguyen 393) This sentence never fails to make him feel more confident.

The duality of the captain starts from his birth, because his mother was a Vietnamese woman while his father is a French catholic priest; neither acknowledged in Vietnam nor in France or even his own father. Given names as “dust of life” or “bastard”, with no sense of belonging or clear identity, the narrator always felt like living between two worlds. Even though he can accommodate and live in each, he still feels like an outsider, as he said “I was in a familiar place, the place of feeling unfamiliar.”(216) the narrator is always an outsider, never finding someone he can see himself in, someone who can mirror his own insecurities. He can clearly see that everyone has at least one person he can identify with, but he was the only man on his own with no one to share his burden.

Being rejected from both sides, he embraces this duality as a part of his identity and uses it at his advantage as it belongs to his self-identification. Nonetheless, he is still struggling with himself not completely digesting the rejection of the world and always tries to please others. “I yearned for nothing but approval, even from fools.”(85) Even if he does not accept the truth, the narrator wants to be acknowledged by others, praised for his

accomplishments, and appreciated for his sacrifices. He always wears a smiling face and spots a series of lies, not only because he is a spy, but also to be approved by others.

Duality is not only related to the captain in this novel, but also the majority of characters in the story. The Vietnamese refugees had to find a way to adapt to their new life among Americans, trying to please them and learn their culture while keeping in mind their community and ancestors' beliefs. They have to find a method that would permit them to respect their values without offending the white people; "the Amerasian, forever caught between two worlds and never knowing where he belongs." (83). For instance, the dignified general has to work in a restaurant with his wife, and try to please their customers who are their enemies at heart. The general has to control his temper and even joke with the white people, ending up playing two different roles serving the ones he despises the most.

Viet Thanh Nguyen here uses the concept of "Double Consciousness" by W.E.B DuBois; which means to have a divided identity –not being a one but a two- phenomena that makes it complicated to identify oneself if not impossible. Ms Morris for instance is Japanese-American, she works as a secretary of the department of oriental studies at occidental college, being an independent woman with high self-esteem she dislikes the Department Chair. Yet, she works under him and has to show respect. She plays it rather smoothly with an indifferent look, not saying much in order to confuse others and show as less as possible. Her character is not easy to decipher, and the way she deals with others makes her more likable.

Going back to the main character involved with duality; the narrator is a spy so it is a fact that he literally plays two roles and lives two lives. Being a Vietnamese refugee living with Americans and working for two parties that are against each other: the Viet Cong on the one hand and the South Vietnam on the other. Even if he is a loyal communist, he still cannot

bring himself to hate his “enemies”; for he is a sympathizer able to be a third party that is neither with nor against. During the entire book, Viet Thanh Nguyen did not voice out which side the narrator was with. While he is a communist, the narrator did not seem to believe in their cause; and his life style is influenced by the other party. His cultural, religious, and political beliefs do not match the Vietcong, but it does not match the other party either. The narrator has always contradicting thoughts as if he was not one but two people, and this only draws more attention to his duality.

Even if the beginning of the novel gives a clear idea that the protagonist is well aware about his duality, but he still cannot understand his own identity; “we are the ones most able to know ourselves and yet the most unable to know ourselves.”(445). His words can sound wrong at times, yet they cannot be more right. Viet Thanh Nguyen is very meticulous with every word he writes, every detail has some deep meaning that makes the reader question himself as well. The human mind is very complex and not everyone could understand the way it works; so when they think that they know themselves best, they discover that they are the most ignorant about it. Sometimes people even learn more about themselves through outsiders, who seem to know them best.

When the narrator starts working in the department of oriental studies, the department Chair gives him an exercise: writing his oriental and occidental qualities. Though reluctant at heart he still kept his composure accepting the task without retaliating. Funny enough the task showed out his own duplicity; his oriental qualities showed how he cannot act or speak freely, always having to manipulate opinions, calculate every smile, and be a hypocrite with each step. The words he used were: “self-effacing”, “respectful of authority”, “worried about others’ opinion”, “usually quiet”, “always trying to please”, “say yes when I mean no”, “prefer to follow”, “comfortable in a crowd”, “self-sacrificial”, “follow my ancestors”,(84).

