

The allegory of rape in paradise of the blind



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the novel *Paradise of the Blind*, Duong Thu Huong tells the story of Hang, a native Vietnamese girl, following the establishment of independence in Vietnam and the imposition of Communism. Vietnam, with a historical background of invasion by foreign entities, was initially accepting of the system of Communism because it allowed them independence from their prior colonial oppressors. However, when corruption began to infiltrate the system, the flaws in the idealistic government system were illuminated. Through the allegory of the orphan rape in *Paradise of the Blind*, Huong demonstrates the failure of Communism in its implementation as a result of the ignorance of the Vietnamese to political injustices and the inevitability of corruption in a repressive Vietnamese regime.

Through the characterization of the deputy director, Huong demonstrates the inevitability of corruption in a Communistic system in Vietnam as a result of human weakness. The director is first described very benevolently, stating that “ whenever he opened his mouth, it was always to give a morality lecture” (Huong 213). The deputy director is described as a moral figure, dedicated to the preaching of a “ revolutionary spirit, a sense of discipline, international obligations, [and] civic duty” (213). Similarly, the system of Communism idealized concepts of morality, teaching the practice of supporting one another, and uniting members of different societal classes. The characterization of the deputy director shifts dramatically as the allegory progresses, revealing the hypocrisy of his character. The Director is seen “ crushing a nine-year-old girl under him [as she] ... squirmed beneath him in pain” (213). Rape is typically associated with lust and desire for power and domination. The rape of the little girl illuminates the human weakness of the

deputy director, as he holds these very sinful vices of lust and greed as opposed to the traditional values of love, and the moral integrity he once held. Comparatively, the system of Communism held a dedication to moral values and sharing among all. However, in its implementation, the system became corrupt as a result of the inability of the Vietnamese to abide by these principles. Lured by the opportunity of wealth and power, many abandoned the original values and concepts idealized by the system of Communism.

The juxtaposition of the character Bich with the seven deadly sins reveal the inevitable corruption of Communism as a result of human weakness. The character Bich had a background as a “ soldier, expelled from the French Colonial Army” (25). Bich has a background in the military, a position that is often associated with nobility and dedication to nationalism. However, his allegiance was not towards the Vietnamese people but rather to the French colonizers, the previous oppressors of Vietnam. In addition, Bich is described as “ very lazy” (25). This alludes to one of the seven deadly sins; the sloth, which is characterized by the avoidance of engaging in physical work or tasks. Bich was promoted by Chinh to the status of “‘ agricultural proletarian’ and ‘ pillar of land reform’” (26). As soon as he achieved this very ironic surge to power, he became “ intoxicated with himself. His satisfaction was that of a creeping, parasitic vine” (26). The description of Bich alludes again to the seven deadly sins, as he is crafted with the sin of pride for his own very misplaced abilities and accomplishments. It seemed noble to assist Bich because of his background as a war veteran dedicated to nationalism and equality, the epitome of Communistic values in Vietnam. However, his

commitment to these principles are tainted by the weaknesses of his character, which are shown through the description of his sins. Similarly, Communistic leaders of Vietnam were unable to implement the system with its original intent due to their weakness in the face of the opportunity of wealth and power.

Huong's characterization of the orphan girl demonstrates the vulnerability of the native people to corruption as a result of their lack of education and cultural background. The little girl is described as "mentally ill, the orphan of a railroad man" (213). The quality of the little girl's mental state is similar to that of the natives, who were disillusioned and manipulated by Communist leaders as a result of their lack of education. In addition, the little girl is the "orphan of a railroad man" (213). Having no roots, the little girl is representative of the native people of Vietnam. The little girl is without a father figure, who typically is responsible for providing structure and purpose in a child's life. With an extensive history of colonization and the occupation of foreign entities, Vietnam lacked a similar infrastructure to the father figure, having no roots or background to support the development of their country. They were therefore vulnerable to exploitation and corruption due to the possibility of a foreign entity or ideology assuming power in Vietnam. The deputy director, while raping the orphan, "gagged her with his hand" (213). The mouth is a mechanism of expression and communication. Her inability to speak and express her voice is similar to the ways in which the voices of the people in Vietnam were stifled by corrupt leaders. The people were unable to speak out against corruption and violence because of fear of conforming to political pressures within their government.

In addition, the orphan girl is described as very “ sweet and very generous, sharing every-thing with us, even a mandarin orange or a guava” (214). The characterization of the orphan girl as very sweet and generous is juxtaposed with the description of the rape scene. This juxtaposition suggests that these characteristics of the orphan girl are exploited by the Director, leading to her manipulation. This is displayed through the characterization of Chinh regarding the treatment of his own family. Chinh pleads for money from Que near the beginning of the novel, stating that “ My wife and I have asked for a transfer here to the capital... they’ve allocated us money for an apartment. But we’re going to need some money to fix it up and furnish it” (52). Que agrees to give money to Chinh because of her devotion to the puritanical values of family and sharing, similar to the values held by the orphan girl. However, when Hang traveled to Uncle Chinh’s house to ask for money to supplement the medical expenses of Que’s surgery, Chinh bickered with Aunt Chinh about these expenses, asking her “ Can we borrow some [money]?’ [to which Aunt Tam replied] ‘ Absolutely not. We have never borrowed money from anyone” (223). Uncle Chinh, although seemingly devoted to the Communistic concepts of sharing and equality among all people, refused to help his own sister as she is dying. Compared to the rape of the orphan girl, Que is exploited by Chinh for money, and when Que’s health is deteriorating, Chinh does not express the same devotion to these values, despite the fact that he has more than enough financial stability to do so and he very ironically preached these same philosophies in the past as a member of the Communist party.

The laughing children witnessing the rape of the orphan girl are crafted to represent the passivity of the native people due to their ignorance, resulting in the severity of corruption under the Communist government. A group of children, including the Bohemian in his childhood, heard “ muffled screams coming from the other side [of the courtyard]” (213). They could see the “ deputy director, naked as a worm, crushing a nine-year-old girl under him. She cried as he got on with his business. We shrieked with laughter. We took turns watching” (213). The disillusionment of the people of Vietnam is evident through this passage. Children are typically associated with the connotation of innocence and ignorance, unable to perceive acts of injustice and evil. Similarly, the native people are given qualities of the same ignorance, blind to corruption and injustice that occurred under their own government. Rather than perceiving the unspeakable act of rape and corruption with disgust and anguish, the majority of the children blindly laughed at the incident and allowed the girl to be violently exploited, with the exception of the Bohemian, who represents a very minute faction of people able to detect corruption within Vietnam.

However, the majority accepted injustice as a way of life and allowed corruption to infiltrate their country through their passivity. This is further exemplified by the historical background of the author Huong. At the age of “ twenty, she volunteered to lead a Communist Youth Brigade sent to the front during the Vietnam War” (1). Huong, who centers her book around the repression and corruption that inevitably accompany Communism, was once part of a brigade designed to promote the system in Vietnam. The irony of her uprising as a political activist against Communism parallels the same

struggle of the native Vietnamese. In the same way that Huong was swayed blindly towards the Communist party despite her contradictory political beliefs, the people were ignorant and were therefore very easily manipulated by their government.

Works Cited

Huong, Duong T. *Paradise of the Blind*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993. Print.