



***I AND THEY (MINH VA HO) BY NGUYEN BINH PHUONG
AND PARANOIA (HOANG TAM) BY NGUYEN DINH TU –
FROM HAUNTING BY WARⁱ***

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Abstract:

Border war literature (including the Northern border war and the Southwest border war) has made an important contribution to the development of modern Vietnamese literature. In this article, we explore the hauntings of war in two typical novels of the above literature: *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong) and *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu). With the inspiration of psychoanalytic theory, we deeply analyze the obsessions of war crimes, the loneliness of people during and after the war. Through this, we have a deeper insight into the issue of the human being, the spiritual life of the human being, and the relationship between the individual person and the social person.

Keywords: haunting by war, the Northern border war, the Southwest border war, psychoanalysis

1. Introduction

The war has long since cooled, but the pictures of it still stick in my mind to this day. Stepping out of the fierce war, many people fell into a state of heavy grief. A psychiatric investigation is hard to cure. Battle phobia has been chosen as a refuge, pushing people into a state of pain, torment, and fear, even people tend to get stuck between reality and the past, reality and dreams, life and death, good and evil. They have the ability to integrate with life and escape painfully, but they feel lonely in life. The haunting of war is a horrible haunting of the “ego self”.

After the liberation of the South and reunification of the country (April 30, 1975), the Vietnamese people continued to face two devastating wars taking place at both ends of the border: the Southwest Border War (1975) and the Northern Border War (1979).

ⁱ *MÌNH VÀ HỌ CỦA NGUYỄN BÌNH PHƯƠNG VÀ HOANG TÂM CỦA NGUYỄN ĐÌNH TÚ - NHÌN TỪ NHỮNG ÁM ẢNH CHIẾN TRANH*

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During the years of fighting against Pol Pot - Ieng Sary (Southwest) and China (North) to protect the fatherland, a line of literature on the topic of armed forces was born. This line of literature includes two (or three) pieces of the puzzle, including: southwest border war literature, northern border war literature and sea and island war literature. After 1975, compositions were published on the topic of war, and the human condition did not stop when the war ended, it was born in the first two decades of the 21st century and showed no signs. When writing about the southwestern border war or the northern border war, the authors not only respond to the conflicts and contradictions between “we” and “the enemy” but also focus on human issues during and after the war, showing the inner workings of them, especially psychological obsession.

Among the writers writing on the topic of the border war, Nguyen Binh Phuong and Nguyen Dinh Tu are two typical faces. Nguyen Binh Phuong was born in 1965 in Thai Nguyen, worked on the northern border in 1979, and is the Editor-in-Chief of Military Arts Magazine. He is famous for novels such as *An ordinary example* (Mot vi du xoang), *Sit* (Ngoi), *Absent people* (Nguoi di vang), *Children die of old age* (Nhung dua tre chet gia), etc, in which *I and They* (Minh va Ho) is an excellent work written about the Northern Border War. Working together at the Military Arts Magazine, Nguyen Dinh Tu - was born in 1974 in Hai Phong - also chose the armed forces as the subject of his composition. Among the novels such as *Profile of a Death row inmate* (Ho so cua mot tu tu), *Beside Sau Dien* (Ben dong Sau Dien), *Draft* (Nhap), *Version* (Phien ban), *Closed* (Kin), etc. *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) is a typical novel about reality and people in the Southwest border war. In this article, we study war obsessions through two novels: *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong) and *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu). Through that, we want to look back at a painful but heroic period of the nation from many “sides”, both outside and deep within the human soul.

2. Haunting by war in two novels *I and They* (Minh va Ho) by Nguyen Binh Phuong and *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) by Nguyen Dinh Tu

Since the early years of the twentieth century, psychoanalysis has been born in Europe, whose father is the Austrian-Jewish scientist: Sigmund Freud. This theory has taken the unconscious part of the human as an object of study, thereby providing effective solutions, contributing to the treatment of human mental diseases, such as wobbly states, anxiety. mental disorders, delusions, paranoia, and haunting images of horror or traumatic memories of the past. Sigmund Freud defined psychoanalysis as “a science of unconscious psychological processes”, “a mental analysis, a self-assertion in a mental process that is all unconscious” [2009, p. 107]. Freud’s success is in discovering the “*reflouement unconscious*” (Id) and “*moi*” (Ego), and dreams and the human unconscious are made up of compressions whose main expression is compressed composites. On the other hand, Sigmund Freud also emphasized the role of dreams because “*we review dreams with the aim of editing for the investigation of neurological certifications*” and “*dreams can help understand neurological diseases*” [2002, p. 204]. After Sigmund Freud, other representatives

such as Carl Jung, Jacques Lacan, etc contributed to the brilliant development of psychoanalysis.