Whereas his occidental qualities seem to loosen the chains around him, though there are some clear restrictions that are stuck to him; “occasionally opinionated”, “sometimes independent”, “now and then carefree”, “talkative (with a drink or two), “once or twice have not given a damn”, “say what I mean, do what I say”, “yearn to lead”, “ready to take the stage”, “live to fight another day”, “forget my ancestors!”(84). The task or exercise was well fulfilled, which is a given coming from a top student such as the narrator.

After analyzing the given exercise, the Department Chair remarks the seriousness of the situation; given how “the oriental qualities diametrically oppose the occidental” resulting with some “severe” issues of identity. He encourages the captain to reinforce his oriental side and tells him that out of those two sides can come one in the future; since “he meant to be kind” the protagonist plays his oriental self and goes with the flow. Telling him to choose one identity when the two are part of him is a way of telling him to change his identity implicitly. Those two sides of his are what makes the person he is, what makes him sympathize with others, and understand their feelings.

Throughout his confession, the protagonist’s duality came to surface many times, if not all of the time, but still the two minds of his do not seem to agree at any point. Until his return to Vietnam resulting of his imprisonment and Bon (his best friend) where he discovers that the commissar with no face is none other than his other best Friend Man. Their Friendship is deep and truthful, for they were “blood brothers”. However the one facing him has neither ears nor nose, he was faceless after being burnt. Still, there is more than just his physical features that changed. Man has seen so many people suffering apart from himself that he became numb, thus when he sees that his friend is still the gullible person he once was he wants to “help” him find himself. He wants to make the narrator take his stand noticing his lack of conviction about everything.

Man has to be his fiend in order to help him understand all the ambiguities and contradictions he encountered in his own mind. That is why he subjects his “re-education”, also the starting point where the novel turns into a darker side, creating turmoil inside his head. The torture, he endured, made him see himself as a stranger, and while the commissar asks “simple” questions, the man himself does not seem to know the answer, “had he forgotten his name?”(444). The narrator faced all his insecurities during the torture with the conflict between his two minds, when seeing everything clearly he seems to sober up from his delusional thinking.

Even if the narrator has to go through an intense pain, the results were worth it. At last, he made peace with himself realizing that all he did was for the sake of “nothingness”, his revolutionary, communist, and mole “self” was for nothing. While he sympathizes with others he forgot that he was also someone who needs sympathy, and if he does not sympathize with himself no one would. Finally sympathizing with him and himself embracing his identity saying, “I was the man of two minds, me and myself”, (487). However to define himself, the narrator has to reach craziness. Hence, he went through another process of destabilization to regain his sanity.

There are two sides of everything, depending if one can see them or ignore them, just like the protagonist can see the commissar and Man. The faceless man who is not different from his two minds self proves that everyone has a double identity, the question is if we can see it or not. Same goes for the person we face in a mirror or the one that others see, it is two different sights.

Viet Thanh Nguyen created a very interesting character, always surprising the reader by what he does next; so is the narrator the fruit of the author’s imagination only or is there more to it? A writer is always influenced by his personal life while writing either consciously

or unconsciously. Artists externalize their hidden internal desires or experiences through their work; the only difference is that some are crystal clear whereas others are more discrete. Here the author and narrator's lives are very similar, but at the same time very different, which make their relation more complicated and uncertain.

1.2. Author Vs Narrator

The Sympathizer is not, by any means, a semi-biography, as highlighted by Viet Thanh Nguyen. He claims that he is nothing like the narrator who is a murderer, a womanizer, and an alcoholic. Yet, there are many similarities between the two. He confirmed the idea himself when I contacted him via email, asking him if he is a man of two minds he clearly answered, "I am definitely a man of two faces and two minds! I've said this in interviews, that growing up as a minority and Vietnamese in a white-dominated United States gave me this feeling of always having to occupy two worlds. And to feel sympathy for both worlds and everything and everyone in between"

Being a sympathizer himself, Nguyen decided to input the characteristic to the narrator as well. The author put much effort creating the character of the captain communist double agent, and knowingly or unknowingly he impregnates much of his own person in it. Some facts are very obvious at first sight while others need the reader to dig deeper. If the narrator plays two roles and lives between two worlds without being able to choose, Viet Thanh Nguyen experiences the same things in both his personal and professional life.

