

La Sapienza

Revisione esterna dottorandi DAVIDE PASSARELLI e GIACOMO TRAINA 35° ciclo

TRAINA GIACOMO

Za zgodność z oryginałem

Podpis Wydział Humanistyczny
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Evaluation form for PhD dissertation

Evaluation form

Title of the thesis

The Voice that Carries Everything: History and Confession in Viet Thanh Nguyen's "The Sympathizer"

Affiliation of the reviewer

Università degli Studi di Bergamo

Report

On "The Voice that Carries Everything: History and Convergence in Viet Thanh Nguyen's The Sympathizer" by Giacomo Traina It is a carefully argued and very well researched study of the aesthetic construction of Nguyen's novel as a complex response to the history, historiography, and cinematic renderings of the Vietnam War. Traina builds a compelling argument that at this moment in history the Vietnam War cannot be chronicled in a straightforward manner; the stories and films it inspired have obscured and distorted the historical reality. He argues persuasively that Nguyen recognizes this impossibility, and in his fiction, Nguyen deliberately deploys of many different sources and cinematic legends to reimagine the war both as it happened and as it lives on in the American imagination. According to Traina, by referring to and incorporating marginal texts, "re-education literature," and histories of Vietnamese refugees into his own version of highly articulate self-confession, with The Sympathizer Nguyen constructs a powerful counter-representation of the war. Traina clearly brings his own deep history of reading fiction and history about Vietnam to this study. He puts the novel in conversation with "reeducation memoirs" and "reeducation novellas" that narrate individual examples of collective trauma. His argument that

Nguyen transforms the concentration camp from a "lieu de memoire" to a chronotope seems very convincing. His own travels through Vietnamese America, culminating in his visit to the Viet Museum in San Jose in California, demonstrate his process of researching many strands and representations of Vietnamese-American experience and how his encounters with places and texts advanced his thinking about the novel's sources and function. The interview with Nguyen (included at the end) shows Traina's thorough preparation and knowledge; the critical questions he poses offer a chance to obtain answers to ideas he'd been exploring while writing the dissertation and confirm Traina's insight into Nguyen's intentions and process. In part 2, by focusing on the distortions of history and misconceptions perpetuated by Hollywood cinema about the war, Traina argues that Nguyen's novel effectively criticizes the production of such misconceptions in real time. Unlike some other critics who claim that Nguyen's 'Hollywood subplot' lays bare the inventions and obsessions of Francis Ford Coppola when he made *Apocalypse Now*, Traina demonstrates that this section of the novel mixes and critiques many different cinematic sources (from prestige cinema and B movies), creating a satire not of Coppola's film itself but of the legend it still commands. He proposes reading *Apocalypse Now* as a "fluid text" that Nguyen's novel continues in order to see the "double-edged truth" of even the great art made about the war. The section on *Apocalypse Now*'s references in *The Sympathizer* could become a small book or a very long essay; it could be of interest for a cinema scholar, too. The interview with Viet Thanh Nguyen in the appendix could be published in an international journal. The dissertation's fine conclusion (see last paragraph, p. 237) summarizes the ambition of the novelist's anti-realist approach and indicates its continued life and after-life (through the other two novels planned for the trilogy). Overall, the writing in English is assured, with very few mistakes. Excellent incorporation of critical sources (including from film critics in Chapter 2). The Bibliography (both of primary and secondary sources) is excellent. The thesis can become an excellent critical volume with only minor changes. As a Ph.D. dissertation it is excellent as it is. There are a few instances in which the candidate could provide better transitions to prepare the reader, as well as brief summaries of material that few will be familiar with (one example: general readers normally do not know the movie *Go Tell the Spartans*). These are issues that he should be able to address easily (and result from his deep immersion in all this material). In the attached file of the thesis (in word format), I made some very minor remarks and tentative corrections on the following pages (see evaluation file uploaded): 54, 140, 141, 155-56, 166, 167, 182, 190, 193, 194, 264

Confidential report (it will not be shown to the candidate)

Traina's dissertation is probably the best Ph.D. dissertation I ever evaluated.

Evaluation file (optional)

File caricati:
GIACOMO TRAINA PHD DISSERTATION with minor corrections.pdf

Presentation and clarity

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The reviewer should be able to read the text without difficulty. This implies that the dissertation is clear and 'user friendly', without duplications or repetitions.

Integration and coherence

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The manuscript should present logical and rational links between different parts of the thesis.

Introduction to scientific background

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The text should contain a satisfactory introduction to the scientific background which is relevant to the research, preparing the reader to the exposition of the problem.

Review of relevant literature

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The candidate must have a detailed knowledge of original sources, have a thorough knowledge of the field, and understand the main theoretical and methodological issues.

Statement of research problem

None Poor Average Good Excellent

A clear statement of the research problem should be made, together with specific hypotheses, predictions, or questions which the research is designed to address.

Originality

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The research must be the candidate's own work. The degree of independence may vary according to the research topic.

Contribution to knowledge and scientific relevance

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The dissertation should be substantial enough to be able to form the basis of two articles on refereed journal, a book or research monograph.

Mastery of the English language

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The candidate must be proficient in written English and show mastery of appropriate scientific/technical language.

A major goal of the review process is to evaluate if the present version of the thesis is:

- 1) adequate as is
- 2) require minor revision
- 3) require major revision

for admission of the candidate to the defense of the work in front of a national evaluation board.

Accept as is Minor revision Major revision