In general, characters in novels on the topics of the Southwest border war (1975) and the Northern border war (1979) have a rich and complex inner world. When reading the above-mentioned novel, readers have the feeling that the character is struggling, thrashing, trembling, and fluttering with desires and dreams. The meeting point between the novels *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong) and *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu) is the focus on the characters' unconscious lives, especially the deep obsession with the brutal war, the severe, persistent psychological trauma. The "ego self" in the above two novels is the "ego" that haunts the war, the "ego" that is suppressed by the darkness of the horrors of the war, and the lonely, lost feelings of those who leave the war. They are carrying a psychological wound.

2.1. War and the haunting with crime

The unique feature of the novels on the topic of border war (including the Southwest border war and the Northern border war) is that they do not directly present the enemy's crimes, losses, and sufferings, but reproduce them through the character's unconscious. Sigmund Freud said: *"Repressed things are, for us, archetypes of the unconscious. We are aware that there are two layers of unconsciousness, namely repressed mental components and latent mental aspects that can become conscious. Because they are suppressed and unconnected, these variables are unable to resurface in the conscious realm"* [2015, p. 35]. Characters in border conflict books tend to have second-level war obsessions. Repression of horrifying images in the war, the crime that the enemy has spread to the nation, has remained in the unconscious part of the character, it becomes psychological trauma.

Nguyen Binh Phuong and Nguyen Dinh Tu did not choose to tell stories of war in the traditional way (continuous time, the event after connecting the previous event clearly displayed the war's) in their works. On the contrary, these two writers have disrupted the chronological sequence, causing time to be disturbed. The events in the novel happen in the present or in the past (the case of *Paranoia* - Hoang tam), sometimes between reality and the past there is a blurred line that is difficult to delineate (the case of *I and They* - Minh va Ho). In it, images of war are like invisible strings connecting time dimensions, in other words, those images have a starting point that is too distant, clinging to people in the present and even in the future. In *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong), the image of the invaders (in the event that China massively sent troops to attack Vietnam across the northern border in 1979) with barbaric crimes became an obsession, deeply in the mind of the character "him"-a soldier who participated in the anti-Chinese border war, unfortunately, became a prisoner, was brutally beaten. During the trip to the northern mountainous provinces, the character Hieu (vocative "I") relied on the diary with the attached lines of "him" character, trying to find the marching footprints of "him" in the past. Every place that Hieu encountered, such as the valley of injustice, Bang River, Nho Que River, Quay Tra Mountain, and Ta Van Peak, all evoke the crimes that China has committed against our nation. Sometimes the brutal act of

Chinese appeared in the words of “him” character, who directly testified and psychologically haunted; other times it shows up in the words of Hieu, the younger generation, which has not experienced the war and only knows the war through the fragmentary notes of the predecessor (“him” character) and imagination. It was the brutal murder of Meo people, “*the whole Meo village with more than forty households disappeared*”, “*was chopped up and drowned in the Nho Que River*” [2019, p. 128]; they exterminated the military units of “him” in the Valley of Misfortune; the most terrible crime is cannibalism: “*The liver of Haitce, the French interpreter in Mong Cai, and his entourage were once devoured by people on the other side of the street in the middle of the street*” [2019, p. 119]. *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu) has two parallel storylines. In the character line of Anh, his teammates and enemies have highlighted a traumatic period in the nation’s history. The Southwestern Border War has left in the British character psychological trauma (also the cause of physiological trauma, which manifests specifically as the “loss of sexual capacity”, which dissolves his sexual desire). With a sharp pen, Nguyen Dinh Tu portrayed the murderous crimes of Pol Pot’s invaders. Each detail in chapters four, six, and fourteen not only haunts the characters but also haunts the readers with images of gore, death, sin and sacrifice: “*disfigured corpses lying on the ground lying around scattered in small shacks*” [2013, p. 64], Hang “*had his throat cut off, died in a sitting position*” [2013, p. 81], a squad of young female volunteers was tragically assassinated by Pol Pot with “*scattered pieces of meat*”, “*a piece of hair, a patch of scalp, an arm, a leg, an eye, a piece of lip, an earlobe, a tip of the nose, a nipple, a piece of ass*” [2013, p. 83], “*Gam’s corpse was dumped near the camp, in a position like a frog lying on his back, with a cassava root in his door*” [2013, p. 85]... Pol Pot’s crimes against innocent people on the southwestern border are no less than the crimes of the Chinese invaders on the northern border.