First Viet Thanh Nguyen is a Vietnamese-American novelist and scholar, living in the United States side by side with Americans without forgetting his origins from Vietnam. He once said that he felt as a spy himself, for he does not have any feelings of belonging anywhere. He left Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in 1975 when he was only four years old,

thus he does not feel that he belongs there. Likely, he finds himself as an outsider while living with the “white people” as well, yet he can still understand and accommodate with both. In other words the author has no problem in living anywhere with any who because he see no difference. For him he was split in two unable to decide and choose a side. He struggles between two worlds but neither accepts him as theirs.

The narrator just like the author cannot identify himself with anyone; he can feel familiarity with something or someone which is the feeling of unfamiliarity. In his confession states that he feels as an outsider wherever he goes, never able to melt in the crowd. Viet Thanh Nguyen said once during an interview that he sees everything from a third-person point of view, which helps him to sort out his thoughts more calmly and face any issue without ignoring someone’s point of view. The narrator as well is someone who can see “any issue from both sides”, either a “curse” or a “blessing” this talent helped him survive as a spy.

Second, the idea of the sympathizer came from his own feelings and the way he see the world, for he is a sympathizer. Viet Thanh Nguyen said that he cannot remember anything before the age of four, his memory starts from the moment they separated him from his mother since they need a sponsor in order to leave the Vietnamese refugee camp. The anecdote is quite traumatic for a child at such a young age, but it also helped him understand life earlier than is expected from a child. The past makes the person we are at present, and Nguyen may not achieve any of his success and life if not for the dark period of his life. The past we lived makes the present we live in. The narrator is not an exception; he lived as an unwanted person since his birth, treated as bastard even his father refused to acknowledge. While growing up, he was more aware of people’s feelings, reading into situations more than others could, and analyzing anything from different points of view.

“There is that experience of feeling between two worlds, seeing things from two sides, being the lone minority in an environment” (Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*). As he already explained in many interviews, Viet Thanh Nguyen has the ability to sympathize with others; living as a “minority” among a majority. He explained that this does not really illustrate how he developed this sympathy for others, nor would everyone who went through the same experience feel the same. It is all in the mind of a person and the way he perceives life, a thought that is both related to him as a person as well as the narrator expressed in the last pages of the novel.

Last, Viet Thanh Nguyen lives even his professional life as a divided unit; he is both a scholar and a novelist. He spent twenty years of his life to bring those two separate parts of him together, in which he succeeds at last. Being able to unite his academic scholarship and literary ambitions is similar to the way the narrator unifies his two minds together. While the author achieved his peace of mind by clearing his duality, the narrator has to go through physical and mental torture in order to unify his “two minds” and find his true self. The process is different, but the result was the same satisfying feeling of awareness.

Even with all those similarities the author and narrator are still worlds apart in a sense. Both having different ideas about life and each one has his own views and principles. Both have minds of their own, even if the theory is similar the application is far from it. The narrator is “a misogynist” as Nguyen said, “I’m enjoying writing from the viewpoint of a misogynist, so what does it mean about him and what does it mean about me.” (Yale University video) In other words, the narrator is still a character of fiction; and while he is fine with the idea of being single and having fun with prostitutes, Nguyen is a happy husband and father. If the narrator has to fake his emotions in order to please others, Nguyen does not shy away from his thoughts and expresses them high and loud; *The Sympathizer*, being the best

example to back up the idea. After all Viet Thanh Nguyen was well aware of the hate and bitterness that his novel would provoke in many.

The Sympathizer explores many themes related to all genders of all ages, and the main objective of the author is to influence the public opinion about two things: the first one is to enhance people to sympathize with others for a better world; the second is to expose the fake information and stories provided by Americans. Since all the movies and books in English about the Vietnam War are from an American perspective, Viet Thanh Nguyen is considered to be the first author to give voice to the Vietnamese population. The novel plays with the psyche of the reader letting him wonder between the real and hyperreal.

