

Is phuong the
embodiment of war?
essay sample



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The Sorrow of War recounts the emotionally gripping account of the Vietnam War. The author, Bao Ninh, gives an honest account of the harsh reality and experiences that he alongside many others, experienced during the war. The protagonist Kien acts as a mouthpiece for the harsh lessons and effect of war. Kien endures the loss of his fellow soldiers and the slow deterioration of his self and his one true love. Ninh's depiction of love during the war is profoundly highlighted and shows the importance of love during a time of despair such as war. Unfortunately, war tarnishes any possibilities of Ninh finding hope. As we go through the nonlinear and almost chaotic structure, we slowly witness the mental and physical state of Kien deteriorating.

Phuong is represented as a soldier in the context of love who sacrificed her body and purity as a consequence of war. The nonlinear of The sorrow of war and the distortion of Kien and Phuong relationship directly mirrors the hectic environment of Vietnam. The idealized and innocent perception of life in Vietnam is changed for both Phuong and Kien where War has no place for love, and slowly we see Phuong and Kien's identity being stripped away. The rape of Kien's first love Phuong changes the relationship and perception of war. At first, Phuong had warned him about war and even said: " You loved the idea of going to war . you were headstrong, you wanted to remain pure and loyal to your ideas." At first, like many, Kien tried to stay true to his communist ideals and believed that it was his duty to fight for his ideas.

Kien attempts to " close her blouse, but there wasn't a single button left. Her bra had been snapped, and a strap dangled loose". This quote, in particular, has many interpretations. One of which is, the shirt acts as a metaphor for the pain and emotional and physical suffering of women . Kien attempts to

forcibly close the blouse, but it somehow refuses. The 'blouse' is also a wound that can not be so easily healed. This specific quote also shows the harshness and aggressiveness of the soldier's behavior, showing no remorse for their actions and treat women as easy targets.

Phuong represents rebellious and peace her rape leads to a lack of passion. She tells kien " I'm a free spirit, a rebel out of step in these warring times. You're perfectly suited to them ". Phuong and Kien are opposites yet still are perfectly fitted. Despite previous actions, Kien still sees her as a " saint, or fairy; she has their sort of perfection ." This juxtaposed with the rape scene where she has been violated and harmed. His description of her being untouched and unharmed by evil is a coping mechanism where he attempts to forget the horrific situation. Her innocence is horrifically stolen away from her as a tragedy of war. Women in Vietnam faced vicious criticism when their virginity is not saved for their husbands.

The change in Phuong identity is discernible. She transforms from a free-spirited girl" to damaged and completely disconnected from her own life. Later on, Kien describes her as a " from being a pure, sweet, and simple girl she was now a hardened, experienced woman, indifferent to vulnerable emotions ." Phuong's first-hand experiences have caused her great grief, and as a consequence, she has had to become a prostitute. Her new perspective in life has been altered because of her experiences. The passion and identity once in Phuong have been stripped away. This represents the social construct and cycle for tainted women who were continuously forced into this position because of what was occurring around them. The intensity

of war and his relationship with Phuong, Kien is unable to reconcile their relationship.

Ninh saw the ruin and decay of Vietnamese society after the war. The chaotic structure of the novel is constructed to show the sequence of reminiscence, jumping backward and forwards between time describing the events. The structure reveals the internal conflict that the protagonist, Kien was battling but also the obscenity, devastation and economic dislocation for his country s. The Vietnamese lost two million people alongside there landscape, culture and traditions. The sorrow of war is not an ideological novel I, it censures brutality and suffering and criticizes Vietnamese propaganda. The morality of the society is ruined, and norms are broken. Exposed to this, women of the war started to lose their identities; slowly they were ripped away from their loved ones. Phuong loss of character comes from war.

Phuong represents the country as a whole. Kien is unable to protect her from what is happening. A specific quote which shows the effect of war is when it states “ the girls should become warped and twisted when she played in the mainstream of life.” Before the war, Phuong is described as an innocent