Besides libido discourse, magical discourse, polyphonic discourse, trauman discourse is installed with high frequency in the two novels *I and I They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong) and *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu). This discourse originates from the trauma theory born in the twentieth century, associated with the name of Sigmund Freud. It is not only physical trauma but also psychological trauma. The war has had a bad impact on the human psyche, initially with fear, hatred, and enmity, then with psychological (even is physiological) sequelae even when the soldier leaves the battlefield, survives, and returns to a new life. The traces of horror, pain, and loss from war are still lingering in the minds of people in the post-war period. In addition, the obsession with war also affects non-combatants like Hieu character in *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong). Phan Tuan Anh said: “*These are all terrible mental injuries of soldiers in the post-war period*” [2019, p. 178]. The more wartime experiences a soldier has, the more severe the post-war trauma. Similar to *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong) and *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu), the issues of haunting war and psychological trauma in other novels (belonging to border war literature) such as *Hero Silhouette* (Bong anh hung) (Doan Dung), *Mortal Body* (Xac pham) (Nguyen Dinh Tu), *Wild Land* (Mien hoang) (Suong Nguyet Minh), *Under the canopy of jaggery forest* (Duoi tan rung thot not) (Nguyen Tam My)... both true and

painful. It might be stated that war haunting is more common in books concerning border wars than in books about the conflict with French and American colonists.

2.2. War and human loneliness

Penetrating into the world of fiction after 1986, it is not difficult for us to see a lonely person lost in his homeland or lost in the crowd. In novels on the topic of the border war in general, *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong) and *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu) in particular, the type of character with a sense of loneliness and alienation appears popular. In the middle of the war, even though they were determined to devote their whole blood to their homeland and the country, the soldiers still clearly felt loneliness and alienation at the border. Especially the Vietnamese volunteer soldier in the southwestern border war, following the call of the United Front for the National Salvation of Cambodia, after expelling Pol Pot from the southwestern border, expanded the scope of the war. fighting in Cambodia, performing a noble international duty. Living in a foreign country, with differences in language and culture, the volunteer soldier fell into a state of extreme loneliness (the case of Tung's character in *Wild Land* (Mien hoang) of Suong Nguyet Minh, Phien character in *Under the canopy of jaggery forest* (Duoi tan rung thot not) of Nguyen Tam My, etc). The Anh character in *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu) also once fell into a state of floating, vaguely in the nostalgia of the volunteer soldier's homeland: "*The soldier's heart touches each other, it's shaking, it's sad, and it causes a yeast of sadness and sadness*" [2013, p. 49]. Unlike the Anh character in *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) of Nguyen Dinh Tu, Hieu's brother in *I and They* (Minh va Ho) of Nguyen Binh Phuong did not have to leave his homeland to fight in a strange country. However, "him" character still carries loneliness before the reality of the war. In the recollection of the Northern border war, many times "him" cried. The soldier's tears were tears of helplessness, of the overwhelming feeling of loneliness. "I" confided to Hieu: "*I used to cry in the valley of injustice*" [2019, p. 174], because there "*his company was almost wiped out*" [2019, p. 174] or when "*the company deputy political officer was smashed to pieces by artillery, he wept*" [2019, p. 223]. While the plot of *I and They* (Minh va Ho) "jump" frequently and the figure "him" is fragmented, readers can nevertheless see "him" as having a rich and deep inner existence that is being toward its own tragedy in addition to the larger tragedy of the ethnic.