2. Hyperreality

“It is the simulacrum which ensures the continuity of the real today, the simulacrum which now conceals not the truth, but the fact that there isn’t any.” (Beaudrillard, 102) According to Jean Beaudrillard there is no truth and no reality, there is only the hyperreal, which is an illusion or a simulation that people take as reality. During the postmodern era researchers and philosophers introduced many new concepts, and acknowledged a new reality that is: there is no real.

As time goes, the world is exposed to a greater knowledge and opened its eyes to perceive new things that were already there, but hidden by the dust of simulation. In life people tend to know more, yet to understand less; meaning became a foreign word going further and further away from their grasp. People seek for truth, but truth does not seem to be able to free itself from those simulations.

The development of technology is a two-edged sword, like any other thing in life, there is no hundred percent. “Every truth means at least two things” (Nguyen480). On one hand,

technology is very helpful in everyday life, either to entertain or to make tasks easier. On the other hand, it can also be considered as a very negative influence on humanity. Technology controls everything even the way masses think. The most flagrant and simple example is the beauty standards; seeing a celebrity who is thin with white jade skin will make a revolution and every girl would want to be like her while every man would want his woman to be like her. Same goes for men; most of them would want to be called the most handsome man in the world and have that perfect muscular body that Hrithic Roshan has. However, if they were ordinary people that you see in front of you and not on TV, the thought might change a lot. That is to say, we live in a world where our beliefs are not ours, simulation hinders our perspective of the real, and the wrong might be right.

2.1. The Real Vs The Hyperreal

Jean Beaudrillard claims that the media only replaces reality feeding people illusions and simulations, thus resulting with the hyperreal. In other words the media makes the world believe in “realities” that are not real, same goes for movies inspired from real life. Viet Thanh Nguyen introduces an example in *The Sympathizer* about the hyperreal that people believe in. A scene inspired by his own experience when he was ten years old, during that time he watched *Apocalypse Now*; a war movie that narrates the story of the American and Vietnam war. Living within Americans Viet was rooting for them at first until he saw Americans killing Vietnamese people, being a Vietnamese himself, the little boy was shocked. Also the time where he has a split of identity, not knowing where to identify himself.

In *The Sympathizer* the narrator was asked to be an advisor on a Hollywood film “The Hamlet” that was viewed as a fictional version of *Apocalypse Now*. However, Viet Thanh Nguyen claims that it is “a compilation of all the movies that I’d seen about the Vietnam

War... The Hamlet is going to be one of these films” (*Terry Gross, Fresh Air*). The narrator’s role is to be the authenticity consultant, so he thinks that he will help to portray the Vietnamese real self. However his dream to give a better image to the Vietnamese people in the movie were but illusions, for the Vietnamese characters were not even Vietnamese actors, they did not have any dialogue, and they were framed as barbarians. (Nguyen 204_206).

The captain understands at last that Hollywood is the “unofficial ministry of propaganda for the Pentagon”; its only objective is to make the American soldiers shine as heroes and good people while others, either Indians or Vietnamese, are the alien, different, and marginal. The only difference was when they added three Vietnamese characters with a few sentences representing them as the bad guy, there was also a change in the way they would scream from “AIIIEEEEE” to “AIEYAAHHH” (172). This can be considered as a ridiculous step forward, after all there was no dialogue for the Vietnamese actors (represented by Philippines actors) in the original script.

It was their story but they could not say a word, truth is not important, reality is what they want it to be, and history is what they make people believe in. Viet Thanh Nguyen explains that the narrator thought he could try to change things and make a difference, yet the humor as well as the tragedy is that he cannot. Clearly stating that the media influences the beliefs of the masses and the truth, it takes a thought, a truth, or an idea to fill it with lies and simulations in order to create a reality for all; referred to as a hyperreality by Jean Baudrillard in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1986).

The captain did not have his full of surprises yet, further in the story he saves the life of his friend, Bon, but he has to pay a big price for acting on impulse. The narrator has always put his safety first whenever he has to complete a mission, unless it is related to his two

close best friends Bon and Man. They were only one who can stimulate his genuine feelings. After returning to Saigon they were both imprisoned, but they did not share the same fate. (399-400)

The narrator being a sympathizer, gives the readers an opportunity to see through others' emotions and feelings as well, yet he himself is unable to see the truth. Falling in the hands of his communists confreres, the captain is forced to write a confession. They were asking him to admit that he was brainwashed by the white people since he listens to their music and mentions their poets and writers throughout his confession. Being someone who cannot tolerate pain or grievances, the captain was quick to say what the commandant, who forced him to write his confession, wanted to hear; however that was not his objective. The commandant asked him to write down the words that came through his mouth, yet the captain could not bring his hand to move in accordance to his lips. Even though he lies all the time and has never been sincere when expressing himself, writing was his exception; so how could he bring himself to break his last cord of honesty?