But the feeling of loneliness and strangeness did not end when the war ended, stepped out of the war and returned to ordinary life, they once again fell into the old psychological state. If in the past the soldier felt lonely when he had to leave his family, even the country (in the case of a soldier who volunteered to fight in Cambodia) to fulfill his duty to the country and to the cause; when returning to a peaceful life with the country in the process of building socialism and healing the wounds of war, the soldier feels isolated. They cannot integrate with life, much less return to the heroic past. From a feeling of loneliness and alienation, the soldier gradually turned to a feeling of helplessness, which was more terrible than suffering from hysteria. *Hysteria* is not a physical injury but a psychological state, a symptom of mental illness, febrile illness,

delusions, and ghosts that make people writhe, suffer for a long time, and are easily manipulated by erroneous thinking. Returning from the Northern border war, the “him” character in the novel *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyễn Bình Phương) “*didn’t have a single wound on the body, but the spiritual world was completely destroyed, leading to a mentally ill person not being allowed to live a normal life like many others*” [2020, p. 327]. The “him” character - a soldier against the Chinese invaders, became silent after being discharged from the army: “*He just sat in the dark, my two eyes were staring straight ahead without seeing anything or seeing through everything. His mouth rattled without a sound*” [2019, p. 172], living forever in painful and heroic war memories. In the eyes of “him” ordinary people with the same skin color, language, culture, and country as “him” all became “*Chinese enemies*” used to be aggressive at the border, so that every time they met, “*he went crazy, rabid, striated, frothy mouth*” [2019, p. 197], and tried to attack. In the post-war period, the “him” character still thought he was living in the fierce days of the nation’s history, “him” still kept the “*tattered backpack with all the contents inside*” [2019, p. 200], the gesture of “*putting my left hand across the corner of my forehead like a salute to the commander*” [2019, p. 200] and talked about combat: “*I still have to go deep and beat those bastards to know their faces. Go ahead, stay away from explosives*” [2019, p. 200]. The culmination of the tragedy was the lonely, cold death of a wounded soldier on the roadside, in a state where his face was eaten away by an animal. That is the most painful tragedy that the wounded soldiers in *I and They* (Minh va Ho) have to endure, it is many times heavier than the physical pain. Phan Tuan Anh said: “*The image of a mentally ill wounded soldier after the war is quite common in the discourse of novels about the border war, because of the terrible psychological trauma and obsessions they have suffered*” [2018, p. 178]. After many confrontations with Pol Pot soldiers, the Anh character in *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu) fortunately survived and returned from the southwestern border war. However, Anh character often falls into a state of madness, vaguely standing between reality and fantasy, the present and the past: “*He find himself standing in the midst of the fiercest battleground*”, “*A rope has the noose was thrown out of nowhere, wrapping itself around Anh*” [2013, p. 45]. The Anh character is also aware of his psychotic symptoms. The war was over, but its aftershocks still lingered in his mind, causing him to “*talk around, sometimes shouting without knowing it*” [2013, p. 232], Anh lamented him wife for being “*unlucky to marry a mad man*” [2013, p. 232]. Psychological trauma leads to physiological trauma, causing the Anh character to turn off sex and lose the feeling of excitement when being close to a woman’s body. The happiness of his family was broken, Anh suppressed the pain of family separation and the loss of the inherent ability of a man, but was always in a state of timidity, withdrawing from the opposite sexes. Proof of Anh sexual impotence is the uncoordination of Anh genitals under Son Phan’s erotic hands: “*Anh penis, unable to get an erection, still hangs down, like a peeled banana hanging next to two people the lemon has backed up*” [2013, p. 106]. In other words, the Anh character in *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) has carried on his castration guilt, “*the psychological and emotional state of man when his instinctual needs are suppressed, which is an inferiority complex about genitals when that existence cannot bring people a sense of satisfaction*” [2016, p. 77]. The obsession born from the Southwest border war and the

hidden conflicts taking place in society that Anh witnessed when Anh character returned from the battlefield robbed Anh of joy and pleasure, pushing Anh character into a painful, stifling, vicious tragedy.

From the critical point of view of psychoanalytic criticism, we can delve into the unconscious world of the characters in *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong) and *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu) in particular border warfare in general. From there, discover and explain the people's feelings of loneliness, being lost, helpless, and hysteria. All have contributed to shaping the post-war human face in Vietnamese literature after 1986.