Afterwards, the narrator was tortured in the worst way possible by none other than his friend Man, who happened to be the commissar. At last he understood the message that his best friend wanted to communicate to him. Everything he lived for, believed in, and fought for turn out to be a lie. The novel ends with the destruction of his simulacrum, a communist imprisoned by communists, slapped in the face by the truth; all his sufferings and sacrifices were for "nothing". The narrator is said to be "infected" by western ideas, for he believed something that they do not acknowledge, listens to their music, and refers to their poets. This kind of influence is considered to be treason, indicating his immersion in values that are unethical to communism. (479).

Man, his friend, tortures him in order to make him understand where lays the truth all by himself. All the time the narrator thought he was helping his people, yet his mind decided to forget the cruel reality he once witnessed. He forgot that he watched a female communist agent being raped and tortured by three policemen, doing “nothing” to help, which proves his poor level of commitment to the communist cause. The narrator clearly lacks conviction, as he never whole heartedly believed in the cause he was serving. Nevertheless, the narrator is not the only one lost his faith in communism, because Man also sees himself as an inauthentic and hypocrite doing things he no longer believes in. (480)

The narrator has to lose his sanity in order to answer many of his questions about life. The answer was simple: “nothing”; the only truth is nothingness. As Jean Baudrillard states, “The secret of theory is that truth does not exist” and “The opposite of knowledge is not ignorance, but deceit and fraud” (Baudrillard). That is to say the narrator was deceived during all his life, either by people’s lies or by his own mind. He finally acknowledges life while looking for a new purpose to live for and a reality to believe in. The narrator summarizes the lesson life taught him using two slogans that look alike but portray two different meanings, “nothing is more precious than independence and freedom, *nothing is also more precious than independence and freedom*” (Nguyen 486).

The captain had one particular goal he lived for; that is to see his people free and independent one day, but the book does not end with a The happy ending of the protagonist achieving his dreams. On the contrary, in *The Sympathizer* the protagonist’s whole purpose and beliefs in life turn into ashes enlightened that he lived in a realistic delusion. This brings us to the next point of the research where we discuss the paranoia and delusion of the narrator.

2.2. Hallucination & Delusion

Dealing with the same subject, we can find many similarities between the themes discussed in this research work; thus delusion may seem very close to hyperreality while interpreted in a certain way, after all it is a misconception of reality. These two terms are very much related because they are both about losing touch with reality. While hyperreality is a disguised or implanted fake reality that the mass believe in, delusion is a kind of a parallel world where an individual is stuck between the physical and spiritual, the fantasy and reality.

A delusional person would not think of himself as delusional, in fact he would often try to justify his action in his mind. He would deal with issues differently, see things with a new eye, or understand situations on his own way. Despite all these characteristics, deep down a delusional individual is aware of the right and the wrong. The truth is either intentionally ignored or unconsciously, according to the mind that tries to protect itself from a harsh truth with a gentle lie.

In case of the character in *The Sympathizer*, the captain, it is not that explicit and obvious at first. When saying that the narrator is a man of two minds, some would say that he has schizophrenia; a plausible explanation for the indecisiveness and doubt of this ambiguous man though not the right one in this situation. In the novel, the protagonist struggles between two worlds; the real world that is obvious yet he still cannot see, and the fantasy world that he wants to believe in. The entire time he lived in a well made delusion, created through his internal desires and beliefs.

The captain believed himself to be a good person, and whatever he did was the right thing to do. His mind has created its own delusion for him to live and believe in, justifying all his deeds and clearly running away from the truth. As an example, when the narrator

named the culpulent major to be a spy without hesitation, knowing clearly the he was the culprit but still able to blame an innocent person (Nguyen 113-115). The protagonist was well aware of his wrong doings, however he was able to convince himself that all he did was for the right cause. In the end he accepted to “correct his mistake” with the help of his friend Bon and get rid of the “spy”.

The narrator caused the death of an innocent person but in his delusion he preferred relating to his friend’s words, when Man told him that “of course men will die... But they are not innocent. Neither are we, my friend. We are revolutionaries, and revolutionaries can never be innocent. We know too much and have done too much.”(145) His words hold truth, yet it does not justify the act of taking someone’s life. Here the narrator knows that the murdered person was a kind and friendly man, but it did not stop him from convincing himself that all he did has to be done; even his way of comforting his conscience makes the reader believe in him.

Under such beliefs, the captain killed another person, Sonny, a journalist and communist who was writing things that may reveal the general’s plans. Being a communist himself, the narrator tried to help the journalist in vain, in the end he had to shoot him. Just as he did the first time, he hid behind words like “we would not be killers if God himself was not one, too” (347) or listening to his friend Bon saying that “this isn’t murder. It’s not even killing. It’s assassination.”(348) and “remember ... you’re doing what has to be done” (360).

Furthermore delusion does not stand alone, wherever there is delusion we find hallucinations, these two terms are tied together in some way but theorists could not decipher which one is the product of the other. There are cases where a person suffers from delusions that may create hallucinations or the other way around. The psychologist Brendan

A. Maher explained in his article *The Relationship between Delusion and Hallucinations* in 2006 the uncertainty and complexity of the matter.

In the analyzed novel, the main character suffers from hallucinations due to his delusions, that is to say the hallucinations of the narrator resulted from his delusional acts. He has auditory and visual hallucinations; it started with the crapulent major in page 147 where the latter comments on a topic and the narrator just “grins” as if the most normal thing in the world was to see and have a conversation with a dead person. His hallucinations do not stop there as he finds himself talking to two dead persons starting from chapter 17.

“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.”(364) even after finding many excuses that could explain his crimes; his conscience was not that clean. For the rest of the novel he would talk with the major and sonny, they would criticize his actions, mock and laugh at his fate, and celebrate his downfall. He sees them as they were both enjoying how he was tortured in the last chapters and expressing their happiness while he suffers; “I wish I was dead! ...at last I knew what...I wanted for myself, what so many people wanted for me. Sonny and the crapulent major applauded in approval” (468)

Not long after the narrator’s torture started, his delusional self kicked again. This time, his pain caused him to separate his body and mind. The narrator, at this point, sees himself as another self while he was a bystander only watching and describing the events in front of him. “Fixed on his mattress, the prisoner__no, the pupil__understood that this was the study group’s final session...He writhed, he wriggled, he wrestled with himself in his failed bid for sleep” (442) the narrator detached his mind from his body in order to lessen the amount of pain he would feel. Until the end of his re-education where he said, “I glued myself together” (478) putting an end to his delusional world.

The narrator's mind is so complex and ambiguous that he is unable to understand his own thoughts or decipher his own emotions very often. As he got a very peculiar way to deal with this problem, the reader could be confused about this psychological flaw, or is it a blessing in disguise? After all no one could ignore the way he overcame those psychological obstacles.

General Conclusion

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Following both the psychoanalytical approach and the postmodern approach, we have analyzed few ideas about *The Sympathizer*. We have approached the novel using two main concepts; *Emotional Intelligence* and *Hyperreality* which is the purpose of the research. Viet Thanh Nguyen chose “The Sympathizer” as the title of the novel because it suits the narrator’s personality, a person who sympathizes with others and understands the way they feel. He also wants to transmit a message for people and incite them to put themselves in others’ shoes.

The double consciousness or the duality of the narrator is very obvious when reading *The Sympathizer*; the narrator is very explicit in his confession when his identity is concerned. Being a “man of two minds”, sympathizing with both parties, and understanding others’ feelings; the whole points out that the narrator is an emotionally intelligent individual; this character is able to sympathize with others even if the other is an enemy. He is a sensible person that catches up with people’s feelings while his own emotions remain a mystery even for himself. The protagonist of the novel is always hiding his true self, after living as a spy for so much time he lost his true self.