2.3. The subjective narrative mode

In the field of novels on the topic of the border war, the number of novels narrated in a subjective narrative mode accounts for a large number, such as *Wild Land* (Mien hoang) (Suong Nguyet Minh), *The Season Away From Home* (Mua xa nha) (Nguyen Thanh Nhan), *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu), *Hero Silhouette* (Bong anh hung) (Doan Dung), *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong). Two novels were selected to be surveyed in the subjective narrative mode. This method has contributed significantly to deepening the character's inner world, evoking obsessions, and at the same time creating a modern narrative style, bringing Vietnamese literature into the general orbit of the literary in the world.

According to Lai Nguyen An, the narration is "*the composition of the words of the author, the narrator (introduced into the work more or less as a character), or a narrator; that is, the entire text of the narrative work, except for the direct speech of the characters*" [2017, p. 410]. There are two types of narration, including objective narration mode and subjective narration mode. In the objective narrative mode, the story is told from an outsider's point of view, and the narrator shows that he knows the story's happenings and nature. As for the subjective narrative method, the story is told from the inside point of view, that is, the characters participate in the story. The "him" character and "I" character (Hieu) in the novel *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong) took turns telling stories of the war and the post-war period. The scenes are more "I" stories than "him" stories, sometimes arranged in order (my story, then "him"), sometimes in an interweaving sequence narration of "I" and "him". The story is told from the points of view of two characters who are intertwined. Since it is an insider's story, the reader's confidence in the story is higher. Besides, in the inner world, the character's psychological traumas are revealed more clearly and naturally than from the point of view of the outside.

The story in the novel *Paranoia* (Hoang Tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu) is mostly told from the point of view of the character Anh but there is no constant change like "he" and "I" in *I and They* (Minh va Ho) Nguyen Dinh Tu has arranged two storylines in two different time regions, in alternating order, the odd-numbered chapter is the story happening in the present (when he was discharged), and the rest of the chapters are stories that happened in the past (when Anh character was a soldier in the southwestern border war). With this narrative, Anh character was able to "confess" the psychological and

physiological problems Anh encountered after returning from the battlefield. Retelling the story from an insider's perspective helps readers visualize the reality and fierceness of the war and at the same time penetrates the emotional pain that soldiers have to endure when returning to a peaceful life, the peace they once yearned for.

In the two novels *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong) and *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu), the narrative point of view (in the subjective narrative method) has a difference, creating diversity. In the novel *I and They* (Minh va Ho) is narrated in the first person, the narrator switches roles, sometimes calling himself "minh" (the Hieu character - the younger brother), and sometimes calling himself "tao" (the "him" character - the person who is the veteran). In it, "him" plays the role of witnessing or experiencing the pain and loss of the war, and "I" plays the role of being heard and told, combined with his imagination. On the other hand, the "him" character tells the war story, while the Hieu character tells the post-war story, continuing the unfinished stories "him" told by word of mouth or by fragmentary notes. Unlike *I and They* (Minh va Ho), the novel *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) is narrated in the third person. Although the subject of the narration is hidden, it can be understood that it is Anh character, because every detail, story development, and emotional level of the hidden narrator coincide with those of Anh - the central character in the story. With these two perspectives, the writer succeeded in reflecting the reality of the fierce war that took place at the border after the country's reunification, and at the same time expressed his mood, emotions, mental pain, and timeless personal obsessions. This is also the purpose of the authors in the line of literature on the topic of the border war.

3. Conclusion

In short, we can delve deeper into the worlds of characters in novels about border wars in general, *I and They* (Minh va Ho) (Nguyen Binh Phuong) and *Paranoia* (Hoang tam) (Nguyen Dinh Tu) in particular, using psychoanalytic theory. The application of psychoanalysis to study the world of the characters in the above novel is feasible and makes a lot of sense. It can be seen that the writers have honestly reflected on the reality of the fight against the Khmer Rouge genocidal regime and against the Chinese invaders, building the image of a Vietnamese revolutionary and volunteer soldier. Aside from the common pain caused by the war, each character in this novel has a distinct pain, a distinct tragedy. Psychoanalytic theory becomes "light" to illuminate the character's unconscious, war obsessions, and complexes. Through that, the writers have aroused the simple dreams and aspirations of the characters during the war and after the war. After a long time, the novels are written about the border war still retain their value. Literature has accomplished its goal of conserving the effects of past wars so that the next generation might be proud of a glorious era in the country's history and love the tranquility of the present.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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