Hypocrisy took place in his everyday life, and genuineness became a fantasy to him. The narrator would often make fun of himself while pointing his finger at the irony that is life. All the time doing things that are against his own thoughts, or saying something but acting otherwise. Is it not laughable to say “It’s hypocrisy that stinks, not sex” (Nguyen 102), while being hypocrite himself?

More than that, the narrator does not act as expected from a sympathizer. The fact that he can understand things from “both sides” is supposed to make him feel for others and thus help them; but the narrator in the novel does “nothing”. He did nothing even when a female

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agent was raped in front of him because he is scared of pain and death. “Sympathy alone would never persuade the rich to share willingly” (426).

The complexity of the narrator’s personality was what Viet Thanh Nguyen aimed for. A character that can be seen under many lights, loved and hated. The ambiguity of his mind was the key for the fluency of the author’s message. The “man of two minds” was able to tell different stories that could be told by a number of people. Nguyen also tried to create a character with many flaws as any other human being, so that any reader could see even a glimpse of his own in the narrator. The main goal was to make him approachable, so that Nguyen could persuade people about his own point of view.

Viet Thanh Nguyen was influenced by *The Invisible Man*; however the personality of the narrator was more of a mirror to his own. Except for his addiction to smoking, alcohol, or women; but focusing on the themes of duality and sympathy, Viet does recognize himself in the narrator. (*Yale University’s journal*) Nothing surprising since many events in the novel are based on true life experience, and the novel is in a way the fruit of his traumatic experience. Even if the author and narrator have two different lifestyles, they still share something in common which is the loss of identity. While they both wanted to find a place where they fit in, at last they both embraced their difference from the world and felt content about it.

The concept of *Double Consciousness* is also part of the author’s self just like the narrator; the only difference is that the former feels as a spy around people, while the latter is a real spy. Always feeling familiar with unfamiliarity, and being an outsider even if it is only you and yourself. Viet Thanh Nguyen and the narrator have both complex identities with a dual mind that is a part of their existence.

General Conclusion

Going back and forth between the real and hyperreal in *The Sympathizer*, the narrator seems reliable, and the way he analyses every situation may show that he is clear headed. The narrator makes the reader see him trustworthy, and his honesty makes people believe in him. He confesses every little memory he has even the most embarrassing ones; like his first sexual experience that was with a squid (103-104). The narrator is often lying when talking, faking his every smile and expression, and his rare moments of sincerity were only with his two best friends Bon and Man. On the other hand writing can be said to be his salvation, for he is only able to write what he truly thinks or believes. During his imprisonment the narrator would say anything that the commandant wanted to hear but could not bring himself to write it down with his own hands, which confused the commandant to the bone.

However at the end of the novel, during his “re-education”, the narrator loses his sanity which exposes the delusional world he lived in. It starts to be creepy when he hallucinates the two persons that he killed, he finds himself listening and talking to the crapulent major and Sonny; hence doubt creeps to the reader’s mind. Furthermore the narrator suffers from selective memory loss, where his brain blocks some memories that are too much for him to remember. He watched a female communist agent was being raped by three policemen but did nothing to help, just sat down frozen with his eyes wide open.

A sympathizer who can understand others’ feelings is a good start, but one who acts upon it, not just sitting down doing nothing makes us believe in a better world. The narrator suffers from lack of conviction from the start to the end of the book, all the time unsure of everything. He never exposed which cause he sided with giving the readers space for their imagination. Viet Thanh Nguyen did not want to condemn the mind of his character in order to have an open space while expressing his thoughts.

General Conclusion

“The unseen is almost always underlined with the unsaid” (Nguyen 192); Viet Thanh Nguyen has his thoughts said since the publication of *The Sympathizer*. He stated in almost all his interviews that he was conflicted whenever he reads a book or watches a movie about the Vietnam War. While he works with Americans, he shares a home with Vietnamese people as well without forgetting his own origins. The author is clear about the truth, but his thoughts could not reach the mass, that is why he decided to say the unsaid. And what is easier than literature to serve the cause? “Art and literature could also be tools of domination” (226).

Viet Thanh Nguyen discloses the effects and influence of the media on the public opinion and the real. People’s minds are blinded by simulations and the hyperreal, ignoring the truth before their eyes. Reality is way simpler than the complicated and ambiguous lies presented for us to see. Sometimes we just need to wait for the clouds to clear up in order to see the blue sky.

The Hamlet in *The Sympathizer* represents the fake truth that Hollywood wants to make people believe in. Just like any other Hollywood movie about the Vietnam War, the Americans are represented as the heroes and the centre of attention. While the War is between two Countries, the movie is all about the American’s loss, sadness, heroism, and “victory”. Not only Movies but any piece of art is concerned when talking about subjectivity.

The narrator struggles between the real and hyperreal in the novel and confuses both many times. While he wants to show the world a more reliable image of the Vietnam, he is unable to differentiate the real and hyperreal himself. The narrator discovers at the end that all he believed in was only a simulation created by the Vietcong and revolutionaries.

Furthermore, we discover that emotional intelligent individuals have to go through many different feelings and emotions, contradicting themselves very often. The process may cause the instability of their mental health, making them feel things more intensely then

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others. The narrator in *The Sympathizer* creates his own world full of delusions and simulations in order to protect his mind, and convince himself that all he does is for the good cause but which one. At last, he opens his eyes to see the real world and accept the truth at the cost of his sanity. Everything he lived for, sacrificed for, and believed in was a lie; thus the abrupt truth made him lose his mind.

However, we need to lose something to find something, and the narrator found himself and reconciled with his real identity. “Every truth meant at least two things” (Nguyen480) and the narrator has a long road ahead to find his truth, which is the reason for Viet Thanh Nguyen to write a sequel for *The Sympathizer*.

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Résumé

Les émotions ont tendance à aveugler l'esprit humain, à l'embrouiller et à le distraire de réalité, à perturber ses pensées et influencer ses actions, ou bien le faire délirer. Cette thèse identifie l'intelligence émotionnelle et l'hyperréalité dans *Le Sympathisant* (2015) de Viet Thanh Nguyen, un roman au grand potentiel psychologique sur l'histoire inédite de la guerre du Vietnam. L'auteur voulait montrer une version non corrompue de la guerre, contrairement à ce que les livres et films américain veulent faire croire au gens, laissant le monde préjudicié. Grâce au narrateur, Nguyen a pu extérioriser la rage qui le tourmente depuis son enfance. Le roman est en forme de confession du narrateur anonyme, qui se débat avec lui-même en raison de la dualité de son esprit qui le rend incapable de comprendre sa propre identité. En tant que sympathisant et "homme au deux esprits", le narrateur ressent différentes émotions contradictoires le rendant délirant de tant à autre. Cette thèse sera examinée sous la perspective psychanalytique et la théorie Postmoderne.

Mots Clés : Intelligence Emotionnelle, Hyperréalité, Dualité, Identité, Postmodernisme, Psychanalyse.

ملخص

تميل المشاعر إلى تعمي العقل البشري وتشويشه وإلهائه عن الواقع وإزعاج أفكاره والتأثير على أفعاله أو جعله يؤمن

بأشياء محاكية وتركه في حالة من الوهم. تحدد هذه الرسالة الذكاء العاطفي والواقعية المفرطة في رواية المتعاطف

(2015) لفيت ثانه نجوين ، وهي رواية ذات إمكانات نفسية كبيرة حول القصة غير المرورية لحرب فيتنام. أراد المؤلف

عرض نسخة غير فاسدة من الحرب ، وتوضيح الصورة التي خلقتها الأفلام والكتب الأمريكية التي أثرت في الرأي العام.

من خلال الراوي ، تمكن نجوين من إظهار الغضب والصدمة التي احتفظ بها بداخله منذ الطفولة. الرواية هي اعتراف من

الراوي الذي لم يذكر اسمه ، والذي يكافح مع نفسه بسبب ازدواجية عقله مما يجعله غير قادر على فهم هويته. بصفته

متعاطفًا و" رجل ذو عقليين "، يمر الراوي بمشاعر مختلفة متناقضة تقوده إلى حالة وهمية. سيتم فحص هذه الرسالة من

منظور التحليل النفسي ونظرية ما بعد الحداثة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذكاء العاطفي ، الواقعية المفرطة ، الثنائية ، الهوية ، ما بعد الحداثة ، التحليل النفسي.